

# WHAT THE POSTMODERN/EMERGENTS CAN LEARN FROM WESLEY.

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## *Introduction*

Once upon a time there was a world in pain. This world seemed normal. You woke up, lived, worked, played, and slept. If you were poor, you too woke up, survived, drank, slept. Then, a man was born. By a merging of gifts and an unshakeable confidence in GOD, this man began to tell people a story of *a different way*. The poor believed him. Gradually, as they discovered that his story was *a true story* they began to live differently, in communities that seemed somehow ALIVE, a movement that could change the face of the world, and help her heal. BUT, instead of spreading the message of hope, or resistance, of *a different way* they somehow started to do this: wake up, live, work for money, play, sleep. And, since the man who had told them the story had died, it all seemed very normal again. So passion died.

Three centuries later (ish), with passion still mostly dead, and with the world still in pain, and with communities still waking, living, working, playing and then sleeping, something strange happened. In a lot of places at once, people were born, and somehow started telling people a story of *a different way*. A way (they thought) that would be **real**. A way that would show passion. A way that would somehow help the world heal, become all that she should have always been – a way that she could become all that she could be. They too drew together in communities, so that they could show the world around them, that this story is *a true story*. A story that changes lives.

And so, we move from Wesley to the Emergent church.

Depending upon your perspective, the emergent church is either full of woolly liberals, betraying evangelicalism and denominationalism, disregarding the bible, rejecting systematic theology and certainly not what the church should be, or is a perceptive challenge to the way things are. Certainly, the emergent church presents a timely critique of 'Modern Church.' Power structures, (hierarchical) denominationalism, the prevailing evangelical attitude towards stewardship of creation,<sup>1</sup> the classical tenets of evangelicalism (Conversionism, Biblicism, Crucicentrism, and activism)<sup>2</sup> all come under scrutiny.

So – the questions arise: who are the emergents, what do they believe, and what can they offer us? And, as European Wesleyans, engaging with our cultures, churches, and future, the question is also asked: what can the emergents/ postmoderns learn from Wesley?

## *Who is the Emergent church?*

In some ways it seems premature, in a time of transition, to talk about what is a loosely gathered group of people adhering to equally loosely gathered core values as if they were a clearly defined group. The emergent church, however, is beginning to be a strong undercurrent in theological streams – at least those dealing with 'contextual theology.' The emergents (also often called *pomo* or postmodern) are drawn from a range of denominational backgrounds (or non), are consciously steeped in postmodern thought,

strive to be 'culturally relevant' and are challenging previously held Christian norms. They are generally found in predominantly English speaking developed nations, and are "Emergent" by design. Their main spokesperson is Brian McLaren. His books resonate with the emergent generation, who find that his main emphases are theirs.<sup>3</sup> The gurus adopted by the 'emergents' are odd stable mates: Frei, Hauerwas, Brueggemann, Campolo, N.T. Wright, and Bonhoeffer (to name a few) .

### *Narrative Theology*

The emergent church resonates with the idea of narrative theology. The bible as narrative source, the church year as overarching narrative, the role of the person: narrator; protagonist and supporting cast at one and the same time, all frame the emergent church. Many emergent books are in the form of story or dialogue. The flexibility and fluidity that narrative thinking enables ensures a great breadth of opinion within the movement. Couched in the language of story differing opinions co-exist in amicable relationships. Of course, the issue of meta-narrative arises as soon as postmodernism is engaged, and the emergents stress the narrative of a peculiar people drawing upon a 'meta-narrative' for life.

### *Journey /Sojourn:*

The overarching metaphor of the emergents is that of journey. They insist on including the possibility of struggles/stopping/stumbling and progressing. The forward moving, dynamic metaphors allow tension to be a part of the Christian experience and refuse to delineate an *ordo salutis*, instead demand that this be recognised as *via*. Thus, although a 'conversion' experience is entirely acceptable (as it is *your story*) that this is preferable, or indeed normal, may be rejected. After all (shades of Wesley), how dare we limit the ways in which God can work? The ideas of the Christian life as a quest, dance, and accompanied journey, are all frequently drawn upon.

### *Historical Tradition/Ecumenism:*

The emergents long for a return to tradition (not traditionalism). They crave rootedness, and long for the recovery of ancient wisdom. It is common for emergents to be sitting at table with those who would not be historical conversation partners (so in *The Church in Emerging Culture* the sweep of conversation embraces Eastern Orthodox and postmodern thinkers). The emergent church is open – to dialogue, discussion, debate, placing emphasis upon an ecumenism that rejoins the ancient strands of faith to its present expression. Icons, creeds, confession, sacrament are vital hallmarks of emergent church. The emergents are beginning to plumb the depths of patristic scholarship. As Webber articulates, the postmoderns emerge:

... with a new love for the past and a commitment to the notion that the road to the future runs through the past. ...They want to immerse themselves in the past and form a culture that is connected to the past, a culture that remembers its tradition as it moves to the future.<sup>4</sup>

A further dynamic is a shifting theological position in relation to evangelicalism<sup>5</sup> which is often the framework of reference for the emergent church. There is a transfer of emphasis to the Trinity, understanding God as community, social and mysterious. The Cross is neither rejected, nor exalted, rather incorporated into an understanding of faith and salvation that

sweeps from the Creation to the resurrection life possible now. The cross takes its place alongside other elements of faith. Likewise, there is a shift from an incipient individualistic faith towards community/ corporate understandings of faith. Belonging to an authentic community of believers is not perceived as preferential for the individual, but an imperative for a believer, for in the community they are shaped and shape others. This mitigates against a conversion experience, and points towards a journey, process, and mystery, with increasing importance placed upon companions-on-the-way. Thus, for the pomos, the people belong, **then** believe, then conform their lives to Scripture, (or to the traditions of the faith community they are a part of).

A concomitant shift is away from Biblicism. The use of Scripture as The Answer (... the bible says *x* therefore *y*) is not perceived as particularly empowering, enabling or authentic. Word-based faith and services (either spoken, read or heard) make way for an increasingly sacramental, ritualistic, practice based faith. The bible is used as a vital narrative, expressing the love of God throughout time (and there is a range of understanding of this). There is still a love of the Bible, but it is increasingly interpreted through a narrative lens, recognised as a historical creation. It certainly reveals the Creator, points to the Trinity, and to relationships, but no longer is it used as inerrant text.

It is in the area of activism vis-a-vis practice that the final grand shift is taking place. The emergents perceive themselves as more holistic (and less dualistic) in their approach to life. Rejecting compartmentalisation (a body/soul dichotomy), people are valued as whole people – body, mind, spirit, social relations, not merely as ‘souls to be won’. The practice of life is all about God (or it is about nothing at all), with ancient practices forming faith. Meditation groups to soup kitchens all find a place. Loving neighbour as self is seen as a part of community living – there is still the hope that people will come to faith, however, there is a greater willingness for this to be over time in non-uniform ways.

These shifts have occurred in theory and practice. Most of the emergent authors see them as vital for the health and life of the church, and see this as a return to something lost.<sup>6</sup> The church's absorption of modernity is seen as an aberration or a deep wound on the church's conscience. "Thus, though most would tacitly acknowledge that the recent church (in Webber helpfully delineated as fundamentalist evangelical or pragmatic evangelical) had the right intentions, most damn with (very) faint praise their ecclesial predecessors of the late nineteenth and twentieth century. It seems that the craving for Tradition and ancient forms of faith is key to the emergent church movement, and though they have an ancient-with-post-modern-twist [ironically doing it 'their way'], they nonetheless would see this as a reformulation of what is more authentic to the Gospel of Christ."<sup>7</sup>

### *Experience & Participation*

"It is within the construct of 'authenticity'<sup>8</sup> that the emergents formulate their sense of God. As they experience authentic community (living, loving, sharing, communing) and as they participate in sacramental worship (bodily as well as mentally or emotionally) they encounter Christ. This expression of holistic living/ experience is a development that moves beyond the modern rational worldview. Sweet analyses this as: "The postmodern economy is an "experience economy." Some call this "immersion living"... whatever you call it, experience is the currency of postmodern economics."<sup>9</sup> It is in the light of this 'economy' that the emergent church begins to develop its particular ways of being church. Sweet identifies this church as *EPIC*, and says: "While a worship methodology that is more

Experiential, Participative, Image-based and Corrected (sic) will likely be classified as postmodern, its whole life and being inheres in the biblical tradition... For Jesus truth was not propositions or the property of sentences. Rather truth was what was revealed through our participation and interaction with him, others, and the world."<sup>10</sup>

These ideas are echoed in the emergent writers, where elements of engagement/participation are vital. Whether found in a fluid, dialogue-based or conversation-based sermon, services based around 'stations', '24-7'prayer rooms, creative-arts ministries in churches or in out-of-doors pursuits as part of the community pattern, this is not understood as a methodological development, but as an outworking of theology and faith.<sup>11</sup> An experiential imperative, flowing from experience to the transformation of lives, this aspect of the emergents is striking. Lives are to be changed. Through experiences, (including prayer, which is considered central to praxis of faith) and over time, the emergents seek transformation that is authentic and rooted in God. This is not an experience-by-observation, or a participation-by-presence (counting heads, as is so often the case in the modern church), but rather a perichoretic engagement. So Ward, drawing on Fiddes:

participation is the key to understanding the relational nature of God, because participation describes the mutual relationships among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also recognizes the communion between believer and God,<sup>12</sup>

The community of an emergent church seeks to foster an authentic encounter with God by the means of participation and experience, and moreover, would see that as in keeping with the fullest understanding of the God-Self relation.

#### *Aesthetic & media-engaged*

Beauty, creativity, image, icon, form part of the aesthetic of the emergent church. Closely related to a theological emphasis upon understanding God as Creator is an increased interest in art, sacred space, symbol, and physical expressions of faith. Once again as emergent churches move towards these elements in their practice, they see themselves as reuniting with the ancient paths of the church. The sense of communication through the arts, allowing the openness of art to speak of God are all highly significant features of the emergents. So McManus 'the art of art' and 'a world of images' where "any leader who engages in this endeavour [communicating in their culture] must go beyond having a value for aesthetics and must understand and use the power of aesthetics for the creating and shaping of ethos."<sup>13</sup> The ethos being shaped is vitally important to the emergents: an ethos of openness, creativity, connection and participation, grounded in Christ.

The ethos is also that of being net-worked. Media-savvy postmoderns are engaged in the 'texts' of the day. Their common frame of reference is found in music, film, t.v., video games, web-sites and mobiles. The emergent use of the media is not as a means to an end (*The Matrix* as the clever illustration of a point), rather it IS the expression of the truth pomos are seeking. *The Matrix* is entered into at the level of an intuitive Means of Grace that can point to God, but also bears God's truth within it. For the modern generation, this seems anathema: texts are tools. Whereas, for the emergents the media enable and engage the recipient in a self-interpreted/transcendent/ sacred experience. A U2 song becomes worship.

Naturally, the question of orthodoxy emerges. How do we know that what the worshipper is experiencing is *true*? What are the parameters? What is in place to protect the church from heresy? The questions reveal the prejudice. For the emergents, there is greater mystery, flexibility, and allowance made for various expressions of faith (albeit non-conformist) than the 'modern church' would allow. The emergents are concerned that the base-line beliefs of the church are adhered to (generally some expression of Credal belief: Jesus as Lord, God as Triune, Church as the body of Christ<sup>14</sup>) but in many ways the authentic expression of faith on the part of the believer takes precedence. So "We recognise God's indefinable presence in music, film, arts and other key areas of contemporary culture. We wish to affirm and enjoy the parts of our culture that give a voice to one of the many voices of God and challenge any areas that deafen the call of God and hence constrain human freedom"<sup>15</sup> becomes part of the statement of faith of a group of believers. God speaks in mysterious ways. Perhaps, however, the looked for standards of orthodoxy are found exactly here: in the sense of community and within the framework of a faith community.

### *Community/Connected*

One of the precursors to the emergent church is *FRIENDS. The Rembrandts'* song spoke for a generation: "I'll be there for you!/(When the rain starts to pour)/I'll be there for you!/(Like I've been there before).I'll be there for you./'Cause you're there for me too...."<sup>16</sup> The craving for an accepting, embracing, genuine community demonstrating love, compassion, and faithfulness is soul-deep in the pomo/ emergent. Community then is vital. It serves as

"the locus of faith, the carrier, corrector, central to the life of the believer. However, the emergent community is both visible and virtual, both present and future. Speaking generally the emergent church is critical of church growth principles and numerical growth is spoken of as a by-product of health (though not necessarily so).<sup>17</sup> The church of the emergents is one where community is a value that is seen as integral to the understanding of faith. Salvation then involves membership in a community and decision to act in certain ways... By entering into the community of faith, which embodies what it means to be a Christ community, a person is grasped by the embodied faith and brought to conversion, membership, and a new life "within" the body.<sup>18,19</sup>

Each emergent church makes an unashamed appeal to the believer to become fully engaged in the community's life. This does not necessarily equate to 'membership' or relate to the traditional understanding of programme-based engagement in a church. Rather, the believer's full engagement is seen as more comprehensive and organic, less compartmentalised and static. The emergent church is seen as a local body of Christ (organically in alliances/net-works and possibly mentoring relationships with other similar churches), contextually shaped and relevant, dynamic, co-operative, led by a participating lay ministry, flexible, adaptable, creative, experiential, multi-cultural, intergenerational, ecologically friendly, missional and is a community where people are held accountable to an authentic Christian lifestyle that makes room for re-creation and relationships above all else.<sup>20</sup> These communities are often (though not always) post-denominational, and see themselves as counter-cultural, although it must be noted that often the culture it rejects is the worst of modernity writ large.

Sacred encounter, the 'other' as sacred, are ideas that are beginning to carry more weight within the emergent church. The Eastern Orthodox view of the fall, sin and restoration

resonate with people who long for an optimistic and healing view of God's grace. For the emergents God is both immanent (but with more depth than the 'Buddy Jesus') and transcendent. Reflected in the intimacy of worship and the mystery of the sacrament that creates and points towards such intimacy, this re-discovering of God is vital. This in turn touches other areas of the emergent world-view – sexual expression, self-awareness, healing, wholeness, time are all gathered together and reconsidered in the light of the sacred. Again, 'in keeping with the uncertainties so prevalent in post-modernity, that something/ one (God, the other) can be both known and unknown is vital. ...This resonates with the creeds of the church.'<sup>21</sup>

### *Eco-theology*

The sacred and the holy find expression through the community's attitudes towards the world. So vision statements such as Mosaic's "The Church is called to whole earth evangelism,"<sup>22</sup> go beyond what is typically understood in modern-traditional churches approaches to the world. Embodied theology is interwoven in their worldview. How the community of faith embodies its understanding of God in and to the world is significant. For the emergent church, this is mediated through the early church and postmodernism. It begins with a renewed interest in the Eden narratives, reconsiders the fall, and offers redemptive understanding of the purposes of God, including re-creation and restoration of the whole world. For the emergents, the Christian's engagement with the world must reflect this understanding: "The two biggest reasons why Christians should make environmentalism a high priority... are that Christian stewardship requires it, and that the destruction of the earth's natural beauty actually impacts the worship of God."<sup>23</sup> This concept of responsibility and care for the cosmos entails a new found ethic of faith. The impact of globalisation, the ideas of a global community and a global conscience, is readily embraced by emergents, and is increasingly seen as an imperative. "The church must move its concern from simply protecting single species to protecting whole ecosystems."<sup>24</sup> For emergents, this is not discombobulated, rather they see in this a return to the ancient practices of the church—simplicity and generosity. The theological inheritance the postmoderns have rediscovered lends enormous *kudos* to figures such as St. Antony, and St. Francis of Assisi.

So, if the emergent church, responding to its cultural contexts, has developed a pattern of faith that includes as its main tenets: narrative, the journey, historical/ancient precedents, participation and experiential faith, an aesthetic, media-engaged worship, the idea of a community of faith embodying Christ, and an eco-theology, what (if anything) can such a church learn from Wesley?

### *Wesley and the emergents.*<sup>25</sup>

There seem to be considerable parallels between the circumstances that led to Wesleyanism and emergent theological development. There are also significant differences. Wesley, was also faced with the dawning of a new, transitional age of thought. From pre-enlightenment, to enlightenment, from rural and community dwelling to ever-increasing urbanisation and its concomitant effects of (amongst others) the commodification of humankind. For both Wesley and the emergents the horizons must have seemed equally bewildering. Several features outlined above as emergent, resonate with Wesley's theology. It must be noted that the imposition of such features onto Wesley's theology is at best somewhat forced. Wesley would not have recognised some of the premises that the emergents use, or some of their conclusions.

In many ways, the emergents' reluctance to claim denominations – even those they are a part of, stems from the general perception that they are unresponsive to the needs of *this* generation. This has marked parallels to Wesley – though of course, there is also dissonance there. Wesley felt led/driven to preach in the fields, never wanted to part ways with the Anglican communion, and was an ordained priest in the Church of England until death. For the *pomos*, there is less of an assumption that there is value in remaining in the fold of established and mainline denominations; there is more freedom without.

### *The Narrative & The Journey*

The use of the narrative and journey metaphor and an understanding of the process of conversion have both resonance and dissonance with Wesley. For instance, Wesley's emphasis upon prevenient grace and the way of salvation<sup>26</sup> offer clear points of convergence. Wesley would have agreed with their claim that "...God is active in people who may be far from church and that his activity is vibrant and essential."<sup>27</sup> Though Wesley is sometimes forced, most often by those Wesleyans who are also American Holiness movement theologians, into a conversionism mould, he also was willing to allow the believer to grow in grace, and indeed, saw this as vital to belief. Wesley, however, held to the need for a point of repentance and recognition of the need for Christ. Indeed "justification by faith implies... a sure trust and confidence that Christ dies for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me."<sup>28</sup> This, for Wesley, would have formed the narrative postmoderns so need.

### *History, Tradition and ecumenism*

Wesley would also have recognised the tug towards the ancient experienced by the emergents. He was a student of the Fathers, relied on patristics for some of his understanding, and as an Anglican was credal in his very essence. For Wesley the testimony of the early fathers, the Pietists, the puritans and his own Anglican heritage was of critical significance. Wesley based both his theology and practice on the premise that there was nothing new to be found. He acted, preached and taught in accordance with the Scriptures and Tradition. Perhaps therein lies a lesson for the emergent church, for Wesley the measure of all he was doing was the early church.

The liturgy and sacrament were also vital to Wesley. He was clear that the Sacraments were to be part of the life of those who became believers under his ministry. However, in "The way to the Kingdom" Wesley was so determined that true religion was "of the heart" that he warned his hearers: "true religion does not consist in meat and drink, or in any ritual observances; nor indeed in any outward things whatever, in anything exterior to the heart."<sup>29</sup> The context from which he writes and the audience to whom he writes is determinative of his intention, and it may well be that the emergents would apply his words to the majority of 'fundamentalists,' 'pragmatic evangelicals' or church growth practitioners; however, Wesley is clear that there is a both/and at work in the spiritual realm, and a return to liturgy, sacrament and ritual must be closely guarded.

Then too, the Triune emphasis re-emerging from the ancient tradition through the emergents would have been recognised by Wesley as normal, vital and quite right! Wesley is dependent upon triune formulae and in his sermon, *On the Trinity*, he explicitly develops his understanding of the Trinity by drawing on the power of mystery and yet by asserting

that the reality of the Trinity is knowable to the hearer. Again, the correspondence of Wesley and the emergents is marked.<sup>30</sup>

Scripture (one branch of Wesley's quadrilateral) is an area of some tension. Since for many emergents the Scriptures are holy, but not infallible or inerrant, open to debate and interpretation, there is some common ground. Wesley, whilst maintaining the sacred and truthful nature of Scripture, was willing to engage in debate and seek the best interpretation. Wesley would, however, have rejected out of hand the notion that only some parts of Scripture offer good news. That is, the whole of the canon is infused with grace and able to offer a response to the needs of humanity. Then too, this notion of grace infused (at times) Wesley's understanding of conversing with other traditions (the right hand of fellowship he offered to the Catholics, for instance). Though by no means 'ecumenical' in general, at points he was willing to engage in dialogue with those of other Christian understandings.

#### *Experiential and Participative.*

The reverberation between Wesley and the emergents that seems most obvious and crucial is in the area of "experiential" participative faith. A life-changing experience of the Holy Spirit that led to assurance, was critical. For Wesley, faith was reasonable, attested to by scripture and tradition and was to be experienced. Wesley speaks frequently of the transformational love of God in the heart of the believer. In the *First Fruits of the Spirit* he speaks of the reality of an experience of freedom, of peace, of "being filled with faith and with the holy ghost, they possess in their hearts, and show forth in their lives, in the whole course of their works and actions, the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God..."<sup>31</sup> Wesley was often accused of being an "enthusiast" a pejorative which he denied, and yet, there can be no doubt that he encouraged people to have a genuine and life-transforming (in postmodern words) but authentic experience of God.

Second to this, Wesley developed a system of participation believers within the incipient Methodist movement. Each was strongly encouraged to be part of a "cell" structure. Their presence and participation was vital to their own spiritual health, and to that of others. So too, Wesley encouraged (again strongly!) participation in ministry and "works of mercy." The participation in such actions was integral to the development of community, and was part of the genius of the Methodist movement.

#### *Aesthetic and Media-engaged*

Wesley would perhaps not have recognised the need for a recovery of aesthetic in the way that the emergents have. Certainly the churches he was familiar with had still a design-with-purpose, and would have engaged the senses to a degree. The eventual building of chapels, though functional, nonetheless retained the understanding that space could point to the central importance of a movement, thus the pulpit's centrality. The whole-body engagement in worship was an almost unheard of discussion, though certainly kneeling, standing, movement (though not dance) occurred in most services.

The engagement of the media, however, would be familiar territory for Wesley. He was prolific in writing tracts for publication, short pieces to familiarise the reader with his thinking (like video shorts?). Both Wesleys were also engaged in writing the lyrics to songs that were to communicate essential truth. Wesley distributed "coins" for entrance into

societies, and tickets for classes, and worked diligently to communicate the Methodist way . It seems that Wesley would have been sympathetic to the media-engaged emergents. Imagine Wesley with the Web!

### *Community/Connected*

"There is no holiness but social holiness" has gradually been redefined as it was intended. Meeting together for Wesley was not optional. For the reality of faith and holiness to be out-worked, one needed to be in community. The Methodists were interconnected to one another in several ways. Each society was similar to the other. The class meetings tied local groups together, across classes and generations. The conference enabled the leaders to collect and consider matters of importance. Methodists sang, had love feasts, Watch nights and chapel meetings together. Indeed, the strength of the movement on either side of the Atlantic was its strong emphasis on community. Those who were part of the community were expected to serve, and, though this is not a highly developed emphasis in most of the emergents, Webber (at least) nods towards activism. For Wesley, community was of paramount importance, and though he speaks of the mass rallies and the thousands, the strength of Methodism was in its ability to transfer the thousands into local 'support groups.' Solidarity with others was key.

### *Eco-Theology*

The development of environmental concern is generally considered a recent phenomenon. Wesley however, was ahead of the times. In *The General Deliverance, The Great Assize, and God's love to Fallen man* Wesley addresses himself to the theme of cosmic redemption, and attests "...I doubt not that the Father of all has a tender regard for even the lowest of creatures..."<sup>32</sup> Though he certainly has an eschatological purview, the area of justice and a rudimentary understanding of solidarity are present in his work.

Wesley would also have lauded the embodied-ethic understanding of faith. For him, if one of the community was sick, poor, hungry, naked, the onus was on the believer to redress this. "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can," was not lightly meant, and its practise was to be normative for the Methodist community.<sup>33</sup> Wesley would look for solidarity, practising works of mercy, and would have recognised this in nascent form in some of the emergent ideas of embodied faith. Its underdeveloped nature would have drawn his ire. He would have empathy with their eco-theology, but never at the expense of serving fellow humans who suffer. Any sniff of 'self-help religion' at the cost of a deeply rooted sacrificial religion would not be acceptable to him. The figures cited by Campolo and McLaren - "At present...more than forty-thousand children in this world die daily from starvation and disease related to malnutrition"<sup>34</sup> - would have resonated with Wesley, and he too would have proffered the call to serve the whole of the environment as part of embodied faith.

*What then can we learn?*

The emergent Church movement and Wesleyan theology have many points of convergence. The limitation of this essay has been that it offers only a broad overview. In several key areas there is potential for further consideration, for example in: the emergent church's understanding and use of Scripture, the emergent church's understanding of reason (particularly in the light of postmodernity), the emergent church's understanding of mission and evangelism, and in particular, the emergents' understanding of the outworking of faith.

In terms of the initial question posed in the introduction: how may the emergents learn from Wesley? The main area that seems underdeveloped is that of the outworking of faith in the context of the world. Though most of the emergents give some small consideration of faith as outworked (embodied), most do not develop this fully. The issue of poverty, and how Christians relate to the poor (Christ's poor) in the twenty-first century emergent church is generally glaringly absent. In the most explicitly Wesleyan book (*11 Genetic Gateways*) Sweet addresses this issue somewhat.

Lived holiness is the synergy of faith and works moving the world from injustice to justice, from cruelty to compassion, from evil to good, from lies to truth. The holiness gene is more than an affair of the heart; justifying and sanctifying grace is an affair of public policy. Spreading scriptural holiness is habitually going about doing good...<sup>35</sup>

but he makes this an issue of church health, vis-à-vis church growth, not at all a complete analysis of what Wesley understood by works of mercy.

A final area of consideration is that of the absence of any clear theology of the emergent church. Certainly the question of whether or not a postmodern movement by its very nature resists any form of 'systematic' theology may be raised. Webber is the most classic in his approach, choosing to emphasise various elements of theology in *Ancient-Future Faith*; however, the emergents would benefit from some sort of integrated analysis. Though in their ecclesiology many of them begin to develop theological principles, further expansion would be beneficial.

The church of the Nazarene (and Wesleyans in general) in pluralistic Europe are not immune from the impact of postmodernity, or the attraction of the emergent movement. Increasingly people are drawn towards communities of faith that reflect the values that have been outlined as 'emergent' above. The question which remains, if the emergents can learn from Wesley (and I think they can), is what can Wesleyans, Nazarenes, and the rest, learn from the emergents?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Transcript from CNN.Com: A conversation between Larry King and representatives from the Time Magazine list of the top 25 most influential evangelicals in the USA.

KING: Why, Reverend LaHaye haven't evangelicals been more outspoken about the environment?

T. LAHAYE: Because we believe that the environment was made for us. And not us for the environment. ...

<sup>2</sup> Bebbington, *The Nineteenth Century Evangelicals*

<sup>3</sup>The framework I am using for the emergent church is gleaned from a number of emergent books/authors. Including, Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, and Sweet, *11 genetic gateways*.

<sup>4</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, p.82

<sup>5</sup> McLaren, in *Generous Orthodoxy*, makes a distinction between Evangelicalism and evangelicalism. The former is by and large rejected by the emergents and would be what is currently typically understood of evangelical communities (particularly in the US and increasingly in the UK). Small 'e' evangelicalism, being 'good news' is still adhered to by the emergents.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, there are those who argue that there are churches who never lost these practices and emphases, and that the best recourse of those who are beginning to realise this would be to return to those ancient-future churches which still exist. This might, in part, explain why there are those who are regularly joining the Orthodox (in particular) and Roman Catholic movements.

<sup>7</sup> D Brower Latz, *The emergent Church and Wesley's theology*, PhD research paper.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Sweet, *PostModern Pilgrims*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>11</sup> Ward notes, however, that this can be seen as a creation of choice in a consumer environment. Another type of menu.

<sup>12</sup> Ward, *Liquid Church* p.53.

<sup>13</sup> McManus, p.127-129.

<sup>14</sup> See [www.mosaic.org](http://www.mosaic.org), [www.apostleschurch.org](http://www.apostleschurch.org), [www.solomonsporch.com](http://www.solomonsporch.com), [www.freshworship.org](http://www.freshworship.org)

<sup>15</sup> [www.sanctus1.co.uk](http://www.sanctus1.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> [www.spynets.com/lyrics/troduction](http://www.spynets.com/lyrics/troduction)

<sup>17</sup> McManus, in, Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*.

<sup>18</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, p.132.

<sup>19</sup> D Brower Latz, *op cit.*

<sup>20</sup> See the mission statements of the above sites.

<sup>21</sup> D. Brower Latz, *op cit.*

<sup>22</sup> [www.mosaic.org](http://www.mosaic.org)

<sup>23</sup> Campolo and McLaren, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, p.167.

<sup>24</sup> Sweet, *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> Much of this section is an expansion of a paper written in June 04 entitled *The Emergent Church and Wesley's Theology*, by D. Brower Latz.

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- <sup>26</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*.  
<sup>27</sup> Ward, *Liquid Church*, p.80.  
<sup>28</sup> Wesley, *Justification by Faith*, Sermon V, BCE, 194.  
<sup>29</sup> Wesley, *The Way to the Kingdom*, Sermon 7, BCE, 219.  
<sup>30</sup> Wesley, *On the Trinity* Sermon 55, BCE, 373-386.  
<sup>31</sup> Wesley, *The First Fruits of the Spirit*, Sermon 8, BCE, 237.  
<sup>32</sup> Wesley, *The General Deliverance*, Sermon 60, p.447.  
<sup>33</sup> Wesley, *The danger of Riches*, Sermon 87.  
<sup>34</sup> Campolo and McLaren, p170.  
<sup>35</sup> Sweet, *11 Genetic Gateways*, p.143.

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