

Part 1

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What I want to do as a matter of fact is to extend some of the thoughts that I didn't realize were going to be quoted here, and you may have seen that my general subject is Emergent Spirituality. We today are at the threshold of a new day. It is a spiritual day. Some see this spiritual awakening as being parallel to and perhaps even greater than the awakenings that we know of as the First and Second Great Awakening. In his book called *Revolution*, which came out just a couple of weeks ago, George Barna looking at this, especially among Christians, says, and I'm quoting him, that "It is the most important spiritual movement of our age." Now what is different about this is that these prior spiritual awakenings were Christ centered. And they were the product of evangelism. This new spiritual awakening, for the most part, is not. And indeed, the spiritual awakening — if that is what it is — this spiritual awakening is true not only of America, but it is true throughout the West. Throughout the West there is evidence of something very unusual happening in our western culture. So in this first lecture this morning I want to look at this phenomenon rather broadly, this cultural spirituality, and then tomorrow I want to take a segment of its expression in the so-called Emerging or Emergent Church, which is self-consciously surfing on this cultural reality. And although I'll be thinking of the Emerging Church I will try to focus, I will have to focus somewhat on Brian McLaren.

Now the fact is that today the West is awash in spiritualities. Spiritualities of every kind. And this is something that wasn't supposed to happen. It wasn't so long ago, the 1970's and the 1980's, that America was debating about Secular Humanism. The debate created quite a significant literature. On the one side, soaring hope among its proponents, and on the other side a certain amount of dismay and perhaps even fear that this might indeed be the way that we were headed. Among those who were hopeful about Secular Humanism, the voices of the enlightenment, the thought was that progress was finally taking root. This would mean that America was finally going to escape the bonds, the shackles, of superstition. That the map, the soul, was going to be cleansed of all religions and all spiritualities. Don't forget Immanuel Kant's famous essay on the enlightenment, which came out in 1784. He was addressing, answering the question as to what is the enlightenment.

So what is it, or what was it? Well, he said it's about maturing, it is about growing up. Because when we are children we are dependant upon others to direct us, and to give us rules about how we should live, and to put boundaries on us about what we should not do: "don't touch what is hot," etc. Children are dependent upon an outside authority. And so it has been with the human race, says Immanuel Kant in that famous essay — we have been dependent on outside authority, either voiced through the Bible or, with respect to Catholicism, through the church. This, he said in that essay — this is his language — this has been a ball and chain that the human

race has dragged behind it on its foot, it is what has impeded its progress. And from this moment onwards all morality, all mystery, and all meaning is going to be found in the human being. So, that being the case, religions become redundant and in a completely rational world as the enlightenment conceived it all spiritualities disappear. So it was that the advocates of the enlightenment world view, this secular humanism, in the 1970's and '80's, awaited their final triumph. But even then, two or three decades ago, for those who were willing to see, there were already signs that the enlightenment ideology was beginning to come apart. Indeed, it had begun to fall apart, in American culture, from about the 1960's onwards. It is true that it retains its power in pockets of our culture. Among some of our cultured elites. It is certainly ensconced in the academic guild; and among what Peter Berger calls "the knowledge class"; it is certainly ensconced in our elite newspapers; and it is certainly ensconced in Hollywood. But the interesting thing is, that these "pockets" in our culture, with their Secular Humanism, are increasingly at odds with the great majority of Americans. Peter Berger, the American sociologist, has likened America to a Sweden in its cultured elites, presiding over an India in its religious and spiritual peoples. So in this lecture this morning, what I want to do now is to forget about the Swedens in our culture, and I want to try to focus on the India. First I'm going to give you a brief factual description, and then secondly I'm going to give you some cultural pegs on which to hang some thoughts, and then finally I'm going to give you a brief theological framework for thinking about this.

So, first of all, what are the facts that we're talking about in this spiritual revolution, as Barna calls it? Well, the facts are, that eight out of ten Americans describe themselves as being spiritual. This is their own self-designation. And six out of ten say that their spirituality is very important to them. And almost six out of ten say that in life's crises they look to the power within. Now, undoubtedly, among those are some Christians, but the great majority I suspect who say that are not, and so when they talk about the power within, they're thinking about their natural connection to the sacred. And more than half say that the only truth that we can know arises within our private experience, and it is something other than truth that is given to us by objective sources outside of us, like the Bible or the church.

Now in this spiritual revolution, the dominant voice I believe is those who say that they are spiritual but not religious. Now, the percentage who would so describe themselves is a little bit in dispute — you may have seen the Newsweek article in early September, the cover story was on the subject, "Are We Up To Date Here Or What?" The Newsweek story said that there are 24 percent of Americans who say they are, describe themselves as, spiritual but not religious; Gallup puts it at 40 percent, and I suspect that Gallup is probably closer to the truth. They are spiritual but not religious: what they apparently mean, what they are thinking about under the word "religion," is, first, doctrines to be believed which have been formulated by

others, and perhaps derived from some external source; doctrine to be believed. Secondly, a corporate dimension, that is attendance at and involvement with, for example, a church. And thirdly, ethical norms to be followed, which are not simply rules that are self-generated. But norms that are objective, perhaps absolute, that come from outside. Now in these ways, the dominant voice in the spirituality is saying they are spiritual, but not religious. They are averse, they are opposed, to religion with these three elements in it.

Now I'm inclined to think — and this is a rather important point, and I'll pick it up again tomorrow — I'm inclined to think the spiritual revolution which is being described actually is in continuity with the enlightenment rather than being its termination, because there are threads of continuity that go from the modern period into the postmodern, which is, spirituality is undoubtedly the voice of the postmodern; but there are threads of continuity that go between them, and one of these threads is that of the autonomous self. Think back to Immanuel Kant's essay. Is that not what we're hearing in this spiritual search? This spiritual search is one that is self-focused. And it is one in which the self has been freed from the past, it is free to be free from God, and it is free from others. It therefore is free to generate its own doctrines, to devise its own practice, and to decide what kind of corporate involvement it will have. Robert Wuthnow, the Princeton sociologist, has given us a couple of pictures that are somewhat helpful in thinking about the difference between this kind of spirituality and religion, and especially religion of a biblical kind.

See, the difference is that between a house in the one case and a journey in the other. The point about a house — and this is especially true of biblical faith — the point about a house is that it has four external walls. You always know whether you're in the house or out of it. You know when you go in the door, or go out of it, and leave the house. and within this house, there is a kind of internal geography. And the rhythms of life are co-ordinated with that: there is a place for cooking and a place for eating and a place for hanging out and a place for sleeping. And biblically speaking, this house is the house made out of revealed truth. Even more than that, it is within this house that the self is required to live. And those who really understand it, would not wish to live outside this house, for it is within the house that we live with the eternal, unchanging God, in the midst of all of the vicissitudes and the changes and the perplexities and the pains of life. We live with Him.

On the other hand, says Wuthnow, when you're thinking about this contemporary spirituality, it's better to think of a journey. But here I think his two images get a little bit confusing, because it is also true that Christian faith is a pilgrimage; this is simply another image or picture that the Bible gives us. We are aliens to this world, we are strangers in it. We are people, the people of God, who are on a journey. And

perhaps this was best captured by John Bunyan in his famous *Pilgrim's Progress*. And it's helpful to remember the full title of Bunyan's book. It is *Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*. And here is the difference between the Christian idea of pilgrimage and this contemporary idea about a journey. Pilgrim always knew where he was headed. And even though along the way he sometimes fell, sometimes got confused, sometimes got lost, he was always able to pick himself up and once again to head in the right direction until finally he crosses the river Jordan and beyond which there is this great celestial crowd. In this contemporary search, the object is not the destination, but it is the journey itself. The satisfaction is in the journey, not so much where the contemporary searcher is headed, indeed, in this contemporary search people don't know where they're headed and they don't know how to get there. And that is why in this contemporary spirituality there is constant experimentation, constant mixing and matching of beliefs and practices, borrowing from this religion, borrowing from that practice, trying to put it together into a package that is satisfying therapeutically, because here what is true is what works. And what works is what works for me therapeutically. This is nicely captured for us by Sheila Larson. Sheila Larson was a nurse who underwent some therapy, and she spoke to Robert Bellah and his colleagues who did the classic study on individualism in America. The book is called *Habits of the Heart*. Sheila Larson created her own faith. And she named it after herself: her name was "Sheila," and she named her faith "Sheilaism". She said she couldn't remember the last time she'd been in church but, she added, her faith had carried her a long way. And now I'm quoting: "It's Sheilaism, just my own little voice." And her own little voice said to her, just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. So, this is the spirituality of the journey.

But let's clarify this. This is not the journey of the pilgrim. That is biblical faith. This is more like the journey of the tourist. Tourists, when they visit places, are there just to take in the sights and sounds. They don't really contribute anything to the places where they are — except, of course, they leave behind their cash. Tourists, that is what we are becoming. Tourists: we move through life flitting from idea to idea, from novelty to novelty, from new person to new person, never settling, always moving. Selecting the best sights, the highlights, the choice cuts, avoiding the mess on the edge of town, the slums, all the uncomfortable things, the struggle of really knowing people. Never settling, always moving, lest we hear the hollow clang of our own emptiness. Tourists. That's what we are becoming. Inquisitive, curious, picking up the tidbits of other people's depth. Tourists. Flicking through our snapshots, the paper-thin trophies of our click-and-run existence, filing them away, loading the next roll of film, never settling, always moving — tourists. That is what we are becoming. That was written by a friend of mine Mark Green.

So that is the contemporary search. Now, secondly, let me give you a couple of pegs

on which to hang some thoughts. It may seem that this spirituality has suddenly burst upon us, perhaps unexpectedly for those who were expecting America and indeed the West to become secular humanistic. But in actual fact I think the foundations for it were laid a long time ago. Were laid, in fact, throughout the twentieth century, and I want to give you just the gist of a little of what I wrote in my book *Losing Our Virtue*, simply for understanding here. The bottom line to it all was that throughout the twentieth century we were in the process of leaving behind the moral world in which Americans traditionally had lived, and we began to inhabit in place of it a psychological and therapeutic world. That is the bottom line. Now this involved three changes. First of all, we began to think less of character, more of personality. It used to be, when people believed in virtues (virtues are aspects of the good that are enduringly true for all people in all places), it used to be when people thought about virtues that they cultivated character. Now we don't believe in virtues we believe in values. Values may be simply nothing more than what's important to us. We today treat values in a value-free way.

But when people believed in virtues, they did believe in the importance of character, and so in the advice manuals at the end of the nineteenth century the words typically came up repeatedly were words about character and its functions. Words like "citizenship" and "duty" and even "manners" and certainly "morals" and "integrity." Personality was an invention of the twentieth century. It's an interesting thing that if you looked behind the twentieth century, if you had lived before the twentieth century, and asked people about personality, they wouldn't have known what you were talking about. But we became fascinated with personality and so our language is a different kind of language. We talk about words like "dynamic" and "exciting" and "charming" and "forceful" and "creative." That's the vocabulary of personality. And so it was that the self-sacrifice of the moral world was replaced by the self-realization of this emerging psychological world. Now this splintering apart of character and personality is what runs all through our culture. It is what television depends upon, as do rock musicians, as do celebrities of all kinds, as do politicians. All of whom in their different ways are projecting a personality for a particular segment of the audience. And what lies behind that personality may be very different from what is projected. On television, the most important thing is that you are likable. If in real life you are a scoundrel, it doesn't really matter. as Daniel Schor the newsman, said: "In this business, you've got to be sincere; and if you can fake that, you've really got it made." It's the first shift from character to personality.

Second, the shift from nature to self. For centuries, we have thought about the human being in terms of human nature. Inside the church and out. And the point was, that what differentiated us from animals was the possession of human nature. And in its Christian formulation, it was human nature made in the image of God. So despite all of the particularities of age, or of gender, or of ethnicity, or of cultural

locations — social location — or civilization, or time; any of these things despite all of these particularities by which we are differentiated from one another; underneath it all was the same human nature, made in the image of God. Genesis 9, that is why we should not kill. You can kill a chicken, you cannot kill a person. Because every person is made in the image of God. But we have shifted from thinking about human nature, something that is common to us all, to thinking about the self, which is unique in every single person. It is our unique interior. It is that juncture within myself, where my own personal narrative, my own life experiences, my own education, my own particular insights and intuitions, who I am, is entirely different, it is unique, it is unlike anybody else's self. Isn't this what you were taught in school, that you are unique, that there is nobody, nobody on the face of this earth, who is like you? Now, it doesn't take a great deal of imagination, to see how you move from this understanding of self into a postmodern world, where all reality is private and internal. Where there are no meta-narratives, no over-arching structures of meaning, like an umbrella that shades the whole of life; that simply, I have my own private personal history. My own private meaning. No truth, only perspectives. No focal point in reality on which to take our bearings, just my own private take on things. No enduring moral norms, just my own choices for my own reasons. And this spiritual search, this contemporary spiritual search, in my judgment, is simply an expression of this sort of transformation.

And thirdly, a third change that happened in the twentieth century, was a change from thinking about guilt to shame. Now I know that we use these words interchangeably, and if you still live in a moral universe you can think so. But increasingly in our time these words are being differentiated. Guilt is seen to belong in a moral world. It is the compass that lines up our actions and who we are vertically with who God is and with his law. Shame, especially in psycho-analytical literature, shame is, by contrast, not vertical, it is horizontal. It is simply the sense of embarrassment, that I might feel if somebody sees me doing something that I didn't want them to see. And increasingly the thought is, that shame is a crippling thing. That the ultimate liberation, therefore, is to become shameless. So, we have moved in these three ways from a moral world, into a psychological one. And this is the world that resounds with the words not of salvation, but of spirituality. Not of redemption, but of healing.

And I should also add, it is a world that resounds with complaint, because we have emerging here a new cultural type. It is the aggrieved, or the annoyed person. For in this world of self, rights multiply like fruit flies. Uncontrolled by any moral norms, and responsibilities, disappear like the morning mist. Consider the FBI agent who embezzled a lot of money and lost it all on gambling, was prosecuted, and of course dismissed from the FBI, and he sued to be reinstated on the grounds that his love of money was a handicap. And in this country you're not allowed, you're not allowed to discriminate against the handicapped. And he won his suit. So all rights,

and no responsibility for his actions. Two days ago on the news, there was a story of a woman who has just sued because the letter carrier left a letter on her doorstep, and she slipped on it. And so she has sued. Because she had a right not to have her letter left there. But the fact that she also has a responsibility for seeing where she puts her feet, is simply dismissed. All of this is parodied by Anna Russell, a folk singer who says, "At three, I had a feeling of ambivalence towards my brothers, and so it follows naturally I poisoned all my lovers. And now I'm happy, I've learned the lesson this has taught, that everything I do that's wrong, is someone else's fault."

Now, I believe that it is this sense of personal right that is being carried over into this new kind of spirituality. If everybody has a right to vote, in America, everybody surely has an equal right to access the sacred. Indeed, the assumption is, that the sacred (however we define it), that the sacred is there to be accessed when we want, on our own terms, and to satisfy our own therapeutic needs. Sixty percent of Americans — sixty percent — say that they have God or the sacred within them, and therefore they draw the conclusion, therefore they do not need the church. They are spiritual but not religious. So here are these changes, as we have progressively left a moral world and entered a psychological world. It's not salvation that we're now seeking but healing. It's no longer the thought that God is alienated from us by our sin, but it is now the thought about the sacred being available to us in ourselves, ready to be accessed, and ready to be accessed on our own private individualistic terms.

Well, let me briefly and finally give you a little perspective on this. It may seem that this spirituality is a novelty, certainly as I mentioned, for those who thought that Secular Humanism was going to triumph; and even if we look further back as I've been suggesting, all the foundations were laid in the twentieth century, so in that sense too this is no great novelty. But in fact, I think that you and I need to look much farther back indeed. Because what I think we are seeing is the Emergents in our own culture and throughout the west, in a postmodern form of a primal spirituality that has tracked beside and often tried to invade the work of God. In the Old Testament, it was paganism. In the early church in the patristic period, it was Gnosticism. And I understand that there are some significant differences between Gnosticism and paganism, and there are some significant differences between those two and this postmodern spirituality. But here is a common thread: that for all of them, as Elaine Pagels puts it, "The self, the psyche, is pursued as a religious quest." That's her language. It's in the self that as the Gnostics put it, knowledge is found. What they meant by knowledge was insight. Intuitive insight. Think of Sheila Larson: "Just my own little voice." Think of the 56 percent of Americans who say in life's crises they look within. Think of the 54 percent who say they find truth in their own experience. Some years ago, Anders Nygren, the Swedish Neo-Orthodox theologian, wrote a book called *Agape and Eros*, he had a big complex objective in

mind, and I simply want to take this little formulation of his that I've actually found helpful. He says that in life you can actually see two kinds of spirituality that he talks about under these symbols, these two kinds of love: agape and eros. Agape spirituality has God at its center. Eros spirituality has the sinner at its center, and with the sinner comes this aching want, yearning, longing, which is there both by creation and because of the fall. Eros spirituality, the spirituality of paganism, of Gnosticism, and I believe of this contemporary spirituality, this kind of spirituality moves upwards. It is in Christian terms about the sinner trying to find God on his or her own terms. It is the projection of the human, of human yearning into eternity. Dismissing the need for grace, and dismissing the need for special revelation. Always at the heart of this spirituality is need and want. Its prime objective is its own therapeutic satisfaction, and God is loved or the sacred is loved simply for what can be had in return. Here is a kind of profit and loss mentality. The sacred pursued for what the pursuer gets in return.

Agape spirituality, the spirituality of the Bible, is entirely different. It is about God reaching down through Christ. It is about grace. It is about God doing for the sinner what he or she cannot do for herself. In agape there is no sense of the sufficiency of the human spirit in finding the sacred, but only of the human being's insufficiency, which is the very condition for receiving God's grace. And here God is not owned and controlled: it is he who is sovereign. So the one tries to rise up to eternity on its own mortal wings, and the other receives eternity as a pauper might receive some small kindness which is given to him.

And biblical spirituality is the spirituality of a personal universe. This Eros spirituality is one of an impersonal universe. In this Eros postmodern spirituality, we talk. In Christian faith, we listen. Because in Christian faith we are addressed from outside of our situation. In this other kind of spirituality, the sacred is mute. The sacred never speaks. The sacred can only be perused by our own internal intuition and our own internal radar. In Christian faith it is God who speaks from outside our situation, speaks to us, and before him we are summoned. And that is why it is to the church, and to you, that God has given his word, that you and I might be instant in season and out. We are given a charge to proclaim His word and His truth. The very means by which he speaks today, the only place where he speaks savingly to people today in our society. And God draws near to us, through his word and by the work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with that word. It is only through his word that he lifts the fallen with his promises, and he fills the hungry, and he corrects the wandering, and he rebukes the self-sufficient. And every time he speaks, he leaves behind the fragrance of his grace. And so may we be preachers of his word.

Part 2

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Well, yesterday I was trying to make the argument that we are in the midst of what — for some people at least — has been an unexpected renewal. However, in my judgment this is not — is not — a spiritual renewal like that of the first and second Great Awakenings earlier in our church life in America. Those spiritual renewals established Christian truth and biblical orthodoxy, and this new spirituality at best is indifferent to biblical truth and very often hostile to it. Its most distinctive characteristic voice is that it is spiritual but not religious. And so, I want to try to develop an argument with you today, and it is that first, as I see it, there have been two responses to this cultural mood in the evangelical church. The one has taken the form of the marketing of the church, and the other, more current, takes the form of the emergent conversation. So that's the first point I want to make. Then secondly, I want to pick up on the Emergent church, and I want to make three points; and the first is, that in my view, the emergent church has been altogether too facile in the way that it has distinguished modern from postmodern; and second, that it is way, way too close to the postmodern sense of the loss of truth and meaning. And that thirdly, the Emergent Church mood, along with many other things in Western Christianity, is contributing to the shaking of Christian orthodoxy, which I think is probably the best explanation for the fact that Christian faith is now fleeing the West. So those are my three points. ...

Well, this mood, this spiritual mood, we're spiritual but not religious, and first of all, what I suggested to you is that there have been two responses to this as I see it. Since about the 1970s, there have been those, who in one way or another have been experimenting in how to do church differently, and in a way that will be more attractive in this particular culture. They have employed the mechanisms of marketing, Willow Creek being the early gold standard of this. What it's trying to do is to offer spirituality, but to disguise the religious component that has gone with that. That is to say, the institutional "churchy" side of it. So, let's remove those things that would strike our contemporaries as being religious, because they apparently don't want that. Down with steeples and church architecture, out with pews, pulpits, and hymn books; away with liturgy and religious symbols, including the cross. Let's make the experience of walking into a church no different from the experience of walking into a mall or into a country club. Now this innovation that we have been experimenting with has been undertaken without a lot of knowledge of what's happening in other parts of the world. But we might just for a moment just like to consider this: not too long ago, Herbert Hofer published his book called *Churchless Christianity*; it's mainly a descriptive book, although the description carries with it his own prescription. But one of the things he does, for example, is to look at the Hindus and the Muslims in Chennai (formerly Madras) in India. Here is something that is really quite striking and unusual. Here apparently we have

Hindus and Muslims who are “Christian” without ever ceasing to be Hindu and Muslim. Now within Hinduism you can choose your God, and you are allowed to give special devotion to one particular god. So, they’re choosing as Hindus to give their special devotion to Jesus. They never get baptized, they never join a church. So here you have spirituality, which is not religious, at least in Christian terms. The same thing is happening in many parts of Africa, and on the mission field this is raising really serious, profound questions about the connection between knowing Christ, and being a member of a visible community of faith, namely the local church. Now, it seems to me that it is this same kind of undertow which is at work in our culture too. In George Barna’s latest book that came out about three weeks ago, he made a projection that over the next decade church life, meaning the local church, church life will decline by about a half, but at the same time, at the same time this is declining and decreasing, spiritual life is going to increase. It is going to be spiritual but not religious.

Now, the Emergent Church, Len Sweet, John Franke being its principle gurus, its pastoral leaders being Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball and in England Steven Chalke; the Emerging Church leaders have not been friendly towards this experiment in the marketing of the church, and so here now we have the second response to this cultural mood. Their argument is, that when we engage in marketing, with its use of polls and focus groups and advertising, what comes out on the end is never anything but a product. And their argument is, that Christ is not a product. He’s not a product to be bought. Now, the interesting thing about this, is that I don’t believe that the Emerging Church is actually that hostile to the marketing process *per se*; it’s just that what is being marketed and the people to whom it is being marketed, in their view are different. It is not the church that is being marketed, it is Christ we want to make known, and it is not to modern people (they say), but it is to postmodern. But what does this mean? What is this distinction between modern and postmodern? Willow Creek was taken up with marketing to modern people. We’re not doing that; we can’t do that, because people are not modern anymore, they are postmodern. So what does this mean? Well I think the typical typology that they all seem to follow is laid out by Neo, and Neo ... stands for his three names, which I have forgotten, something like Nigel Egelburt Orenstein. Something like that. But it’s Neo, and Neo obviously is the symbol of the postmodern person, and Neo in McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christian* argues that what is modern, is modernization, which in the West means urbanization, capitalism, technology, telecommunications, and the enlightenment ideology. Now I have no complaint with that, I think that is exactly the case; that the modern world is made up of these two realities: the social transformation of its fabric under these impulses, and the enlightenment ideology. But he goes on to say, that as part and parcel of this complex social fabric and of ideas, part of it is also the Protestant reformation, with its understanding of God, and truth, and Christ, and the gospel. And that, the Protestant reformation and its

understanding, its certainties about God's word, God's truth, God's gospel, God's Christ, this needs to be rejected root and branch, because it is modern, it can no longer be believed.

So, let me now come to the three points that I want to make about the Emergent Church and this posture which it is taking. And the first is, that I think this distinction that they are advancing and advocating, this distinction between the modern and the postmodern is altogether too facile in the way that they have set it up. Let's just take the components of this. Think about the modernization of our world. Today, in the West, and certainly here in America, capitalism continues unabated; technology grows in its sophistication, and its reach into life; our lines of communication with each other are swifter, more abundant, and cities are more numerous, larger, and more socially dominant. On the plane I brought with me to read Thomas Friedman's really quite brilliant new book called *The World Is Flat*, and it has a subtitle *A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*. It was published this year. It's an account of globalization, of how countries like India and China have become part of this global supply, not only of products but of services too. A US hospital that is short on radiologists can send the X-ray images to India, and given the time difference, a Radiologist in India can read those images and have the results back for first thing in the morning of the following day in the USA. A fast food chain following the same kind of practice: when you drive up to this fast food chain and place your order, there is a friendly voice that greets you. You might think that person's in the building, but that friendly voice isn't in the building: that friendly voice is at an answer center that is several states away, and this fast food chain by doing this now is able to on average process an order every one minute and five seconds rather than two minutes and thirty-five seconds.

And Friedman accompanied General Richard Meyers to a Marine base in Fallujah, and there was a screen that was up that they were looking at, and it was showing real-time pictures taken by a TV camera with a telescopic lens on it. That camera was in a drone, a Predator, that was flying overhead. But the interesting thing about this, is that that drone was being controlled, it was being flown, by a technician in Las Vegas, Nevada, thousands of miles away. Not only so, but those real-time images were not only being seen in Fallujah, they were also being seen in the US central command in Tampa, in CENTCOM headquarters in Qatar, and in the Pentagon. In four places simultaneously. And experts in each of these locations were interpreting the images and what they were saying was scrolling down on the right hand side of the screen.

Now are we postmodern in any of these ways? When you think about modernization, we are not AFTER the modern. We are more modern than ever before. We are ultra-modern. On the other hand, it is true that as part of this package you do have the

enlightenment ideology and from the 1960's onwards it has been collapsing. So in that since, yes, today increasingly we ARE postmodern and it's a good thing too. But this complex of ideas and social realities, it really is very taxing to try to understand, and to try to understand it you have to approach it from multiple disciplines. It's what I try to do because I think it is so important for us to do it in the last book I wrote which is called *Above All Earthly Powers* and has a subtitle *Christ in the Postmodern World*. But I'm not persuaded, not persuaded at all, that the Emerging Church leaders have done their homework. I don't think they really have made the kind of careful distinctions that we need to make as we talk about what in our life is modern and what is no longer modern. In their minds, this distinction between modern and postmodern seems to me to be little more than a license to have spirituality without too much truth. Those on the forefront of the church marketing movement wanted spirituality with diminished religion, meaning a diminished sense of "churchy-ness." The Emerging people it seem to me want spirituality with a diminished sense of biblical truth as normative. So let us be clear what the issue is here. It is not, it is not whether we should engage our world at the point of its own language and conceptuality. Listen to this quotation:

No one will doubt that Christians of today must state their Christian beliefs in terms of modern thought. Every age has a language of its own and can speak no other. Mischief only comes when instead of stating Christian beliefs in terms of Christian thoughts an effort is made rather to state modern thought in terms of Christian belief.

Now those words were spoken a century ago, thereabouts, by B. B. Warfield. And I'm inclined to think that this is in fact what we're looking at in the Emergent Church. An effort is being made to state modern thought forms in the terms of Christian belief. Neo, in McLaren's book, says that the old ideas of truth are disappearing. I'm quoting: "They're being questioned. New understandings of truth and knowledge that might improve on them, however, have not been fully developed." Now, if Neo's point and if McLaren's point and the Emerging Church's point, if their point is that the enlightenment rationalistic understandings of truth are evaporating, are being discredited, indeed they are right. But that apparently isn't what they have in mind, because on the very same page as Neo says this, he goes on to say "The old question was: 'which religion is true?'" The new question, he says, is "which religion is good?" Now, can you imagine, an Old Testament prophet saying, "Look. It doesn't really matter whom you worship. Just be nice about it." Can you imagine Jesus saying that? Is this what Paul said in Acts 17 when he was surrounded by pagan spirituality? Did he say, "Oh, it doesn't matter, by all means go and worship those idols, but just be civil about it." I don't think so. Which leads me to my second point on the Emerging Church. It seems to me secondly that the Emerging Church is way too close, way too close to the postmodern loss of truth and meaning. The postmodern worldview is one that has come to think that truth, what Francis Schaeffer in an earlier generation used to call "true truth," it has come to

think that truth is an impossibility. Now this more modest tone would be fine, if the enemy that they were attacking was the enlightenment because — and if it was only the enlightenment — because the enlightenment offered to people knowledge that was ultimate of purely humanistic naturalistic bases. And so it looked upon reason as a substitute for revelation, and the only way it could operate this way, the only way it could make this kind of offer, was if it ignored the internal biases of reason which are undoubtedly there. So the Emergent crowd is right to say that the enlightenment ideologues were arrogant and they were blind to their own biases. But that of course is not only what they have in mind, and today the pendulum has swung entirely to the other side. Postmoderns in effect are saying that if we cannot know everything exhaustively, then we cannot know anything at all. And postmoderns think that they can't know anything at all, in any sort of absolute way.

Here is a new attitude in Walter Truett Anderson's language; here is a new attitude which, I'm quoting, "regards truth as socially constructed; contingent; inseparable from the peculiar needs and preferences of certain people in a certain time and place." Truth as something that is knowable by all people in all places in all times has now been banished. So truth, as Postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty observes, somewhere, truth is simply "what my colleagues let me get away with."

Now the biblical language of truth, it seems to me, suggests a wholly different way of looking at things. What is true is what corresponds to what is there. The proposition is true or false depending on whether what it purports is actually there; what is there corresponds to the meaning of the proposition. So, when John warns us to distinguish between the spirit of truth and error as he does in 1 John 4:6, he is encouraging us to discern between teaching that represents things as they are, and teaching which pretends to represent things as they are, but in actual fact fails to do so. And this correspondence must pertain, whether we're talking about trees, or whether we're talking about the character and the councils and the will of God. If I say to you, "There is a tree that I can see out that window," that is a true proposition if there is a tree there. If there is no tree there, then that proposition may pretend to be true but it does not correspond with what is actually out there. And what the Bible is doing is telling us that there are realities that correspond to what it is saying is there. Whether these are in the character and the will and the councils of God or realities in life created and fallen. So when Paul calls the gospel "the truth of Christ," as he does in 2 Cor 11:10, he means that the gospel message corresponds precisely to who Christ was and is and to what he did on the cross. Now it's this connection between what is said and what is there; it is this connection which has been broken in postmodern discourse. Language is seen to be only self-referential. It points, not to a world or to a reality out there, it points only to me, and how I am feeling about that world out there. Postmoderns go on to argue that the meanings that words carry are simply arbitrary. That words mean what we WANT them to mean. So they've

gone on to speak of the death of the author. That what an author intended when he or she wrote is irrelevant to the way in which those words are taken. Please, please don't read my books that way. I really struggled to convey exactly what I thought, and when you read my words they're out there so that you can know exactly what I was thinking when I wrote them. As an author you don't always execute your intentions with perfection, and perhaps rarely do you do so; but you TRY, you do your BEST so that your words and your intentions correspond exactly.

Now, from all of this falling debris in the postmodern world, we should not conclude as many in the Emerging Church are doing, that matters of truth and meaning are secondary in Christian faith. We certainly should not conclude that these are a matter of indifference to the Biblical authors; or, that the subsequent efforts in the church to get it right are things that we can simply disregard. Now that is what I think McLaren actually sets out to do. In his book *Generous Orthodoxy*, which is full of mockery, he professes himself to be evangelical, liberal/conservative, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, anabaptist/anglican — I mean, even the pairs don't match up. Methodist; catholic (small c), green, incarnational, depressed, yet hopeful; emergent and unfinished. And perhaps, most glaringly, in the territory that he covers in his chapter called "the seven Jesus's I have known", he sometimes mockingly, but I think sometimes ignorantly, rides rough-shod over the distinctions that the church has struggled to make over the centuries, distinguishing and protecting biblical orthodoxy from its alternatives. All of this is sloughed off, as if consistency, and care, and precision with the truth of God, are things that don't really matter that much, when you are a Christian. Well, I think that they DO matter. And my starting point is with the reality of truth and with the way in which the Bible itself understands truth. Because its own starting point is that it is a revelation from God

The Bible is not constructed by communities; that was the older liberal view, and it is now the postmodern view. But it is not constructed by communities; it is not simply the product of believing individuals; it's not merely their view point, it is a personal disclosure of God, who himself secures its authenticity. It is the verbal form in which God has made himself known to us. God's perfect knowledge of himself, and his perfect knowledge of reality in all of its parts, is in fact the measure of what is there. And this is what he has disclosed to us. Notice Paul's language, in the famous passage in 2 Timothy chapter 3, about inspiration. What is it that is said to be inspired? It is not the writers of Scripture, although in a derivative sense you might want to say that. But Paul does not focus on what the writers were experiencing or feeling when God the Holy Spirit worked miraculously in them, so that what they wrote corresponded exactly with what God wanted the church to have. And yet, it is not what they were experiencing in this process that is the focus of Paul's comment: what is it that is inspired? It is the Scriptures. And then again,

where is his focus; it is not on the readers. Unlike the neo-Orthodox, like Karl Barth, who conflates the doctrine of inspiration with that of illumination, relocates the miracle of inspiration to the moment the hearing, the reading of Scripture which becomes the word of God. That is not what Paul does. It is not the reader who is inspired, but it is the Scriptures that God has inspired for the church. And in so doing, he has secured for us — he has secured for the church for all time — the existence of his truth. And it is true, not because we have found it, not because we have somehow stumbled over it, but it is true because it is God who has given it to us. And it is God in all of his holy character who stands behind it. And it is knowable because it is a communication that is objective to us. Now I don't mean by that that therefore we don't have to read the Scriptures, because of course we do. Of course we have to understand them, interpret them. And of course we have to struggle with our own biases and weaknesses and limitations and blindnesses which we bring with us all the time to the reading of Scripture. That is why, typically, the beginning of a sermon, certainly, for myself at the beginning of each day as I read the word of God, I begin with prayer. I come to his word as a sinner, with my own internal biases, my own need to justify myself. I recognize that, as I read Scripture. So I'm not saying we don't have to struggle to understand the word of God. Sometimes we get it right, and sometimes we don't. But nevertheless, the word of God stands over against us, over against the church, generation after generation, always retaining its power to correct and reform us.

Now this leads me to my third point. This set of dispositions that we see in the Emerging Church, along with plenty of others — I here don't want to single out the Emergent people — but along with plenty of others, it seems to me, are contributing to the shaking of Biblical orthodoxy, which in turn — as far as we're able to understand the providence of God — probably best explains the flight of Christianity from the West.

Several years ago I attended a conference in Uppsala, Sweden, and on Sunday morning I and a few of my friends went to worship in the cathedral. I think there were eight other people besides our party. They were all old, too. This in a cathedral that I would guess, probably, could have seated 1,500. Now this is just one anecdote and you can't extrapolate from this and generalize from it, but the fact is that Christianity is disappearing from Europe today, and leaving behind it nothing but empty churches. This is true of Canada, it's true of Australia and New Zealand as well. Here in the US the Christian story is a little different, and it is mixed. Certainly the mainlines are declining; liberal theologies continue to wither and retreat; and the evangelical world, however, is just — just — holding its nose above the waterline.

Outside the west, in Africa, parts of Asia, Latin America, Christianity is burgeoning,

at least numerically. We today are living in the middle of an almost epic change. The center of gravity of Christian faith is moving from north to south. It is moving out of the European nations, with their extensions into Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, it's moving out of the European nations into non-European nations. All of this is very nicely chronicled in Philip Jenkin's book *The Next Christendom*. He projects, if current trends continue, by the year 2050, there will be six countries with a hundred million Christians. Six of them. Only one of them, the US, only one of them will be in the industrialized West. The other five will not be. It will not be long, he says, before the term "white Christian" will sound as strange as the term today "Swedish Buddhist."

Now there is a question here that is worth pondering, and it's this: why is Christianity especially the Christianity of a traditional Biblical kind, why is it finding it so hard to sustain itself in the middle of this modernized, postmodern setting, in which it is in the west? Or, to put it a little differently, why is Christianity fleeing the west and as it were taking root in other parts of the world. The answer from the Emerging Church, from the Emerging Church leaders, is that the culture of the west — not least that in the United States — the culture of the west has been modern, now it's become postmodern; the evangelical church, not least of the marketing kind, has been tied into a modern kind of experience and framework, and that culture is dying and the church is dying with it, and if we want to survive we've got to become emergent. I personally believe the answer is a little different. And it is, that our postmodern world, our modernized world with its postmodern ethos and soul, has proved more than a match for us. And in our daily contact with it, we have found that our own souls have become eviscerated and smaller. And Christian faith, which in its real nature is a profoundly consequential thing, in its daily practice has become a somewhat inconsequential thing. And is this not the story of God's people, from the Old Testament to today? Ebbing and flowing. Advancing and falling back. Great faithfulness, and great unfaithfulness are never very far from each other. Victories and conquests, yes, but all of them fragile, subject to reversal, subject to later defeat. But what we also do know is this: God's word of truth stands forever. Its commands and promises are not subject to reversal. God himself endures for all ages, in all ages he is the same. And grace, grace is like a fountain whose waters never cease. Amen.