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**Re-Emerging Pietism**  
**The Emerging Church as Postmodern Pietism**

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Germany in the seventeenth century was ripe for religious reform: the Thirty Years War had created doubts about the correctness of contemporary religious institutions, theologians of most denominations were engaged in abstract, scholastic theological controversy, and inter-denominational conflict was increasingly off-putting. It was into this climate which Pietism emerged as an alternative way of doing religion. Its central tenants were: (1) a more extensive use of Scripture, (2) a reinvigorated spiritual priesthood, (3) an emphasis on orthopraxy, (4) irenic conduct in religious controversies, (5) the establishment of seminaries as centers of personal spiritual cultivation, and (6) sermons emphasizing faith and its fruits.

The impact of this historical movement was geographically and philosophically far-reaching. A number of religious organizations in the United States including Evangelicalism can trace their roots back to Pietism. As a result, the most contemporary expression of Evangelicalism, the Emerging Church (a sort of postmodern version of Evangelicalism), also shares a historical link with seventeenth century Pietism.

More important than the historical connection are the theological similarities. I have shown how the Emerging Church, in response to the philosophical movement of postmodernism, has taken up the six central tenets of seventeenth century German Pietism. In the process, the Emerging Church has taken these tenets to the next philosophical level. After providing a cultural-historical background I have shown how the Emerging Church has developed these central tenets and the implications for the Emerging Church and Christianity in general.

### **Biographical Sketches**

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## Re-Emerging Pietism The Emerging Church as Postmodern Pietism

What was will be again,  
what happened will happen again.  
There's nothing new on this earth.  
Year after year it's the same old thing.  
Does someone call out, "Hey *this* is new"?  
Don't get excited – it's the same old story.  
-from *Ecclesiastes* (Peterson 1160)

Much has been made in Evangelical circles about the so-called emerging church. The emerging church is essentially a postmodern Evangelicalism which seeks to reinvigorate contemporary Christianity by addressing or adapting to postmodern cultural pressures. Both advocates and critics of this movement see the emerging church as a *new* way of doing church and of being Christian. Rather expectedly, when viewed in historical context this "new" way of doing Christianity bears a striking resemblance to a variety of previous movements in "experiential" Christianity including: early church asceticism, medieval monasticism, and most recently (and most importantly) the German Pietism movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Religion, like most fields of study can be divided into two fields: the theoretical and the practical (hereafter called the experiential). The line where these two fields meet is constantly shifting (and is drawn differently in different cultures). The struggle between these two facets produces a tension which has spawned many new religious movements within Christianity. Often, when either the theoretical or practical aspects gains inordinate dominance in a culture, the other side re-emerges and combats the dominant form.

The struggle between these two "ways of believing" is very clearly spelled out by Ernst Troeltsch in his book *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Troeltsch argues that the dualism of Christianity consists of (1) an inclusive, sacrament-dispensing, institutionalized Church and (2) a disciplined, obedient sect who often see themselves as the salt of the religion. The former, argues Troeltsch, are represented by men like Paul, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas; the latter, by the likes of Jesus, monastics, and the medieval sectarians (Durnbaugh 12). Speaking of this latter group, Troeltsch argues that,

They all tended toward the same type, the type of primitive Christianity. Strong fraternal feelings, simplicity, and democracy of organization, more or less communist ideas about property, an attitude of passive obedience or conscientious objection toward the coercive and militaristic governments of the time, opposition to the selfish and oppressive Church, a genuine faith in the practicality of the ethics of Jesus, and as the secret power in it all, belief in an inner experience of regeneration and an inner light which interprets the outer word of God.... (Durnbaugh 14).

I will refer to the first group as the systematists and the latter as the experientialists. This paper will show that the seventeenth-century German Pietists and the members of the emerging church are both experientialist re-awakenings.

In this paper I will show that the emerging church can be viewed as a re-emergence of seventeenth-century German Pietism but with a postmodern spin. As with any cyclical pattern in history, every return to the old involves some new cultural adaptations which make it distinct from the previous historical expression. In the case of the emerging church, the central tenets or concerns of Pietism are points held in common between both movements. But the emerging church is dealing with the cultural force of postmodernism which shapes its understanding(s) of the central tenets.

### ***Historical Background of Seventeenth-Century German Pietism***

“As culture goes, so goes the church.” (Webber, *Listening* 9)

Pietism has the reputation of being, “[o]ne of the least understood movements in the history of Christianity” (Stoeffler, *Rise* 1). It comes as no surprise that the influence which Pietism had on Protestant churches has “not been fully realized in America” (Stoeffler, *Rise* ix). The reputation of being poorly understood was begun by the first historians of the movement, men such as Karl Barth, Ernst Troeltsch, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Emil Brunner, who all painted rather negative portraits Pietism (Stoeffler, *Rise* 1). These writers looked askance at the supposed naivety, anti-intellectualism, and legalistic tendencies of Pietism. This view among historians stunted research in the field. Research into the history and influences of Pietism steadily increased in the second half of the twentieth century, and the first book-length treatment or translation of Spener’s *Pia desideria* into English appeared in 1963 (Deeter xi).

Before describing seventeenth-century German Pietism in more detail it is important to note that other forms of Pietism existed prior to the form which will be dealt with in this paper. Max Weber summarizes the previous development of Pietism with sufficient detail for our purposes:

Pietism first split off from the Calvinistic movement in England, and especially in Holland. It remained loosely connected with orthodoxy, shading off from it by imperceptible gradations, until at the end of the seventeenth century it was absorbed into Lutheranism under Spener’s leadership. (as quoted in Stoeffler, *Rise* 9)

The 17<sup>th</sup> century environment which saw the rise of the German Pietist movement was ridden with religious upheaval. Having just come out of the Thirty Years War, a growing number of Germans (joining the ranks of citizens from other European countries) were increasingly discontent with the Church in all its guises: Lutheran, Calvinist, and Catholic (Deeter 17).

Even with the threat of losing parishioners to atheism, the battered branches of Christianity were battling one another even when the bloodshed of the Thirty Years War was over. The Catholics, eager to make up for lost spiritual territory in northern Europe began to go on the offensive with its new, culturally adapted form: the Catholic Counter-Reformation (Deeter xxii).

The Catholic Counter-Reformation was able to re-convert a significant amount of the population because Protestants were busy quarrelling with one another (Deeter 13-14). The leading Lutheran theologians of the day were busy rehashing Aristotelian logic, resurrecting the theological monster of scholasticism (Deeter xxii). Lutherans were even engaged in revisionist history making claims that Aquinas was an unwitting proto-Lutheran (Deeter 32-33, 185). Indeed, “Lutheranism was dominated by efforts to make

her institutional and doctrinal positions impregnable” (Deeter 10). With competing religious leaders all vying for political influence in Germany after the war, the Lutherans were forced to take the defensive when the Calvinists and Jesuits gained the upper hand (Deeter 9).

With the unprecedented competition for a limited number of European souls, “blind confessional hatred” became the theological order of the day (Deeter 4).<sup>1</sup> Friedrich von Logau, an intellectual and cultural critic of his day, remarked that, “Lutherisch, Pabstlich, und Calvinisch, diese Glauben alle drey sind vorhanden, doch ist Zweifel, wo das Christenthum dann sey”<sup>2</sup> (qtd. in Deeter 34). Pietism developed in this environment of religious doubt and in-fighting.

The intellectual seed which would develop into Pietism had been planted early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the German theologian and pastor, Johann Arndt<sup>3</sup> (Arndt xiii). The publication of his book *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum* in 1606 challenged the “arid speculative orthodoxy” of his day while also providing a program for change (Arndt xi). This program involved calling Christians not to abandon (Lutheran) orthodoxy but to make every effort to *live out* that orthodoxy in everyday life.

Many think that theology is a mere science, or rhetoric, whereas it is a living experience and practice. Everyone now endeavors to be eminent and distinguished in the world, but no one is willing to learn to be pious. Everyone now seeks out men of great learning, from whom one may learn the arts, languages, and wisdom, but no one is willing to learn, from our only teacher, Jesus Christ, meekness and sincere humility, although his holy, living example is the proper rule and directive for our life. (Arndt 21-22)

Arndt was concerned with an experiential Christianity which would combine orthodoxy with orthopraxy. This sort of writing also shows how heavily influenced he (and most experientialist Christians) was by “medieval monastic and mystical traditions” represented in Germany by the likes of Johannes Tauler<sup>4</sup>, Thomas à Kempis<sup>5</sup>, and the *Theologica Germanica*<sup>6</sup> (Arndt xvi). In sum, *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum* encourages its readers to take up the art of imitating Christ (*imitation Christi*) (Arndt xi).

But Arndt’s goals required both a platform for reform and an energetic reformer. Both would be found in the person of Philipp Jakob Spener.<sup>7</sup> In 1675, Spener provided the spark for the Pietist Movement with the publication of *Pia desideria*, a text written to serve as a preface to a collection of sermons by Arndt (Spener, *Pia* 15). Like Arndt’s *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum*, Spener worried that Christianity was being misunderstood as a set of intellectual propositions (Aristotle over exegesis) (Spener, *Pia*

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<sup>1</sup> Theologian Philipp Nicolai argued that Calvinists worshipped Satan himself while Duke Julius of Braunschweig claimed that if his son became a Calvinist he would insist that Satan was his father (Stoeffler, *Rise* 184).

<sup>2</sup> “Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Calvinism; all three of these faiths are present, but it is uncertain, where Christianity is.”

<sup>3</sup> (Balenstedt 1555 – 1621)

<sup>4</sup> (Strasbourg c. 1300 – 1361)

<sup>5</sup> (Kempfen 1380 – Zwolle 1471)

<sup>6</sup> An anonymous mystical writing which influenced the likes of Thomas More, Martin Luther and many others.

<sup>7</sup> (Rappotsweiler 1635 – 1705)

6). To correct these errors, Spener provides a program for the “reform of life (*reformation vitae*)” which was to “follow up and complete Luther’s reform of doctrine (*reformation doctrinae*)” (Arndt xiii). Spener would later describe this effort as a finishing of the Reformation by bringing the priesthood to the people (more on this later) (Spener, *Spiritual* 13). Virtually none of Spener’s propositions in *Pia desideria* (“Pious Desires”) were original. Rather it was his clear program for reform which caused a “tremendous stir” (Stoeffler, *Rise* 235).

Like every other movement in history, seventeenth-century German Pietism was far from a monolithic attempt at reform. Rather, at least five groups of Pietism resulted from the efforts of early Pietist theologians like Spener. The first, and for the purposes of this paper, most important group consisted of Spener and his inner circle of correspondents. Another group in Halle was led by August Hermann Franke.<sup>8</sup> This latter group tended towards anti-intellectualism and legalism. A group centered in Württemberg produced the leaders Johann Albrecht Bengel<sup>9</sup> and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. A fourth group in Herrnhut which would come to be known as the Moravian Brethren was led by Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf.<sup>10</sup> Radical separatists comprise the fifth group of Pietists (typically an eighteenth-century phenomenon (Stoeffler, *Rise* 178)) (Deeter xiii).

Despite the splintering of Pietism, Stoeffler argues that Pietism had an “essential unity” which was expressed in diverse forms, regions, and denominations (*Rise* 8). He argues that the four distinctive features of Pietism were its experiential nature, perfectionist and oppositive tendencies, and Biblical emphasis. Other scholars emphasize Pietism’s cultural flexibility:

Pietism was evidently a quite flexible ideology, capable of representing many different things to different societies, and certainly not reducible to any particular one of them. (Fulbrook 43)

Indeed, Pietism was so flexible that calling Pietism a movement can be problematic. Some scholars suggest that it may be better described as:

Diffuse cultural orientations, broad historical movements in the weak sense. As such, ...Pietist attitudes could be held by individuals far apart in social status, political activity, network of organization or pattern of action. (Fulbrook 36)

While diverse in its manifestations, nearly all of the Pietist groups shared common theological concerns which were summarized by Spener in the *Pia desideria*.

The six central tenets of Spener’s *Pia desideria* were: (1) a more extensive use of Scripture, (2) a reinvigorated spiritual priesthood, (3) an emphasis on orthopraxy, (4) irenic conduct in religious controversies, (5) the establishment of seminaries as centers of personal spiritual cultivation, and (6) sermons emphasizing faith and its fruits (Spener, *Pia* 87-115).

While the strongest connections between Pietism and the Emerging Church are theological ones, a long and complicated historical connection also exists. While the

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<sup>8</sup> (Lübeck 1663 – 1727)

<sup>9</sup> (Winnenden, Württemberg 1687 – 1752) Interacted with the philosophy of Aristotle and Spinoza and the theologies of Spener, Arndt, and Franke.

<sup>10</sup> (1700 – 1760)

connection is present, how much it has actually influenced the Emerging Church is unclear for reasons which will shortly become evident.

One of the “godchildren” of Pietism was Count Zinzendorf. He studied with Franke and felt comfortable with much of the Pietist’s rhetoric (Noll 63). While Zinzendorf returned to Moravia and set up a commune of religious tolerance for refugees of religious persecution, Franke was influencing Englishmen Whitefield and Howell Harris (Noll 86, 93). The German Pietist organization Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge brought Halle Pietists to England as well (Noll 78).

Zinzendorf also influenced a number of prominent English theologians, most notably Watts and Wesley. Zinzendorf spoke to them about the missionary work of the Moravians in January of 1737 (Noll 87). The Pietist link with Wesley in particular had a tremendous affect on his personal theology. He came to believe that Christianity must be experienced; not just intellectually acknowledged (Noll 87).

Some of the members of Zinzendorf’s Moravian organization moved to England and organized an independent religious group there which continued to influence theologians in the area. Interestingly, Zinzendorf also did work with African American missions (Noll 172). While this may have been the only direct link between Zinzendorf (a quasi-Pietist) and the United States, the indirect influence through Wesley and Watts would be enormous.

As historian Reginald Ward has demonstrated persuasively, a great range of connections – literary, personal, pastoral, hymnic – linked the spirituality of Continental Pietism to almost every phase of the British and American evangelical awakenings. (Noll 60)

From the American evangelical awakenings the Evangelical movement would later emerge, the movement which fostered the development of the emerging church.

A number of emerging churches (including Solomon’s Porch based in Minneapolis) are associated with the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). The ECC’s “Affirmations” note their general “legacy of Pietism” (“Covenant” 11). In relation to their commitment to missions, the work of the Halle Pietist Franke is mentioned (“Covenant” 11). In the section on their use of Scripture, Spener is both mentioned and quoted for his use of Scripture not as an end in itself but as a means for producing the fruits of faith through the Spirit (an important commonality between Pietism and the emerging church) (“Covenant” 7-8).

It is unclear whether or not the members of the ECC are aware of this part of their church’s history or whether they themselves are making any conscious effort to draw from this part of their tradition.<sup>11</sup> A number of blogs by emerging church-goers have made mention of the theological connection with differing views as to whether or not the link is a good one. Citing the Noll text cited above, Scot McKnight makes the following comments on his blog:

You might see in Mark Noll’s defining characteristics of 18th Century Pietism — Spener, Francke, Zinzendorf — a glimmer of the emerging movement. (Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*.) For those of you

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<sup>11</sup> The majority of religious leaders in the emerging church have an educational background which emphasized the history of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods over the Medieval and Ancient. As a result it is unlikely that they are completely unaware of these similarities (Webber, *Listening* 196).

know care [sic] about historical movements like this, tell me what you think. How might the emerging movement be seen as a 21st Century form of pietism? (McKnight, “Emerging”)

It is indeed a question of “how” the two can be compared. As we shall see, it is their commonalities as experiential Christianities which are most enlightening.

### ***Historical Background of the Emerging Church Movement***

“The philosophical climate of our time inevitably forces its own clothing on us”  
-from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 471)

The emerging church is (arguably) forming in the age of post-modernity; which is notoriously difficult to define. At the core of almost every attempted definition is a discussion of epistemology and theories of knowledge (Campbell 312). Whereas the Modern worldview purports that things like truth and beauty can be found “out there” in the world, postmodern thinkers tend to believe that these notions are constructed or created by humans (Campbell 313).

Two aspects of the postmodern ethos are especially important for theological method: the fundamental critique and rejection of modernity, and the attempt to live and think in a realm of chastened rationality characterized by the demise of modern epistemological foundationalism<sup>12</sup> (Grenz 19).

With objective truth undermined, the rejection of the modern impulse to serve reason above all else becomes inevitable. This does not mean that reason has no part to play in the postmodern world, rather it plays a complementary role instead of the main role.

Since the emerging church is so closely associated with the philosophical movement, it also suffers from a lack of clear definition (Webber, *Listening* 195). In his article on the stereotypes and realities of the Emerging church, Scot McKnight remarks that:

It is said that emerging Christians confess their faith like mainliners – meaning they say things publicly they don’t really believe. They drink like Southern Baptists – meaning, to adapt some words from Mark Twain, they are teetotalers when it is judicious. They talk like Catholics – meaning they cuss and use naughty words. They evangelize and theologize like the Reformed – meaning they rarely evangelize, yet theologize all the time. They worship like charismatics – meaning with their whole bodies, some parts tattooed. They vote like Episcopalians – meaning they eat, drink, and sleep on their left side. And, they deny the truth – meaning they’ve got a latte-soaked copy of Derrida in their smoke and beer-stained backpacks (McKnight 35).

A more scholarly definition suggests that:

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<sup>12</sup> “Foundationalism refers to a conception of knowledge that emerged during the Enlightenment and sought to address the lack of certainty generated by the human tendency toward error and to overcome the inevitable, often destructive disagreements and controversies that followed. This quest for certainty involved reconstructing knowledge by rejecting “premodern” notions of authority and replacing them with uncontested beliefs accessible to all individuals. The assumptions of foundationalism, with its goal of establishing certain and universal knowledge, came to dominate intellectual pursuit in the modern era” (McLaren, *Generous* 10-11).

Emerging church are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities. (qtd. in McKnight 35-36)

For the present moment the Emerging church can be most simply conceived of as an attempt to “translate the gospel for a postmodern generation” (Colson 72).

Leaders of the emerging church movement view their work as an attempt to make the church a postmodern institution. It is only by understanding and for some, accommodating, the views of the postmodern man that the church will be able to survive. A brief look at how these religious leaders think about post-modernity is in order.

One of the more philosophically inclined Emerging Church theologians, Robert Webber, outlines his views on the historical development of ideas. He posits the following timeline: Classical Christianity (100-600), the church in the Medieval Era (600-1500) experienced an inordinate amount of influence from Aristotle, followed by the Reformation/Protestantism (1500-1750), the Modern Era (1750-1980) with heavy Cartesian influence (Webber sees much of the work done in this time period as a response to the cogito argument: “Cogito ergo sum”), and finally the Post Modern Era (1980-present) (Webber 13).

Webber does not give a straightforward definition of Post-modernity; rather he leaves almost all of his definition to the interplay and transformation of Modern Era to the Postmodern Era. He views the Modern Era as a time marked by individualism, rationalism, and factualism (Webber 18). Thus by implication Webber believes that the Postmodern Era is interested in something other than those things (or those things to a lesser extent).

Some see two different streams of post modernity: the “deconstructionists” like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and a lesser known, more positive group comprised of people like the “philosopher Michael Polanyi and Notre Dame professor Alasdair MacIntyre, along with theologians like Newbigin...” (Couch 40). Theologian Stanley Grenz points out that many Evangelical leaders such as Nancy Murphy distinguish between continental post-modernity as expressed in the deconstructive techniques of Derrida and the Anglo American constructive post modernity (citing philosophers like West, Stout, and Putnam) (Grenz 19-20). Emerging church theologians are often more willing to engage the latter philosophers in their theologies and reluctant to adopt the more radical positions of the former.

Given the multi-faceted nature of the philosophical issues with which the emerging church interacts it is not surprising that a number of different theological stances and ministry approaches have also developed. Doug Pagitt suggests that there are three main positions in the Emerging church: one group “will minister *to* postmoderns, others *with* postmoderns, and still others *as* postmoderns” (McKnight 37). Those who minister *to* postmoderns are those who see postmodernism as a worldview or philosophy to be saved from. Those who minister *with* postmoderns accept that postmodernism is part of the culture in which they also are trying to exist. Groups in this category take from postmodernism what they see fit while proclaiming the gospel and determining what it

looks like to live it out in this time. The last group is those who “do church” as postmoderns.

That is, they embrace the idea that we cannot know absolute truth, or, at least, that we cannot know truth absolutely. They speak of the end of metanarratives and the importance of social location in shaping one’s view of truth. They frequently express nervousness about propositional truth. (McKnight 37).

Brian McLaren addresses the aspects of post-modernity which will be the most relevant for the Christian community. He argues that the most important aspects of postmodernity which will affect the church are: (1) postmodernity’s skepticism of certainty, (2) sensitivity to context, (3) leans towards the humorous, (4) highly values subjective experience, (5) unfulfilled desire for community (McLaren, *Church* 162-164). These issues are each dealt with differently by the three groups which Pagitt described above.

A word should be said about the difference between the emerging church and Emergent. The word Emergent comes from the website Emergent Village ([emergentvillage.com](http://emergentvillage.com)) which is run by Princeton Theological Seminary student Tony Jones. This official organization provides podcasts, news updates, and networking opportunities for churches and church leaders as well as lay people. Emerging on the other hand is the “wider, informal, global, ecclesial (church-centered) focus of the movement” (McKnight 36).

McLaren tells the story of how the name emergent was created. In cooperation with Doug Pagitt and a leadership organization the name emergent was chosen in 2001. Later, Stephen Freed discovered a meaning for the word which contained parallels with its new-found religious use. “[E]mergents [are] small saplings that grow up in the shadow of the mature forest canopy... Whenever one of the mature trees dies, the emergents are there, ready to soar up and fill the gap and thrive in the light now available to them” (McLaren, *Generous* 275-276). In the same way, modern ways of Christianity are dying out over time and the emerging church and emergents will take their places, ensuring survival. The website *EmergentVillage* provides another definition:

In English, the word “emergent” is normally an adjective meaning coming into view, arising from, occurring unexpectedly, requiring immediate action (hence its relation to “emergency”), characterized by evolutionary emergence, or crossing a boundary (as between water and air). All of these meanings resonate with the spirit and vision of Emergent Village.  
(Emergent Village)

In both definitions the idea of the church of the future is emphasized.

Definitions of emergent abound in the movement and a clear picture of what is meant by Emerging is also difficult to come by. Pastor Dan Kimball summarizes the influences this way:

The dictionary defines the word “emerging” as “what is coming to the surface.” So I began using the words “emerging church” to describe churches that are exploring what it means to be the church as we enter emerging cultures. This is not unlike what missionaries do. If missionaries do not rethink things as they enter a culture, they probably aren’t very effective in the mission. I never thought the “emerging” way of thinking to

be merely a specific “style” or “methodology” of ministry. I also never thought of it to be a specific theology...I see the idea of the emerging church as more of a mind-set about theology. I view the terms “emerging church” as describing those who notice culture is changing and are not afraid to do deep ecclesiological thinking as we’re on an adventurous mission together for the gospel of Jesus. (Webber, *Listening* 83-84)

The overlap between this definition and the one provided by the *EmergentVillage* exemplifies the lack of definition among the group’s adherents. Some writers use the terms interchangeably while others distinguish between emerging and emergent.

The emerging church (an admittedly highly heterogeneous concept) seeks to leave behind the traditional Evangelical goal of “proving” the truth of Christianity and instead, open up a “dialogue” about “mystery” abandoning the old “black and white” approach (Crouch 38).

With this general background in seventeenth-century German Pietism and the emerging church movement I will now proceed with a comparison of responses to the concerns common to both movements, using Spener’s six tenets for reform as an starting point.

### ***1. Scripture***

#### *Theologies of Scripture*

Spener called for a “more extensive use of the Word of God among [Christians]” (Spener, *Pia* 87). The nature of this extended use starkly contrasted with the contemporary orthodox use of Scripture. As previously mentioned, “the Bible had once again become an arsenal of proof texts” for the orthodox religious leaders in the seventeenth century (Stoeffler, *Rise* 184). Pietism saw a different place for Scripture: practical, everyday applications for the believer’s life. Spener and other early Pietists distinguished between these two different approaches to exegesis: the scholastic method and the practical.

In Spener’s work *The Spiritual Priesthood* he contrasts the “natural knowledge of the letter of the Scriptures” with the “inward power of the Spirit in them” (Spener, *Spiritual* 26). Spener draws up a list of improper ways to use Scripture each of which emphasizes that Scripture is not to be used as a vehicle to show off one’s knowledge (via complicating simple passages or taking up only difficult ones), but to encourage good works (Spener, *Spiritual* 25). In this way Spener makes clear that there the scholastic method of exegesis is inferior to the practical method.

What characterized this practical method? In contrast with the scholastic use of Scripture, Pietists would come to argue that the Bible is only useful when someone is “moved by the Spirit to respond to it” (Stoeffler, *Rise* 240). Spener argued that without the guidance of the Holy Spirit Scripture is no different than any other book. The seeds for this sort of view were laid in *Pia desideria* when he repeatedly distinguishes the scholastic use of Scripture from the practical/spiritual one.

Just as the “orthodox” theologians of the Pietist’s day tended to use Scripture as proof texts for propositional theology, so also the emerging church is reacting to modern Evangelicalism’s apologetical use of Scripture. In response to a conservative Evangelical theology of Scripture, Doug Pagitt argues that, “[p]lacing Bible passages in and around

an argument is not in and of itself a proper way of being informed by the Scriptures” (Webber, *Listening* 43).

In a manner similar to the Pietists, the work of the Holy Spirit is emphasized by Emergent Doug Pagitt. Quoting John 14:23<sup>13</sup>, he argues that it is not Scripture but the Spirit who will lead the believer into the truth (Webber, *Listening* 113). “Christians have never been intended to be a people only of a book, but a people who are led by the ever-present God, active in our lives, communities, and world” (Webber, *Listening* 126). This takes the separation of the Pietists one level further: for the Pietists the Spirit needed the Word in order to enliven the believer; for Pagitt, the Spirit needs no intermediary, making Scripture a component of discipleship instead of the center of discipleship.

A similar view of Scripture is posited in Karen Ward’s chapter of *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*:

What I hope can happen is a revival of the Holy Spirit as the only teacher and possessor of true knowledge. With this posture towards the Scriptures, one is humble and is relying on God, instead of being arrogant and relying on human logic and systems of interpretations. (Webber 166)

This is reinforced in her communities approach to studying the Word. Rather than take it “line by line,” they seek to take Scripture “story by story” at their “Mass gatherings.” This allows the believers to let the “narrative speak for itself” (Webber, *Listening* 167). Ward makes clear she and her community understand Scripture “relationally” rather than as “inerrant” or “infallible.” It provides a “normative set of stories.” “Scriptures are also a mysterious stranger in our midst...bearing the otherness of God reflected in the various stories of God-encounters...” (Webber, *Listening* 168).

An example of the use of Scripture in emerging churches is provided by Solomon’s Porch. Every week at the Bible discussion group, members from the religious community discuss the Scripture which will be presented the following Sunday. Members share their insights and questions with one another and Pagitt relays this information to the congregation at the Sunday gathering (Pagitt, *Church* 115). The lay people’s opinions gathered at this Bible discussion group are (Pagitt hopes) the result of the individual’s interaction with the Spirit. When the congregation meets on Sunday, everyone is allowed to share insights that they have about the text at hand that week.

Relying on an invisible Spirit to ascertain truth causes concern about the potential for heresy. How is the congregation supposed to distinguish between an interpretation or idea which is really from the Holy Spirit and an erroneous theological opinion? Again citing John 14, Pagitt tells how the members trust that the Holy Spirit will “keep in our minds things said that accord with the ways and teachings of Jesus” (Pagitt, *Church* 117). Thus the community depends on the Spirit and fellow believers to prevent heresy (Pagitt, *Church* 123).

Spener was also trying to toe the line between the individual believer’s right and duty to study the Word and the fears about disorder and heresy on the other side. In question and answer format, Spener addresses these two sides of the problem thus:

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<sup>13</sup> “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Webber, *Listening* 113).

40. Would it not be better to leave the more careful searching of the Scriptures to ministers, and for the rest to abide by simplicity?

All Christians are obligated to this simplicity, not to desire to search out what God has not revealed, and also not to make their reason master in matters of faith. But if by simplicity is meant that they who are not ministers shall not seek nor exert themselves to grow in knowledge, this is against God's will and is disgraceful ignorance, indolence and ingratitude towards the rich divine revelation. Here we ought to seek not to be simple, but wise and understanding, and to have by reason of use senses exercised to discern good and evil, Heb. 5:14; Rom. 16:19; I Cor. 14:20; Eph. 1:15-19; 4:14; Col. 1:9-12, 28.

42. But is there not danger that disorder will arise when all study the Scriptures so much?

If such study aims only at showy and carnal knowledge, whereby great conceit and love of disputation with others are engendered, it leads to no good. But if it is carried on according to the rules given above, there will follow from it divine and salutary wisdom, which rather prevents than produces disorder, James 3:17,18. (Spener, *Spiritual* 26-27)

As long as the believer is striving for knowledge for the right reasons, then there is no need to fear disorder, in fact such desire for knowledge is commended by God himself, according to Spener. Both the emerging church and Pietism saw that their conception of Scripture left them open to an increase in heresy, and both believe they solve the problem by relying on God to keep their religious communities in check. In other words, there is no human system for verifying true spiritual insight and insanity or inventiveness.

Pietism's conception of Scripture was heavily influenced by their emphasis on a living Christianity. Like the Pietists emerging church leader Brian McLaren believes that, "[t]he purpose of Scripture is to equip God's people for good works" (McLaren, *Generous* 164). Just as Spener distinguished between the scholastic use of Scripture from the spiritual one, McLaren muses:

Oddly, I've never heard of a church or denomination that asked people to affirm a doctrinal statement like this: *The Purpose of Scripture is to equip God's people for good works*. Shouldn't a simple statement like this be far more important than statements with words foreign to the Bible's vocabulary about itself (inerrant, authoritative, literal, revelatory, objective, absolute, propositional, etc.)? (McLaren, *Generous* 164-165)

The reference about inerrancy, etc. of Scripture is clearly a jab at conservative foundationalist theologians. McLaren makes clear that meaningful use of Scripture involves using the Word as a springboard for good works, not a source of propositional theology.

But McLaren's theology of Scripture involves more than using the text as an encouragement to do good works. He argues that believers should view the Word as a narrative of God's interaction with humanity. This approach allows him to get around a number of classic difficulties. For example, McLaren believes that God commanded the chosen people of the Old Testament to massacre large numbers of people and destroy entire cities because this was simply what God had to do to keep his people alive. However as time moved on God was able to advocate love for neighbor (in the Torah)

and universal love (in Jesus) (McLaren, *Generous* 167). As a result of this theology, McLaren argues that we must not view Scripture as a “timeless” document but as a “timely” one (McLaren, *Generous* 170).

But it is important to note that McLaren, like many other emerging church theologians, goes a step further than the Pietists (McLaren, *Generous* 162). Spener would never deny the inerrancy, literalness, or objective truth of the Bible (though some later Pietist groups would come to question these things). But the denial of the inerrancy of scripture is not at all unheard of in Emerging Church circles. Enter Rob and Kristen Bell, leaders of Mars Hill (a church in Grandville, Michigan), who:

...started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself-  
 “discovering the Bible as a human product,” as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. “The Bible is still in the center for us,” Rob says, “but it’s a different kind of center.” (Crouch 38)

This view of Scripture typifies the Emerging Church’s theological methodology. Just as the Pietist’s doctrinal positions can be seen as reactions to the increasing pressures of Rationalism and early Enlightenment thought, so the Emerging Church has adapted its theology to some of the basic tenets of postmodern theory.<sup>14</sup>

Both Pietists and emerging church-goers emphasize the role of the Spirit in understanding Scripture. Both movements contrast their view on the use of Scripture with scholastic, propositionally-based approaches which they see as damaging to the believer. In addition, their conception of Scripture is heavily influenced by their emphasis on living Christianity in everyday life. Scripture then becomes a source of encouragement for the individual’s living faith.

### *Conventicle and Community*

As has already been shown, theologies of Scripture are closely connected with a philosophy of community in which the Word is studied. Community determines what text is studied and the way members of the community engage Scripture.

This focus on the practical application of Scripture as opposed to a more scholarly use led to one of the most distinguishing features of Pietism: the collegium pietatis, also called conventicles (Stoeffler, *Rise* 19). In *Pia desideria* Spener advocates that at some point following the weekly church service interested lay people and the minister should gather to discuss the sermon. This gathering would be of great use not only because it would help the ministers and parishioners become better acquainted with one another (leading to improved ministry quality) but also because it would encourage the people to “modestly” ask their questions about Scripture. Conventicle goers would assumedly gain

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<sup>14</sup> Obviously, not everyone in the Emerging Church adheres to such views or engages in this methodology. Emerging Church leader Mark Driscoll preaches *to* people of postmodern persuasion rather than *as* a postmodern (to use the distinctions drawn in the historical introductions). In his chapter in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, Mr. Driscoll has this to say: “Since [the mid-1990’s] I have been encouraged by the resurgent interest of doing missions in emerging American culture. I have also been greatly concerned by some of the aberrant theological concepts gaining popularity with some fellow emerging-type younger pastors” (Webber, “Listening” 21). It quickly becomes clear that Driscoll is not in the majority in this collection of beliefs or in the general published opinion of emerging church-goers.

a better understanding of Scripture, resulting in higher quality religious instruction in their homes (Spener *Pia* 90).

While the primary focus was on interaction with Scripture, these meetings were meant for two purposes: (1) an opportunity to share religious insights and concerns, and (2) a time to encourage fellow believers to live Christian lives (Stoeffler, *German* 120).<sup>15</sup> After being encouraged to produce fruits of faith by means of the Word, the conventicle participant would also be encouraged by his or her fellow believer.

What did these meetings look like? They seem to have been similar to a modern bible class. Here is an account of the activities of a conventicle which met in Tübingen in 1733:

Sonntags nach vollendetem öffentlichen Gottesdienst sammlete sich unvermuthet von selbst nach und nach ein Häuflein redlicher Seelen in meinem Haus; da wir dann unsere fernere Andacht mit singen, beten und Betrachtung des Wortes Gottes hatten.<sup>16</sup> (Fulbrook 139)

Spener sees this sort of gathering around the Word as essential to any proposed reform (Spener *Pia* 91). The remaining five points for reform would all hinge on the use of Scripture. It is important to note the goal of these meetings was to edify the laypeople. The emphasis on the importance of each individual believer understanding the Scriptures has been seen as a response to early Enlightenment thought. Indeed Pietist groups became some of the first groups to tolerate some of the theological implications of Enlightenment thought (Fulbrook 178-179).

Pietism's conventicles were not without precedent. Labadie<sup>17</sup> had formed similar organizations. He in turn was influenced by English Congregationalists. The Collegiants<sup>18</sup> also held such meetings (some Pietists would later come to merge with such groups) (Stoeffler, *Rise* 19, 165, 166, 176). Spener also wrote of his respect for the congregational organization of the Waldesians, a group with an unpaid ministry and strong priesthood of all believers (Deeter 50). Spener's support of such meetings naturally caused much dismay in the camps of the orthodox leaders who were familiar with some of these existing groups (Stoeffler, *Rise* 244).

Spener himself had been involved with a conventicle-like organization at the University of Leipzig (the year was 1686). This *collegium philobiblicum* was not only interested in a devotional extension of the Sunday service, but also in digging deeper into the Scriptures using linguistics and the original language texts (Stoeffler, *German* 4). The emphasis of study was not "reine Lehre" but "nützliche"<sup>19</sup> (Stoeffler, *German* 7).

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that such gatherings were not deemed necessary by all Pietist leaders (notably Bengel) (Stoeffler, *German* 104).

<sup>16</sup> "On Sundays when the public service was over a small group of honest souls would gather, of their own accord, by and by at my house; for we then had our further devotions, with singing, praying, and reflection on the Word of the Lord." (Fulbrook 139)

<sup>17</sup> (1610-1674) Labadie was a reformer who penned many of the concerns which would later be taken up by Spener and Lutheran pietism (Some very close parallels between Spener's six proposals and Labadie can be seen in Labadie's work *The Reform of the Church Through the Pastorate*) (Stoeffler, *Rise* 166-167).

<sup>18</sup> A radical religious organization which subscribed to prophecy, the Sermon on the Mount, anti-ecclesiasticism, and was thoroughly anti-dogmatic. "Their basic ethical principle was that of trying to live in the Spirit of love" (Stoeffler, *Rise* 177).

<sup>19</sup> Not pure doctrine but practical or useful doctrine.

Such groups developed in a number of cities across Germany accompanied by much controversy. Conventicles were usually offshoots of existing congregations. Often, conventicles would be faced with the question of whether to remain part of the congregation or become an independent organization. As a result Pietist's tended to break down into two distinct social groups: "inner churchly Pietism" and "separatist Pietism" (Fulbrook 136). Inner churchly groups continued to attend regular church services and used conventicles as an additional or supplemental opportunity to worship. Often these inner churchly groups would come to be led by someone who was critical of the church (Stoeffler, *German* 120). Over time these groups would break away and become independent from the church they originally belonged to.

There is a parallel for the conventicler in a number of Emerging Church groups. One example of an inner churchly group is the "micro churches" of the Church of the Apostles (COTA) in Seattle, led by Karen Ward. Micro churches are small groups which meet together at the weekly mass but are distinct entities in themselves (Webber, *Listening* 167). Ward describes the "Mass gathering" (the meeting of the micro churches) this way:

We come together as children to be gathered around and taken up into the Big Story told by our Father, which we are invited to hear, touch, taste, smell, and see through the life of Jesus...

At Apostles [COTA] we call our reflections on the Word the "reverb." Reverb may or may not be a sermon, as a sermon is just one way to break open the Word among many other ways we might use (drama, art, music, discussion, poetry...). (Webber, *Listening* 167)

The primary purpose of the gathering is to hear and reflect on the "Big Story" as presented in the Scriptures. The emphasis, like Pietist conventicles, is on meeting around the Word.

Ward's church is inner churchly in another important way. COTA is affiliated with the Anglican and Lutheran churches. As a result, and unlike many other Emerging Churches, they exist within the bounds of existing denominations, creating a "change from within" according to Pagitt (Webber, *Listening* 192). "Anglimergent" (the emerging church movement in the Anglican denomination) and "Presbymergent" (the emerging church movement in the Presbyterian denomination) groups are only two examples of what could be considered an inner churchly emerging church.

For the emerging church the religious community is where the Scripture and the Spirit are encountered. Since theological truths come from the interaction of the individual, Scripture, and Spirit, the community becomes the place where theologizing is done. Thus Grenz argues that the religious community should be the focus of the church's interest, with theology taking its place as a "second-order" discipline (Grenz 16-17). Theology is a by-product of the religious community not an end in itself. Grenz speaks, "...of the church as the fellowship of those persons who gather around the narrative of God at work as inscripturated in the Bible" (Grenz 225). The church becomes subsumed in an overarching project of God, with partial history of the project recorded in Scripture.

The theological reading views Scripture not as a storehouse of facts waiting to be systematized but as a testimony to the ongoing work of God with humankind, a work that climaxes with the Spirit calling into being

the fellowship of Christ's disciples as the eschatological community.  
(Grenz 90)

Like the Pietists, Grenz argues that it is only the triangular interaction between the Spirit, reader, and Word which makes Scripture important to the religious community. "...[T]he singularity of voice we claim for scripture is ultimately the singularity of the Spirit who speaks through the texts" (Grenz 90).

Just as the conventicle became the central place for the study of Scripture for the Pietists, the "community" is the central place of Scriptural interaction for the emerging church.

We have noted repeatedly in this chapter that the Spirit appropriates the biblical text so as to fashion a community that lives the paradigmatic biblical narrative in the contemporary context. The goal of our reading the text, therefore, is to hear the Spirit's voice forming us into that community. This understanding leads to the conclusion that reading the text theologically entails reading "within community." (Grenz 91)

The Scriptures, as we have already seen, are understood to rely upon the Spirit to be properly understood. Grenz elaborates this position, making clear that the Spirit acts in the religious community. As a result, the community itself becomes the pre-requisite for theological understanding.<sup>20</sup>

Community is necessary in order for Scripture to be understood, theology to be developed and good works to follow. Thus the religious community is pivotal to the emerging church in a way similar to the Pietist conventicle. Community becomes the place where one learns about the large story in which one is taking part. Karen Ward describes the role of the religious community this way:

As we live together in the way of Jesus within community, we see ourselves participating in the very life of God. As God is the source of all relationality, the relationships we have in community that are guided by the Spirit are reflective of the inner relationship that happens in God, even if reflected "in a mirror dimly." (Webber, "Listening" 175)

The experience of God can be found in the participation of the religious community. The community becomes the stage on which God acts.

The term religious community can be deceiving. In emerging-church language community means much more than just the local congregation. For example, Pagitt's conception of community is comprised of four "elements: Local, Global, Historical, and Futural" (Pagitt, *Church* 27). The local community is not just those in the local congregation but also everyone with whom the believer interacts. The local congregation also seeks to fit into the context of the global Christian community with all of its

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<sup>20</sup> The philosophical basis for this "communitarian" theology has been provided by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff: "...these thinkers maintain against Enlightenment foundationalism that there is no universal human reason but that reason is "person specific" and "situation specific." Nevertheless Plantinga and Wolterstorff assert that certain beliefs are basic. In response to the question of what – if anything – might be deemed basic for Christian theology, these philosophers, following the lead of other nonfoundationalists, point to the believing community. Plantinga and Wolterstorff assert that to be human means to be situated in a particular community, so that our respective communities (or traditions) play an indispensable role in shaping our conceptions of rationality, as well as the religious beliefs we deem basic and thus by appeal to which we test new claims" (Grenz 231).

diversity. The historical community consists of the history of Christianity and its interaction with cultures around the globe. As suggested earlier, the emerging church lives in the half-future tense of youth. Pagitt retells the story of this word in his community:

We owe this concept to a 20-year-old named Luke. During a discussion of part of the Bible that I no longer recall, Luke called us all to a life that is future-focused as well as focused on the here and now. (Pagitt, *Church* 29)

The conception of community covers much more than the immediate congregational context that a traditional definition may suggest. The emerging church acknowledges this use of the word while broadening the use to describe other dimensions of context which inform theology.

One of the best examples of this interaction between Scripture and community is the Minneapolis congregation Solomon's Porch led by Doug Pagitt. Pagitt speaks of the Bible as another community member, a voice to be heard, listened to, and discussed, but not to be blindly followed (Pagitt, *Preaching* 195). The sermons at Solomon's Porch are clearly influenced by this conception of scripture. After the worship leader (who may or may not be Doug Pagitt) presents a section of scriptural text and some historical and theological background listeners are invited to ask questions, comment, and generally interact with each other and the worship leader. This is not a far cry from the Pietist conventicles, a point which will become even clearer in the section on priesthood.

Pietism and the emerging church hold community in high regard a place for the individual to be encouraged by the Spirit through other believers. It is also a place to encounter Scripture leading to theologizing. The emerging church drops back one level further than the Pietists did, making community a place where people discovered how they fit into the story of God.

### *Eschatology*

Both Pietism and the emerging church existed at times when the future looked gloomy for organized religion. Yet both groups have a surprisingly positive eschatology (theological study of the end times and the nature of the future in general).

Unlike many "orthodox" leaders of their time, the early Pietists believed that the best days of the world were yet to come. He believed, "...that there were better times ahead for the church on earth because of the sureness of God's fulfilling of His promises" (Deeter 132). Among his positive eschatological beliefs was that the Jews would all be "saved" (citing Romans 11:25-26 and Hosea 3:4-5) and that the Roman papacy would fall (citing Revelation 18, 19) (Spener, *Pia* 76). The promises of a better future allowed Spener to proscribe that "[t]he evil circumstances of our time...be borne with compassion rather than bewailed with anger" (Spener, *Pia* 80). By the late eighteenth century, when these promises failed to come true, the result was a whiny, meek, faint Pietism which became the historical stereotype of the movement.

Like Spener, the Emerging Church presents an eschatology of hope and a better future. Emerging churches are said to "...live in the half-future tense of the young, oriented toward their promises rather than their past...their own focus is on what they are 'emerging' toward" (Crouch 37). One of the most important books of the movement, McLaren's *A Generous Orthodoxy*, "[offers] a fundamentally hopeful, rather than despairing or defensive, reading of [postmodern culturally] changes..." (Crouch 39)

The basis for much of this hope is provided by a re-imagined doctrine of election<sup>21</sup>, largely thanks to the missionology of theologian Lesslie Newbigin. McLaren elaborates on this new understanding of an old doctrine: “Election is not about who gets to go to heaven; election is about who God chooses to be part of his crisis-response team to bring healing to the world” (Crouch 39-40).

British Emergents Jason Clark and John Green, citing the theologian Jurgen Moltmann, argue that the Emerging Church’s eschatology must look with hope to the future. Moltmann, citing the Indonesian word for hope as “looking beyond the horizon,” thought that believers must live in the dynamic tension of the future. They contrast this position with the imminent-return eschatology of many Christians which, they argue, paralyzes the church’s ability to act, to plan, and to provide hope (“Hermeneutics”).

Both Pietism and the emerging church developed at times when the Christian church was facing an increasing number of external threats. Despite or because of this state of affairs, both movements hold positive eschatologies which offer their followers a brighter future for mankind.

## ***2. Priesthood of all Believers***

The priesthood of all believers is the theological position that every believer is ultimately in charge of their own religious affairs. That is, every believer can have a direct connection with God, without another human mediator. But being one’s own priest also comes with responsibilities. This connection with the divine means that every believer has the obligation to preach the word (in one form or another), evangelize, and conduct a virtuous life which will theoretically lead others to Christ.

### *Women*

As previously mentioned, Spener saw a need to continue the reformation which Luther started. An essential aspect of this project was bringing the priesthood to the people (Spener, “Spiritual” 13). Spener makes clear what he means by the words “spiritual priesthood”. For him there are three different offices or functions: (1) sacrifice, (2) praying and blessing, and (3) the Word (Spener, *Spiritual* 17).

Each of these offices breaks down into different ministries or courses of action. For example the Word involves preaching, teaching, studying, reading, in addition to theological positions as to what the Word is or means. Much of what Spener advises in this treatise is formulaic orthodox theology for the time. Here I will focus on the aspects of his argument which broke with the standard of orthodoxy at the time.

In his work *Spiritual Priesthood*, Spener begins outlining his vision of what is called the priesthood of all believers by citing 1 Peter 2:9<sup>22</sup> and (more importantly) Galatians 3:28<sup>23</sup>. This latter passage has extremely radical implications when used in the context of the priesthood of all believers.

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<sup>21</sup> The doctrine of election deals with how God decides or knows (or, in some theologies doesn’t pick or know) who will be saved from eternal damnation.

<sup>22</sup> “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (New International Version)

<sup>23</sup> “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

59. Do all these offices [teaching, converting the erring, admonishing, reproof, comforting]...concern all Christians?

Yes, and that too not only in the sense that fathers and mothers should faithfully do these things among their children and domestics, but that every Christian has the power and right to do these things among his brethren on other occasions, as the passages referred to prove...Deut. 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15. (Spener, *Spiritual* 30-31)

By proclaiming that Christ erases differences created by religion (“Jew nor Gentile”), class (“slave nor free”), and gender (“male nor female”), Spener seems to completely level the playing field of priesthood, making every single human their own spiritual priest (Spener, *Spiritual* 15).

Spener, perhaps unwittingly, opened the door to a number of “heretical” practices and teachings. One of them was the role of women in the church. Here is what he had to say concerning women in *The Spiritual Priesthood*:

60. But do women also share in these priestly offices?

Assuredly; for here is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus, Gal. 3:28. In Christ, therefore, the difference between man and woman, in regard to what is spiritual, is abolished. Since God dignifies believing women also with His spiritual gifts, Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 21:9; I Cor. 11:5, the exercise of them in proper order cannot be forbidden. The apostles themselves make mention of those godly women, who worked together with them and edified their fellow-men; and far from censuring them for this, they accorded them love and praise for it, Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1, 2, 12; Phil. 4:2, 3; Titus 2:3-5.

61. But are women not forbidden to teach?

Yes; namely, in the public congregation. But that it is permitted to them outside of the public congregation, is clear from the passages and apostolic examples cited, I Cor. 14:34 sq.; I Tim. 2:11, 12. (Spener 30-31)

Question sixty throws the doors wide open for women to take positions and duties in the church which were not allowed by the orthodox at that time. In question sixty-one, Spener attempts to limit the preceding response but hinges his argument on the words “public congregation.” What were the nature of conventicles? Were they also to be understood as public congregations? Many thought not, particularly separatist groups.

While many of the conventicles were led by ministers, many others were not. “...we hear of ‘ein alter lieber Mann’ in Freudenstadt, and an ‘erweckte Mädchen’<sup>24</sup> in Stuttgart in 1734, who seem to have held *Erbauungsstunden*“ (Fulbrook 140). Conventicles were often conducted for the “godly few in their congregations” (Fulbrook 140). Berlin conventicles were known to be led by laymen (Stoeffler, *German* 74). This trust in God’s Word over men’s words concerning Scripture often allowed unprecedented trust in “theologically untrained men,” and as we have seen, untrained women (Stoeffler, *Rise* 21).

The speaker or worship leader at services (both at Solomon’s Porch and a number of other Emerging Churches) are often women (Pagitt, *Church* 73). While not without protest from fellow Emergents (Webber, *Listening* 184), women often take lead positions in Emerging groups (Emerging Women).

<sup>24</sup> “‘A dear old man’ and ‘an inspired girl.’” (Fulbrook 140)

While controversial, both Pietism and the emerging church allowed women to in ministry roles. While Spener attempts to curb this possibility, Pietist practice seems to have allowed female leadership within the conventicle. The role of women in the emerging church is much more prominent and is endorsed by a number of emerging leaders.

### *Missionology*

The renewed emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, particularly as seen in the excerpts from Spener's writing, logically involved a reinvigoration of mission work. Mission activity among Christians was virtually dead when the Pietists revived it (Durnbaugh 230).

Many conventicles were advocates of social and justice issues and railed against the hedonism of the court society ("vom Hof komme alles übel"<sup>25</sup>) (Fulbrook 138)) (Fulbrook 156-157, 177).<sup>26</sup> Pietist conventicles, particularly those in Halle led by August Franke, were renowned for their work in education, social work (especially orphanages), and religious tract publication.

One of the catchwords in the emerging church movement is "missional life." While the word is new, the meaning draws on a number of common experientialist tendencies. Living missionally involves participating "in the redemptive work of God in this world" (McKnight, "Five" 38). It can be described as "follow[ing] Christ into the world" ("Values"). This also involves participating in a local community and, more vaguely, "participating in the holistic redemptive work of God in this world" (McKnight, "Five" 38). This boils down to loving others shown in good works. Belief becomes interaction with religious community rather than subscription to a statement of belief (Pagitt, *Church* 13).

All three of these aspects of a missional life were present in the Pietist movement. By living a life true to God's word (inherently in a community of believers) the Christian was seen to be the salt of the earth, God's true children who worked for his glory.

### *Worship Space*

A religious organization's conception of the priesthood of all believers can be "read" in its worship space. Because of their experientialist theology both Pietism and the emerging church developed informal worship spaces which decentralized traditional power structures.

The conventicle brought religion into the homes of believers. Meeting in homes meant that the worship space entered into the domain of the layperson. Those who hosted meetings naturally held a certain degree of power in the conventicle. The increased comfortability and control of the layperson was combined with the displacement of the pastor from his traditional power center of the pulpit. These factors equated a leveling of the priesthood playing field.

Pagitt argues that Christians need level the playing field of the priesthood, something which his church has done in a number of ways (Pagitt, *Preaching* 152). The nave and sanctuary of Solomon's Porch is set up in a roundtable format with couches and

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<sup>25</sup> "All evil comes from the court." (Fulbrook 138)

<sup>26</sup> Pietists also tended to be against absolutist rule and were for this and the previously cited reasons, seen as potential disturbers of the peace (Fulbrook 189, 145).

chairs replacing pews (Pagitt, *Preaching* 207). The speaker at the worship service sits on a swivel stool in the center of these large concentric rings of couches. The visual layout is telling: rather than placing the speaker in the sanctuary, s/he is “among the people” in the nave, while congregants sit in the area once used as the sanctuary.

On the lower level there is a lobby, kitchen, and an art gallery space... The walls are multicolored and decorated with paintings, photographs, and sculpture, Tables are covered with candles and communion elements. People expecting rows of folding chairs find instead groupings of couches, chairs, end tables, recliners, and the like arranged in the round with an open center area. The musicians are located across from the door, but not in the center. Projector screens adorn the corners of both long ends of the room so people can see a screen no matter which direction they face. Because we meet in the round, some people are facing the door, and others are looking away from it. (Pagitt, *Church* 59-61)

Part of our communal effort on Sunday nights is to limit the things that separate those in charge from those who are not; our hope is that all people will be part of this experience. That’s why it’s important that the roles people play don’t become confused with power in other area of our community. We don’t have special places of activity or certain rights that are reserved for only some (okay, I admit we do have gender-specific restrooms). Because we don’t have a stage, we don’t have to be concerned with who is utilizing that place of power. It is important for us not to centralize power or give undue power to those wearing microphones who speak to the entire group in ways that other do not have. We are conscious of the feelings that come when one person has the ability to address the crowd with sophisticated sound reinforcement and what that communicates to others about whose words are important.

Because of the couches, the absence of a stage, and the fact that people wander around during the gatherings, some people describe our setting as casual. Actually, I prefer the word *normal*. But what happens in this space is anything but normal. (Pagitt, *Church* 67)

By creating a home-like environment and decentralizing the speaker, Solomon’s Porch erases the lines between the priest and the people.

Both Pietism and the emerging church have made worship spaces more informal; the Pietists by moving worship into the home and the emerging church by moving home into the church. This parallels the theological position on the priesthood of all believers: every believer is their own priest all of the time making a sacred/secular divide impossible.

### *Separatism*

With a theology which emphasizes the spiritual independence of every believer separatist tendencies quickly developed among both the Pietist conventicles and the emerging church.

As mentioned above Pietist conventicle groups were generally either inner churchly or separatist. The strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers accentuated

the separatist tendencies within the movement. Conventicle groups who disliked their spiritual leaders could easily argue that this ordained leader was unnecessary to their spiritual development. In other cases charismatic spiritual leaders removed their religious communities from larger ties, justified by their independent understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

This is especially true among the Württemberg Pietists. A number of separatist groups tried the patience of political leaders who enacted a number of laws aimed at reuniting these separatist groups with existing churches (Fulbrook 145). In 1674 the General Synod of Cleve passed a law allowing small conventicles to meet but requiring large conventicles to be led by an ordained minister (Stoeffler, *German* 219). Some cities were even stricter. The city of Mühlheim forbade conventicles altogether from 1740-1750 (Stoeffler, *German* 194).

The emerging church is seeing similar internal movements. Some emerging church groups have done away with organization and leadership altogether. McLaren describes such organizations as “idealists” who focus on “interpersonal relationships” and “loving [their] neighbors.” These groups meet in homes and restaurants, not churches (McLaren, *Church* 96-97).<sup>27</sup>

A number of such groups have developed. While most are impossible to locate, one variety is gaining popularity: intentional communities. Perhaps the most famous intentional community which is linked with the Emerging church is Shane Claiborne’s group named “The Simple Way” which is based in Philadelphia. Claiborne espouses an active priesthood similar to the one described by McLaren, but he calls it the “Mustard Seed” method or revolution (Claiborne 334-340). Ward makes clear that a number of members have an intentional community in Seattle (Webber, *Listening* 174).<sup>28</sup>

McLaren points out a number of problems with such groups: they simply cannot maintain themselves at the grassroots level. Either they die out “after a few months or perhaps a few years” or the “little church will grow, change its ecclesiology...and get organized” (McLaren, “Church” 97). McLaren’s solution is a typical one for the Emerging Church, the answer is that there is no definite answer. In this case,

...the perfect structure is just about any that is flexible enough to become a better structure tomorrow. Conversely, the “perfect structure” that claims to be *the* right one, immune to improvement, is actually one of the worst structures possible. (McLaren, “Church” 107)

These small independent forms of church do not usually stand the test of time. The separatist Pietist groups provide a good example of what often goes wrong. While they contain an overabundance of energy, they quickly burn out leaving little behind. The emerging church would do well to heed the lesson of the separatist Pietists who adopted this anti-organizational model.

### ***3. Emphasis on Orthopraxy***

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<sup>27</sup> Naming such people “Revolutionaries,” Barna states that, “[s]ome of them are aligned with a congregational church, but many of them are not” (8).

<sup>28</sup> Ward’s community is part of the New Monastic movement which stresses communal living and the experiential side of Christianity. Ward, for example is often referred to as an abbess, and her church as the Abbey (Webber, *Listening* 177).

For Spener and the Pietists, religious orthodoxy was not enough for the true believer. “[I]t is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice” (Spener, Pia 95). One could know all of the required doctrine and still not be a good Christian. The missing piece was orthodox practice: a living out of faith generally called orthopraxy. By combining orthodoxy with orthopraxy Pietism opened its theology to the influence of experience and mysticism.

The following selections from Webber’s *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* show how central orthopraxy is to the emerging church.

...emergents are saying theology and practice must be brought back together again. They call on us to find a better way of doing theology; because theology is not abstract, ethereal answers. Instead, theology must be contextual, particular, Spirit-led, a song and dance with culture, participatory. It must be integrated with God’s agenda for the world; it must seek to answer the questions being asked in today’s culture; it must interface with world religions; it must speak to the mission of the church; it must form worship and spirituality and all the ministries of the church. (Webber, *Listening* 198)

The challenge that lies before the emerging church is to bring theology and practice together once again. As I have indicated above, the healing of the division between theology and practice is evident in the writings of the contributors to this book. The ancient church had a saying for this kind of applied theology: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The literal translation of this Latin phrase is, “The rule of prayer is the rule of faith” or, another way of putting it is to say, “Show me what you practice, and I will show you what you believe.” In the traditional evangelical approach to theology, this saying was reversed. We were taught, “Get your theology straight and it will inform your practice.” But that approach failed. It never built the bridge between theology and practice. Theology became a thing in itself. (Webber, *Listening* 201)

Both Pietism and the emerging church developed in opposition to Christianities which emphasized correct understanding of theology and correct teaching of that theology. The emerging church and Pietism argued that orthodoxy (correct teaching) alone is not true Christianity.

#### *The Role of Experience in Theology*

“...give priority to love over knowledge...” (“Values”)

The talk of orthodoxy and orthopraxy comes down to questions of truth. What does it mean to be a true follower of Christ? The orthodox theologians for Spener’s day argued that an intellectual knowledge of Christ and Christianity would produce the truth: true faith, true ethical life, and truth in objective reality. Spener repeatedly made clear that he had no quarrel with these claims, however, orthodoxy would never be the whole truth: orthopraxy was equally (if not more) important.

With this theological position, the individual comes to have some say on the nature of truth. Experience of God, the world, religion, etc. come to play a role in determining truth. The problems are obvious: since it cannot be disputed that there are multiple, often contradictory experiences, the truth becomes impossible to reach objectively. As we shall shortly see, the door was open for self-proclaimed prophets and other charismatic leaders to enter the conventicles and gain a following based on the content of their religious experiences.

The same problems also arise for the emerging church. The problem is compounded for the emerging church which has to deal with the added pressure of philosophical relativism. As mentioned in the historical introduction, some Emergents minister *to* postmoderns, making the relative claims of truth only a problem of missionology. However, for those who minister *with* and *as* postmoderns, the collapse of objective truth causes all the obvious controversies.

Emergent Tony Jones argues that the believer's new paradigm for thinking about questions of truth should be that of Aristotle's. He argues that, contrary to Plato, Aristotle allowed for two kinds of knowledge: *sophia* (wisdom, knowledge ascertained by reflection) and *phronesis* (practical knowledge gained from experience). The postmodern believer should strive for knowledge of the *phronesis* variety. Jones argues that this type of knowledge is like the one we use to drive a car: we can do it instinctively because we have repeated the experience so many times. This *phronesis* was the reason for monastic communities, argues Jones. By using this type of knowledge believers can live the life of Christianity in the emerging world ("Tony Jones").

The important question becomes not "is this objectively true" but "what would this look like in the real world?" The critical response of contemporary orthodoxies is unsurprising. One editorial in *Christianity Today* is titled: "Emerging Confusion: Jesus is the truth whether we experience him or not" (Colson 72). The "very foundation of our faith" is undermined in this postmodern approach, argues the writer (Colson 72). And he's right. The orthodoxy which he is referring to and the orthodoxy in Spener's day completely collapses if experience plays a role in obtaining truth (objective or otherwise).

The questioning of objective truth claims takes up a large amount of emerging church leaders' writings. Take this response from Doug Pagitt when confronted with a theologian who claims to know the "correct" way to understand Christianity:

To really consider this a legitimate option [correcting those in error] would mean that he [the theologian Pagitt is responding to] would be "correct" on these matters, and that all who think more broadly on such issues of Scripture and atonement are in his care to correct. This is a ludicrous assumption. (Webber, *Listening* 43)

This "ludicrous" assumption is the foundationalism of the modern evangelical movement. Pagitt here clearly dismisses such theological methodology.

The individual is the vessel of experience and therefore the source of individual theologies. This point is advocated heartily by Ward. She cites a poem by Rainer Rilke to clarify her position: "God 'speaks to each of us as he makes us'" which she believes means, "that God speaks to us out of our own culture and the stuff of our own lives, no less than God speaks to us in the canon of Holy Scripture..." (Webber, *Listening* 162).

If the individual is to create theology out of experience then truth claims will rarely last over time. For Pagitt, "theology is meant to be temporary" (Webber, *Listening*

121). “Theology functions like an adapter that allows the story of God to connect with the story of our lives” (Webber, *Listening* 122). He gives the analogy of an internet connection. An old computer required a certain type of device in order to connect to the internet. Now, that device no longer functions. The old device could be kept for a variety of reasons, but not because it functions any longer. In the same way theology needs to constantly find new adaptors to God which work for the people involved in making the theology.

Emerging Church leader Karen Ward picks up on Pagitt’s idea and describes it in this way: as Clement Sedmak’s concept of “little theologies” (Webber, *Listening* 156, 162).

Little theologies are those developed within local faith communities that help them reflect upon, shape, and live into their lives in Christ within a particular time, place, and set of circumstances, which are unique to them and may not be readily applicable to the times, places, and circumstances in other communities. (Webber, *Listening* 156)

Other samples of the view of truth come out in Pagitt’s response chapter: “...people cannot legitimately operate with no cultural lens,” “...such a view [conservative, foundationalist] denies the reality of the development of language and the pressures of culture” (Webber, *Listening* 44). And:

There seems to be an undercurrent of the idea that we ought not be caught up in our culture to such a degree that we would diminish the gospel...I think this notion, while sounding good, is simply not possible. Every time we use language, meet in a place, or make decisions, we are full participants in our culture. This idea that we can stand outside of culture in some sort of neutrality is not possible. So it seems to me that we need to be part of the cross-cultural practice of engaging with our faith from our culture, in relationship with another culture, but not allow ourselves to think that we are somehow unbiased. (Webber, *Listening* 77)

For Pagitt, there is no way around this cultural emersion, there was no ideal time to do theology or think about God (Webber, *Listening* 123). Theology as a result cannot escape this sentence nor should it desire to do so. Pagitt goes even further: “In many ways, theology is not the point. Theology itself is a category for separating our understanding of God from other “disciplines” (Webber, *Listening* 124).

Dan Kimball acknowledges the influence of culture to a lesser extent: “When anyone speaks or writes about theology and church, they are emerging from some sort of background and culture that frames what they say” (Webber, *Listening* 87). Or, “[p]erhaps we need to admit that our own personal biases and backgrounds do taint how we view theology (Webber, *Listening* 91). While Kimball sees cultural influence as a sad but true state of affairs, Pagitt sees it as an acceptable reality and framework for Christianity.

Pastor Karen Ward’s response to the same theologian which Pagitt referred to is even more telling:

I reference Scripture as the “big S story,” a founding partner in a relational dance, as my friend Rachel Mee Chapman says, “in the overlap” of text, community, and Spirit.

As such, my take on truth is that it is *personal*, and my view of authority is *dynamic*... (Webber, *Listening* 45)

The emphasis of Pietism and the emerging church on experience creates unique theologies which elevate the individual.

### *Mysticism*

By permitting experience to play a role in theology, mysticism naturally gained a foothold in Pietist and emerging church thought.

Spener was fighting a number of theological presumptions in exhorting the experience of Christianity in addition to the intellectual understanding thereof. One of the most venomous stemmed from the passive understanding of faith in Lutheran circles at the time. God was argued to be the only one actually acting, therefore it would be presumptive to claim that a believer had done a good work. Good works had become a “phantom of the mind” and a “hoax of the devil” (Stoeffler, *Rise* 233).

The other theological menace which Spener encountered was that of *ex opera operato*: the belief that the beliefs and actions of those performing sacraments, giving absolution, etc. had no affect on the recipient. Spener’s view came into direct opposition to this claim, those ministering for the church had an enormous effect in this theological system (Stoeffler, *Rise* 233).

The influence of mysticism on Pietist leaders like Spener is enormous. The most influential mysticism was that which came out of the Middle Ages (Spener 7-8). Terms like “the mystery of Christ” provoked discussion about the role of reason orthodoxy (Spener, *Pia* 38). Advocating a religion of both the heart and the head, Spener and the other Pietists were not shy about embracing the mystical tendencies that come along with such an understanding of faith (Spener, *Pia* 19). Of course, this stance stood side by side with affirmations of the prevailing orthodoxy of the day, creating a strange and seemingly contradictory theological approach (Spener, *Pia* 7-8, 19, 51, 63).

Spener’s position on mysticism was, like most of his stances, a moderate one. He saw a number of mystical writings and authors as useful for the cultivation of a living faith but he did not think that they were without error:

There is no doubt that such little books [of mystical nature], to which something of the darkness of their age still clings, can and may easily be esteemed too highly, but an intelligent reader will not go astray in them. (Spener, *Pia* 112)

Spener’s response to critics of his stance was often one of “no comment.” For example when asked of his opinion of Jakob Böhme<sup>29</sup> Spener refused to comment on his writings (Deeter 44).

When Spener posits that “the reality of our religion consists not of words but of deeds” this opens the door to religious experience as *real* religion instead of sophistry (Spener, *Pia* 104). He even goes so far as to say that disputations are unhealthy for the soul (Spener, *Pia* 99-100). In Spener’s theology the ability to debate doctrine with Reformed Christians, Anabaptists, and Catholics does not equate *living* Christianity (Spener, *Pia* 49). Spener makes clear that this does not devalue academic theology, he merely believes that it needs to be put back into its proper place.

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<sup>29</sup> 1575-1624 a highly influential German mystical writer during Spener’s time.

Spener himself advocated the use of mystical texts such as John Tauler, the *Theologia Germanica*, Thomas a Kempis, and Ephraem the Syrian. (Spener, *Pia* 15, 111-112). He justified the advocacy of these texts by citing Luther's endorsement of these works (Spener, *Pia* 110-111) Spener also cites Luther in defending the orthodoxy of encouraging religious experience. Spener argues that Luther himself had tried to do away with sophistry and believed that it was creeping into the church through the "backdoor" (Spener *Pia* 53). Spener quotes the reformer as saying that, "[a] man becomes a theologian not by comprehending, reading, or speculating but by living and indeed dying and being damned" (Spener *Pia* 113). Spener also cites the German theologian and historian David Chytraeus as stating:

[w]e show ourselves to be Christians and theologians by our godly faith, holy living, and love of God and neighbors rather than by our subtle and sophisticated argumentation. (Spener *Pia* 112)

Spener's view that Christianity is orthopraxy (which is only possible with a foundation of orthodoxy) undermines the authority of the church. This explains the frequent accusations from academic theologians who had reason to fear a loss of influence.

McLaren cites the same medieval mystics which inspired Spener as having influence on his understanding of Christianity as well (McLaren, *Generous* 53). According to an article in *Christianity Today*, McLaren is not alone. Many of today's generation are looking for a faith which is, "deep enough for mystery" (Crouch 38). Rob and Kristen Bell describe their experience:

This [way of doing church] is not just the same old message with new methods... We're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life. Legal metaphors for faith don't deliver a way of life. We grew up in churches where people knew the nine verses why we don't speak in tongues, but had never experienced the overwhelming presence of God. (Crouch 38)

Mysticism in the Emerging Church looks strikingly similar to Spener's view. References to its usefulness are common. McLaren explains his understanding of mysticism as partaking of mystery, a way of knowing beyond rationality (McLaren, *Generous* 149, 151). The connection between mysticism and the inadequacy of words to accurately describe reality is driven home by McLaren (McLaren, *Generous* 151). This stance deals a heavy blow to systematic theology, a point which McLaren also makes clear.

Dan Kimball tells about how he changed his thinking about the nature of theology. Rather than assume that we can be certain of finding a tidy answer to every theological question he suggests that he sees, "...theology more like a mysterious adventure than as a mathematical puzzle" (Webber, *Listening* 91).

#### **4. Irenical Nature**

Both movements place a high emphasis on irenics (the doctrine or practice of promoting peace among Christian churches in relation to theological differences ("Irenics")). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century such an irenical movement was a timely check on the denominational tensions previously described. Spener criticized the scholastic theological positioning and denominational polemics in *Pia desideria* (Spener *Pia* 19). He went beyond advocating mere interconfessional tolerance by encouraging all sides to make

efforts to actually understand each other (Spener *Pia* 19). In the fourth point of his proposal in *Pia desideria*, Spener states that, “[w]e must beware how we conduct ourselves in religious controversies” (Spener *Pia* 95). Spener went so far as to say that disputations were unhealthy for the soul; a bold statement when one’s own church is fully engaged in theological debate (Spener *Pia* 99-100). He suggests that the job of the church is first to strengthen fellow believers in their faith and only then to correct others. (Spener *Pia* 95). This less damning attitude towards other religions and their followers was something of an anomaly at the time, unsurprisingly and ironically raised many criticisms from theologians across the denominational divide.

#### *Other Denominations*

Spener is quoted as saying promoting, “In things essential, truth; in things non-essential, freedom; in all things, charity” (Deeter 62). This position allowed Spener to simultaneously maintain orthodoxy (“in essential things, truth”), reach out to other denominations (“in things non-essential, freedom), and justify this entire procedure via “charity”.

One of the most remarkable examples of this interdenominational tolerance is found in the life of Count Zinzendorf. Having studied with German Pietists, the Count returned to his native land and welcomed religious refugees from across Europe.<sup>30</sup> In the process the many different faiths on the property melded into a unique form of Christianity later known as the Moravians.

The emerging church’s interaction with churches of other denominations is made most explicit in McLaren’s *A Generous Orthodoxy*. The introduction to the work lists a number of inter-denominational interactions:

...Protestants are growing in their appreciation for ancient Christian tradition; Lutherans and Catholics have issued a joint declaration of justification; evangelicals and Catholics are working together and expressing mutual appreciation for each other. (9)

In this context, the emerging church is attempting to offer pieces of many denominations (McLaren cites conservative Protestantism, Pentecostalism/Charismaticism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Liberal Protestantism, Anabaptism, Christianity influenced by Liberation Theology, Fundamentalism, Calvinist, Anglican, and Methodist) in order to create a Christianity which is informed by the varieties of Christianity past and present.

What if we enjoy them all, the way we enjoy foods from differing cultures? Aren’t we glad we can enjoy Thai food this week, Chinese next, Italian the following week, Mexican next month, and Khmer after that? What do we gain by saying that Chinese food is permissible, but Mexican food is poison? Isn’t there nourishment and joy (and pleasure) to be had from each tradition? (McLaren, *Generous* 66)

McLaren makes clear that this is not a melting pot scenario where the best pieces of Christianity are blended together but rather like a table where all of these varieties are offered for the guests (*Generous* 67).

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<sup>30</sup> Zinzendorf was thanked for his hospitality by one particularly conservative group of believers on his land who met in his house and declared that Zinzendorf was the Anti-Christ. Zinzendorf allowed them to stay on his property.

Both Pagitt and McLaren make clear that they wish to do more than simply listen to other denominations and expressions of Christianity, they hope to learn from them. Pagitt describes the relationship as a communal one: "...everyone has something to contribute" (Webber, *Listening* 127).

Other theologians are looking backward in history to overcome denominational divides. Robert Webber sees the history of the church, particularly the Reformation, as continual attempts to return to the teachings and practices of the Early Church (Webber, *Ancient* 25). Webber also cites Spener as a reformer who based his vision of a reformed church on Early Christianity (Webber, *Ancient* 34). Webber himself takes a similar view:

Therefore, our [Evangelical Christian's] challenge is not to reinvent Christianity, but to restore and then adapt classical Christianity to the postmodern cultural situation (Webber, *Ancient* 24).

Presumably, Webber sees this as restoring not only the theology and practice of the church but the assumed unified nature of the Early Church as well.

The *Values and Practices of the Emergent Village* makes this interdenominational support even more explicit. Referencing a variety of current denominations, the statement proclaims that, "[w]e seek to be irenic and inclusive of all our Christian sisters and brothers, rather than elitist and critical." In a list of practices and values for Solomon's Porch the words "global Church" are used to describe this inclusive idea of Christianity. Other churches are to be "valued and supported" (Pagitt, *Church* 13). Beyond rhetoric, Pagitt tells of interaction with other religious communities in the prayer and community service (Pagitt, *Church* 206-207).

#### *Other Religions*

Pietists and emerging church-goers are not only seeking peaceful dialogue with other Christians, both movements also contain elements of irenical positions towards other faiths.

The best place to see Pietists reaching out to people of other faiths in addition to working for inter-denominational understanding was Halle, Germany. There Pietists set up "institutes and language centers" for Jews and "pagans" in the area (Durnbaugh 292). The Pietist leader Francke was quoted as calling the Turks as "my good brothers," an unheard of level of acceptance (Durnbaugh 23).

Coming of age in a culture which has grown tired of religious infighting, the Emerging Church also shows an interest in inter-religious irenics (Grenz 4). McLaren argues that Christians must not only accept that other religions will continue to exist in the future but must also "follow Jesus' teaching of neighbor-love, *especially* to those whose religions are different – even those who might be considered enemies" (McLaren, *Generous* 256-257). Like Franke calling the Turk his brother, McLaren would have contemporary Christians show love towards members of all religions.

McLaren speaks about the issue of inter-religious dialogue in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*. He suggests that:

We [members of the Emerging Church] must accept the coexistence of different faiths in our world willingly, not begrudgingly....Having acknowledged and accepted the coexistence of other faiths, Christians should actually talk with people of other faiths, engaging in gentle and respectful dialogue (256-257).

Rather than just accept the existence of other religions, he argues that Christians should make an effort to understand them. This point is elaborated by the story of a mother and young daughter who encounter a Muslim woman wearing a veil. The mother explains to the child that the woman does this as an act of love towards God. Rather than try to demonize or criticize the practices and beliefs of other religions, this story implies that the believer should embrace them on their own terms (McLaren, *Generous* 266). Doug Pagitt also suggests that the Church needs to start listening to the ordinary person, the outsider (i.e. unchurched), and the unbeliever (Pagitt *Preaching* 221-222).

There is more to the Emerging Church's irenics than just religious rhetoric of tolerance. One physical manifestation is the Faith House in Manhattan. Supported by Church of the Advent Hope (led by pastor Samir Selmanovic), this inter-faith housing project seeks to bring religious believers of all persuasions and non-believers of all varieties together in an effort to better understand one another and serve each other (Faith House).

As a member of Emergent Village, Selmanovic has posted a podcast dealing with the issue of inter-religious understanding. In it, he argues that Christ supersedes Christianity itself as the object of the believers' faith. In addition he argues that there is something greater than God, namely the Kingdom of God which encompasses Christ and Christianity but is not to be equated with them. Differentiating the name of Christ (calling one's self a Christian) from the substance of Christ (giving one's life for the Kingdom of God), Selmanovic argues that many have rejected the name of Christ in order to accept the substance of Christ. That is, one refuses to associate with Christianity in order to live a Christ-like life ("Samir"). His examples include Hindus and Native Americans. He goes so far as to claim that Christianity must die so that Christ and the Kingdom of God can be renewed once again.

This sort of radical sentiment is echoed by the New Monastic Shane Claiborne. He retells the story of a friend who "gave up Christianity in order to follow Jesus" (Claiborne 71). By distancing the following of Christ from the organized religion, members of the emerging church can associate with and learn from those of other religious traditions.

Pagitt also argues that "Christendom is not the goal" nor is the church. Rather, God interacts with the world and humans can choose to be part of it or not. Churches may assist in this participation, or not (Pagitt believes that many do not).

It may be quite necessary for some of us to move forward with the way of Jesus in ways that are not encumbered by the history of Christendom, in the same way the early Christians had to move on with the way of Jesus beyond the temple or synagogue model of Christianity's beginning.  
(Webber, *Listening* 132)

Karen Ward, uses Ghandi's quotation, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ," as a launch pad for the argument that Christians must claim their religion and "still move beyond religion" (Webber, *Listening* 180).

McLaren also raises this point with one of chapter titles from *A Generous Orthodoxy*: "Would Jesus Be a Christian?" (79). McLaren muses that he would not be. "...[T]he more one respects Jesus, the more one must be brokenhearted, embarrassed,

furious, or some combination thereof when one considers what we Christians have done with Jesus” (*Generous* 80).

There is a clear parallel between the sentiments above and the separatist Pietists previously discussed. Both groups have found that the best way to practice their form of Christianity is to separate themselves from the institution. Both Pietist conventicles and emerging churches were fostered by Christian organizations and continued to call themselves by that name but their theologies extended beyond the normal theological definitions of Christianity.

The irenic nature of Pietism and the emerging church extends beyond inter-denominational dialogue. Both groups believed that inter-religious irenic dialogue could produce a better Christianity.

### 5. *Ministry and Education*

With both Pietism and the emerging church emphasizing practice over knowledge it is not surprising that both movements sought to reform the seminary education systems of their respective times. Working against the notion of seminaries as a place to acquire pure theological knowledge, Pietists and emerging church leaders conceive of seminaries as places where experience is gained, most importantly spiritual experience which will strengthen future leaders.

The *Pia desideria* is full of concerns about the ineffectiveness of the clergy of his day. Spener believed that most of them knew all the required doctrines and could skillfully engage in theological debates with Reformed, Anabaptist and Catholic theologians but were not leading Christian lives (Spener, *Pia* 44, 46, 49). While Spener sees “pure doctrine” as essential for both leaders and laity, he believed that orthodoxy alone was not enough. Spener thought that a reform of higher education, particularly seminaries was the hope for the future of a lived Christianity.

Spener believed that seminaries should be process places where a holy life was developed alongside diligent theological study (Spener, *Pia* 103). Since, “the reality of our religion consists not of words but of deeds” the future church leaders would do more for the gospel by living it than merely reciting it (Spener, *Pia* 104). Spener cites Chytraeus and Luther in order to show that this conception of religion is not something new, but an old truth which must be recovered:

We show ourselves to be Christians and theologians by our godly faith, holy living, and love of God and neighbors rather than by our subtle and sophisticated argumentation. (Chytraeus)

A man becomes a theologian not by comprehending, reading, or speculating but by living and indeed dying and being damned. (Luther)  
(Spener, *Pia* 112, 113)

Students with special ability should be chosen to go through spiritual exercises which will develop their faith (Spener, *Pia* 113). These exercises would include, ...how to institute pious meditations, how to know themselves better through self-examination, how to resist the lusts of the flesh, how to hold their desires in check and die unto the world...how to observe growth in goodness or where there is still lack, and how they themselves may do what they must teach others to do. *Studying alone will not accomplish this.* (Spener, *Pia* 112-113, emphasis added).

The goal of the seminary is both to instruct in orthodoxy and methods by which it can be lived out.

The methodology for this sort of experiential instruction is also laid out in the *Pia desideria*. Rather than work with all of the students, Professors are encouraged to select a group of students who show a “fervent desire to be upright Christians” (Spener, *Pia* 113). They are to work through the New Testament verse by verse with students explaining the practical applications of the passages. The students should be encouraged to watch one another to ensure that they do not fail “to observe the rules of conduct” (Spener, *Pia* 113). Also, Spener advocates the use of *collegium pietismus* in colleges and seminaries, in order to prepare the ministers for their work among the people (Spener, *Pia* 114).

But it was not only leaders who were to be trained to live out the Christian life; conventicles sought to encourage every believer to engage in this pursuit. Some groups hoped to bring about change in the community in which they lived (Fulbrook 140). This often involved disciplinary measures which disrupted the peace of the community (Fulbrook 141).

The desire to impact the community in which members of a conventicle found themselves also found expression in more positive outlets. The Pietists in Halle (led by Francke) developed an “orphanage, schools, and associated enterprises” (Fulbrook 157). The desire to influence also led to developments in mission work which were discussed above.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the practice of apprenticeship among the believers at Community of the Apostles church provides an interesting parallel.

...instead of giving folk tracts with “spiritual laws” and invitations to pray the “sinner’s prayer” off of cards, we try to come alongside seekers and be a community of sound spiritual guidance and good spiritual company as newcomers embark on a life-altering journey into “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.”  
(Webber, *Listening* 172)

Ward does not go into the details of what the path of apprenticeship looks like. She does, however, provide a list of the goals of this apprenticeship endeavor: “discipleship, transformation, conversion, faith as relationship, formation, process, length varies, public and communal, members as lay mentors, incorporation” (Webber, *Listening* 173).

The emphasis on religious experience led to a reinvigoration of pastoral work among Pietists when compared with the other Christianities of the day. A pastor’s duties included “catechization, home visitation, and the deep concern of the pastor for the spiritual and moral problems of the people” (Stoeffler, *Rise* 4). This led to an emphasis on edificatory literature, the rise of mission movements, and social outreach programs benefiting slaves, the poor, and prison reform (Stoeffler, *Rise* 4).

Compare Spener’s use of Luther’s words above (page 52) with Pagitt’s discussion of spiritual development:

In truth the idea that a person needs to be specifically educated to understand the things of God is little more than Western conceit. We are unique in our belief that education leads to superiority, that the preliterate or illiterate are somehow less qualified to be vessels of God in the world. There was a time when churches believed that the pastor should be the sole speaker for God because he was among the few who could read, as

though the only important knowledge of God is the kind that comes from reading. We still, too often, behave in a way that suggests we believe the only legitimate means to understanding or experiencing God is education. Obviously, there are benefits to having a pastor with some theological education, but what if we thought of that education as a gift the pastor brings to the community, one that melds with the gifts and life experiences of others to create a rich, multifaceted community of faith? (Pagitt, *Preaching* 153)

Pagitt's argument suggests that it is experience that makes someone's words valuable. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that education (the second hand encounter with experience) does not hold power over other community members.

McLaren provides a clearer idea of what he imagines a seminary should be:

When I said that seminaries operate on the modern model, I meant (among other things) that they put theory before practice and that they assume that knowledge (not character, skill, experience, know-how, passion, and so on) is power. IN the postmodern world, I think we'll interweave theory and practice (which will mean that education will be lifelong, not pushed to the beginning of one's career), and we'll believe that power in ministry flows from character, know-how, experience, relationships, spiritual disciplines, passion, AND knowledge (and probably some other things too). The dethroning of theoretical knowledge will require something far more radical than rewriting seminary curricula; it will require reinventing the whole idea of professional ministry training. (McLaren, *New* 146).

McLaren's argument parallels Spener's: experience must run alongside knowledge in order to create effective ministry. Therefore McLaren mistakenly calls this idea a "reinventing" of ministry training, it is really an unwitting rediscovery on his part.

Instead of seeing the pastor as an answer book or religious dictionary, both Pietism and the Emerging Church see the pastor as another member of the community. Both advise the reform of seminary education. Accordingly they argue that seminaries should be places of both knowledge and practical experience in Christian living.

## **6. Preaching**

Emphasizing orthopraxy, the priesthood of all believers, and a practical use of Scripture, Pietism and the emerging church created similar approaches to preaching. The two movements show important similarities: a decentralized spiritual leader and a living faith based on the narratives of Scripture.

### *Returning to the Laity*

Pietism is known for having revitalized preaching (Stoeffler, *Rise* 3). Most sermons of the Pietist's day were lofty scholastic rhetoric about minute doctrinal points. Spener believed that sermons should be used as an opportunity to clearly expound Scripture in such a way as to encourage "faith and its fruits" among the people (Spener, *Pia* 115).

A successful sermon was one which resulted in lay people leading more Christian lives. For Pietists, the primary way to achieve this goal was to use Scripture (because Scripture is the primary motivator for good works).

...Pietists...sought to arouse in the souls of others the living experience of conversion to an active faith and a new life as one of God's elect; and to maintain in the regenerate the sense of overcoming sin and temptation, to sustain the battle for living the Christian life. Pietist...preaching, in contrast to the dull doctrinal elaboration of orthodox Lutheranism...was plain, immediate, and piercing in intent. (Fulbrook 32)

One of the distinctive features of the emerging church is the method and philosophy of preaching which claims to be a departure from the recent trajectory of the field. Solomon Porch pastor Doug Pagitt in his book *Preaching Re-Imagined* tries to differentiate between positive, spiritually constructive preaching from presenting speeches with religious content, which he calls "speaching" (Pagitt *Preaching* 48). Pagitt sees the preacher or "speaker" as having lost connection with his/her audience. The churchgoer has virtually no influence on the content of the sermon and can expect to hear the theological opinion of the church's leader and little else (Pagitt, *Preaching* 48).

Pagitt argues that this has not always been the case and need not be. Indeed, argues Pagitt, if preachers do not rethink the manner in which they preach they will soon have no audience to preach to. The answer, thinks Pagitt, is to have the pastor and the religious community mutually influence one another, even in the content of the sermon (Pagitt, *Preaching* 49). For Pagitt,

...there is no way to separate the method from the message....the way we "speech" creates a certain understanding of God, faith, life, and authority, and power... (Pagitt, *Preaching* 50-51).

The goal of preaching is not the transferring of predetermined creedal statements but to allow the experiences of community members to alter one another's understanding of faith (Pagitt, *Preaching* 175).

Speaching makes a "select few who know God's truth" (Pagitt, *Preaching* 29). As mentioned in the discussion of the priesthood of all believers, this is one of the central battles which the Emerging Church sees itself as fighting. In this conception of preaching, the pastor becomes an equal partner in the church (Pagitt, *Preaching* 144-146).

The theoretical underpinnings are manifested very clearly in the physical setup of the worship space at Solomon's Porch. With a concentric circles of couches with a non-centralized microphone, the room is intentionally constructed like a giant living room. This concept of preaching has even been used to characterize the emerging church itself. Brian McLaren describes the emerging church this way:

Right now Emergent is a conversation, not a movement. We don't have a program. We don't have a model. I think we must begin as a conversation, then grow as a friendship, and see if a movement comes of it (Crouch 39).

Both Pietism and the emerging church place an emphasis on the use of the Bible in worship. At Solomon's Porch the sermon basically consists of me [Pagitt] reading these parts [chapters of the Bible] with a running commentary that we refer to as a sermon. This commentary includes historical clarification as well as reflections on what may be of consequence for our community. This commentary is a group effort, having been shaped in our precious Tuesday Bible discussion group

where we preview the reading for the coming Sunday and talk through its implications as we work to enter into what it has to say.

The Bible is our primary text for the sermon. I don't typically quote other people. I don't lay out a three-point thesis or make a great effort to apply what we're reading to life today. Instead, we want to know the story of God and see our lives in relationship to what God is doing, has done, and promises to do.

The story of God is the story that encompasses our entire lives. Our hope for the sermon is that it allows us to find ourselves in that story, to see how others have played their parts, and be informed by the ways they have followed God. Reading the Bible through this lens offers a tremendous perspective for those of us who tend to get stuck in the muck of today.

On most occasions the sermon is followed by a time of open discussion where I ask for comments, interpretations, and thoughts of significance from our community. During these few minutes not only are brilliant observations made, but people are also reminded that we are called to listen to one another and be taught by each other and not only by the pastor. (Pagitt, *Church* 77)

Both Pietism and the emerging church strive to meet people where they are in an effort to integrate them with God's will by using Scripture as a motivator.

### *Prophecy*

The idea of prophecy is central to both of these movements. The definitions and thus implications are different for each group, but share a certain amount of commonality. For the Pietists, prophecy was believed to be direct revelation from God to human, either directly to an individual, or indirectly as an insight into Scripture (to cite one example).

A number of factors contributed to the development of the use of prophecy among Pietist groups. The most influential was the Pietist's understanding of the priesthood of all believers. As previously mentioned, the Pietists sought to bring every individual to a personal faith in Christ which would result in a Christian life. This led, as we have seen, to an emphasis on experience which in turn led to mysticism. Also, as noted in the discussion of seminary education, leadership was to emphasize the living out of a Christian life. If the pastor was not providing such faith, conventicle groups would often go out on their own, independent of church guidance.

Often the combination of these ingredients, when combined with a charismatic leader (who often lacked educational experience) led to the rise of prophet figures in Pietist circles. One well known example is that of Jakob Böhme.<sup>31</sup> After writing down his mystical experiences and resulting theology, Böhme found a following among Pietists. But Böhme was certainly not alone, a large number of mystical-prophetic leaders arose in Pietist groups, much to the dismay of "orthodox" leaders.

The conception of prophecy in the Emerging Church is linked with the movement's positive eschatology and mystical leaning. Jason Clark and John Green tell of their conception of prophecy as someone who preaches a message which is imaginative, they tell us what we could become ("Hermeneutics"). Quoting McLaren,

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<sup>31</sup> 1575-1624

they believe that the “best days are ahead of us” and that the “future is more real than the present” (“Hermeneutics”).

The idea of prophecy is linked with mysticism as it was for the Pietists. McLaren sees a relationship between mysticism, poetry and prophecy.

This non-prose world [of many theologians] – called unreal by the rulers of this age, but real to people of faith – is the world entered by the mystic, the contemplative, the visionary, the prophet, the poet. (McLaren, *Generous* 146)

Quoting theologian Walter Brueggemann, McLaren believes that the church needs a new kind of preaching which is, “dramatic, artistic, capable of inviting persons to join in another conversation, free of the reason of technique, unencumbered by ontologies that grow abstract...” (McLaren 146).

Though Pietists and emerging church-goers define prophecy differently both movements create a place for the prophet in their movements.

### *Conclusion*

The emerging church and Pietism both deal with the same central concerns because they are both members of the experientialist Christianity. Using Spener’s program for reform to compare the two movements, it is clear that the emerging church can be described as a postmodern Pietism.

As a result, the emerging church has much to learn from the history of Pietism. Most important is the separatist tendency inherent in both movements. The groups which operated under the auspices of an existing organization were able to endure much longer than the separatists. The latter usually became heavily influenced by radical philosophies which produced unique theologies before becoming extinguished.

Like Pietism, the emerging church has a positive eschatology. When the eschatological claims of the early Pietists failed to find fulfillment, the movement lost momentum. The same predicament could face the emerging church movement if they adhere to overly hopeful predictions for future times.

The political implications of both religious movements are extraordinary. Pietism’s emphasis on orthopraxy led to mission work which would be considered social justice work today. Today, the emergence of a liberal-minded evangelicalism could force political analysts to rethink traditional approaches when dealing with religious voting blocks.

Pietism has made a tremendous impact on the Christianity of its day and influenced theologians and lay-believers for hundreds of years afterward. Some of the effects can be seen in the emerging church movement. The emerging church also seems poised to make a considerable mark on Christianity even after the movement itself fades away.

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