AN EMERGENT

MANIFESTO
OF HOPE

KEY LEADERS OFFER AN INSIDE LOOK

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- DAN KIMBALL
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INTRODUCTION

FRIENDSHIP, FAITH, AND GOING SOMEWHERE TOGETHER

Tony Jones

To answer the question "What is Emergent Village?" I often go back to the beginning. When I jumped on board Emergent Village, I really didn't know what I was getting into. I was invited to a meeting in a crummy hotel meeting room in Arlington, Texas, in August of 1998. And, as so many have found, it was an exhilarating experience. The energy in the room was palpable. The room positively crackled. I think that's because we had the feeling, even back then, that we were on to something.

And even as we struggled to determine what that "something" was, we talked about an element of the connection that was seemingly even more important, and surely more elusive, and that was and is *friendship*.

To be sure, there are words in English that have been overused to the point of confusion. *Love* is one. And *friend* is another. Yet as we searched for ways to identify ourselves, other appellations didn't fit. We were more than a "network," and we surely weren't a "denomination." We didn't want to be a "club" or a "society." Some people have called us a "think tank," but that doesn't quite fit either.

We just kept coming back to the word *friend*. We wanted to recover that word and to invest it with theological meaning. We knew this wouldn't be easy, for not only were we fighting a word that had been overused to the point of meaninglessness, but we also had the creeping suspicion that many of us didn't really know how to be true friends.

It doesn't take long to figure out that friendship is hard. Most of us find out by, say, kindergarten. Recently I had to walk with my five-year-old son down to his friend's house a couple blocks away and watch him apologize for something he'd said on the bus. There, standing in the driveway watching with his friend's mom, I experienced vicariously through Tanner how it felt to discover for the first time that a friendship is a fragile thing, something that needs great care.

By the time I was first getting involved in Emergent (before it was even called Emergent), I had had about two and a half decades of struggling through friendships—enough to keep me quite humble about the prospect of more and better and longer-lasting friendships. Like most everyone, I suppose, I had a wake of ex-friends (not to mention ex-girlfriends!) that I brought to Emergent.

Yet I did immediately sense that there was something different about this group. We talked about ideas we had for the church and for developing a deeper life with Christ, but we almost always talked about doing it together. In fact, I had the growing sense that *this* was the group of men and women who would take the church into its next iteration, and I became convinced that we were going to do it *together*.

In the beginning, we came together under the auspices of Leadership Network (LN), a church-assisting foundation in Dallas. LN had hired Doug Pagitt, a former evangelical youth pastor and proven networker, to develop a network of innovative, young pastors. Doug began this work in 1997, making a point to fly around the country and connect with any young church leader about whom he had heard good things.[1] With that kind of energy in the room, there was excitement every time we met. Persons flowed in and out of the group—the boundaries of the group were quite porous.

One of the things that we were committed to doing, from the beginning, was throwing parties. We often called them "events" or "conferences," but everyone knew that in reality they were parties for the church and for our common life in God. Regardless of the

invited speakers or the musicians playing on stage, the real premium was placed on relational connection—that's our technical term for friendship.

As with any friendship, I suppose, some folks didn't jibe with what we were about. I was sitting in the Baghdad Café in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco a few months ago. It was 2 a.m., and I was there with Mark Scandrette, Karen Ward, and Lilly Lewin. We had been speaking all day at an event, and there we were, ordering pancakes and hamburgers in the middle of the night, still talking a-mile-a-minute. In a moment of insight, Mark said, "We really are a relationally manic people."

That maniacal style has been a struggle for some, and understandably so. Our kind of friendship is a high-demand friendship. Folks give a lot and they expect a lot in return. But this friendship bears much fruit. This soil has been worked thoroughly, and good stuff has sprung up from it.

What you hold in your hands is an example of the good stuff, and I'm talking about "good" in several ways.

First of all, it is a "good" as in "goods and services." Most likely, you paid for this book. It's a good that has somehow been produced and delivered to you. Friendships often produce goods, items that become an extension of the friendship. In that sense, Emergent Village has been producing goods for a while. Events, conferences, even church plants that have been inspired by the Emergent friendship can be considered goods that have come about through it.

But in another way, we consider this kind of "good" differently than others might. The books that have been produced from the soil of the Emergent Village friendship are not to be considered be-all and end-all books on any subject. Instead, they are to be considered discussion starters—part of the conversation about what it is to be Emergent, friends, Christians. Like a coffee-table book, this book (and the others that come from Emergent Village) is meant to sit at the middle of a relationship, to provoke conversation, and consequently to deepen the friendship. So, this "good" works in a cyclical way in the friendship. It both *comes from* the friendship and *deepens* the friendship.

In another sense, we hope this book is a "good," and that's in the philosophical sense. Aristotle's definition of *good* comes at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly, every action and choice of action, is thought to have some

good as its object. This is why the good has rightly been defined as the object of all endeavor."[2] In other words, every human enterprise is done with some end, some result in mind. That result is the "good" of the endeavor. The "highest good," according to Aristotle, is that good at the end of the line, the good that is desirable exclusively for its own sake.

In his well-known definition of a *practice*, neo-Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre relies on this understanding of a "good":

> By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which *goods* internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and *goods* involved, are systematically extended.[3]

So when we get together and do things together, the things we do together are the "goods" internal to that enterprise. The striving toward excellence, together, achieves goods, and the goods subsequently result in more striving and more goods.

I can't say that we knew exactly what we were getting into in 1998, when we planned our first event together. But it does seem that we were engaging in some sort of "socially established cooperative human activity," as MacIntyre calls it. To say it in a less philosophical way, we've rolled up our sleeves and done stuff together. It has involved everything from debating leading theologians and biblical scholars (live and in print) to literally digging in the dirt together to get God's goodness under our fingernails. As a result, we've achieved some "goods."

One of those goods, I think, is this polyphonic text. In a variety of voices, this group of friends is attempting to sing a song together. There are times, I'm sure, when the harmonies don't match, when someone seems to be singing out of tune. But that's really not the point for us. The point is that we're singing, and that we're singing together. We get better at singing only by (1) doing it, and (2) listening to those around us. You might think of Emergent Village in general, and this book in particular, as a choir with no conductor.

Of course, the Christian faith is based on a sacred text that has a similar trajectory. At times, the Bible seems contradictory, out of harmony with itself. But on the whole, it is beautiful in its grand

sweep, and those disharmonious parts in fact establish the beauty of the whole. Our hope is that this book, in a small way, is a reflection of the disharmonious beauty of the Christian Story.

Finally, we hope that this book is "good" in the sense that when you read it you don't hear a giant sucking sound. I have found these essays to be compelling and brilliant, each in its own way.

Be mindful that this book gathers a wide variety of authors, not unlike Emergent Village itself. And each author comes from a different field and values a different expertise. One is a missionary, another a philosopher, another a beat poet, and another a writer. Each of these activities carries its own rationality—that is, its own internal way of thinking and doing—and, as such, each has its own way of judging what is good (and what is bad). So, it's a bit artificial for us to ask each of these individuals to write three thousand words of prose to be fitted into this book. How do you explain where you fit in the Emergent friendship in three thousand words? Or, worse yet, how do you describe your hopes and dreams for the future of God's kingdom and your cooperation in it in as many words?

Obviously, that's really an impossible task. However, the impossibility of it hasn't daunted these authors one bit. And, as a result, you do hold a thing of beauty in your hands, something that's "good" in the sense of being favorable, bountiful, and fertile—like a field that is "good" for planting. When I look at my backyard garden in the spring, it isn't the least bit orderly or systematic, but it sure is beautiful and good. It's full of leftover weeds from last fall, some old leaves, and not a few rocks that have been heaved to the surface by the winter frost. But, as I turn the soil, spread a year's worth of compost over it, and ready it for planting, I know that this good garden will, by August, produce good fruit. It won't be perfect. There will be weeds and bugs, some plants won't make it, and the dog might get in and dig a bit. But, on the whole, the outcome will be good, and we'll be eating homegrown tomatoes by the middle of August.

I hope that you can see the beauty in the mess that is this book. It's not one, univocal message. But, seriously, who'd want a garden of all green beans? No, you've got to have variety, and that's what you'll find in the pages that follow.

What is Emergent Village?

A mess. A beautiful, *good* mess.

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CONVERTING CHRISTIANITY
THE END AND BEGINNING OF FAITH

Barry Taylor

Barry Taylor *lives and works in Los Angeles California. He has a Masters in cross-cultural studies and a PhD in intercultural studies with an emphasis on the relationship between faith and contemporary culture. Taylor teaches at Fuller Seminary in California, where he has developed a number of courses focusing on the intersections between theology and popular culture. He also teaches on advertising at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Along with teaching, Taylor is a songwriter and composer, recently working on film scores as well as with his own recordings. He travels widely as a lecturer and speaker at international events exploring emerging global culture. As a Brit living in "exile" he is constantly searching for the perfect cup of tea!*

"God is nowhere. God is now here." In his book *Hey Nostradamus!* Douglas Coupland tells the story of Cheryl Anway, a Christian teen, pregnant and secretly married, who scribbles this epigram on her

school binder before a rampaging trio of misfit classmates gun her down in a Columbine-style high school shooting.[1]

Since I read those words in Coupland's book a couple of years ago, I have been turning them over and over in my mind. For me, this linguistic trick sums up much of how I feel about the present condition of faith in the twenty-first century. The spacing of the letters transforms God from absent to present, and this is surely indicative of the current situation. God may have always been Immanuel ("God with us") to the church, but the same cannot be said of the wider culture.

Much has been said and written about the collapse of the secular project and the subsequent reenchantment of Western culture that is characterized by a rising interest in issues of faith and the "return of God" to the public realm. God, it seems, is a topic of interest once again, and it is possible and permissible to speak of God and find a willing conversation partner in our culture today.

But before we get too excited about the return of God to our cultural landscape, I think we should be aware that God's return is not a return to business as usual for religion nor is it a wholesale embrace of traditional faiths by the broader culture. In fact, the literary device Coupland uses resonates so much because it represents the ongoing tension that exists in the arena of faith today; God is both present *and* absent in that the return to God is not a return to traditional concepts and ideas of God. "Throughout history people have discarded a conception of God when it no longer works for them," wrote Karen Armstrong in her book *A History of God*.[2] Faith in the twenty-first century is not exclusively centered on concepts of God.

Postmod God

We live in a post-Nietzschean world of faith and spirituality. Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" still holds true since interest in all things spiritual does not necessarily translate to a belief in a metaphysical God or the tenets and dogmas of a particular faith. The return to God we are experiencing today is not a resurrection of the pre-modern God as much as it is a new iteration of concepts of the divine, based not on medieval scholasticism or metaphysics but rather on the daring and often precarious notions of postmodern culture.

The challenges for Christian faith in times like these are immense. The vapor trails of Christianity remain on the cultural landscape, but the once dominant religion of the West no longer has the last word on matters of faith.[3] Whether "Christianity" has any future at all as a vibrant expression of faith in the Man from Galilee is a matter of debate as far as I am concerned. Perhaps the times call for something else, something other, not merely the repackaging of old metaphors (playing the "relevant" game), but a new incarnation of what it means to follow Jesus.

Traditional faiths of every kind are experiencing challenges to their hegemony, to their claims on the truth, and to their self-proclaimed right to speak authoritatively on behalf of God. The rise of fundamentalism seems to be a constant reminder that religion can be a source of chaos and confusion as well as a provider of comfort and consolation. For many, the former seems to outweigh the latter. This dynamic, which has only gathered more steam post 9/11, is just a small part of the erosion of confidence in traditional religion in our time.

The cultural perception of an immense difference between those who consider themselves "spiritual" and those who consider themselves "religious" is another example of the shift in our understanding of the divine.

What it means exactly when a person declares himself or herself to be "spiritual but not religious" is a matter of some debate. Some people find *spiritual* an irritating term that means nothing of any real substance, a marker for a sort of "wishy-washy" sentimentalism that passes itself off as real faith. Others have embraced it wholeheartedly, and the rise of spiritual language in sermons and discussions, as well as a growing interest in spiritual directors in many churches, point to an embrace of the term on some levels even amongst the "religious."

I don't think there is one definition for the term or for its usage. *Spirituality* is an umbrella word, a catchall concept used to characterize a commitment to the sacred elements of life. It defies a singular definition, hence the fluidity of the usage of the word; it is also an evolving term rather than one of fixed determination.

One thing that it *does* signify, almost universally, is the rejection of traditional faiths as a primary source of connection to the divine. I would argue that traditional faiths are no longer the first resource that people go to in order to develop and nurture their spiritual lives, but

instead function more as secondary archives with which new spiritual permutations are created. Those who do choose to explore their spiritual quests within traditional faith environments do so with very different eyes and intentions than previous generations of seekers have. For me spirituality *is* the religion of the twenty-first century.

This is a dramatic shift, and one that some might contest, but the momentum seems to be toward this perspective. It should come as no surprise to us that our understanding of religion is undergoing a transformation. In times of significant cultural change, all the ways in which we order ourselves socially are usually affected. For instance, religion as it was experienced in the post-Reformation period was quite unlike its pre-Reformation incarnation.[4] That faith in the postmodern world is showing itself to be markedly different from faith in modernity only serves to underscore the significance of the cultural changes we are presently experiencing. *God is nowhere. God is now here.*

If then we truly find ourselves in a new situation, one in which the old ways simply no longer suffice, what then of the future for Christian faith? I have already raised the notion that there may not be a future for "Christianity," the religion of Christian faith. I mean no disrespect to historic Christianity when I make this comment, nor do I seek to simply dismiss centuries of faithful service, worship, and theology.

I think that the Christian faith has been held captive to a "pseudo-orthodoxy" for much of the late twentieth century. Christianity's love affair with modernity and its universalizing tendencies created a climate in which the general assumption has been that what constitutes Christian faith has been "settled," and therefore any challenge to the status quo is often rejected as unbiblical or unorthodox. The assumption is a singular understanding of the faith.[5] The easiest way to undermine different perspectives on issues like faith and practice during my lifetime has been to call someone's commitment to orthodoxy into question. But Christian faith is open to discussion. Historically it always has been. It can be questioned and reinterpreted. In fact, I would argue that it is meant to be questioned and reinterpreted.

Religion is always a cultural production, and sociocultural issues cannot be discounted from the ways in which we envision and understand faith.[6] Issues and questions raised by our particular cultural situation not only inform but shape the various ways in which we

interpret the gospel. If there ever was a time to question the status quo, it is now.

Converting the Converted

For the rest of this chapter, I simply want to explore what the future might look like if we consider the past two thousand years as an evolution of faith and not as something that has been static and fixed, something that a few disgruntled people are trying to unravel and undermine.

What I offer is not complete by any stretch of the imagination. I realize that a short essay cannot do justice to most of the issues that I have raised thus far, and that I will have probably raised more questions than answers, but it is intended to generate conversation and ongoing reflection as much as anything else.

God is nowhere. God is now here.

The times in which we live are intense on any number of levels. The threat of terror haunts the world like a specter; issues of global poverty and disease are constant reminders of economic disparity and human despair. Our world has also recently been rocked by a series of natural disasters, the sheer force of which has raised renewed concerns about environmental issues and the ramifications of our commitment to fossil fuels, chemicals, and other resources on the planet. The impact of globalization and its many discontents on various parts of the world is a continuing part of our daily lives. Along with this, we in the West find ourselves drowning in choices, trying to balance our rampant materialism with a renewed desire for meaning and purpose.

These are certainly not the times to be seeking self-preservation, but that seems to be the general focus of the church today. Everywhere we turn we see books, conferences, workshops, and a host of other resources that focus on what can be done to preserve the church, and we are willing, it seems, to employ any marketing device to make it happen. Trend watchers and marketing strategists offer ways in which churches can connect with the culture. We brand and market Christianity in attempts to make it viable again.

But what if we let go of our need for a branded and marketable entity and turn instead toward a new way of living and being in the

world? This is not an entirely new idea. Dietrich Bonhoeffer posited a "religionless Christianity" in the 1940s, but what if it is an idea whose time has finally come? What if "religion," and by this I mean the institutional and organizational form around faith, is no longer necessary for the future of faith?

Religions exist in certainty and sanctity; faith lives in inquiry and fluidity. The reason traditional faiths are having a hard time of things is that the present situation is one in which certainty is suspect and sanctity is being redefined.

We should consider letting go of our obsession with certainty; we do, after all, "see through a glass darkly," as the apostle Paul reminds us. It is hard to claim clarity when shadows linger over what is revealed. The future of faith does not lie in the declaration of certainties but in the living out of uncertainty. "Believing that one believes" is how philosopher Gianni Vattimo puts it: "To believe means having faith, conviction, or certainty in something, but also to opine—that is, to think with a certain degree of uncertainty."[7] Our declarations about matters of faith are always fragmentary and provisional.

This idea challenges religion's commitment to sanctity. Sanctity implies security and inviolability—the territory is delineated, the lines clearly drawn. Contemporary society is reluctant to draw such lines of division; sometimes it is difficult to tell where one idea ends and another begins.

One of the most interesting dynamics of the present time is the collapse of distinction between the sacred and the profane. Contemporary society allows for the "holy" to be found in the most unexpected places. As Christopher Partridge writes, "The new spiritual awakening makes use of thought-forms, ideas and practices, which are not at all alien to the majority of Westerners. They emerge from an essentially non-Christian religio-cultural milieu, a milieu that both resources and is resourced by popular culture."[8] The future of Christian faith lies in its ability to inhabit this gray world, not attempting to "sort it out" as much as to be available to help others navigate and negotiate the complexities that such a dynamic raises. To "go with the flow" might seem a trite way of describing theological engagement, but a commitment to fluidity and a willingness to swim in the cultural waters rather than insisting on one's own paddling pool is a necessary perspective.

All of these thoughts can be summarized as a commitment to weakness rather than strength. "Muscular Christianity" and "robust faith"

are views that worked well in modernity's concrete world, but the
viability of Christian faith in the twenty-first century is not guaran-
teed by claims to power and declarations of strengths and doctrinal
postures. This is not a slide into relativism but a commitment to
nondogmatic specificity. We can tell the gospel story without resort-
ing to competition, exclusivism, or elitism.

God is nowhere. God is now here.

When discussing the conversion of African slaves to Christianity,
W. E. B. DuBois argued that Africans did not convert to Christianity
but rather converted Christianity to the basic themes, rhythms, and
interests of African religion.[9] In considering the future of Christian
faith in the twenty-first century I find this idea of reverse conversion
to be really helpful.

The concerns of religion are different from those of faith. Religion is
concerned with right belief, faith with believing in the right way. This
was something that Jesus confronted continually in his encounters with
the Pharisees. Their commitment to right belief actually led them to
wrongful living, to exclusion, judgment, and prejudice. I believe our
commitment to the religion of Christianity has led us into a cul-de-sac of
ineffectuality and redundancy. Our concerns with converting the world
to our way of looking at things are completely out of sync with the dy-
namics of faith in our time. We need a conversion of sorts. A conversion
to the themes, rhythms, and interests of post-secular Western culture,
not so that we become just like the culture, but so that our countercul-
tural way of living can be heard from within the culture. I have heard
an awful lot of sermons in my time about not being "of the world," but
that is only part of the admonition from Jesus. It begins with a call to be
"in the world, but not of it." For too long Christianity has attempted to
exist outside of cultural situations, seeing itself as acultural, as if such a
thing is truly possible. Perhaps this had some resonance in modernity,
with its commitment to objective rationalism, but in today's world such
a view seems hopelessly remote and out of touch.

I firmly believe that Jesus did his theology and lived out his life in
the marketplace of the culture. His ministry was conducted outside
the sacred spaces of his own faith tradition. His forays into sacred
space and time were usually to affect pronouncements and challenges
to the religious establishment.

For the Christian faith to remain viable, we are going to have to
let go of the attractional model—inviting people to come to us—and

instead go to where they live and live out our faith there. A Chinese proverb says we should "Go to the people. Live among them, learn from them, love them, start with what they know, build on what they have."[10] The rhythm and content of this proverb offers some clues about the actions we might take.

To learn from others requires that we listen in order to understand. Another chapter could be written on the positive influence silence might have on the Christian faith in postsecularity. "Start with what they know and build on what they have"—this shifts the ground of discourse from the abstract to the actual. Our theological engagement and concerns ought to be developed from the questions and needs of the world around us. For too long we have gone out into the world to tell people what we think they ought to know rather than seeking to discover what they are interested in and where they are looking for answers. This is reminiscent of Paul's encounter in Athens, a city devoted to questions of ultimate meaning, a place so intent on religious propriety that it erected an altar to an unknown god, just in case. Paul began with what they had and built from there. His declaration that "God is not far from any one of us" is a profound missional lesson for us all; we don't have to take God anywhere, we just have to discover where he is already at work.

God is nowhere. God is now here. God is present, God is absent. The future of faith rests in the tension between these words, and it is from this place of discomfort and complexity that new life emerges.

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LEADERSHIP IN A FLATTENED WORLD

GRASSROOTS CULTURE AND THE DEMISE OF THE CEO MODEL

Sally Morgenthaler

Sally Morgenthaler *is recognized as an innovator in Christian practices worldwide. Her prophetic role among church leaders and local congregations continues to increase in denominational scope and impact, as her work now broadens into the arena of new forms of leadership and the untapped potential of women. Known best for her book* Worship Evangelism *(Zondervan, 1998), Morgenthaler became a trusted interpreter of postmodern culture and a guide to the crucial shifts the North American church must make if it is to become a transforming presence within pre-Christian communities.*

What is leadership in an age of unprecedented connectedness? When information is as accessible as the Blackberry in your back pocket?

When the world no longer needs data brokers, when the word *author-ity* inspires only suspicion and revolt, and when business, political, and religious icons are deconstructed at the click of a mouse button? What does it really mean to be in charge of anything?

Nothing. Because, in the new and increasingly flattened world, being in charge is an illusion. Being in charge worked (and marginally so) only in a world of slow change, in a predictable universe where information (and thus, power) is ensconced in the hands of a few. But that world is gone. With the rise of the individual (the power of one) and the rise of the tribe (the power of one connected), all bets are off. From Al-Qaeda to the post-Katrina revolt to fragmenting retail markets to the small-enterprise explosion in India and China, we see the old world of "big and powerful" unraveling.

Still, we hang on to our illusions. We retreat into the old story: leadership as domination and control. Margaret Wheatley describes our desperate attempts to hang on to what is gone:

> Ever since uncertainty became our insistent twenty-first-century companion, leadership strategies have taken a great leap backward to the familiar territory of command and control. . . . How is it that we failed to learn that whenever we try to impose control on people and situations, we only serve to make them more uncontrollable? All of life resists control. All of life reacts to any process that inhibits its freedom to create itself. When we deny life's need to create, life pushes back. We label it resistance and invent strategies to overcome it. But we would do far better if we changed the story and learned how to invoke the resident creativity of those in our organizations. We need to work with these insistent creative forces or they will be provoked to work against us.[1]

Perhaps what Wheatley describes has always been a reality: human beings are simply wired to push back. Maybe the real shift is that now we have an unprecedented ability to do so. Now, eighty-year-old Uncle Harold can post his very own book review on Amazon.com. Aunt Sarah can finally sell her Hummel collection, not at the neighborhood garage sale, but on eBay. Now, we have Google in our hip pockets, and our cell phones double as personal computers, televisions, cameras, video recorders, and stereo systems. Do we really get the significance of those sideways, post-terrorist clips from the bowels of a London subway system? Suddenly it actually mat-

ters that we exist, that we live in a certain place and time. No matter what our income or educational level, we can join the posse of several thousand bloggers and send CBS's Dan Rather a group message. A big and terrifyingly audible message: "Dan, we smell a rat. We know too much. Get the story right or get out."

To Know and Be Known

Having found our long-lost voices, not only are we finding ways to push back, we are moving out of anonymity to a fledgling, halting culture of communities. Yes, we may still crave cocoon time, but the Starbucks "third place" concept—whether real or virtual—has literally revived what it is to have a public life. From village-concept malls to Internet cafés, Listserves, chat rooms, match sites, video gaming events, Texas Holdem parties, martini bars, and neighborhood twelve-step groups, we're trying to figure out how to be in conversation with each other.

We may not be at the level of mature exchange in all of these venues, but even our attempts at community say something: at our deepest levels, we want to know and be known; we want to put a stamp on life. And now that we've tasted what it is like to be noticed—to be connected and together, to make a difference—our expectation of influence is at an all-time high. Whether at work, in school, online, on our iPods, or at the Home Depot do-it-yourself design center, we want our stories, our passions, preferences, and opinions to matter. And the most successful companies and innovations of the past fifteen years—eBay, Google, Amazon, Comcast On Demand, Match.com, Blizzard (multiplayer online video gaming), Starbucks, Netflix, MySpace.com, Apple's iPod Nano and iTunes, Blackberry, etc.—have figured this out. Creating interactive, personalized experiences for their customers is primary. But these companies don't stop there. Their value for significance—for participation and personal engagement—permeates their organizational structures as well. And the reason is as simple as the dollar sign: when their companies are interactive and self-organizing at their core, profits increase. Leadership theorist Margaret Wheatley agrees:

> We have known for nearly a half century that self-managed teams are far more productive than any other form of organizing. There

is a clear correlation between participation and productivity. In fact, productivity gains in truly self-managed work environments are at minimum 35 percent higher than in traditionally managed organizations.[2]

Why are self-managed teams more productive? If personalized participation is such a high value in our culture, it is going to be indispensable in the place where people spend most of their time: work. People want to have their opinions heard. They want to push back on company practices without having to fear that their job is at stake. And they want to belong—to know their cohorts care what is going on in their lives as well as their minds. Self-managed teams make for a better, more connective work environment, and in turn, more productive workers.

Collective Intelligence

But there is another theory surrounding the success of self-managed teams that goes beyond mere social dynamics: people seem to make better decisions together than apart. They are collectively "more intelligent." James Surowiecki, in his book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, uses Google's wildly successful search engine technology as an example. Google pushed ahead of Yahoo and every other search engine in the early 2000s. At the core of the Google system is a calculating method called "PageRank"—an algorithm that allows the collected human wisdom of the Web to cull for essential information and rate the results for relevance. Surowiecki explains:

> In that 0.12 seconds, what Google is doing is asking the entire Web to decide which page contains the most useful information, and the page that gets the most votes goes first on the list. And that page, or the one immediately beneath it, more often than not is in fact the one with the most useful information.[3]

Collective intelligence isn't just about the aggregate human brain on the Internet, however. It is increasingly how the best business, scientific, and creative work gets done. In its internal operations, Google applies the same principle of groupthink that it did to its technology. Employees are encouraged to post ideas for new products

on an internal website. Colleagues then vote for their favorite idea. Those ideas with the most votes get pushed to the top for strategic attention.[4] In 2005, Google sponsored a contest that drew 14,500 eager programmers. The contest resulted in an entire library of competitive new products.

In *The Wisdom of Crowds,* Surowiecki contrasts traditional, top-down decision making with collective intelligence:

> [The wisdom of crowds] helps explain why, for the past fifteen years, a few hundred amateur traders in the middle of Iowa have done a better job of predicting election results than Gallup polls have. The wisdom of crowds has something to tell us about why the stock market works (and about why, every so often, it stops working). . . . It's essential to good science, and it has the potential to make a profound difference in the way companies do business. . . . We feel the need to "chase the expert." [But] the argument of this book is that chasing the expert is a mistake, and a costly one at that. We should stop hunting and ask the crowd (which, of course, includes the geniuses as well as everyone else) instead. Chances are, it knows.[5]

Surowiecki's summary of the scientific collaboration involved in the discovery of the SARS virus is riveting. On March 17, 2003, after China had announced the spread of an unknown and deadly virus, the World Health Organization embarked on an unprecedented effort termed the "collaborative multi-center research project." By April 16, they announced their findings: the Corona virus was the one that had caused SARS. By isolating it so quickly, they were able to save the lives of potentially millions of people. The most incredible aspect of this project, however, was that no one was actually "in charge." Surowiecki explains:

> Although WHO orchestrated the creation of the network of labs, there was no one at the top dictating what different labs would do, what viruses or samples they would work on, or how information would be exchanged. The labs agreed that they would share all the relevant data they had, and they agreed to talk every morning, but other than that it was really up to them to make the collaboration work. . . . In the absence of top-down direction, the laboratories did a remarkably good job of organizing themselves. The collaborative

nature of the project gave each lab the freedom to focus on what it
believed to be the most promising lines of investigation. . . . And
the result was that this cobbled-together multinational alliance
found an answer to its problem as quickly and efficiently as any
top-down organization could have.[6]

Missing the Memo

Significance, influence, interaction, collective intelligence—all of
these values describe an essential shift from passivity to reflexivity.
We are no longer content to travel in lockstep fashion through life
like faceless, isolated units performing our one little job on an assem-
bly line. This attitudinal shift is nothing short of revolutionary. True
to form, Western Christendom seems oblivious to its implications.
But it is the entrepreneurial church (congregations of roughly one
thousand and above) that seems particularly clueless about the shift
from the passive to the reflexive. And this, despite all its posturing
about cultural relevance.

This disconnect shouldn't really surprise us. Large-church leaders
have been trained in the modern, command-and-control paradigm
for thirty years. Here, organizations aren't seen so much as gather-
ings of people with a common purpose but as machines. There is no
irony here. Machine parts don't have minds or muscles to flex. They
don't contribute to a process or innovate improvements. Machine
parts simply do their job, which is, of course, to keep the machine
functioning.

The mechanical paradigm or organization largely explains why
modern church leaders are trained as CEOs, not shepherds. Sheep
have their own ideas of what, where, and when they want to eat.
They may not want to lie down by quiet waters and go to sleep at
eight. They just might want to check out the watercress down by the
streambed. Or they might want to head out over the next ridge to see
if there are any other flocks out there. Conveniently, machine parts
don't get ideas. They just get to work, and they work according to
specification.

Church members who don't comprehend this three-decade shift in
leadership paradigms are frustrated that their CEO pastor is so self-
absorbed. They were looking for a shepherd—albeit, one with a big
name and a big flock. What many of them ended up with instead was

a "my-way-or-the-highway" autocrat—a top-down aficionado whose ecclesiastical machine whirs only to the sound of his own voice and functions tightly within the parameters of his own limited vision.

One doesn't have to be on the pastors' conference circuit long to figure out that prime-time clergy (ages forty to fifty-five), are marinated in this kind of thinking. They have been told repeatedly that this is the only leadership model that will ensure success. (And make no mistake: in new millennium America, success equals the greatest number of seats filled on Sunday morning.) Theirs is a mono-vocal, mono-vision world—one that affords the most uniformity and thus the most control. It is a world of hyperpragmatics where the ends (church growth) can justify the most dehumanizing of processes.

Pity the member who questions the machine and develops any significant influence. Sooner or later, that member will be disposed of—shunned, silenced, and quietly removed from any position of authority on staff, boards, worship teams, or within the most lowly of programs. Unwittingly, this member has run headlong into an industrial age anachronism: "the great man with the plan" methodology. And he or she has lost.

But it is not only individual members who lose. It is God's kingdom and the waiting world that is being sacrificed. Sacrificed on the altar of pastoral ego. The question is, how long can these antiquated, top-down systems last? As long as people will let them. In a push-back world, hierarchy can function only in the womb of passivity, which may be good news—at least on the survival level—for big religion. Because, if there is anything the entrepreneurial church is good at creating, it is compliant cultures—those Stepford-like minicities populated with otherwise savvy, creative human beings. Yet these otherwise savvy children of God somehow missed the memo: they have a brain, a voice, and a Jacobesque call to wrestle, not only with the living God, but with whatever institution claims to hold all truth inside its too perfect confines. Is it any wonder that megachurches proliferate in areas of the country where the church attendance percentages are well above the national norm?[7] This is not quantum physics. It's the law of supply and demand. Entrepreneurial churches thrive in the most churched areas of the country because they are populated with the already churched, not the unchurched. And their leaders know this, despite their incessant outreach-speak. They know who their real target market is: it is hothoused Christians. And if hothoused Christians are anything, they are passive.

If passivity is a requirement for participation in big-church America, then it is no wonder that most new world citizens wouldn't put so much as a tire mark on our parking lots. Maybe they get what we refuse to get: *supersized ecclesia is as much about power as it is about God.* With luxurious facilities bordering on the obscene, organizational hierarchies designed to feed pastoral ego, and constituencies of the robotically religious (who else would tolerate living in a machine?), it's not hard to figure out that one's story, creativity, and opinions aren't welcome. Newsflash: the "Forty Days of Honest Dialogue" campaign is *not* coming to your local suburban church-plex anytime soon. So much for relevance in a reflexive culture, the members of which will most likely keep driving past our parking lots. No one has to tell a new world citizen that power-and-control religion is about monologue, not dialogue. It is about one leader's vision; one take on what God is up to in the community, the nation, and the world; one single, often blurry, and out-of-context frame in this speeding movie we call life.

Sameness as Terminal Illness

Passive systems are systems of sameness. Yet sameness is eventually terminal. Ask any biologist and he or she will tell you that diversity and the adaptability necessary to sustain it are exactly what is required for living systems to thrive. Eliminate even a few species from an ecosystem, and the system begins to fail. So it is in human systems. We need difference, not because it looks good to the outside world, not because it is mandated at some denominational level, but because it is healthy. We think, work, learn, respond, and create better in the midst of a rich tapestry of the human family. Richard Florida, in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*,[8] researches those cities on the cutting edge of innovation, and they all have one thing in common: a high diversity of people groups and lifestyles. Surowiecki comments about our penchant for sameness:

> Groups that are too much alike find it harder to keep learning because each member is bringing less and less to the table. Homogeneous groups are great at doing what they do well, but they become progressively less able to investigate alternatives. . . . [They spend] too much time exploiting and not enough time exploring. . . . But,

if you can assemble a diverse group of people who possess varying degrees of knowledge and insight, you're better off entrusting it with major decisions rather than leaving them in the hands of one or two people, no matter how smart those people are.[9]

Diversity may well be one of the primary keys to innovation, but it is hardly a lived value within entrepreneurial church circles, be they baby boomers or shaved-haired twentysomethings. In modern, mono-vocal religion, the lack of substantive influence by people of color, females, and singles is appalling. For instance, females make up well over 60 percent of the average entrepreneurial congregation's constituency, while their representation as leaders outside the realm of children and women's programs is usually less than 1 percent. Those few who are given staff or lay positions in nontraditional areas are rarely more than glorified clerks or assistants. The female staff member may have a plaque on her door that indicates she is a respected part of the "team." She and her female volunteer cohort may even have their names in the bulletin as heads of programs. But both know what is really expected of them. It is to do the mundane, lower-level work of getting things done. Ultimately, it is to keep the lie alive—to feign diversity in a system that has no interest in actually embracing it.

The Neutralized Voices of Women

When it comes to women, what we are actually seeing within big-box church is the engineered neutralization of well over half of the human voices. And it is the case, not just in entrepreneurial congregations with an average age of forty or fifty, but surprisingly, in church plants with an average age of twenty-five to thirty. To quote Einstein, "No problem can be solved from the level of thinking that created it." And that statement describes twenty- and thirty-something church circles only too accurately. In the case of diversity, most young church leaders are blithely oblivious to their entrenchment in patriarchy and the command-control systems inherent to it.

The debilitating DNA of patriarchy—hierarchical organizational structures and their marginalization of the powerless—is tenacious, and to shake it loose, it will take an enormous amount of intentional, humbling work. But shake it we must because the reality is this: hierarchy (command and control) fails to move the reflexive souls of new

world citizens, regardless of gender or race. It simply ensures their absence. And in case we haven't noticed, there are now a plethora of spiritual experiences waiting for them outside the cloning parlors of big churchdom. Carole Gilligan is right. "Hierarchy always creates an underground."[10] These days, undergrounds simply vote with their feet and go elsewhere—somewhere they can talk back. Wrestle. Contribute. Make a difference. Have a voice. Challenge Dan Rather. Or join a prayer circle on Belief.net.

If we really can't accept the reality of the flattened, antihierarchy world described in Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*,[11] then perhaps we should take a look at Scripture and see what God had in mind. Jesus flattened the universe in order to reach it. God Incarnate—the Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Infinite—leaves the realms of glory, subjecting himself to human existence and pouring himself out for the sake of all creation. This is hierarchy confounded. Power and position undone. And Paul's impassioned plea to the Philippians encapsulates this divine deconstruction of dominance so perfectly that, to this day, it is considered to be the Great Prayer of the Church—one of the clearest and most compelling expressions of the gospel in any form. Yes, according to Jesus, the world is indeed flat. He flattened it himself.

> In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
>
> Philippians 2:5–8 TNIV

Jesus's flattened world was no more clearly evident than in his relationship to women. He didn't draw them out just to comfort them or even to elevate them out of their oppression. That he did. But first and foremost, he drew them out for the sake of the kingdom. Their obvious discernment, strength, vision, courage, and ready response of faith made them the logical forerunners in the spread of the gospel. Who they were qualified them for leadership, which is exactly why

Jesus trusted them (and trusted them first) with some of the greatest truths of his Person and ministry.

Jesus first revealed his identity as the Son of God to a woman—and an outcast woman at that (John 4). She responded (at great risk) by evangelizing. It took a woman to understand that Jesus was to be crucified, even though Jesus had told his disciples what was to happen (Matt. 26:6–13). She responded (again, at great risk) in profound grief and worship, anointing Jesus's feet with a perfume that had cost her everything, and with her tears. Jesus affirmed her act as exemplary, as an act of leadership to the rest of the world. "I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached in all the world, what this woman has done will be told, and people will remember her" (v. 13).

Finally, women were the first to see the resurrected Christ (Luke 24:1–12). Was that an accident? Hardly. Again, Jesus trusted that these women would not only believe, but in believing, they would do the hard thing—risk not being heard and not being believed. Which, of course, was the case. The consequence of their obedient, apostolic act—encountering the risen Son of God and voicing what they had seen and heard—was not much different from what women today experience within the patriarchy of big-church. Those women who see and hear God well and speak about what they see and hear can expect, in too many cases, to be dismissed.

Many women see and hear God well. But they also tend to see people well and the systems of relationships people create, whether in personal or business spheres. Business experts are now observing the remarkable feminine tenacity in the fight for collaborative systems. Their larger vision seems to be long-term, organizational health, with many sacrificing reputation and easy advancement in order to flatten top-heavy, unresponsive structures. Peter Senge, one of the world's most respected voices on leadership and culture, is struck by the disproportionate number of women who are "making things happen," especially when it comes to durable, organizational change. He observes: "Women managers and executives are leading many of the most important sustainability innovations. . . . They seem especially willing to take on long-term issues that deal with imbalances in the system as a whole."[12]

Women also seem more comfortable with ambiguity, unpredictability, and crisis than their male counterparts. Not surprisingly, all three of these realities are inherent to the postmodern context. William

Bergquist, in his groundbreaking book *The Postmodern Organization*, described the kind of leader that the postmodern world requires. And he places women at the forefront:

> What will be the nature of the newly emerging postmodern leader? He or she will be one who can master the unexpected, and often unwanted. He or she (and more often, it will be she) must be able to tolerate ambiguity. Most importantly, the postmodern leader will acknowledge and even generally anticipate the occurrence and impact of rogue events (i.e., those unforeseen incidents that occur from within the system or outside of it).[13]

Is the anticontrol, relational, intuitive edge Bergquist describes here the sole hegemony of the female? One would be hard pressed to find such a view among sociologists and psychologists. Even populist works underpin a more holistic perspective. Malcom Gladwell, in his bestselling book *Blink,*[14] proposes that relational/intuitive propensities—those necessary for effective systems thinking and certainly for handling irreversible change—are a common denominator of all humans. He contends that most of us, including many women, have simply learned to mute or silence right-brained information, especially in the modern era.

Muting Intuition

Psychologist Carol Gilligan is famous for her concept of muting—of editing the deeper, intuitive self. In her seminal book *In a Different Voice*[15] (see also her latest work, *The Birth of Pleasure*[16]), she traces the severe editing of the relational/intuitive voice in males to early socialization. This socialization culminates at about age eight, when boys adopt a more distant, objectified interaction with the world—one that replaces interdependence with independence, and relationships with objects. This socially mandated flight from the relational in young boys also results in a constriction of the emotional range, an enforced editing of what are perceived to be "weaker" emotional expressions: sensing, caring, attachment, compassion, grief, and so on. The result is what Gilligan refers to as "voicing-over": a pseudomale orientation to the world that is less attuned to the forces of connection and certainly less attuned to what we have come to know as right-brain

operations. The strong attraction evangelical men have to neopatri-archical works such as John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*[17] may actually be rooted in what Gilligan describes as the socialized amputation of the male relational/intuitive bents. What Eldredge actually roman-ticizes in his book is the all-too-familiar male caricature, the male cut off from the expressive and vulnerable self of early boyhood; the self-sufficient, invulnerable, impenetrable rescuer. Perhaps, when one has little memory of a complex self, caricature is the best one can hope for.

Editing the authentic self is not only a male problem. Much of Gilligan's work focuses on how girls edit themselves. She contends that girls begin the voicing-over process sometime around puberty. Anywhere from the age of ten to twelve, girls start a process of con-scious silencing. But they not only muzzle one sphere of knowledge as boys do, they muzzle both their rational and intuitive insights. Why? The reason is simple. In our persistently patriarchal culture, females who know what they know and speak what they know—whatever the source of their knowing—are at risk. Girls figure out early on that knowledge is power. And power, even in the new-millennium West, is still a male birthright. For a female, to know anything and then to speak what she knows is a fairly certain path to rejection. In "great man with the plan" circles, be they Dockers big-church or frayed-jeans hip, it is a sure path.

Yet what happens when women begin to release their voices? They begin to understand just how well they are wired to lead in the new "flattened" landscape. If the best leadership in the postmodern setting is connective, intuitive, and responsive at its core—if it is about the nativity of God's work in community versus captivity to one person's and one gender's ego and agenda—then the gutting of female influ-ence in the kingdom is not only brainless, it is suicidal.

Female Christ-followers who possess true leadership skills do not need to lead because it is politically correct. Neither do they need to lead in order to assuage what is most often a millimeter-thin veneer of male guilt, whether age twenty-five or fifty. Women with leadership abilities need to lead because, more often than not, they get this new world and they get it really well. In a world weary of hyperindividualism, top-down systems, pedestal personalities, and I-win-you-lose dichotomies, the natural feminine resonance with the flattened world—conversation, collaboration, participation, influence,

presence, collective intelligence, and empowerment—has raised the cultural bar for what true leadership is and does.

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Leadership in a truly flattened world has no precedents. Never, in the history of humankind, have individuals and communities had the power to influence so much, so quickly. The rules of engagement have changed, and they have changed in favor of those who leave the addictive world of hierarchy to function relationally, intuitively, systemically, and contextually. Male leaders—yes, even the male leaders of entrepreneurial churchdom—know this at their core. They realize they're playing a deadly endgame, and that the hierarchical clock is ticking. More than that, however, they have a deep knowledge of another way of being, though they may rail against it, retreating for comfort into cardboard cutout versions of both leadership and masculinity. But if they're honest, they know they have tasted the new essence that is required of leadership now. They know it in the recesses of their boyhood memories and in the experience of intimacy, art, music, story, film, hospital prayers, and all that human beings are at their best, together. Those who are up to the challenge of the new world will draw upon that deep knowledge. And they will look to the marginalized—including women—not as necessary evils in a politically correct world, but as their own leaders, mentors, and guides. The brightest will finally dump the myth of the great man, park their egos, and follow the one Great Man into the relinquishment of power.
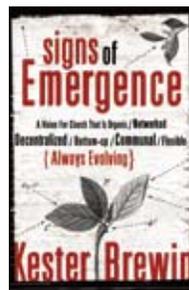
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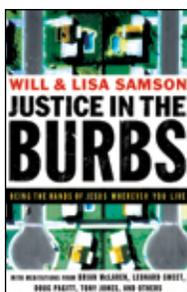
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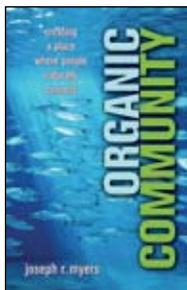
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