



# 1

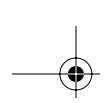
## IT'S ABOUT THEOLOGY, NOT GEOGRAPHY

A friend who read an earlier version of this book said, “Well Ray, it looks like you may be reinventing the wheel! The Antioch Church already exists. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by converting to the Antiochian Diocese of the Orthodox Church and joining Peter Gillquist along with others from the Protestant evangelical movement.” I replied, “This is exactly what I don’t want to do—start another denomination!”<sup>1</sup> No, I don’t look back to Antioch in order to find a new ecclesial community but an emergent theology that can shape the contours and stimulate the growth of a vital root structure for an emerging-church movement that appears to have more fluidity than focus. Something is going on, we need to know what it’s about.



<sup>1</sup>Gillquist serves as head of the department of missions and evangelism for the Antiochian Diocese of the Orthodox Church. Gillquist, along with a group of former Campus Crusade for Christ leaders, set out in the late 1960s on a search for a church with deeper roots only to one day wind up on the doorstep of the Orthodox Church, seeking admittance. Gillquist told his own story in his book *Becoming Orthodox*, where he tracked the conversion of nearly a thousand evangelical Protestants to Orthodox Christianity in 1987. This mass conversion was one of the biggest events in modern American Orthodoxy, and Gillquist’s book paints a vivid picture of the theological wrestling and jurisdictional complications that ended in the reception of the converts in the Antiochian Orthodox Church (Peter E. Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith* [Ben Lomond, Calif.: Conciliar Press, 1992]; see also, *Coming Home: Why Protestant Clergy Are Becoming Orthodox*, ed. Peter E. Gillquist [Ben Lomond, Calif.: Conciliar Press, 1995]).



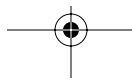
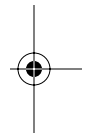
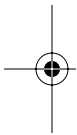


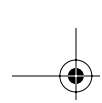
The thesis of this book is simple and succinct. The Christian community that emerged out of Antioch constitutes the original form and theology of the emerging church as contrasted with the believing community at Jerusalem. I will argue that the emerging churches in our present generation can find their ecclesial form and their core theology by tracing out the contours of the missionary church under Paul's leadership based in Antioch. The difference between Antioch and Jerusalem is essentially a theological difference, not merely a geographical one.

### MOMENTS AND MOVEMENTS

While the distance between Antioch and Jerusalem can be measured in miles, the difference can be understood in a moment. There are moments when, for something to emerge, a line must be drawn, a cord cut, a breaking away in order for the new to break in. The Greeks had a word for it—*kairos*—not a chronological sequence in time (*chronos*), but a “moment in time,” as it were, the emergence of something new within the continuum of time and place. “See, now is the acceptable time [*kairos*];” wrote Paul, “see, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The history of the Christian church includes both movements and moments. A movement is the development of a new strain out of an older batch! It is true that a moment can lead to a movement. But what is unique about a moment, as I use the term, is that it does not come by evolution but by revolution. Or, to use the language of change, a moment is second-order change while a movement tends to be first-order change.

First-order change is a change from one behavior to another within a given way of behaving as a response to a new environment or a new stimulus. First-order change has a high degree of continuity through the transition of change. The church community in Jerusalem, despite the “moment” of Pentecost, quickly incorporated this event into a movement with a high degree of continuity with the tradition of the Twelve. It carried a great deal of the DNA, to use a contemporary ex-





pression, of the historical past into the present.

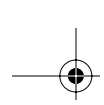
Second-order change, on the other hand, produces a new system and a new way of behaving rather than a new behavior within the same system. It has a high degree of discontinuity through the transition of change. While first-order change appears to be based on common sense, second-order change may appear to be weird, unexpected and paradoxical. In second-order change there is less extrapolation out of the past and more of an attempt to restructure the present in terms of a perceived goal. Thus a moment, such as Paul's conversion and anointing with the Spirit as a result of the Damascus-road encounter with Jesus, was second-order change as contrasted with the evolving movement within the Jerusalem community of believers.<sup>2</sup>

The new evangelical movement came about during the middle of the twentieth century as some leading theologians and ministers felt the need to form a more positive and culturally relevant theology out of the older fundamentalism. The so-called new charismatic movement in the latter part of the twentieth century brought about a vigorous and sometimes contentious spirituality leading to the renewal of existing churches and the creation of new ones. Martin Luther, on the other hand, had a moment of spiritual and theological insight when he discovered the liberating and biblical teaching on justification by faith that led to the Reformation. John Wesley had a moment of deep personal and spiritual inner awareness of his salvation at Aldersgate that led to a theology of sanctification and holiness of life. While these moments also led to movements, these movements were more revolutionary in nature than evolutionary. The emerging church at Antioch was a moment, not a movement, leading to a new kind of church and a new gospel of grace; it did not evolve out of the Jerusalem community but was radically revo-

---

<sup>2</sup>Sources for the discussion of first- and second-order change can be found in Paul Watzlawick, John H. Weakland and Richard Fisch, *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974). See also Ray S. Anderson, *Minding God's Business* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), chap. 3.





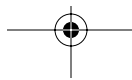
lutionary in nature, much to the alarm and concern of the elders at Jerusalem! The time (*kairos*) for the new messianic community had come, in Antioch rather than Jerusalem. Emerging churches can be understood as a *kairos* moment in our time.

The several hundred miles that separate Antioch from Jerusalem is not what is significant. It is the theological moment that emerged at Antioch that tells us what the new kind of church is about. Could the same event have occurred at the doorstep of Jerusalem? Would it have taken place in the same way in a suburban synagogue of Jerusalem, perhaps within walking distance of the temple? In one sense, yes, for the Spirit moves where it wills. In another sense, probably not, for, as Jesus said, new wine does not fit well in an old wineskin, nor can one put a new patch on an old coat without it tearing away (Mark 2:21-22). Thus it seems providential that through the persecution of the Jews in Jerusalem, a number of believing Jews ended up in Antioch where the Holy Spirit emerged in the form a new kind of community, including both Jews and Gentiles. But its difference was not only the inclusive nature of the new community, it was the theology that emerged through this community that became a “vintage theology,” a theology that keeps its original flavor and increases in vigor as it leads the church closer to the coming day of the Lord.



### THE CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

There is a sense in which spatial distance from the womb of tradition appears to be necessary for the emergence of life beyond the womb. It was at Jerusalem that Pentecost occurred, an event that has often been noted as the rebirth of Israel as the Messianic community. In this new event there is both continuity and discontinuity. The formation of the believing Jews into a new community was based on two things. First, this community was constituted by the tradition of the Twelve. The original disciples were reconstituted as apostles through the breath of the Spirit following the res-



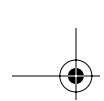


urrection of Jesus: "he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " (John 20:22). Judas, of course, having taken his own life was not one of them. However, in their minds, the number twelve was a necessary structure of continuity, and after the ascension of Jesus, under Peter's leadership, they chose Matthias to take the place of Judas on the basis that he was among those who were followers of Jesus from the beginning and who was a witness to his resurrection (Acts 1:15-26). Thus the church at Jerusalem began to take shape even prior to Pentecost based on the felt need for continuity and the constitution of a central point of authority and control. It was into this already established community that the Holy Spirit came, leading to the multiplication of believers among the Jews. As it turned out, however, the moment (*kairos*) of Pentecost was subsumed in the time line (*chronos*) of historical continuity by the Jerusalem church. Both before and after Pentecost the tradition of the Twelve prevailed even as the witness and growth of the community expanded. What resulted was a messianic movement within the historical Jewish tradition where circumcision and observance of the Jewish law continued as the theological litmus test of conformity and community.

Meanwhile, it appears that the Spirit of the resurrected and ascended Jesus was already pushing the envelope of historical continuity and traditional thinking. Joseph, a native of Cyprus, was filled with the Spirit and became attached to the Twelve. Though he was an outsider, so to speak, he soon impressed the Twelve with his apostolic gift of encouragement and was renamed Barnabas, after his generous act of selling his property and giving the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the poor. Later, Barnabas was recognized as an apostle in addition to the Twelve, indicating that the sharp lines of traditional authority were already beginning to be blurred as the defining structure of the early church.

The encounter between Saul of Tarsus and the risen and ascended Christ on the road to Damascus, however, threatened the authority and eventually the theology of the Jerusalem church (Acts 9). Returning to Jerusalem, Saul was met with suspicion by the Twelve because of his



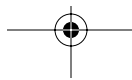


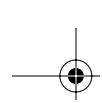
former activities against the believers, and only by the intercession of Barnabas was he admitted into their fellowship. Threats against Saul led some of the believers to get him out of town and on his way back to his home in Tarsus (Acts 9:26-30). When Saul (who later assumed the Roman form of his name, Paul) reflected back on this experience, he added his name to the list of those within the line of historical continuity who were witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. His name, however, while appearing last, is not intended to be part of that tradition. “Last of all,” he wrote, “as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Corinthians 15:8). While scholars speculate as to the significance of the rather unusual term “untimely” (*ektrōma*) that Paul used to describe his own encounter, it probably does not mean a “late birth” (i.e., one occurring at the end of a procession) but actually “premature” (i.e., one born ahead of time). Some translate the word as equivalent to an abortion—or a premature, extraordinary birth. All of the other witnesses to the resurrection encountered Jesus prior to his ascension, but Paul encountered Jesus after he had ascended to heaven. It’s as if Paul wants us to understand that the Jesus who is to come at the end of the age had already appeared to him. No other human has yet experienced that encounter, only Paul. What a moment!



### REVELATION AND RELIGION

My thesis is that the emerging church at Antioch is distinguished by its new theological orientation, not by its geographical distance from Jerusalem, although distance sometimes allows what proximity denies. I will paint in broad brush strokes the theology of the emerging church at Antioch in order to lay the foundation for what will follow in this book—an attempt to provide an emergent theology for a contemporary form of emerging churches that is biblically based and culturally relevant. In doing this I will contrast the emergent theology of the church at Antioch as a missionary church with the theology of the church at Jerusalem. In the remainder of this chapter I want to show why a theology based on revelation, such as that emerging out of Antioch, is a more “vintage” theology

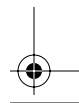
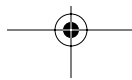
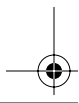


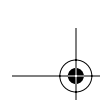


than a theology based on religion as represented by Jerusalem. It may appear that I am overgeneralizing at points and overstating certain assumptions in order to make my point. However, I believe that a fair reading of the New Testament documents will support my basic thesis.

What clearly set apart the emerging church at Antioch from the church at Jerusalem was a theology of revelation as contrasted with a theology of religion. The theology of the Jerusalem church was committed to historical precedent, crippled by religious scruple and controlled by a fortress mentality. Every venture out of Jerusalem, even by an apostle, was tethered to home base by a theological bungee cord. A prime example is Peter's encounter with Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman soldier. Directed by a vision at the house of Simon in Joppa, Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius, his friends and relatives. During the sermon the Holy Spirit fell upon all who believed his word and as a result Peter baptized them. When the church in Jerusalem heard of this, they summoned Peter to account for his actions and criticized him for eating with Gentiles and baptizing the uncircumcised. Upon hearing Peter's lengthy explanation they consented saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). This concession was a superficial one, as it turned out, for the leaders of the church in Jerusalem continued to criticize and oppose the ministry of Paul on a theology based on the law of Moses. Much later, Peter himself, while visiting the church in Antioch, was rebuked by Paul for separating from the uncircumcised Gentile believers under the influence of certain delegates of the church at Jerusalem who came to oppose the fellowship of Jewish believers with uncircumcised Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

The emerging church at Antioch, in contrast, was oriented to a theology of revelation as led by Paul, whose own testimony was that he had received his gospel not from human sources but by revelation (Galatians 1:11-12). He made a special trip to Jerusalem in response to revelation (Galatians 2:2). He claims to have received his knowledge of the mystery of the gospel by revelation (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3); he frequently refers to

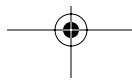


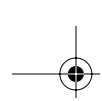


revelations in his correspondence with the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 14:6, 26, 30; 2 Corinthians 12:1, 7). Paul refers to guidance by visions, dreams and direct intervention of the Holy Spirit in his missionary work (Acts 16:9; 22:17; 27:23). While the Old Testament Scriptures were the basis of his theological reflection, his interpretation and use of the Scriptures were guided by his revelational theology. He was often criticized for this and responded to his critics by saying that his theology and ministry were finally to be commended or judged by the Lord Jesus who was coming. "I do not even judge myself," he wrote. "I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes. . . . Then each one will receive a commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:1-5). This is more than a claim for apostolic authority, it was for him a method of doing theology. It was the content of his apostolic teaching, not merely his role as an apostle that he was defending. In fact, he was so bold as to say that if anyone, including he himself or an angel from heaven should preach a different gospel than what he had received by revelation they were to be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).

Paul will not yield his authority as an apostle to those who heard the spoken words of Jesus prior to his death and resurrection. He fully accepts these teachings and acknowledges them in the context of his own teaching. But he claims that the same Jesus is now revealing his will through the mission of the Spirit, so that Paul can claim the same source for his teaching as an apostle as do those who have their source in the remembered words of Jesus.

This must have been an astounding claim at the time—that Paul first insisted on its veracity in the face of those who were eyewitnesses to what Jesus said and did before his resurrection and ascension! It would be one thing to say that the Spirit is the agent of redemption, whereby the hearts of men and women are opened to hearing the gospel of Christ. It is quite another thing to claim, as Paul did, that the Spirit is the very revelation of the work of Christ opening new dimensions of truth as a





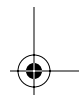
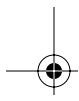
basis for theological reflection on what has already been revealed.

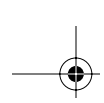
Paul's theology of the Holy Spirit goes far beyond a theology of renewal through an experience of the Spirit. There is an understanding of the Pentecost experience among some that it results in a theology of a Spirit-filled life or a theology of the baptism of the Spirit. For Paul, the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ working to reveal truth, not merely to express spiritual feelings and stimulate spiritual worship.

At the same time, however, Paul's theology of revelation through the Spirit did not seem to be a kind of "word revelation" or "rhema revelation" that has popularity today among some Pentecostal Christians. The Spirit may also have given revelation through the gift of discernment and prophecy within the context of the Christian assembly. Paul does not deny that this was also experienced by the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12). But these words of revelation seem to be largely words that enhance and enable other aspects of his ministry rather than becoming a basis for theological reflection.

What is clear, however, is that Paul did not base his argument for his apostolic authority on these private revelations alone but on the work of the Spirit among those to whom he ministered Christ. What became undeniable, so that even those in Jerusalem had to acknowledge it, was that the Spirit of Jesus was doing signs and wonders among the Gentiles, and that many had come to believe that he was the Messiah through Paul's ministry. This was a critical issue at the Jerusalem conference, where Paul was sent by the church at Antioch, along with Barnabas and others, to address the question of circumcision for the Gentile converts (Acts 15). Paul didn't argue his case based on his personal revelation experience but on the grounds of the manifestation of the Spirit of God through his missionary activity among the Gentiles. What constitutes "revelation" for Paul is not a private experience but an open, public and obvious work of the Holy Spirit as the continuing ministry of Christ.

The fruit of the Spirit's work, for Paul, was the evidence for the work of the Spirit. To the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "our message





of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). These early Christians “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

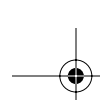
This theology of revelation became the distinctive theology of the emerging church at Antioch and of the churches that emerged through Paul’s missionary activity working out of Antioch. What Paul had to argue was that the emerging church was a continuation of the ministry of Jesus despite the clear break with the theology of religion as represented by the church in Jerusalem. This is an issue not only for the first century church but a theological issue for emerging churches in our present generation. Emerging churches must continually argue their theological continuity with Christ in the context of critical discontinuity with religious forms and historical traditions that, like the old wineskins that they are, can hardly contain the new wine.

### THE CORNERSTONE OF CONTINUITY

The Jerusalem church sought to extend its own life as a movement out of the historical tradition of their own apostolic order. It is true that Paul well understood the significance of the foundation laid by the first apostles. Writing to the church at Ephesus he reminded them, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20). The continuity, however, as Paul envisioned it, was not in the historical link with the original apostles but due to the eschatological reality of the Jesus who was resurrected and ascended and present in the community through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus likened himself to the cornerstone that God had chosen. When his authority was questioned by those who were presumed to be guardians of the temple and the law, he replied: “Have you never read in the scrip-





tures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?’ (Matthew 21:42; Psalm 118:22-23). As the first apostle, Jesus is the cornerstone for the apostolic foundation. Indeed, after his resurrection and ascension, Peter speaks of Christ as the “living cornerstone” and of members of the church as “living stones”: “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5). Rather than viewing apostolic authority as vested only in the original Twelve, Paul viewed Jesus himself as the true apostle, as the author of Hebrews was later to articulate clearly: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also ‘was faithful in all God’s house’” (Hebrews 3:1-2).

Following the resurrection of Christ, the early church was realigned to the living cornerstone, with the church comprising “living stones.” We might picture Christ as both the historical cornerstone of the original apostles as well as the contemporary “living cornerstone” of the church as follows:

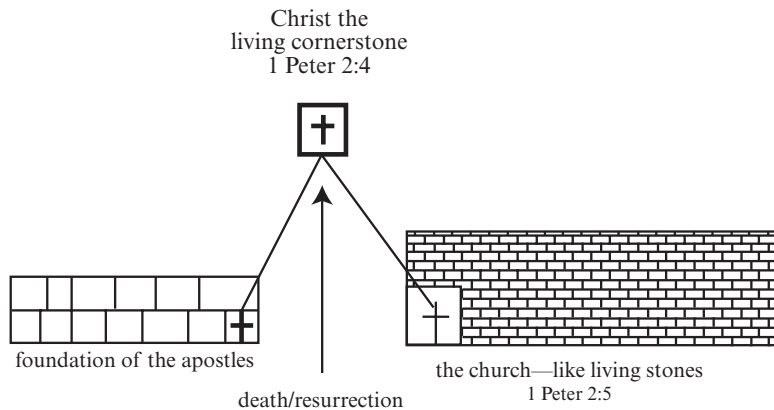
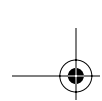


Figure 1.1. Christ the living cornerstone

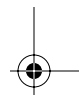


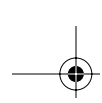


The cornerstone connects the church to its apostolic foundation as the above diagram shows. At the same time, the risen Christ is the cornerstone of the church in every generation. As such, continuity with the apostolic foundation for the church at Antioch was well established through Christ as the cornerstone. This provided a theological criterion for Paul as he argued for the authority of the emerging church at Antioch over and against the demand by the Jerusalem church that he submit both his theology and his ecclesiology to their approval. This led Paul to suggest a quite radical discontinuity between the old order and the new order marked by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The discontinuity relates to the side of historical, religious or ethnic priority. On the side of God's election and gracious covenant as fulfilled through Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, there is real continuity. Paul's own apostolic authority and commission rested on this fact; so did his theological hermeneutic.

No longer could circumcision be a criterion for belonging to the kingdom of God when the circumcised Messiah died and his circumcision did not save him. No longer can the regulations and rituals of the law bind persons with cultic power now that the Spirit of the resurrected Christ had become the new law (Romans 8). These things were only "shadows," but the "substance" belongs to the Christ who died and is now alive (Colossians 2:17). Through this Christological hermeneutic, Paul is able to find trajectories of theological tradition in the Old Testament that strongly support the theology of the emerging church.

There is a strong sense of continuity in Paul's theology, but this continuity rests solely in the relation between the Spirit given at Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ who confronted him on the Damascus road and the Spirit of the historical Jesus who died and was raised again. Thus Paul makes no clear distinction between Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, Spirit of Jesus and Spirit of Christ. Each of these ways of speaking refer to the unity of Word and Spirit as revealed through Jesus, descended from



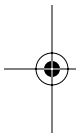


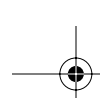
David according to the flesh, and Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and declared to be “Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4).

For Paul, the nature of the church could only be established through continuity and discontinuity. His theology of the church was developed as a theology of the mission of the Spirit as the continuing mission of Jesus as Son of God. In his letter to the Roman church, in particular, Paul cites the faith of Abraham before he was circumcised as the basis for justification. So then it is through faith in the promise of God by which righteousness comes (continuity), not through the Mosaic law (discontinuity), as many of Paul’s contemporaries claimed (Romans 4). Not only that, through faith both Jews and Gentiles become heirs of the promise given to Abraham by which “all the families of the earth” should be blessed. Through this Jesus Christ, who is descended from David according to the flesh but declared to be Son of God in power through the resurrection (Romans 1:4), a new relation of continuity is established between the Jew and Gentile as well as between the old covenant and the new covenant (Galatians 3:23-29).

The organic connection between the church (new covenant) and Israel (old covenant) is now established through Christ, even though the forms of the old cannot be required as a condition for participation in the new. Nor does one’s standing in the former community of Israel grant automatically a place in the new community of the Spirit. “We [Jews],” says Paul, “have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16). Between Isaac and Ishmael is the barren womb of Sara, so that Isaac is the child of promise and grace. The continuity is solely due to the promise, fulfilled through grace, not due to natural process or religious standing.

In the same way, between the church and Israel is the empty tomb of the Messiah. The resurrected Christ is the “child of promise,” so that both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father through him. Paul



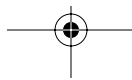


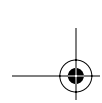
stresses the point that the offspring promised to Abraham was singular, not plural (Galatians 3:16). Christ is actually this offspring promised to Abraham. The continuity between the church and Israel is thus through Christ alone, so that all who belong to Christ through the Spirit, both Jews and Gentiles, are “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29). This continuity is not established through historical succession but through the resurrection of the Messiah (Christ) and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The emerging church of Antioch claims full apostolic authority and structure through direct continuity with Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The basis for this, as Paul argued, is revelation not merely religious tradition or historical precedent.

#### **EMERGING CHURCHES AS MISSION-MINDED COMMUNITIES**

The book of Acts is the foundational document for the emerging church at Antioch and the expanding of God’s kingdom as the continuing mission of Christ through the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. The establishing of communities of new believers westward throughout the Greek and Roman world of that day by teams sent out of Antioch marks the emerging church of every generation as a mission-minded community of Christ. Paul’s letters to these churches during his own travels produced a narrative theology that to this day constitutes the theological core of the New Testament. Mission and theology are not adjunctive to the nature of emerging churches but constitute both their nature and purpose.

The church exists as the missionary people of God—that is its nature. The mission of the church is to embody in its corporate life and ministry, the continuing messianic and incarnational nature of the Son of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The nature of the church is determined in its existence as the continuing mission of Christ in and to the world. The church’s nature, as well as its mission and ministry, have their





source in the life of the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

This requires a theology that views the nature and mission of the church as a unity of theory and experience. This Paul was careful to do in his formulation “one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4-5). Paul makes it clear, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential to a knowledge of Jesus as the incarnate Lord. “No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). But he also warns, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Romans 8:9).

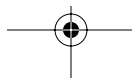
The nature of the church, argued Paul, could not rest solely upon a historical link with Jesus and the Twelve but upon the Spirit of the resurrected Christ who has “broken down the dividing wall . . . [of] hostility,” and created in himself “one new humanity in place of the two” (Ephesians 2:14, 15). The critical phrase for Paul with regard to the nature of the church is “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is “from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). The connection between the old covenant and the new covenant is a real one, but it’s also one that is eschatological in nature. The relation is not predicated on historical necessity but on covenant faithfulness on the part of God.

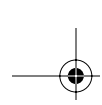
When Paul was challenged as to the authority by which the Gentile churches were operating, he argued that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new age has broken into the old, so that these eras now overlap. Theologian David Ford says it well:

The new is being realised now through the Holy Spirit, so the most urgent thing is to live according to the Spirit. It certainly involves present eschatological freedom, hope beyond death and the signif-

---

<sup>3</sup>See Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); and Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).





icance of the Church in history. . . . If God is free to open history from the future then the future need not mirror the past. In the Church this combines with the message of the cross to allow for discontinuities and innovations.<sup>4</sup>

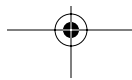
We are thus warned against seeking to establish direct links between historical events, even those that belong to the historical Jesus, and the being of the church in the contemporary age. The result of attempting to do this leads to the question of the authority by which the church is constituted. If the church is historically determined in its authority, it will either seek some kind of institutional connection with the past or in a strongly clerical ecclesiology based on a link with historical precedent, neglecting the role of the Holy Spirit as the present authority of Christ.

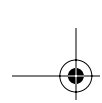
**A THEOLOGY FOR EMERGING CHURCHES**

When we grasp the heart of Paul's theology of the emerging church, we are impressed by several things. First, Paul became the theologian of Pentecost, transforming it from a festival into a foundation for the life and growth of the church. Second, Paul became the primary theologian of the early emerging church, defining the gospel of Christ as an imperative of mission before it becomes a subject of proclamation in the church. Third, Paul produced an authentic praxis theology, discovering anew the truth of the gospel in the context of Christ's ministry in the world.

Central to an emerging church theology is a view of God's mission through the Spirit by which the Spirit of God in creation is united with the Spirit of God through Christ seeking the restoration of the whole of God's creation. The theological formula—Christ Jesus—encompasses the whole of the messianic mission of God as the Father who sends the Spirit and begets the Son. Incorporated in this formula is the cosmic sig-

<sup>4</sup>David F. Ford, "Faith in the Cities: Corinth and the Modern City," in *On Being the Church*, ed. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 248.





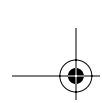
nificance of Christ's death and resurrection as an atonement for the sins of the whole world and "life for all" (Romans 5:18). In saying Christ Jesus, Paul captures the liberating and reconciling power of the Spirit of God as a vital and compelling agent of transformation, overcoming the power of sin, canceling the power of evil, and creating a new humanity within every nation, tribe and culture (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Paul's theology originates in the mystery of God's own eternal and gracious election of all humanity through his own incarnate humanity, Christ Jesus. This theology culminates in the eschatological vision whereby God's gracious election of humanity through his Son is brought to fulfillment through the Spirit's work of effective calling so that "every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). To know Christ Jesus is to experience the depth of the mystery of God's own love for the Son, the Son's own love for the Father and the Spirit's work of love in enabling us to also become children of God.

This is why Paul uses the language of adoption to indicate that even as Christ was raised from the dead to "become a Son of God" in power, so we too will become "joint heirs" with Christ through our resurrection and adoption. "The whole creation," says Paul, "has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23). The Holy Spirit is the present and continuing work of God's redemption through adoption into the divine sonship of Christ. Christ continues his apostolic ministry as Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father (Colossians 3:1). Paul has no problem with this differentiation within the work of God, for God is known as the one God in all his working.

This apparently accounts for Paul's self-conscious distinction between words directly reported to him by the disciples and his own teaching that he claims as having the same authority. For example, to the Corin-



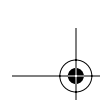


thians he writes, “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord,” then he goes on to state a teaching Jesus gave before his crucifixion. But then he adds, “To the rest I say—I and not the Lord”; here he does not have a direct citation from Jesus. This distinction is not made, however, for the purpose of giving greater authority to the words spoken by Jesus before his crucifixion than to the words that Paul speaks on behalf of Jesus. For he concluded by saying, “I think that I too have the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 7:10, 12, 40). “Now the Lord is the Spirit,” wrote Paul, “and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, who were in confusion regarding the freedom of the Spirit’s gifts, reminding them that though there were a variety of gifts, there is but one and the same Spirit. There are varieties of service but the same Lord (Jesus), and there are a variety of workings but the same God who inspires them all in every one (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). This is an early trinitarian theology formulated as a means of grounding the manifestation of the Spirit in Christ, and the ministry of Christ in God the Father.

When we remember that Paul’s ministry and the writing of this letter preceded the writing of the four Gospels, we see the emergence of a trinitarian theology from within mission theology. To be sure, what came to the early disciples following Easter as a commission directly from the risen Lord was part of the oral tradition that Paul would have learned immediately upon his conversion. Yet, more than any other witness to the resurrection, it was Paul who carried out this commission of Christ and so was led to develop a theology of the continuing mission of Christ through the Spirit.

The unity or oneness of God’s being, for the Israelite, was not mathematical but organic and synthetic. God’s work is one with his being, and so to praise his work is to praise him. To acknowledge the Spirit of Christ is to acknowledge Christ, and to acknowledge Christ is to acknowledge the Father, one God in all his works. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by



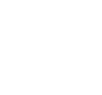
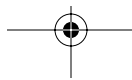


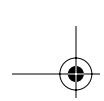
the love of the Spirit, to join with me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf" (Romans 15:30). This is a trinitarian understanding of the inner relations between God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Here we see how the mission theology of the emerging church laid the foundations for what later became the trinitarian confession and theology of the church. Jesus claimed an identity between himself and the Father due to the works of the Father manifest in him. Later, John can remember Jesus saying, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? . . . Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves" (John 14:10-11). The works and the words bind the identity of Jesus and the identity of the Father into a unity of divine revelation. In like manner, the Spirit claims identity with Jesus. Jesus promises that the Spirit, whom the "Father will send in my name," "will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26 NASB). When the Spirit does come, Jesus told them, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14-15).

We remember that these words of Jesus recorded by John were written long after Paul had developed the theology of the emerging church with its intrinsic trinitarian structure. What the disciples had first remembered concerning Jesus' promise of the Spirit, and no doubt shared as oral history, became for Paul an actual experience of hearing the words of Jesus as from the contemporary Lord.

The praxis of the Spirit of the risen Christ constituted the new school of theology for Paul. As he proclaimed the gospel of a crucified and resurrected Messiah, he witnessed the convicting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. He reminded the church at Thessalonica of this compelling testimony to the power of the gospel when he wrote, "our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. . . . [Y]ou turned to God from





idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 9-10).

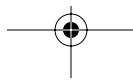
On the one hand, the nature and mission of the church depend on the vital life that it shares with Christ. For this, the church receives and celebrates its life in the Spirit, for without the Spirit it cannot have its life rooted in Christ. On the other hand, the nature and mission of the church depend on its bearing the continuing ministry of Christ to the Father on behalf of the world. For this, the church receives and exercises the gifts of the Spirit through its members as the ministry of Christ. If the church were to abandon the mission and ministry of Christ that now take place in the humanity of the church’s solidarity with the world, the church would forsake its share in the reconciliation of the world to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). If the church were to lose the presence and life of the Spirit as the source of its own existence and life, the church would sever its vital connection to Christ so that its worship would become worthless and its religion mere ritual.

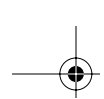
The church is not only Spirit-filled, it is raised with Christ and through Christ has access to the Father in the one Spirit (Ephesians 2:17-18). As the inner life of Jesus in his relation to the Father is constitutive of Christology, so the inner life of the church in its experience of Jesus Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit is constitutive of ecclesiology. The Spirit that creates the church through the renewal of life and faith is the Spirit of the resurrected Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by God, the Father of glory, and so designated Son of God, we too have been made alive, argues the apostle Paul, as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit and so become children of God (Romans 1:3; Ephesians 1:5, 20; 2:2, 22).

This is emerging church theology!

**CONCLUDING NONTHEOLOGICAL POSTSCRIPT**

Emerging churches are often accused of lacking theological sophistica-





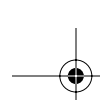
tion, critical intellectual competence and, occasionally, official clerical authorization. If that is the case today, it was also what the emerging church out of Antioch faced in its day. In the face of such criticism Paul responded with what we might call naive realism. I don't use naive realism in contrast to critical realism such as one finds in modern concepts of epistemology. In modern thought naive realism tends to be identical with idealistic or mental concepts of what is real, leading to a kind of arrogance. It leaves no room for mystery and does not depend on revelation. Postmodern critical realism approaches reality as something that involves more interaction between what is real and a person's perception of it. Paul Spaulding suggests that "modest realism" might be a better way to speak of the way that knowledge of reality involves something of the knower as well as openness to a more-than-meets-the-eye (or fills the mind) experience of reality. "Reality is the dynamic medium in which human knowing does its work. Both human knowing and the reality it knows are in a dynamic state."<sup>5</sup>

In 1979, as part of a team of theologians and Young Life leaders, I spent a week in Germany, where we presented papers and had discussion with German theologians and pastors concerning an incarnational approach to evangelizing German young people. At the end of the week I asked Professor Peter Stuhlmacher, "How is it that we can spend a week discussing the biblical basis for evangelism without having a New Testament scholar like your self from Tübingen challenge us as on the basis of recent textual criticism theories?" His response was rather stunning, I thought. "Some of us have concluded that redaction criticism of the text has come to a dead end and that we should simply accept the text as Word of God given to the believing community and read and use it as such!" I think that my own concept of naive realism began at that mo-

---

<sup>5</sup>Paul L. Spaulding, "Proclaiming Christian Truth in a Postmodern Culture" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005), p. 48. Spaulding goes on to say, "What is discovered in this process is *living truth*, that dynamic confidence that reality has been engaged, that a real connection has been made that is trustworthy and true" (ibid., p. 58).





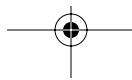
ment! No one could accuse Stuhlmacher, an internationally respected scholar, of mere naiveté concerning the problems of the Scripture text. But when he approached the text as Word of God, the scaffolding of criticism dropped away and left the text to speak for itself.

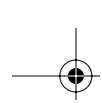
By “naive realism” I refer to how Jesus, the Gospel authors and the apostle Paul used language in an unapologetic way—reality and knowledge were assumed to be true, not parts of the truth. I use the “naive realism” to express a view of knowledge as a “subjective experience of an objective reality.” This kind of knowledge was represented by the Hebrew way of knowing as contrasted with the Greek. John Pedersen points out the difference between the Hebrew way of knowing as contrasted with our modern, post-Cartesian way of thinking.

In the Hebrew dictionary we look in vain for a word which quite corresponds to our “to think.” There are words which mean “to remember,” “make present,” and thus to act upon the soul. There are words expressing that the soul seeks and investigates; but by that is not meant an investigation which analyses and arranges according to abstract views. To investigate is a practical activity; it consists in directing the soul towards something which it can receive into itself, and by which it can be determined. One investigates wisdom, i.e. makes it one’s own.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>John Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1:108-9. Truth was grounded in being for the Hebrew in somewhat the same way that it was for the pre-Platonic period in Greek philosophy. Martin Heidegger argues that the original Greek concept of reality as “truth disclosing itself,” was “humanized” by Plato when truth was subordinated to an idea. Prior to Plato there was a succession of logos to being. Truth (*alētheia*) was the “uncovering” or disclosing of logos through being. Following Plato, says Heidegger, logos became abstracted from being and became mere *nomos*, law or custom, and served as a standard of correctness (Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959]; see also my essay “Theology as Rationality,” in *Christian Scholar’s Review*, 4, no. 2 [1974]: 132-33). Thus, Heidegger maintains, one can draw a line straight from Plato through Descartes to Nietzsche with an ultimate question mark raised over the role of metaphysics as a basis for knowledge (Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 9, 18-19, 43; see also, L. Verseyi, *Heidegger, Being and Truth* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965], pp. 54-55).

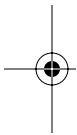


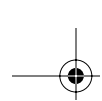


Far from being guilty of mere naiveté, Paul moved beyond the complicated complexities raised by his critics to establish his theological assumptions as realities that carried their own apologetic to any one who demanded to know the source and truthfulness of his theology. “I am not out of my mind,” Paul responded when charged with being insane when testifying to his personal encounter with Christ, “but I am speaking the sober truth” (Acts 26:25). When faced with the challenge of worldly wisdom he argued that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Really! “Yes, really,” he might respond. Paul could say as a matter of fact, in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9). No philosophical proofs, no empirical data, no historical evidences were provided. What might appear as simply naive was for him profoundly simple and therefore real. Whereas modern epistemology looks for evidences of truth, Paul looked for evidences of reality. The reality of Christ was for him the basis for the truth of Christ.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry abound with naive realism. The man whom Jesus healed, who was blind from birth, was not swayed by his critics who challenged the authenticity of the healing and the authority of the one who healed him, but responded simply, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” When challenged further as to the credentials of the one who healed him, he responded, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9:25, 33). “I am the resurrection and the life,” claimed Jesus (John 11:25). “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” was his response to those who wanted him to point the way to God. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The revelation of God through Jesus Christ is so profound in its realism when grasped by faith and empowered by the Spirit that the critical mind becomes blind when attempting to challenge or even confirm it (John 9:39-41). Emerging churches have the truth on their side when they live and witnesses to the reality of Christ. Biblical truth stands as revealed truth on the reality of its effect not merely on the





theory of its origin. The discipline of biblical scholarship and critical theological thinking is not disparaged by the emerging churches. But the theology of the Word of God goes deeper than textual criticism that only scratches the surface of Word of God and, as a result, yields superficial reasons rather than revelational reality.

My aim is to set forth a new vision for an emergent church theology that is biblically based and that is singed by the flames of a burning bush and touched by the tongues of fire lighted at Pentecost. This book is written for those who are hungry for a theology that is sweet and digestible as honey and who are sick to death of a fiber-filled bran where the kernel is gone and the husks pounded into indigestible wafers. I want to fan the fires of renewal already burning and light new ones among the underbrush of the church's institutional bureaucracy. I want the fire to burn back into the theological faculties and to reinvigorate weary and disheartened academicians, opening windows and throwing open doors through which men and women of the Spirit can learn from each other. I want our theological manuals and mission strategies to be opened for audit by those who have stories to tell of God's power and presence and, who themselves, have been transformed, healed, and empowered by the reality of Christ who comes where the two or three are gathered in his name.

This is what emerging churches are about. It is about theology, not geography. It is not about a new theology but a vintage theology—the same, yesterday, today and forever. It is about a theology that sings as well as stings, igniting the mind and stirring the heart.

