The Shape of Things to Come: Megachurches, Emerging Churches and Other New Religious Structures Supporting an Individualized Spiritual Identity.

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Here is the Church, here is the steeple, open the door and see all the people.

Most of us fondly remember this childhood game we learned in Sunday school. The realism of that game, however, is slowly losing its footing. Not only are most churches seldom filled with people, but also fewer new congregations are being built with steeples and most of what passes for "church" seldom resembles the congregations many of us grew up in. In fact, the rhyme of the future might well be more like "Is this a church? Where is the steeple? Open the door and, where are all the people?" Or in the case of the megachurches "Here are no symbols. Here is no steeple. Yet open the door and see 10,000 people!"

Although organized religion in the United States hasn't changed quite that dramatically yet; nevertheless, the structures are in flux both for local congregations and at the national denominational level. It is still true that the vast majority of churches in the country are imbedded in a traditional model and tied to a denominational organization that has shifted very little in the past fifty years. In recent years, however, newer congregational forms offer substantial challenges to this landscape. These forms include the popularity of the house church movement in the 1970s and a recent resurgence of interest in these, the growth of niche, cell and emergent churches and the proliferation of megachurches (congregations with 2000 or more atttenders each week) in the past few

decades. Each of these offers new models for the organizational structuring of religious expression. Likewise, the quasi-denominational networks of congregations that have evolved around these megachurches and a multitude of parachurch organizations present new forms of national cooperation that were once only provided by traditional denominational forms.

It should not be surprising that new forms of religious life are developing; organizational structures adapt and change over time in response to societal and cultural shifts. Nor should these new forms be considered entirely unique and original; variations on megachurches, house and independent churches and networks or "fellowships" of congregations have existed for centuries. Nevertheless, what seems distinctive about these organizational forms is that they have a particular fit, or "elective affinity" with the shifts taking place in the religious identity of individuals.

Many scholarly writings in the past few decades have indicated that religious identity for an individual is presently less tied to tradition, history and organizational forms such as a denomination, local church, religious camp, or parochial school.[1] A vast majority of Americans report that the content of religious faith can be constructed apart from, independent of, a church or other traditional religious authority. [2] Religious identity is seen as something an individual can pick and choose. It makes sense in this evolving context, that new religious structures which fit with the flexible, individualist beliefs of self-created religious consumers, would arise or become more prominent in this religious marketplace.

Yet even within a situation of radical personal spiritual negotiation, there is still a sociological need for physical structures to contain this "individualized" religious

identity. The "spirit" is not sustained without some organizational form. A spiritual treasure requires some earthen vessel in which to contain it … even if this vessel looks very little like the vases and ceramics of past decades. It isn't necessary that these vessels are completely unique and avant-garde for them to work; they just have to be customized to fulfill the purpose. Many congregations have adapted to the new context by a shift in function, a reorientation in their approach and understanding of what they offer "the spiritual consumer." Together, however, all these structural alterations amount to the beginnings of a reshaping of the religious organizational landscape.

This is not to argue that contemporary consumers necessarily are making conscious decisions on the choice of religious alternatives. Often, such decisions are anything but rational selections. However, this essay argues that the new structural forms available allow for different ways of engagement with religious communities – based on the interests of the individual. This chapter will provide a glimpse into the characteristics of these new forms and then assess their implications for the future direction of religion in America.

What Has Changed?

What counts as a legitimate congregation? Recently in Rockaway Township, New Jersey, lawyers representing the Township argued that a growing megachurch, Christ Church, was in fact "not a church." This counterintuitive argument was proposed when the megachurch wanted to move into the area. Township commissioners balked at the idea, hindered its efforts and the case eventually went before the courts. In a limited sense the assertion was true, Christ Church wasn't "a Church" according to the definition of "church" in the minds of the town's nineteenth century founding fathers. Likewise,

most people who might walk into a contemporary house church or visit the website of an emergent church gathering would be hard pressed to call what they see a "congregation." Then again, does a group of Wiccans who gather in a chat room or on a discussion board to discuss sacred texts and exchange methods of ritual practices constitute a religious community? What of hundreds of gay men routinely coming to a drag show in a gay bar to sing gospel hymns and praise God? And do the Willow Creek Association, the Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, the Apostolic World Christian Fellowship, the Vineyard Christian Fellowship or Potters House Network count as denominations? At the very least, the definitions of these religious structures are being stretched and pulled. Over the past forty years there has been considerable experimentation with the structure of religious expression to fit and undergird a highly individualized approach to religion. Major shifts in an individual's perspective of religion in the 1960s and onward has created many "Sheilas" – constructing a religion of ones own.[3] In a sense religious belief has become customizable to an individual's tastes, experiences, and interests. Religious identity is less one that is ascribed or inherited and is instead one that one creates and is achieved but the changes go even beyond just the achievement of an identity. These decades are characterized by cultural unsettledness and mark, as Wuthnow describes, a shift from a spirituality of habitation and dwelling to one of seeking

> "In the newer view, status [and I would add identity & spirituality] is attained through negotiation. A person does not have an ascribed identity or attain an achieved identity but creates an identity by negotiating among a wide range of materials. Each person's identity is thus understandable only through biography. The search that differentiates each individual is itself part of the distinct identity

> that person creates. A spirituality of seeking is closely connected to the fact that people increasingly create a sense of personal identity through an active sequence of searching and selecting."[4]

The changes, sparked by major shifts in our society, have also begun to reconfigure our structured religious forms. The freedom that has enabled Americans to experiment and take control of their own individual belief systems, to wrestle the control of their faith from the gods and the forefathers, has also allowed them collectively to create religious organizational forms that fit this reality. The structures that have arisen likewise support this "a la carte" approach to belief in several different ways evident in major trends in American religion.

One major shift of adaptation in this spiritual consumer reality is the "niche approach" *an organizational reduction in scale with a specificity of focus.* This approach fractures of traditional religious structures into narrowly focused niche congregations with specific and well-defined particular religious interests or sub-cultural characteristics. In economic language, it is essentially a "specialty store" approach to a particular slice of the American religious market.

This effort is evident in a number of developments from the 1960s onward beginning with a motive to express a distinctive religious perspective. Small informal charismatic fellowships, gatherings of new religious organizations, discipleship groups and house churches all fit this model. Other renditions of this trend focus on quasi-political aims including intentional peace and justice communities, social activist and worker house communities, traditional mainline congregations that emphasize ancient rites and rituals of their tradition (such as Rite One Episcopal churches or Latin mass Catholic

congregations) and Base Communities, modeled on a Latin American example. Most recently this niche approach is seen in the Emerging Church movement. This approach segments the market into individual interest enclaves whereby religious persons can select specific groups to suit their needs and then travel between as their interests change. Intimacy, integrity and an intentionally narrow focus are key spiritual values in this organizational form.

A second counter-intuitive adaptation to personal religious customization is the "megachurch approach," *an organizational increase in scale in which multiple choices are offered within a large all-encompassing entity*. This approach follows the "mall mentality" of offering countless boutiques and specialty stores, large anchor stores and kiosks all under one large organizational reality. The effort offers a choice of individualized spiritual customization within small interest groups while also embracing a larger mass worship experience in a highly professionalized, bureaucratic, and publicly prominent religious organization. Many of these megachurches are pushing the bounds of customization by creating multiple simultaneous "venue worship services" and tailored branch campuses to appeal to the distinctive tastes of cultural subgroups within the larger membership. Likewise, it could be argued that the networks of like-minded churches centered around these megachurches are reforming larger national religious collectives as well as the local congregational reality. The values of this organizational expression are personal choice on a number of levels, a quality religious experience, and involvement in a prominent, successful endeavor.

Although this article will not focus on it [see the chapter in this series], the Internet constitutes a third major adaptive structure to this customizable religious reality. The

virtual structures of countless websites, chat rooms, blogs, listservs and discussion boards allow users to engage in online shopping for religious beliefs but also to discover communities of support and even create places to practice their rituals. There are a large number of Internet-based efforts by individuals and social collectives to support virtual religious quests. This approach is especially critical for individuals when no physical faith community exists in geographic proximity. This approach is seldom recognized as a legitimate religious structure but for many individuals of faiths on the fringe this may be their only tangible community. Persons within Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist traditions who are gay and lesbian may only know others of similar faith perspectives through their Internet connections, especially if they are located in rural or small town settings away from major urban centers. Persons interested in Wicca or Santeria, Hinduism or Rosicrucianism, or any combinations of the thousands of established religious beliefs can much more readily find virtual structures of communication, knowledge, writings, and fellowship to support such beliefs in the world of Internet technologies than in the physical realm.

Even though it is very difficult to state conclusively that denominational loyalty is nonexistent, it is clear according to many indicators that the salience of the denominational identity is waning. The prevalence of denominational switching and success of nondenominational congregations attest to the fact that many consider involvement in a particular denominational tradition a secondary value in choosing a local congregation.

American religion is now less institutionally bound. Persons can craft faith systems that fit them as well as construct unique forms that fit these systems. Spiritual persons are

able to customize, not only their beliefs, but also their encounter with religious structures. This may not necessarily be a conscious decision. We are not purely rational customers of religious products or ideas. We do not search the spiritual marketplace with a "consumer guide" in one hand and our list of personal desires in the other. Nevertheless, contemporary Americans have the institutional freedom to shape their religious beliefs, worship experiences and organizational forms to their personal tastes and cultural norms and values. They don't need to worship at the altars of their ancestors or adopt the "faith of our fathers." The words of the gospel hymn are not entirely true anymore – what was good enough for mama and good enough for papa, is no longer good enough for me.

Specialized Boutique Religion - Niche Based Structures

The approach of niche-based religious organizations is to focus narrowly upon a specific and well-defined religious interest or sub-cultural identity. Niche religion then attempts to attract persons to fit that distinct focus. As such, these congregations are small, intentional, and often sectarian in their flavor. In recent decades several major movements of congregations within this model can be identified including the house church movement, cell groups, cell church, intentional activist communities, and most recently the emergent church movement. Clearly each of these distinctive groups have their own reality, however, taken as a whole they exemplify a niche model that allows individuals to select among multiple lifestyle options, picking the group that most meets momentary personal tastes and needs for music, fellowship and involvement in the larger Christian community.

In 1970 I worshipped in a small Charismatic Movement fellowship in central Pennsylvania. This group of 15 to 20 teens and young adults met in a small storefront

Christian bookstore. We sat on the floor on cushions and sang scriptural praise songs to music provided by an acoustic guitarist. We didn't have a leader per se. Each person took turns offering a lesson that "God laid on our hearts." We celebrated the Lord's Supper when we met using a chunk of bread and any kind of juice we could find. We often did community service projects like picking up trash along the streets, helping the elderly shop for groceries, and donating food and money for the homeless in our town. We always spent hours each week witnessing to strangers and our friends, trying to convert them to our way of seeing the truth of the Bible. Everyone in the group knew of the larger Charismatic movement, since most of our songs, evangelistic tracts and reading material came from these national sources. We didn't, however, have any contact with other groups except for the occasional regional mass spiritual rallies that were common in the early 1970s. All we knew was that we were worshipping God in a way that seemed correct to us – and most of us moved on to other religious groups when the charismatic fellowship group no longer filled our spiritual needs.

This was my first introduction to the house church movement. Later I came to understand that those of us who participated in the Charismatic Movement were not the only group to assert a return to an anti-institutional form of church based on what was seen as an authentic recapturing of New Testament worship. In fact, my own ancestors in the Mennonite tradition worshipped in much the same way, and for many of the same reasons, as had many other traditions throughout the centuries since the founding of the Christian church.[5] In our charismatic fellowship group we were able to worship in a way that our "home" congregations wouldn't allow. We wanted intimacy, lay-leadership, a

distinctive style of music that expressed a unique understanding of spirituality and the freedom to praise God as we saw fit.

The larger Charismatic Movement drove this House Church Movement of the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Ideas of spiritual baptism and expression of the Gifts of the Spirit were forbidden in many congregations. If Spirit-filled Christians wanted to gather and worship God, they often had to do it in homes or small fellowships outside the established traditional churches. These house churches were formed around a distinctive theology or worldview. They were characterized also as a distinct organizational form and had a different cultural style, as described by Hadaway, Wright and Dubose.

> "House churches are more inclusive, more dynamic, and more engaging of members' time, energies, and resources than other types of house groups. Persons who join such groups seek to involve their whole lives in church and community. The compartmentalization of religious and secular activities tends to dissipate. Commitment and identification with the group is pervasive." [6]

Often house churches looked to national leaders such as Christian Growth Ministries to help them structure their fellowships, organize their participants, disciple them in Christian truth and connect with other similar groups. A number of these house churches formed into communal groups such as the one that Stephen Warner described as Antioch ranch.[7] The vast majority, however, were mostly autonomous entities that gathered for worship and fellowship as a small group for several years.

Eventually, some of these fellowships were accused of excessive discipleship, labeled as cults and then disbanded. It is evident from the history of these small gatherings that leadership weaknesses both in terms of exercising undue authority and also maintaining

an acceptable religious orthodoxy were continual difficulties. More often, house church fellowships eventually folded when participation dwindled because more established churches began to adopt many of the Charismatic practices into their worship. Other members drifted away when their spiritual needs were no longer being met by the charismatic fellowship. Another weakness this form of religious organization has is fragility as a structure. They are prone to instability and a short life span. Occasionally, some of these house church groups attracted more members. As it grew, the group would begin to institutionalize and often became an established congregation. A few such congregations have even grown to megachurch status. Several of the larger congregations and networks of churches that came out of the Jesus People and Charismatic Movements (such as the Vineyard Fellowship and Calvary Chapel) began as small house church gatherings. However, by the mid eighties, whether due to the publicized scandals or assimilation and institutionalization, the movement had waned considerably.

During this same time several other types of house church congregations existed throughout these decades and to the present. These are supportive of small but vibrant movements on the part of more liberal Protestant and Catholic Christians with quasi-political aims to create small house-based intentional peace and justice communities, social activist missions or, following on a Latin American model, local base communities.

Likewise, the conservative Protestant House Church movement did not disappear completely. Countless small fellowships continue and new congregations have started since the decline of the Charismatic Movement. Many persons remained convinced that

the most authentic model of church is the independent, intimate gathering in homes rather than in “Institutional Churches.”

The Internet has in many ways been a boon to this movement. The potential to create virtual networks of these congregations in an effort to publicize their existence, proclaim their understanding of the house church model as the most genuine religious structure, and share resources among groups has been greatly enhanced by the Internet. At present there are a number of web sites, discussion boards, blogs and listserves dedicated to supporting the contemporary house church movement. Sites like www.housechurch.org/ (with a discussion board, worldwide registry, email lists and a newsgroup and www.hccentral.com (with a directory of over 1400 house churches), www.house2house.tv/ and www.house-church.org/ provide structures of support to individual house churches and those persons wanting to form new ones. In fact, these rich Internet resources have sparked a resurgence of interest in and acceptance of the house church model. Additionally, the recognition of the power of the house church to spread the Christian gospel in places such as China and Russia has prompted the model to be seen as a potent evangelistic strategy.

Additionally, a similar but distinctive movement was developing in the 1970s through the influence of one of the largest churches in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. Its pastor, Paul Yonggi Cho, created a structure of small home cell groups within his massive congregation. These cell groups, held throughout the week in different homes, allowed trained lay deacons and elders to teach and minister to large numbers of people in small intimate gatherings at a more personal level while also sustaining mass

worship gatherings in the tens of thousands. This structure is qualitatively different from the anti-institution house church movement. These small groups are seen rather as having a supportive role within a larger congregation. Cell groups were intended for meeting personal needs, individual spiritual development and intimate fellowship with an ultimate goal for the church to grow larger. This model became very popular in the United States in the 1980s with many very large congregations adopting it. More will be said about this effort in the discussion of megachurches below.

It is interesting that many congregations of all sizes have begun adopting small group fellowships to encourage interaction between members as well as to deepen individual spiritual practices. A number of congregations have incorporated this cell approach as integral to their character. They have shaped their "traditional church" around the cell idea. The congregation's focus is on the life of the cell group rather than on the weekly gathered community worship. The cells may come together each week for worship but the center of the congregation is seen as the cell groups. These cells conduct worship, do ministry, evangelize unbelievers, provide pastoral care, and mentor each other spiritually. Often these individual cells within a church have evangelism strategies to target specific social groups such as nurses, lawyers or the police. In this more extreme use of cell groups, the model borders on being a network of house churches and as such has often been called a "cell-church."

The newest entry into the niche model market is not only intentionally small and anti-institutional but also includes a radical embrace of the contemporary youth culture. The Emerging/Emergent Church movement, as it has come to be labeled, often embraces a house church organizational form and claims a distinctive theological perspective, but is

also very much about expressing the faith in diverse Gen X styles and using postmodern cultural idioms. This approach appeals to a segment of the religious market in which young religious persons can select new enclave groups to suit their personal spiritual needs. Intimacy, integrity and an intentionally narrow focus are key values.

The ideals expressed by the lead figures within the Emerging Church movement are sophisticated and well-reasoned analyses of contemporary society and the role of God and the church in a changing reality. The expressed goal of the approach is completely opposite the consumer driven, style sensitive commercialization of the Gospel. As the Emerging Church's foremost spokesperson Brian McLaren claims, "It's not about the church meeting your needs, it's about you joining the mission of God's people to meet the world's needs."[8] Another Emerging Church leader and pastor of a very successful church, Rob Bell further emphasized the distinctiveness of the approach. "People don't get it…they think it's about style. But the real question is: What is the gospel?"[9]

From the perspective of the congregation, however, the various Emerging Church forms seem radically open to individualistic interpretation and focused on a distinct cultural niche. Although there are a wide variety of types of worship, emerging church services are often held in nontraditional spaces such as recreational halls and warehouse space. Instead of pews it is common to find couches, recliners and lounge chairs or even pillows scattered on the floors of the worship space. The service is technological, multisensory and participatory. Images flash on video screens, constantly changing in rapid succession. Music plays as a DJ uses a computer and turntable to mix and control the sound. Attendees are invited to express themselves spiritually through poetry, art, or other creative acts. The expressed spiritual practices blend together elements from

diverse religious traditions, including Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Celtic traditions. “Some are discovering medieval mystical practices such as walking the labyrinth, but adding decidedly modern twists. It's a pick-your-own-mix approach that also stresses community and social justice.”[10]

The congregations are mostly composed of middle class whites in their twenties and thirties. The pastors, if there are pastors at all, or leadership team are almost all educated white males. The theology tends to be evangelical Protestant in nature but often with a more progressive perspective regarding social issues. However, even this theological stance is somewhat open to negotiation. As one young woman in an emerging congregation told a Religion and Ethics Newsweekly reporter. “There is no set doctrine; there is no set theology. There are things we question and things we believe.” Another claimed, the Emerging church is ”A place were individuals can express their understanding of who God is either in new ways or in artistic ways or even reaching back and reclaiming some ancient ways of expressing their relationship with God, their love for God and connecting with him.”[11]

More than anything else, this form of religious organization is seen as a culturally relevant expression of faith. It takes its cues from contemporary youth culture, much as the Jesus People movement of the 1960s did, and attempts to create forms and practices that conform to the needs of that specific generation.

> “Emerging church with a mission heart is different. It does not start with a pre-determined mould and expect non-churchgoers to compress in. It begins with the people church is seeking to reach, and asks 'What might be an appropriate expression of church for them?'”[12]

Many of the key leaders deny that the Emerging Church phenomenon is a definable movement. As McLaren comments, "Right now Emergent is a conversation, not a movement. We don't have a program. We don't have a model. I think we must begin as a conversation, then grow as a friendship, and see if a movement comes of it."[13] There is no doubt that with leaders, literature, web sites, conferences and a directory of congregations worldwide it certainly looks like a distinct religious movement. A number of these emerging churches are likewise, no longer small but have grown to a thousand or more. The question is how will the movement routinize, exactly what larger organizational forms it will take, and will it remain responsive to contemporary cultural ideals, especially as its members grow beyond their current musical tastes and cultural values.

Megachurches – Generalized Mall Religion

There is great appeal to the small intimate gathering. It offers rootedness in a highly mobile society and a safe place among “people just like us” in which to do spiritual work. This small-scale approach, however, lacks a resonance to the lives many Americans lead. Our lives are replete with large institutional forms, media images, and interest driven choices from major office complexes, malls and food warehouses, to Disney, Las Vegas casinos, and multiplex theaters. In certain ways, the megachurch is the complete opposite of the house church, but with hundreds of ministries, programs and fellowship groups it offers intimacy and choice in one package.

Megachurches have come to dominate the religious landscape in modern American society. Their profound influence is less due to the numbers of these large congregations than it is of their public prominence and as a exemplary model for the new ways churches

are restructuring themselves and implementing new forms of religious life. This religious organizational form is the complete opposite strategy to the niche. It is all things to all people, every religious necessity under one roof, within one structure. Think Wal-Mart Super Store or a regional mall rather than upscale center city boutique.

Imagine driving through downtown Houston, Texas just west of the Galleria on a Sunday morning, when you come upon a traffic jam. You sit in a long line of late model cars are waiting to turn into a vast parking area under a huge sign announcing the presence of Second Baptist Church and eventually decide to follow them. Actually you are at the church's Woodway Campus, one of three that constitute the 18,000-attender church. Mostly what you see sitting on a 25-acre plot of land is beautiful landscaping, hundreds of cars, parking lot attendants directing traffic and a distant dome atop a cream-colored sandstone building that resembles an office building all.

After being directed to a space you follow the steady stream of people, couples and families mostly, toward large inviting doors held open by several smiling greeters in green vests. Passing through the doors you enter an amazing four-story atrium complete with marble and polished wood floors, fountains, huge potted plants all combined into a distinctly mall-like feel. Immediately another clean-cut young adult also in a green vest pleasantly greets you, offers a packet of information, and directs you to a massive visitor kiosk of dark rich wood with video screens and more pleasant attendants. You notice signs for the bookstore, for Jane's Grill, and for dozens of classes, ministries, children and adult educational groups and the family life center offering a weight-training program.

After getting your welcome packet of materials, which includes a tasteful cloth lapel sticker indicating you are a visitor, various brochures, a magazine and CD of messages and screen savers from the attendant, you follow the hundreds of others into the sanctuary. This is no ordinary church sanctuary. The cavernous building has seating for several thousand in many rows of pews on the main floor with additional seating on two floors of balconies, for a total seating of over 5500. But what catches your eyes immediately are the massive stained glass walls of windows to the left and right of the front of the sanctuary and the spectacular dome glass artwork in the ceiling. Behind the pulpit area, organ pipes rise to the ceiling. Between these sit a 300-person choir and above the choir is a baptismal that is flanked by two immense video projection screens. After a number of upbeat songs and an occasional traditional Baptist hymn, Ed Young, Sr. takes the pulpit and mesmerizes the congregation with a down-to-earth, biblically-based sermon complete with audio and video clips on the screens for emphasis.

Welcome to the megachurch model of church. No verbal description of walking into a megachurch can ever capture the experience sufficiently. Fortunately Second Baptist's website provides a virtual tour of their buildings so interested readers can experience it for themselves at www.second.org/global/virtual_tour.aspx.

The megachurch is more than just an ordinary church on steroids. The size of the organization has altered the features and characteristics of these congregations that make them distinctive, bearing little resemblance to smaller traditional congregations. Many of these characteristics described below are shared by many, but not all the nation's megachurches. Although these congregations are quite similar in approach and appearance, there is also considerable variety among them.

The phenomenon is identified as Protestant churches with average weekly attendance of 2000 or more. Although large congregations have existed throughout Christian history, there has been a rapid proliferation of churches with massive attendance since the decade of the 1970s. As such, some researchers suggest that this church form is a unique collective response to distinctive cultural shifts and changes in societal patterns throughout the industrialized, urban and suburban areas of the world.

Prior to 1970 there were less than a few dozen very large churches, while in the decade of the seventies that number increased to around fifty. By 1990 the total number has increased to roughly 350 and to over 600 by 2000. Five years later it was estimated that there were at least 1200 megachurches in the United States. As such, these congregations combined represent less than one half of one percent of all the congregations in the country, but possibly account for as many as four million weekly atttenders, equal to seven or more percent of all weekly atttenders.

Not only have the numbers of churches increased but the size of the largest ones has as well. In 1990, the ten largest megachurches ranged from 7000 to 12,000 in weekly attendance. Fifteen years later the largest church, Lakewood Church also located in Houston, Texas, claims an attendance of over 30,000. Dozens more hover near the 20,000 mark. Together these massive congregations collectively generate annual revenue of approximately six billion dollars and routinely expend nearly that much in expenses. Megachurch pastors dominate religious television and cable channels as well; their books occasionally sell hundreds of thousands of copies (with Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* topping an unbelievable twenty-six million copies sold thought the end of 2005) and they are looked upon as major religious celebrities. Most religious persons in the country

regardless of denomination could name several of these larger-than-life pastors, and many pastors have sat at their feet in teaching sessions and conferences, or have devoured their program materials and sermon tapes. There is no doubt that these mammoth congregations and their leaders have an impact on the American religious landscape in an unmistakable way and their efforts have reformed the shape of religious organizations. Size is the most immediately apparent characteristic of these congregations, however, the Protestant megachurches in the United States generally share many other traits – traits that are increasingly trickling down to smaller churches. The majority of megachurches (over sixty percent) are located in the southern Sunbelt of the United States - with California, Texas, Georgia and Florida having the highest concentrations. Most megachurches are located in suburban areas of rapidly growing sprawl cities such as Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, Houston, Orlando, Phoenix and Seattle. These large churches often occupy prominent land tracts of 50 to 100 acres near major traffic thoroughfares. Virtually all these megachurches have a conservative theology, even those within mainline denominations. Not surprisingly, the majority of Protestant megachurches are affiliated with either the Southern Baptist Convention or the Assemblies of God or are nondenominational. When asked to select a theological label that best fit their congregation, eighty-eight percent of those megachurches surveyed chose a conservative theological identifier. Forty-eight percent claimed to be Evangelical, eleven percent chose Pentecostal with another fourteen percent selected the label of Charismatic, eight percent simply claimed "traditional," three percent said they were seeker, two percent said Fundamentalist and three percent chose the category of "other." Only twelve percent

of those surveyed described their church's theological identity as "Moderate" and none claimed to be "liberal."[14]

Megachurches tend to grow to their great size within a very short period of time, usually in less than ten years, and under the tenure of a single senior pastor. One of the largest African American congregations in the country exemplifies this rapid and tremendous growth. In Atlanta, Georgia, World Changers Ministries, under the leadership of Creflo Dollar, began in 1986 with eight members and in ten years time had nearly 8000 attenders and now claims over 20,000 attenders. In a northern suburb of the same city, Andy Stanley, son of the famous Southern Baptist megachurch pastor Charles Stanley, began a ministry in 1999 and within four years it grew to 5000. In 2005 this church had over 15,000 attenders. Two other instances include New Hope Christian Fellowship O'ahu led by Wayne Cordeiro, which grew to 10,000 in its first nine years www.enewhope.org, and Mars Hill Bible Church with Rob Bell as pastor www.mhbcmi.org, which began in 1999 and five years later had over 10,000 in attendance. As a final example in 1996 T. D. Jakes, one of the most sought-after megachurch pastors, founded The Potter's House as a nondenominational church in the southern sector of Dallas, Texas, with just fifty families. Less than ten years later it has over 18,000 attenders and well over 30,000 members.

Nearly all megachurch pastors are male, and are viewed as having considerable personal charisma. The senior minister often has an authoritative style of preaching and administration and is nearly always the singular dominant leader of the church. Approximately twenty percent of megachurches have been exceptionally large for longer than the tenure of their current minister. Evidence suggests that although these churches

often suffer some decrease in attendance with the change of senior ministers, this decline is likely to be reversed within a year. Megachurches can remain vital following a shift in leadership from the founder to his successor.

Supporting these senior pastors are teams of five to twenty-five associate ministers, and often hundreds of full-time staff. Of the 153 megachurches surveyed in the *Megachurches Today* report, the average workforce included thirteen full time paid ministerial staff persons, and twenty-five full time paid program staff persons. The average number of volunteers who gave five or more hours a week to the church was 297.

Worship is one of the central drawing cards that anchors the church. The worship service in a megachurch is a high quality, entertaining and well-planned production. Given the congregation's size, this service cannot be left to "the flow of the spirit," especially if there are multiple services on a Sunday morning. As a megachurch grows, worship becomes more professional and polished, but also more planned and structured. The vast majority of these worship experiences, even if they include extensive congregational singing, are focused around the preaching. Megachurch sermons are often inspirational, motivational, and well delivered. The message empowers members with the challenge that everyone has choices, but that they are also responsible for what they choose. The listener is instructed, "You can do it, make a change, and make a difference." Sermons are almost always powerful, practical, down to earth, and relevant.

The leadership of megachurches throughout the country are experimenting with several modes of worship service configuration. Many congregations have gone to multiple services throughout the week. Whether this is due to necessity of space or as an

intentional strategy, it has allowed churches to offer a variety of formats and worship styles within one location to address a diverse set of musical and cultural tastes of their members. It is quite common for a megachurch to have a Friday evening young adults service with rock music and laid-back format; likewise, an early Sunday service for older adults might include traditional organ music with hymns and formal liturgy. They hold prayer services, Bible studies, singing services, and perhaps healing or Charismatic praise services. The diversity offered at a megachurch extends even to the choice of the style, form, and time of a worship event that best fits one's needs and tastes.

Some congregations have modeled their efforts after multi-screen movie theaters and now offer distinctive worship venues at the same time in the central church campus. For example, the main sanctuary of a megachurch might have worship marked by contemporary praise music, with a worship team and a traditional order of worship. Concurrently in the fellowship hall there may be a parallel service for those who prefer a very expressive praise service with guitars for music, a healing time and a younger set of leaders. In the youth wing a group of teens might be drinking soda and eating donuts while rock or grunge music, lights and video accompanies free form worship. When it is time for the sermon, however, each of the venues sees the senior minister simultaneously deliver the sermon on their video screen.

This characteristic of choice underlies the efforts of all megachurches. A congregation of thousands encompasses many diverse tastes and interests that must be addressed. Not only does this necessity influence the multiple styles of worship, preaching, and music offered, but it also affects the array of ministries available within a megachurch. In many ways, the megachurch functions like the mall owner providing stability and a common

roof under which diverse ministries, seen as specialized boutiques, can operate. In addition several core ministries, like anchor stores, offer a continuous draw to this spiritual shopping center.[15]

This organizational arrangement allows the larger church programmatic ministry structure to remain unchanged while the lay-driven specialized offerings rise or fall depending on changing needs. This system provides the entire membership with a continuous supply of appealing choices that fit their tastes. It also offers highly committed members a choice of places to serve. Finally, it ensures that the church as a whole appears relevant and vibrantly active at a minimum of cost both structurally and financially. This mall-like approach enables the megachurch's leadership to maintain a stable worship environment and yet exhibit flexibility in serving a changing clientele by continuously altering their ministry choices.

Nowhere is the characteristic of programmatic choice more evident, however, than in the range of internal ministries and the diversity of groups offered by megachurches. Some of these ministries are oriented specifically to religious and spiritual issues such as age-graded Bible studies, prayer groups, new member sessions, and religious education classes. Other ministries focus more on enhancing interpersonal ties and strengthening fellowship and social interaction through home groups, covenant communities, recreational activities, sports events, and organized celebrations. There are always groups which organize and train church volunteers both to assist in the functioning of the church and in the performance of its ministries. Often programs address the physical and psychological well-being of members with health fairs, preventative health clinics, employment support, vocational training, job fairs, various 12-step type recovery groups,

and individual counseling services. In addition, there are any number of interest groups and activities from musical lessons and choir rehearsals to political action committees and auto repair clinics. Over forty percent of megachurches support elementary and secondary private schools, with a much larger percentage hosting day care centers, scout troops, Head-Start programs, and countless teen and young adult activities. These large churches may even provide roller rinks, pools, gymnasiums, racquetball courts, and weight rooms.

Megachurch leadership realize that given their size, members must be strenuously encouraged to become involved in ministries and programs. As such, ninety-six percent of congregations surveyed strongly pressure all their participants to volunteer in church ministries. Over three quarters of churches required new members to take an informational class prior to or after joining. A third of those megachurches surveyed assign a pastor or lay leader to mentor new members as a way to incorporate them into the life of the church. These intentional efforts pay off given that nearly three-quarters of surveyed megachurches thought that new members were very or quite easily incorporated into the life of their church.

Somewhat surprising for these massive congregations, nearly fifty percent of the *Megachurches Today* respondents said the statement "their church feels like a close-knit family" described them very or quite well.[16] This is, in part, due to the extensive use of small group fellowship in megachurches. Half the surveyed churches say their use of small groups is central to their strategy for Christian nurture and spiritual formation. Another forty-four percent have such groups but say these are not central to the church's program. These groups may be formal and highly structured prayer or fellowship cells, or

they may be informal activity driven such as small groupings of parking attendants, police officers, lawyers or business persons. However, it is also due to the fact that members are able to customize their interactions with the church to fit their needs and interests. Over eighty percent say they have an organized program to keep up with members' needs and provide ministry at the neighborhood level. There is no doubt that these organizational forms enhance community and build social networks even as they allow for a tailored spiritual experience based on an individual's needs and desires.

Most megachurches are either newly established churches or older congregations that moved into new buildings prior to their explosive growth. Brand new congregations clearly have an edge over older churches; they have no existing patterns to revamp. In essence new congregations can choose to adopt whatever organizational model, or for that matter building structure, that works best with the size they anticipate becoming. It is a dynamic evolutionary strategy of growth versus a revisionist effort to expand. This lesson is not lost on many national denominational leaders who have recently engaged in concerted efforts at planting new churches. Given this advantage, it is not surprising that one finds numerous accounts in the early history of many megachurches when they were housed in "temporary structures" -- school auditoriums, abandoned shopping centers, and even circus tents before they considered building their "own" sanctuary.

Perhaps the best-known example of maintaining a fluid congregational form during its most rapid growth period is Rick Warren's Saddleback Community Church. This congregation met in a high school, then in countless satellite locations around the Mission Viejo, California area, before it built its current sanctuary. However, there are many other examples of this from both the earliest megachurches to the more recent. Many of

these churches report that every move to a new structure generated a rapid influx of persons to fill the building to capacity.[17] Megachurches describe this as "living at the limits of capacity." Those surveyed in the *Megachurches Today* report had an average seating of over 2000, with forty percent of them claiming to have moved into their building since 1980, and eighty-five percent of them describing the physical condition of their building as excellent or good. Nevertheless, over half the congregational leaders described their structures as inadequate for their current needs.

A large number of megachurches are beginning to realize that having multiple campuses within one organization has strategic advantages. Churches needing to grow are becoming more intentional about establishing satellite locations at a distance from but still a part of the main congregation. In the 2001 *Megachurches Today* survey over twenty percent of churches said they had branch campuses or satellites of their home church elsewhere in their city.[18] Interest in this strategy has increased dramatically in recent years with several major megachurches, including Willow Creek, creating multiple campuses. Megachurches draw from an extensive area of any city, with members often driving from forty-five minutes to an hour to attend. This brings many diverse cultural and social groups together under one roof. The challenge facing any megachurch is how to address this diversity of cultural styles or worship tastes. By creating satellite congregations in other parts of the city, the leadership is able to customize the worship style and format and tailor the message to each unique constituency within the congregation. This approach also allows a church to diminish the travel time of a portion of its membership, while also circumventing the need to construct ever larger and more expensive building and simultaneously deal with the shortage of land, inadequate

parking, and restrictive zoning laws and yet continue to address diverse ministry situations. These efforts have introduced innovations of structure not only into megachurches but also smaller congregations are learning from these distinctive ways of being church.

New Networks of Interconnection

Given the rapid and growth of many megachurches, there is a continual need to consider expansion. The above effort of creating multiple sites within one larger organizational entity is one solution to the need for expansion. A second effort is to emphasize planting new independent congregations that duplicate the mother church's model of ministry – essentially creating a franchise.

Creating daughter churches as independent congregations is a way of continuing to build God's kingdom. The leadership of most megachurches also reap many other benefits from this strategy. This planting strategy is another effective way to customize the message to a much broader audience. It spreads the reputation and market for a distinct style of ministry, as well as expanding the influence of the mother church. In the *Megachurches Today* survey nearly seventy percent of churches reported they had planted other congregations, with nearly a third having founded six or more churches.[19] Eighty percent of these megachurches stated that their ancillary congregations had distinctive styles or missions compared to the mother church. Such a strategy also has the added benefit of providing additional positions in church leadership for promising young members who otherwise might become disgruntled at the mother church with the limited number of leadership roles.

Another consequence of extensive efforts in planting new congregations is that it creates an informal network of like-minded churches who look to the mother church for inspiration and resources. This "familial network" often shares the tasks of training pastors, creating resources, organizing conferences and reinforcing a common network identity. This model, found most prominently in the Calvary and Vineyard Networks, produces unique relational ties and accountability as if to a parent, with an emphasis on the independence of the offspring. A Calvary Chapel pastor claimed in an interview, “Each church is autonomous and each church is self-governing. It is, however, an association of churches.... It is an association of like-minded fellowships that associate with each other because they have the same philosophy.”[20] These familial ties within the informal association are fertile grounds for the recruitment and training of new clergy. Often, promising lay leaders are nurtured into official leadership positions, mentored by existing clergy and then are encouraged to "plant a daughter church" - occasionally with the financial support of the ‘sending" congregation.

Many large megachurches have expanded these “familial networks” to create networks open to all like-minded congregations. This connectional arrangement has been popularized by and heavily employed by megachurches over the past three decades. Certain researchers have interpreted these associations to be proto-denominations, implying that they will eventually organize into forms similar to contemporary national denominations.[21] However, these efforts at creating structures of interconnection are quite disparate from traditional denominations.

Unlike traditional denominations, megachurch networks are loosely structured, de-centralized, non-hierarchical and have virtually no bureaucratic structures. They are

based on relationships, personal ties, and an affinity of interests and mission purpose. The network offers a skill or strategy, expertise or an identity that other congregations or pastors find helpful. Many networks provide the opportunity to "belong to something bigger" while offering fellowship events, resources and training as well as some minimal pastoral oversight, accountability and identification with a successful ministry. A pastor in the Potters House Network described the relationship this way.

> "The Potter's House is more defined as a fellowship - not the denominational or legal ties, but strong relational ties are what binds us, with a common vision or goal. And so, while we as pastors are in essence independent...yet we're not entirely independent - because of relationship. And so we link together and we keep the contact through laboring together and through area-wide conferences. It's the relationship that brings, if you will, the pressure point of things - I don't mean manipulation.... But as a denomination you have the guidelines and rules that you function under. In the fellowship, it's the relationship - so there are standards, guidelines, principles, ethics....There are some very distinct relational connections. Typically it's kind of like a family."[22]

The networked relationship is so informal that church may not know its pastor is associated with one or several networks. These networks are often loose affiliations of like-minded ministers who may or may not formally represent their congregations. The church membership might not even overtly recognize the influence of these networks. Often these connectional influences slip into the congregation unobtrusively through the music, teaching resources, and educational events offered by the network.

Unlike denominations, these networks are not exclusive. They are not restricted only to independent congregations or those churches a megachurch has planted. Any congregation can join one of these networks, even if they are part of an official national denomination. Likewise networks do not demand singular loyalty. Any congregation may belong to multiple networks at the same time. They can just as easily dissolve a relationship with a network, as the church's needs change. There are few formal ties, with minimal obligations to join and even less sacrifices to disaffiliate.

The proliferation of these networks or associations of churches is almost as significant a change in religious structure and organization as are the megachurches and niche congregations over the past forty years. Twenty percent of megachurches in the 2001 study reported they were part of a Network, Fellowship or Association of churches. These networks ranged anywhere from fifteen members to several thousand. The median network size was 600 churches. The majority of networks that have arisen in recent years center on the megachurches but include mostly churches of much smaller size. Megachurches are not the hubs of all networks. Quite a few networks exist that interconnect and support groups of house churches, cell-churches and emerging churches. These connectional structures are developing across multiple forms of religious organizations.

There is no official count of such networks (although some such as the Association of Vineyard Churches the Association of Calvary Chapels or the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship occasionally get catalogued in official handbooks of denominations). Nevertheless hundreds of these information structures exist and include well-known organizations such as the Willow Creek Association and the network of Purpose Driven

Churches. A list of other networks include the Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, Morning Star Ministries, Potters House Fellowship, Victory Outreach Network, International Communion of Charismatic Congregations, the Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship, and countless others.[23]

If these new networks and associations function as quasi-denominations at all, it is certainly with different characterizations of authority and agency than traditional denominations. The dominant basis of authority functioning in these networks is relational - grounded in a unity of vision and purpose - rather than charismatic, bureaucratic or traditional. If a network member's direction of ministry changes, then, as a Vineyard Association judicatory pastor hypothetically counseled in an interview, "we are not walking together down the same path. I still love you as a brother in Christ, but perhaps you should think about finding a different group as your primary fellowship."[24] Likewise, the agency structure of these networks appears to be relatively informal in organization and minimal in the scope of functions performed. Finally, in nearly every case, the network does not function as the sole source of either religious authority or agency for the associated clergy member or the affiliated local church.

To some extend these network structure expand the customization of religious identity to the congregational level. The networks allow individual congregations to choose their affiliational ties based on their momentary interests and needs rather than having it be denominationally-fixed, or permanently committed. These churches are able to select with whom they want to associate and to whom they choose to submit and be accountable. It is the same identity pattern, just written at the congregational level.

The Religious Marketplace of the Future?

The various religious organizational forms addressed in this chapter represent a very small percentage of congregations and active participants in organized American religion. However, this number is continually growing fueled both by the popularity of these alternatives and by the disillusionment of persons with traditional religious structures. Nevertheless, the likelihood of the religious landscape being filled with megachurches, emerging congregations and house churches in the next twenty-five years is highly unlikely. Much of the impact of religious organizational forms described above is more likely to be felt by a vastly larger percentage of congregations of all theological persuasions in more indirect and subtle ways. The changes to these congregations are effected more slowly over time as these distinctive organizational practices and habits become integrated into more traditional congregational forms, gradually altering them beyond recognition.

A reflection on the changes that have already diffused into contemporary religious culture and organizational reality is instructive. Changes in casual dress, music style and worship formats wrought by the Charismatic, the Vineyard and Calvary Chapel Movements proves the power of these glacier-like alterations to the religious landscape. One has to wonder what influence the Willow Creek Community Church's network and conferences have had in disseminating the gospel of seeker-sensitive worship to tens of thousands of churches. Or how Rick Warren's hugely successful Purpose-Driven campaigns have reconceptualized congregational organizations from the congregational, pastoral, and individual levels. In addition to these influences, many smaller churches

have already adopted structural characteristics of megachurches, learned in the countless pastors conferences offered by nearly fifty percent of megachurches.[25]

Careful ethnographic investigations in all sorts of congregations have begun to show that many individuals no longer relate to traditional religious communities as they once did. Melissa Wilcox found this to be the case in her study of lesbians in the Los Angeles area. These persons she interviewed and observed were attenders in a church but not necessarily shaped by the church, rather their spirituality was rooted in their own quest, in their own exploration of the sacred. A similar dynamic can be seen in broad national studies of U.S. Catholics and their beliefs. Based on their lack of acceptance of papal teachings, these Catholics are in but not embracing of the church's pronouncements, traditions and doctrines.[26] Many studies of members within specific denominations show considerable variation of attitudes, practices, beliefs, morality and theology. The question of what counts as a "good" Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Jew and who decides this is up for grabs.

To further complicate this dynamic, numerous other venues for spiritual development outside of traditional religious organizations abound. These parachurch realities offer ways for persons to structure their personal quest for the Spirit without necessarily subscribing to a larger religious tradition. Groups as diverse as the Women's Leadership Institute at Hartford Seminary and the Gospel Hour drag show in a gay bar in Atlanta, Sunday morning Gospel Brunches in the suburbs of several southern cities, or retreat centers, labyrinths and tai chi exercises in public parks, spiritual weight loss clinics, even 12-step programs grounded in a spirituality based on one's own understanding of a higher

power all contribute to a radical reworking of religious organizational life beyond just those discussed in this chapter.

It could be argued that large percentages of persons who claim a spiritual faith, even a religious tradition, and yet very seldom attend an organized faith community are essentially the masters of their own vessel. They implicitly follow their horoscope, learn "truth" from *The Da Vinci Code*, hold to a "prosperity gospel" taught by television preachers, practice yoga, explore native American spirituality at Borders, burn incense, wear crystals, and chat in the Interfaith rooms on Beliefnet. These same folks might even be found visiting a local megachurch or dropping in on a service at an emerging congregation. It is more likely, however, they are one of the millions of anonymous believers who spend most Sundays worshipping at flea markets and malls, at youth soccer and baseball games or in a local running and hiking trail communing with nature.

Societal and cultural changes took place in the decades of the 1950s through the 1970s that set in motion radical alterations to our understanding of spirituality and religion. These shifts began to separate personal beliefs and attitudes about faith from customary organizational forms, historic traditions and established religious authorities. Over time religious organizations evolved or were created that embody an approach to the spiritual life, either niche or mall-like in reality, which caters to the individual as captain of his or her own spiritual ship.

Some of those more obvious organizational forms have been discussed in this chapter, but these house churches, emerging congregations, and megachurches with cell groups and multiple venue worship services only scratch the surface of the diversity. Internet

virtual communities are an example of this variety but other forms of spiritual organizations hinted at above abound and remain to be researched fully.

To identify and explore this spirituality variety we must broaden our conceptual definition of what constitutes a religious organization. Traditional congregational organizations will continue to exist as a path for pursuing spirituality but, as Wuthnow suggests, "the congregation is less aptly characterized as a safe haven; rather, it functions as a supplier of spiritual goods and services."[27] However we also have to reverse our approach to understanding a life of faith. Religion is no longer only that which is being disseminated from "on high," coming down the mountain or through a denominational chain of command, to dwell among the people. Spiritually in the United States, individuals are now scaling the mountain on their own quest for the Gods. At times they are following well-worn organizational paths but more often they are forging their own trails with their own unique goals in mind.

Suggestions for Further Readings

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Endnotes

1. See various descriptions of the changes in religious identity and the corresponding cultural shifts in the works of Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), and Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993) and *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
2. Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 57 indicate that as many as 80 percent of those asked responded in this manner.
3. The religious faith of one interviewee, Sheila, in Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*: *Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) named her religion after herself, claiming it was her own private faith.
4. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 9-10).

5. The historical use of house church gatherings is traced by C. Kirk Hadaway, Francis M. Dubose, and Stuart A. Wright, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987).
6. C. Kirk Hadaway, Francis M. Dubose, and Stuart A. Wright, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 109.
7. Stephen Warner, *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).
8. See the interview with Brian McLaren in Andy Crouch "The Emergent Mystique" *Christianity Today*, (November 2004) www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html accessed 10-15-2005.
9. This quote is part of an interview with Rob Bell in Andy Crouch "The Emergent Mystique" *Christianity Today*, (November 2004) www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html accessed 10-15-2005. This *Christianity Today* article by offers an excellent overview of the Emerging Church movement www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html as does Brian McLaren's commentary on this article at http://www.anewkindofchristian.com/archives/000271.html
10. Kim Lawton, "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly Report: The Emerging Church." July 8 and 15, 2005 Episode no. 845-46. www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week845/cover.html accessed 10-25-2005. Interviews with several Emerging Church participants done by this Religion and Ethics Newsweekly reporter shed light into why these churches are so popular (Lawton 2005).

11. Kim Lawton, “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly Report: The Emerging Church.” July 8 and 15, 2005 Episode no. 845-46. www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week845/cover.html accessed 10-25-2005. An interesting summary of characteristics based on how one person within the emerging church envisions the movement to be can be found at www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/stevetaylor/index.htm. Also see the works of Brian McLaren such as *A New Kind of Christian* and *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Another place to uncover information about the movement is, not surprisingly, on the Internet with sites such as www.emergingchurch.info, www.emergentvillage.com, www.anewkindofchristian.com and www.theooze.com.
12. Michael Moynagh, "How is Emerging Church different?" November, 2004. www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/michaelmoynagh/index.htm accessed 11-7-2005.
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14. Scott Thumma, Megachurches Today: Summary of data from the Faith Communities Today Project. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html accessed 10-20-2005.
15. Scott Thumma, Megachurches Today: Summary of data from the Faith Communities Today Project. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html accessed 10-20-2005.

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23. Scott Thumma, Megachurches Today: Summary of data from the Faith Communities Today Project. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html accessed 10-20-2005.
24. Scott Thumma, "What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support." http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html accessed 10-15-2005.
25. Les Parrott and Dale Robin Perrin, "The New Denominations?" *Christianity Today* 34 (March 11, 1991), 29-33.
26. Scott Thumma, "What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support." http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html accessed 10-15-2005.
27. Scott Thumma, Megachurches Today: Summary of data from the Faith Communities Today Project. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html accessed 10-20-2005.
28. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) begins to explore the nature of the Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel and Vineyard Associations. An article by Les Parrott and Dale Robin Perrin, "The New Denominations?" *Christianity Today*

34 (March 11, 1991), 29-33 is still the best overview of these quasi-denominational structures.

29. Scott Thumma, "What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support." http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html accessed 10-15-2005.
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