

Emerging Toward Convergence

By Sarah Leslie, originally published at Herescope; reprinted with permission

The Emergent/Emerging Church movement is heading towards a crash collision with the New Age movement. In fact, it may already be happening before our very eyes. The Discernment Research Group has reached the inescapable conclusion that this is intentional and it has been planned for over a generation.

In brief, there has been a crossover of personnel, organizations, doctrines, methods, and agendas going back at least 40-50 years. Constance Cumbey, who first exposed the New Age movement and its Theosophical roots in her groundbreaking book *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*, has been writing a series of reports on the earliest examples of this crossover for her blog (<http://cumbey.blogspot.com/>) and her NewsWithViews.com column. Through our own research we have discovered that there was an earlier Emerging Church movement, which was initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which bears remarkable resemblance, crossover and correlation to its newer counterpart. This early history is currently being recounted in an ongoing series of posts on the Herescope blog.[1]

We know that the current Emergent Church is a marketing phenomenon, set up as an official movement by Bob Buford's Leadership Network, a historical fact which we documented in a series of Herescope posts in 2005 and 2006.[2] From its very inception in the 1980s Leadership Network imported a number of leading New Age business "gurus" as "experts" – holding nebulous (if any!) Christian credentials. They trained an entire generation of evangelical "leaders" on the latest [tactics of psycho-social change](#) theory, substituting it for genuine Holy Spirit revival. These business "gurus," some of whom had open New Age beliefs, included such notables as [Margaret Wheatley](#), [Peter Drucker](#), [Jim Collins](#), and [Ken Blanchard](#). Many spoke at a 2000 Leadership Network conference "[Exploring Off the Map](#)" which launched the Emergent Church movement.[3]

From our research we also know that the Emergent Church was set up to be a vanguard, a forerunner, to propel the postmodern evangelical church towards a [paradigm shift](#) in theology, structure, methodology, and purpose. As such, it has been rushing headlong towards an open convergence with the

New Age movement. Emergent leader [Phyllis Tickle](#) has termed this [“The Great Emergence,”](#) which is the title of her 2008 book announcing the “birthing” of a “brand-new expression of... faith and praxis” (p. 17) which will ultimately “rewrite Christian theology” (p. 162).

Important details about both the history and theology of the modern Emergent movement can be found in Pastor Bob DeWaay’s recently published book [The Emergent Church: Undefined Christianity](#) (2009). This book summarizes the basic doctrines and practices of the movement, and gives an account of a few key leaders.

Emergent Eschatology

Pastor DeWaay recognizes the defining issue for the Emergent movement as eschatology:

While Emergent Church leaders differ on nearly every Christian doctrine, one belief they hold in common—the one that unifies their movement—is their eschatology. Emergent theologians and church leaders reject God’s final judgment in favor of His saving of all humanity and creation into a tangible paradise in which all will participate. (p. 13)

This view of eschatology is also a key doctrine of [Dominionism](#), and is therefore linked to the concept of [“building the kingdom of God on earth.”](#) This eschatological worldview proclaims that there [isn’t going to be a Judgment Day](#), and teaches that man can facilitate the return to [pre-Fall paradise](#) conditions on Earth. This view of the future sublimates the Cross, ignores scriptural prophecies about the endtimes, and positions man into godlike status as a [“co-creator.”](#) Obviously, in such an eschatological scenario there is no Heaven nor Hell.

The [Emergent paradigm shift](#) is already happening. This eschatological worldview is now becoming widespread and is [subtly being incorporated into](#) most major “mainstream” evangelical ministries, missions, and organizations. A few examples we have noted on the Herescope blog include [N.T. Wright](#),^[4] the [Lausanne movement](#),^[5] [Ralph Winter](#),^[6] [Transform World](#),^[7] [Dutch Sheets and Bill Hamon](#),^[8] and many [Latter Rain leaders](#).^[9] Exemplifying this shift, a recent article in a publication called ConvergePoint, put out by the Baptist General Conference, describes this group’s transformation initiative in these terms, “My personal joy was

compounded culturally by the fact that the word converge happens to appear in the Portuguese Bible in [Ephesians 1:10](#): ‘...to make all things converge together in Christ, things in heaven and earth.’”[10]

This eschatological worldview has serious ramifications for all of Christian theology. DeWaay explains:

...[T]he possibility of future judgment and punishment of those who do not believe in Christ’s death on the cross and His shedding of blood to avert God’s wrath against sin is either denied or not discussed in Emergent/postmodern theology. (p. 149)

Theology of Hope?

Pastor DeWaay identifies Jürgen Moltmann’s book, *Theology of Hope*, first published in 1964, as a seminal document forming a foundation for the Emergent Church movement’s revisionist, evolutionary eschatology. Moltmann was influenced by Marxism and the philosophies of Georg W.F. Hegel. Moltmann’s eschatological “hope” is “headed toward the kingdom of God on earth with universal participation” (p. 23). DeWaay explains that “Emergent/postmodern theology is based on the Hegelian idea that contradictions synthesize into better future realities.... Moltmann took Hegel’s ideas and created a Christian alternative to Marxism (which is also based on Hegel’s philosophy) that he called a ‘theology of hope’” (p. 30). Emergent church leaders who hearken back to Moltmann include [Brian McLaren](#), [Doug Pagitt](#), [Stanley Grenz](#) and many others.

DeWaay makes the case that, according to the “theology of hope” promulgated by Moltmann and his Emergent disciples, “the truth will only be known with certainty in the future” (p. 39) Therefore, this uncertainty results in the corollary heresies that “God is re-creating the world now with our help” and “the world has a universally bright future with no pending, cataclysmic judgment” (p. 40).

Evolutionary Eschatology

The root theology undergirding all Emergent eschatology is evolution. A generation ago, certain Christian leaders took the ideas of Moltmann and began to fill in the outlines for his “theology of hope.” They also got their ideas from a group of so-called “secular” futurists, who happened to hold a

Teilhardian evolutionary worldview.[11] Today we might classify these futurists as New Agers.

Modern Emergents hold a remarkably similar worldview to these early futurists. Phyllis Tickle, in her book *The Great Emergence*, writes approvingly of Darwin's evolution theory, saying that it was "the tipping point that sent us careening off into new cultural, social, political, and theological territory" (p. 64).

While researching the early Emerging Church movement we came across a seminary theologian, Kenneth Cauthen, who wrote a book in 1971 entitled *Christian Biopolitics: A Credo & Strategy for the Future* (Abdingdon Press). It was the premise of Cauthen's book that Jürgen Moltmann didn't go far enough; that his "theology of hope" was incomplete because it was focused "too exclusively in the context of society and history and has neglected the natural and cosmic setting of the human enterprise" (p. 102). Cauthen proposed a "[Christian biopolitics](#)" – an "ecological principle" that would connect nature and society so that Moltmann's "theology of hope" could become "cosmic." He called for the "recognition of the centrality of an evolutionary perspective" (p. 109). We don't know the full extent of Cauthen's influence upon postmodern evangelicals, but the theological changes he anticipated bear remarkable resemblance to Emergent thought and practice today.

As a member of the [World Future Society](#), a group formed in 1966 with strong ties to the [New Age Theosophists](#), Cauthen articulated an "[ecological model for politics and theology](#)" (p. 106) that would facilitate a "transition" leading to global "transformation." He proposed that "we take the New Testament conception of the consummated Kingdom of God as a symbol of the transcendent goal of history" (p. 131), a theology which would eliminate a future of either Heaven and Hell. And he suggested that "man is indeed becoming like a god...that science and technology are putting power into the hands of human beings that have traditionally been reserved for the gods" (p. 140). He summarized his views as follows:

The message of the church during this period of world transition should be framed in utopian-eschatological terms, stressing the power and purpose of the Divine Spirit to bring all men into the ecstatic joy of a New Age, while the ministry of the church is basically to create a community of persons who

can cause, celebrate, and cope with the changes that are required to bring humanity into the promise of the planetary society. (p. 124)

Cauthen was not happy with Moltmann's social gospel "theology of hope." He said that was too connected to the here and now in [building the kingdom of God on Earth](#). Cauthen proposed that Moltmann's ideas needed a "cosmic" and "utopian" aspect that would give people a "magnificent vision of an ideal future" with a "[new consciousness](#)" that would prove to "be more sensuous, ecstatic, erotic, earthy, bodily oriented, festive, playful, feminine, idealistic, utopian, mystical, sacramental, hedonistic—in sum, a quest for joy in the wholeness of body and spirit" (p. 150). Amazingly, this is a pretty accurate picture of the modern [Emergent Church's quest](#) for a better future.