



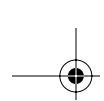
## Preface

## WHAT HAS ANTIOCH TO DO WITH JERUSALEM?

**M**y first reaction to the Internet bloggers touting the emerging church phenomenon, and the books on the subject that pastor friends suggested as “must reads,” was one of curiosity mixed with skepticism. Having mentored doctor of ministry dissertations on the baby boomers, the post-baby boomers and the Gen-Xers, I had come to the conclusion that the church’s attempts to surf the waves of contemporary culture in hopes of being relevant were fickle if not futile. Most surfers end up on the same shoreline they left unless they get caught in a riptide and disappear entirely. Others seemed to agree. The second wave of dissertations sought to catch the winds of postmodernity and sail out further from shore.

All of this, of course, was really an excuse. Having begun as more of a dogmatic theologian, followed by a theological midlife crisis and conversion to practical theology, I ended up in my own comfort zone of being a self-styled maverick theologian. My theological reflections began to take the form of musings rather than rigorous critical and analytical thinking. My musing is an exercise in thinking up questions that have no easy or final answers, but which, I concluded, had more the texture of the bread of everyday life than the hard substance of the philosopher’s





stone. Paraphrasing the late General Douglas MacArthur's final address to congress on his forced retirement—old soldiers never die they just fade away—I prepared my own self-indulgent and poignant farewell: maverick theologians never die they just find themselves amusing!

However, when I actually began to read some of the authors promoting the emerging church—most of whom, by the way, are also practicing pastors—my theological juices started to flow, somewhat like anticipating a bite into a dill pickle or, for those whose palate is a bit more educated, a seafood soufflé. In any event, when I came across a paragraph written by Brian McLaren my mouth began to water! “You see, if we have a new world, we will need a new church. We won't need a new religion per se, but a new framework for our theology. Not a new Spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination.”<sup>1</sup> While I appreciated his evangelistic zeal for postmodernity, his passion for a new framework for theology put a growl in my stomach. It was Dan Kimball, though, who offered an enticing menu, one that whetted my appetite for some theological engagement with emerging churches. “The emerging church,” wrote Kimball, “must redefine how we measure success: by the characteristics of a kingdom-minded disciple of Jesus produced by the Spirit, rather than by our methodologies, numbers, strategies, the cool and innovative things we are doing.”<sup>2</sup> While I am a newcomer to the more recent discussion of the emerging church, in 1993 I did publish a book with a chapter titled “An Emerging Church.” Little did I know at the time that the concept would later come to have a life of its own!<sup>3</sup>

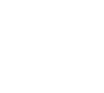
**IS THIS BOOK ABOUT POSTMODERNITY?**

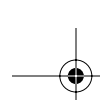
Is this book about postmodernity? The short answer is no. To paraphrase

<sup>1</sup>Brian McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ray S. Anderson, “An Emerging Church,” in *Ministry on the Fireline* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 135-48.





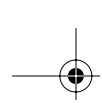
the prophet Amos, I am neither a philosopher nor the son of a philosopher. I am not the son of a theologian either, but, like Amos, this became my calling. Though I was educated in dogmatic theology, perhaps because of the eleven years of pastoral ministry prior to that, and due to the fact that I have served as pastor and preached to the same congregation for twenty-nine years while also serving as a full-time seminary professor, I am comfortable with being labeled a practical theologian.

I have no quarrel with those who espouse a postmodern theology and envision a postmodern church. Postmodernity may well be—at the very least—a healthy correction to the excessively abstract and universalizing tendency of the post-Enlightenment period in Europe. I view postmodernity as a context in which we must do theology rather than as a hermeneutical tool. I have not found it to be an adequate theological and epistemological paradigm to capture the deeper dimensions of an incarnational theology of the kingdom of God that draws the church out of its historical past into its eschatological future. Myron Penner warns against turning toward a postmodern construct of reality that empties truth of any objective content. “I am concerned that Christians who accept the postmodern turn be careful not to become complicitous with certain forms of the postmodern turn that make a reactionary move toward subjectivity, which empties it of the possibility of asserting anything as true.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Myron B. Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), p. 30. Someone once described *postmodernism* as a word that is forever chasing a meaning. Another suggested that postmodernism is like “intellectual velcro dragged across culture—an adhesive label licking up anything at random that floats across the surface of our culture” (Graham Buxton, *Dancing in the Dark* [London: Paternoster, 2001], p. 178). Buxton goes on to say, “The French social theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, argues that the essence of postmodernism is the ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’: that there are no overarching explanations of the human condition, such as those claimed by either Christianity or any other political or social ‘order.’ So free reign is given to relativism and subjectivity, and all are not only free, but encouraged, to believe whatever they wish, for there are no absolutes to life. Objective truth, according to postmodernists, is a myth, a viewpoint that conveys obvious ethical implications” (ibid.). It might also be helpful to remember that *postmodernity* may well be a word that attempts to describe a state of development within intellectual history, while *postmodernism* is more of a hermeneutical theory that claims explanatory power. See also John Franke and Stanley Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).





My faculty colleagues Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger have interviewed almost fifty emerging church leaders and identified a number of missiological principles that these ministries have in common with regard to the application of the gospel in a postmodern context.<sup>5</sup> Some have made the observation that the emerging church is a moving target, impossible to pin down. Brian McLaren likes to say that it is more of a conversation than a movement. While I will take note of some contemporary and (I hope) representative voices in the emerging church conversation, I view my role somewhat as an interlocutor in that dialogue. I am writing for all who are in some way connected to the emergent movement as well as for those who belong to or are curious about emerging churches.<sup>6</sup>

When I use the term “emergent church” in this book, I refer primarily to the first-century emerging church at Antioch, including the various churches that came into existence through Paul’s ministry based in Antioch. When I refer to the emerging movement in our contemporary culture, I prefer to speak of “emerging churches,” as I do not believe that there is any one emerging church but rather a rich variety emerging in both Protestant and Roman Catholic communities. I realize that there has been a great deal of confusion and even criticism, both within and outside the emergent movement.<sup>7</sup> I will not attempt to respond to these concerns or raise some of my own other than to point out, in a positive way, I hope, how an emergent theology drawn out of the early Antioch emerging community can fill what I perceive to be a need for a creative and constructive theological paradigm for the emerging church movement.

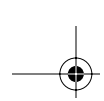
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<sup>5</sup>Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

<sup>6</sup>For information on the emergent movement and connecting links see the Emergent Village website at <[www.emergentvillage.com/Site/index.htm](http://www.emergentvillage.com/Site/index.htm)>.

<sup>7</sup>For example, D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). See also Albert Mohler, “What Should We Think of the Emerging Church? Part One” <[http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-06-29](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-06-29)>, who applauds Carson’s criticism of the emerging movement as biblically weak and theologically suspect, having caved in to postmodern relativism regarding truth claims; and R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).



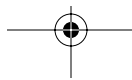


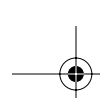
Readers should not expect a critical discussion of epistemology (how we know what we know) or a philosophical critique of postmodernity. It is not that I question the importance of epistemology, for all versions of reality have to do with what it means to say that we have knowledge of that reality. As my former Ph.D. mentor, T. F. Torrance, liked to remind his students, those whose method is primarily philosophical tend to write the first chapter of their dissertation on epistemology, while those of a more scientific methodology, place their epistemology in the last chapter! My epistemology will emerge as an intrinsic aspect of a revelational theology rather than as a set of presuppositional assertions. My concern is not to trace out the contours of a church emerging in a post-modern context but to tease out an emergent theology that is truthful only because it is discovered along the journey (revelational), contextual only because it is currently being lived out (incarnational) and contemporary only because it viably takes us into the future (eschatological).

The emergent theology that I present in this book is certainly not a form of modern theology, nor is it merely postmodern; it is a vintage theology that is intended to remind emerging churches of their origins and lead them forward to fulfill their destiny to expand God's kingdom under the direction of the Lord Jesus, who is coming and who is present through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. As with all theologies, however, an emergent theology must be as devout as it is daring, and willing to be unprofitable as well as provocative. Perhaps it would look as if written by a maverick but taste like a vintage wine.

### **THE EMERGING CHURCH?**

Is this book about the emerging church? The short answer is—partially. My interest in emerging churches was provoked by practitioners who prodded me for some theological reflection on the movement in which they were involved as well as by pastors who queried me about the ecclesial validity of that which was emerging on their very doorsteps. In my view emerging churches represent a contemporary ex-





pression of the first-century church's existence and mission in a post-modern world. While this book is about *emerging churches*, it is not intended to be another book on the emerging church. My focus in this book is not so much on the emerging-church movement but rather on an *emergent theology*.

Dan Kimball has helped me to see a distinction between *emergent* and *emerging*. He considers the term *emergent* to refer primarily to theological change and discussion while *emerging* has more to do with those who are "rethinking church and ecclesiology as any missionary would as we enter new cultures. Many emerging churches focus primarily on more ecclesiological rethinking and pragmatic change, whereas emergent is more about rethinking theology as a whole." Emerging churches who seek an authentic biblical and theological foundation are the ones who really are mission focused but also grappling with theological issues. "The distinction between 'emerging church' and 'emergent' is that 'emerging church' is a term used for churches who are emerging in this current culture and who are definitely passionate about rethinking what it means to be the church on a mission."<sup>8</sup>

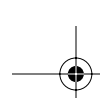
I find this distinction helpful with regard to both an exploration of the church at Antioch in the first century as well as of many forms of churches that are emerging in our culture today. From this perspective, you should read this book as a contribution to the emergent theological discussion with a deep desire to be part of an ongoing dialogue within the emerging church community.

After reading Dan's book I began to think out loud about what the emerging church was about. Not being a leader or practitioner of an emerging church (though a participant!), I began my investigation and pursued my interest in emerging churches from a theological perspec-

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<sup>8</sup>Dan Kimball, personal correspondence from November 2, 2005. Kimball, while continuing to participate in the broad stream of the emerging movement, views his own role as representing a conservative evangelical voice, with deep commitment to the Nicene Creed as a theological anchor along with a high view of Scripture as a source of "truth that you can hold on to."





tive. I began to muse a lot about what emerging churches might look like if they dared to view culture only as a context, the kingdom of God as the criterion and a kingdom-minded disciple as new kind of Christian. Dan likes to use the concept “vintage Christianity,” a thought that I found very intriguing. The word *vintage* took me back, not to something that was good merely because it was old but to what was true and authentic because it was there in the beginning and points the way into the future. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That sounds vintage to me! The gospel of Christ is a vintage gospel, not just because it is old but because it is always true, and more than that, it leads us into the future! I suspect that Kimball’s use of *vintage* follows a different line of thought, but this is how I intend to use the concept as a component of an emergent theology.

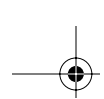
#### **WHY ANTIOCH?**

When I looked for some antecedent in the first-century church for what we today call the emerging church, my mind went immediately to the church at Antioch as one that emerged out of the church at Jerusalem and also that led to an emergent theology under the apostle Paul’s ministry and teaching. Based on modern epistemological assumptions, the conservative evangelical tradition returned to the question originally put by Tertullian (A.D. 160-225) “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?”<sup>9</sup> While Tertullian raised the question for the purpose of discrediting the academy, modern theology’s concern for apologetics sought to integrate or at least to correlate revelation with reason, and the church with the academy. My own seminary library has more than twenty books with some variation of that title! I suspect that postmodern versions of the

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<sup>9</sup>“What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? . . . Our instructions come from ‘the porch of Solomon.’ . . . Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus!” (Tertullian *Prescription Against Heretics* 7).





Christian faith will add more titles of that genre.

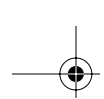
The seminal issue for the church—and for Paul, I suspect—was not one that contrasted Jerusalem with Athens but Jerusalem with Antioch. The persecution of the followers of Jesus in Judea caused their dispersion as far north as Antioch, where the Holy Spirit led the church from its Jewish-oriented ministry and focus to include a number of Gentiles (Acts 11:19-26). The church at Jerusalem hearing of this, sent Barnabas to investigate and, we might surmise, based on later accounts of their concerns, to put the fire out with regard to the promiscuous inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles. As it turned out, rather than bringing a fire extinguisher to Antioch, Barnabas brought an accelerant, for he was a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit,” and a great many more were added to the church (Acts 11:24). Ignoring the elders in Jerusalem, Barnabas went to nearby Tarsus, found Saul, recently converted on the way to Damascus (not Jerusalem!), and for a year they ministered in the emerging church at Antioch, where the disciples were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). It was under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the church at Antioch set apart Saul and Barnabas for a mission that led to the establishing of churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and even Rome (Acts 13:1-3).

An emergent theology was born, and along with it emerging churches. I am aware that the fluidity of thought and images in the emerging community may already have moved beyond the term “emerging church.” In this regard, Will Samson comments, “Speaking of ‘the church that is emerging,’ Brian McLaren mentioned that this might be a better title than ‘the emerging church.’ I like that because it connects deeply into the Church at her root rather than speaking of the work we are participating in as some new expression.”<sup>10</sup> This is exactly what I intend to do—go back to the root of the church that emerged out of Anti-

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<sup>10</sup>Will Samson, “Hopes and Dreams of Emergent,” emergent-us <[http://emergent-us.typepad.com/emergentus/2005/10/hopes\\_and\\_dream.html](http://emergent-us.typepad.com/emergentus/2005/10/hopes_and_dream.html)>.





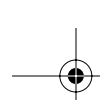
och in the first century in order to anchor the church that is emerging in our contemporary culture with a theology that emerged in the original church.

In following this track I was led to trace out the contours of the emergent theology that Paul developed through his ministry, often in direct conflict with but also with intentional relationship to the church at Jerusalem. The emerging church at Antioch reached back toward Jerusalem as far as the church there allowed, but the theology that emerged came more out of the future than the past. If it became an emergent theology it was precisely because it was a theology of the kingdom, not merely a theology of the church. In the end, as Paul himself wrote, it is the kingdom of God that Jesus brings to completion and offers up to the Father, not the church (1 Corinthians 15:24). The church in Jerusalem, as it turned out, contributed virtually nothing to the emerging church, no churches were planted out of Jerusalem and no theological writings of substance were offered. At the same time, I do not intend to disparage the Christian community at Jerusalem. It was the source of an incredible spiritual force that resisted attempts to suppress and even destroy it. When those who were dispersed, due to persecution, fled to other cities, including Antioch, they carried with them the gift and power of the Spirit along with the message of a crucified and risen Messiah. When I contrast Antioch and Jerusalem throughout this book, it is for the purpose of sharpening the focus on the content and direction of the emergent theology uniquely envisioned and proclaimed by the apostle Paul. This is an exercise in creative narrative theology rather than reconstructive historical theology. Therefore, this book is about an emergent theology more than it is about the emerging church.

#### **WHAT IS AN EMERGENT THEOLOGY?**

In what way can we distinguish an emergent theology from the emerging church in such a way as to maintain the distinction but also preserve the symbiotic relation between the two? Let me count the ways.





*An emergent theology is messianic.* An emergent theology is anointed and Spirit-led to point the way forward. An emergent theology is like the finger of John the Baptist, pointing into the world and saying, “Here is the lamb of God” (John 1:29).

*Emerging churches are missional.* Emergent churches only exist as the continuing mission of Christ (the Messiah) in the world. Emerging churches are like Jesus arising out of the water of baptism, anointed by the Spirit, and moving into the streets and market place to heal, promote justice and seek peace.

*An emergent theology is revelational.* An emergent theology is a theology of the Word; it is the bread come down from heaven; it speaks truth and opens minds and hearts.

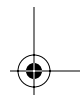
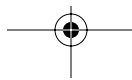
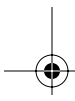
*Emerging churches are reformational.* Emerging churches seek to put new wine into new wineskins; they want to renew the church that already exists and translate the older formulas of the faith into new paradigms of contemporary communication.

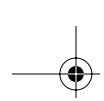
*An emergent theology is kingdom coming.* An emergent theology proclaims a new order of God’s reign already present as a transforming spiritual, social and economic power of liberation and rehabilitation of humankind.

*Emerging churches stress kingdom living.* Emerging churches seek to be the gathering of all who seek the blessing of being grace-filled believers and the empowering community that sends them forth as Spirit-filled disciples.

*An emergent theology is eschatological.* An emergent theology has the mind of the risen and coming Christ as well as the heart and soul of the historical Jesus. It is a theology that keeps hope alive by preparing the way of the future into the present while, at the same time, keeping faith alive by looking “forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

*Emerging churches are incarnational.* Emerging churches’ language is that of the people; their message is communicated through culture; their





presence in the world is ordinary so as to get within arms length to embrace others with extraordinary love.

### **EMERGENT THEOLOGY AND EMERGING CHURCHES AS PARTNERS**

An emergent theology without being embedded in emerging churches becomes isolated, speaking only to itself (solipsistic!), and living the monastic life of those whose windows to the world are not only stained glass but unable to be opened from the inside. In the end, it is pathetic.

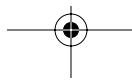
Emerging churches without an embedded emergent theology wear their religion like a costume (always a change for the next act); they hoist their sails to catch a prevailing wind (but lack a rudder by which to steer); they live off the energy of others (having a battery but no generator). In the end, they become powerless.

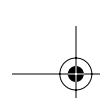
The relation of emergent to emerging is somewhat like that of a seed to the soil. An emergent theology needs the soil of emerging churches in which to take root. One plants, the other waters, God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). An emergent theology is an embedded theology in the emerging church's mission. This book is meant to be somewhat of a manual for those who are emerging.

Who are my intended readers? They are my partners, not just readers.

Emerging churches are a Bible-teaching and a Bible-reading community. Even as the Protestant Reformation was sparked largely by the work of John Wycliffe (1330-1384)—among others—whose work of translation put the Bible into the hands of ordinary folk, so emerging churches are empowered by their members who read and study the Bible. Those who read the Bible (and this is not always an easy task!) are my readers and partners—church pastors and leaders too! But emergent theology is for ordinary folk who are also musing, always ready to ask pertinent questions!

When Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the elders of the church at Jerusalem, I believe it was because they were asking, What is the move-





ment up there all about? The same question is being asked of emerging churches in our generation. I am concerned for what it is “all about,” and the chapters that follow are my attempt to answer this question.

