

FAITHFUL REFORMATION:  
THE IMPORTANCE OF APOSTOLICITY AND ORTHODOX  
CONSENSUS FOR EMERGING CHRISTIAN EXPRESSIONS

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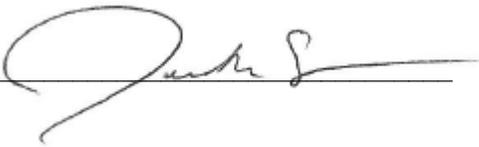
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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis, that this is my own original work and that no part of this thesis has been published, submitted for publication, or submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution. Where other people's work has been used, this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic and departmental requirements.

Signature: 

Date: 4/24/2018

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we have considered *if, how, or to what extent* emerging Christian expressions within the context of the Emerging Church (EC) movement, and related Emerging Missional partners and postcedents, might reform, contextualize, innovate, or revise Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines to reform the church and inculturate the gospel in postmodern contexts, while retaining continuity and congruence with apostolicity and orthodoxy. We also wished to see *if, how, or to what extent* EC voices considered accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy and, if not, to what they were accountable and also to what extent they remain authentically Christian. We have done so by examining the perspectives of leading EC authors, practitioners, and current and historical conversation partners including Vincent of Lérins and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, using historical, theological, ethnographic and narrative inquiry and analysis methods.

Our review of literature from EC authors provides insights into debates that led to fracturing of the EC movement and that offer challenges to orthodoxy. Our analysis also reveals methods EC authors appealed to in order to justify their views, or defense or revisions of core historic doctrines. When they rarely appealed to orthodoxy, there were two common but divergent approaches in which orthodoxy was either viewed as a system of beliefs, in which one could treat orthodox doctrines trans-subjectively, or else as being subjectively grounded in the incarnate Christ, in which accountability to Christ was primarily evidenced in materialist acts.

We also placed our analysis of key EC sources and their approaches to apostolicity and orthodoxy in conversation with the historical perspectives of Vincent of Lérins and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as with current EC practitioners, via an ethnographic questionnaire. We found that Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy*, instead of seeing orthodoxy as a system of universal beliefs, or as entirely subjective, appeared to center orthodoxy in the unified life of the Body of Christ in which doctrine may grow and, yet, its apostolic meaning is safeguarded by requiring Christians to surrender current interpretations of Scripture to the universal ecumenical

consensus of the Body of Christ through history. Then too, our review of Bonhoeffer's works reveals the ways that he provides room for questioning and flexibility, while holding that the creedal beliefs and sacred practices of the apostolic faith must be surrendered to as-is, as agents of revelation. In further analysis of primary sources and ethnographic responses, the study also reveals a third EC approach to apostolicity and orthodoxy, in which, in synergy with Vincent and Bonhoeffer, orthodox doctrine is seen as the unified faith, obedience, worship, and witness of the Body of Christ, and in which body doctrine may contextually grow in faithful alignment with apostolicity. Additionally, we considered Vincent's method as providing orthodox EC voices a rule to guide contextual listening, inculturation and growth of doctrine while ensuring continuity and congruity with apostolicity.

# CHAPTER ONE

## OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The 'Emerging Church' is a working label for an exciting and sometimes controversial movement-and-conversation about Christian reformation on the part of a collection of emerging and missional Christian leaders, and expressions who are seeking to reform or innovate their values, language, forms, practices, and sometimes even their theology or doctrine, to more missionally inculturate the gospel within postmodern western culture. Missiologist Rick Richardson has classified the Emerging Church (herein referred to as the 'EC') as being part of a larger Emerging Missional Movement whose members share a commitment to similar 'missional' values that influence their forms and practices and cause them to focus on moving outward into the culture rather than seeking only to attract the culture into their church structures. (Richardson 2013, 132)<sup>1</sup>

The reforming work of EC and related Emerging Missional expressions has typically been catalysed by their disillusionment with the traditional western church's values, forms, language, and practices that EC voices often perceive as being overly institutional, commercialized, denominationally divided, attractional, instead of missional, and culturally irrelevant for the larger postmodern western culture. (Ibid) As they have engaged in the reformation of traditional western church forms, language and practices, some EC voices have also, in some instances, revised or deconstructed orthodoxy as well, bringing into question both the orthodoxy and apostolicity of their emerging innovation, reformation and inculturation.<sup>2</sup> Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Richardson, "Emerging Missional Movements: An Overview and Assessment of Some Implications for Mission(s)," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2013), 132. Richardson has created a helpful overview of five distinct 'streams' of the larger Emerging Missional movement and has suggested that the Emerging Church is distinguished from other Emerging Missional streams by a desire to more radically innovate or reform their methods, language, culture, ecclesiology, and in many cases to also reform or revise their theology or doctrine with a focus on engaging postmodern culture. We will describe the five streams further below.

<sup>2</sup> We have used the term 'inculturation' in this study to mean the contextual 're-expressing' or fresh narration of the gospel to a culture, in contrast with using 'enculturation' to mean being socialized by a culture. See: Justin S. Upkong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, Eldoret, Kenya (1984), 30.

in this study, we have asked whether, amidst reformation and innovation in Christian forms, language, practices, doctrine, and interpretation of Scripture, *if, how* and *to what extent* Emerging Churches, and related Emerging Missional expressions, are held accountable to apostolicity or orthodoxy and to what extent apostolicity and orthodoxy are considered by emerging expressions, if at all? Where they are not valued, we have tried to discover *to what* such expressions are held accountable and what distinctives allow them to remain uniquely Christian as they seek to inculturate the gospel within the larger postmodern western culture.

Other key reforming Christian voices, such as Thomas Oden, have additionally asked whether Emerging thinkers are even aware of the antecedents to Emerging conversations about reformation, innovation, revision and accountability to apostolicity that are found within the debates of the patristic era.<sup>3</sup> For Oden, for instance, there is a chain of apostolicity, via the consensus of orthodoxy that has historically provided the boundaries for true reformation. However, if Emerging leaders do not at the very least recognize a basic set of guiding principles for their reformation, or revision, of forms, practices or even doctrine or hermeneutics, that are in congruence with the original creedal beliefs of the historic faith, do they then to any extent have an “immune system to resist heresy,” as Thomas Oden has asked in regards to the EC movement, or will they instead continue to fracture into a broad array of divergent expressions that no longer bear any recognizable DNA of the original apostolic faith? (Oden Feb. 8, 1998)

On the question of accountability to apostolicity in theology and doctrine, Andrew Perriman, a more progressive theologian within the EC, suggested that EC communities need only “internal accountability,” in local expressions to be held accountable to the truth. (Perriman 2005a) Still another EC theologian, Pete Rollins, has pointed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his question “Who is Christ actually for us, today?”<sup>4</sup> as the key question of accountability,

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Also See: Stephen R. Goodwin, *World Christianity in Local Context: Essays in Memory of David A. Kerr* Vol. 1 (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 87; and, Justin S. Upkong, “Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Bible in a World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics*, ed. Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 17-32.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas C. Oden, “Our Time: The Opportunities of a Postmodern Culture,” *Modern Reformation* Vol 4, Issue 5 (Sept. 1, 1995b).

<sup>4</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Touchstone, (1944)

interpreting Bonhoeffer to say that one's experience of the true Christ *now*, in materialist acts and being, takes precedence over all Christian beliefs in discussions of accountability for epistemology, hermeneutics, doctrines and practices. (Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv, 20-21) On the other hand, more traditionally orthodox voices such as Thomas Oden, who care deeply about alignment with apostolicity and orthodoxy, have argued Christians are more in danger of falling prey to a subjective, culturally informed interpretation of Christ if they meet him only in the local community or individual experience *now*, than if they allow themselves to meet Christ together with the eternal chorus of the 'Body of Christ' across the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Our work, conducted in this study, around issues of accountability for reformation, innovation or revision is necessary because of the apparent lack of attention to the concept of *consensual orthodoxy* within EC discussions of accountability; a concept in which orthodoxy is seen as not only tradition or a system, but rather as a living chorus of the Body of Christ across all cultures, places and times.<sup>6</sup> As we will see in this study, the answers provided by several leading EC authors on issues of epistemology and hermeneutics are typically that persons can trust in their experiences, in their discerning in the Spirit, in the accountability provided by their local communities, or in Scriptures as interpreted via their individual hermeneutics or those of their systematic or tradition. At the same time, while we have noted traces of a more ancient and consensual approach to epistemology and interpretation of scripture and doctrine amidst a minority of EC voices as well, which we have explored in Chapter Six, overall, few notable EC authors appear to have explained how they can prove that they are not only accountable to themselves or are guilty of placing their values, experiences, and interpretations, or those of their local community, tradition or systematic, over Scripture or even over God. Then too, for those more deconstructionist EC voices who have also, in embracing the postmodern deconstructionism of philosophers such as Jacques Derrida,<sup>7</sup> come to view all beliefs as contextual interpretations,

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1997), 279.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Oden, *Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (Harper One, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> See: St. Vincent of Lérins, *The Commonitory of St. Vincent of Lérins*, trans. Rev. C.A. Heurtley, D.D., ed. Paul A. Boer, Sr. (Veritas Splendor Publications, (1886) 2012), 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> John Caputo, whose views intersect with some EC deconstructionists such as Peter Rollins, as will be

we have asked if there are then any remaining 'marks' that evidence congruity with the Christ of the Apostles?

In this study, we have thus explored the question of *if, how* and *to what extent*, amidst reformation, contextualization, innovation and inculturation, Emerging Christian expressions have approached accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy and, if not, to what they are accountable. Further, we have tried to discover how such Emerging expressions might seek to reform, innovate or revise Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines to inculturate the gospel amidst current postmodern contexts in continuity-and-congruity with apostolicity and orthodoxy. In order to explore these questions, we have conducted questionnaires, participant observations and a literature review of key EC thinkers. We then also placed EC voices into conversation with St. Vincent of Lérins, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Oden, who provide historic thinking around accountability to apostolicity, to explore the essential distinctives that must remain for an innovative and contextual expression to remain authentically Christian.

## **1.2 The Research Problem**

The main problem we wish to explore is whether, amidst reformation, contextualization, innovation, or revision in theology, doctrine, language, ecclesiology, and practices, to reform the church and inculturate the gospel in a postmodern culture, *if, how* and *to what extent* Emerging expressions know it is indeed the gospel of Christ that they are inculturating? Further, how are they held accountable for congruity and continuity with the message *of* Christ and testimony *about* Christ as transmitted by the apostolic witnesses? Together, these questions are vital in attempting to ascertain whether these new expressions are reforming, contextualizing or innovating within the boundaries of apostolicity and orthodoxy, and to what extent, or whether they are instead practicing hermeneutical, doctrinal and practical innovations or revisions that the apostolic witnesses and orthodox consensus would not recognize as faithfully Christian.

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further discussed in Chapter Five of this study, follows Derrida in claiming: "Atheism, theism are belief systems...they're contingent and I think they're accidents of birth or of education or surrounding influences." John Caputo, "Postmodernism and Religion," *Commonsenseatheism.com* (Sept. 15, 2010), accessed Jan. 2018, <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=9750>.

### 1.3 Objectives of Research

Our objective in this study is to explore *if, how* and *to what extent*, amidst reformation, contextualization, innovation, and sometimes revision, to inculturate the gospel in postmodern contexts, Emerging Christian expressions have approached accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy and, if not, to what they are accountable. As such, we have also aimed to create a snapshot of key issues of fracturing, challenges to orthodoxy and justifications for revisions of orthodoxy within the EC. Further, we have also tried to discover how Emerging expressions might seek to reform the church, or update or contextualize Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines, to creatively inculturate the gospel amidst current postmodern contexts in continuity-and-congruity with apostolicity and orthodoxy.

The impact that this research will have is first to create a 'snapshot' of some vital issues that have created conflict and divergence for the EC and related Emerging Missional expressions in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. We have also tried to highlight critical issues and popular Emerging theological movements that promise further contention within the church, especially as seen in the more recent deconstructionist, pluralist, and materialist a/theistic movements of some key voices whom we have highlighted within the EC. Further, we have also engaged in an ethnographic study to also trace the trajectory of EC streams, after fracturing in the last decade, and to note their recent movements and approaches to orthodoxy. In addition, we have brought samples of EC authors and respondents into dialogue with historical conversation partners such as St. Vincent of Lérins, whose method of *consensual orthodoxy* provided for the contextual growth of doctrine while also ensuring that it remained authentically Christian and may thus prove a helpful historical rule to guide flexible but faithful Emerging inculturation amidst postmodern contexts. Then too, in examining Vincent's historical method in conversation with the EC missiological movement, we have further sought to use his historical voice to critique *how* or *to what extent* past and current Emerging expressions approach apostolicity and orthodoxy as Vincent conceptualized them, and, for those who do not, how they then justify their revisions of orthodoxy as authentically Christian. Additionally, we have also placed the historical voices of

both Vincent and Dietrich Bonhoeffer into conversation with Thomas Oden and orthodox EC voices together to explore whether there is a 'third' EC approach to orthodoxy, between that of orthodoxy as a system-of-truth-claims and orthodoxy-as-subjective, that may suggest an epistemological 'way forward' for contextual innovation, reformation, and inculturation that remains faithful to the core consensual belief, confession, worship, unity, and witness of the historic Christian faith.

#### **1.4 Justification for Research**

The purpose of this research was to ascertain how EC churches, partners, and postcedents understood or practiced accountability to Scripture, creedal beliefs and apostolicity amidst issues of fracturing, updating, contextualization, and inculturation. If they did not consider consensual orthodox interpretations of Scriptures, creeds or core historic practices of the church to play a significant role in their accountability to Christ and the apostolic faith, then we wished to ascertain how they justified such revisions, and to what they were accountable. Further, an original contribution of this study is to have provided a 'snapshot' of the recent EC movement, causes of divergence, their postcedents, and approaches to epistemology, hermeneutics, and doctrine which shaped their views on soteriology, orthodoxy, and apostolicity. A further benefit is to have consulted historical voices such as Vincent and Bonhoeffer to suggest an orthodox yet contextual emerging epistemology for the EC missiological movement. Beneficiaries of the research include: Emerging Churches, postcedents, Missional communities, those interested in the intersection of missional inculturation with orthodoxy and faith transmission, those interested in Paleo-Orthodoxy<sup>8</sup> in conversation with Post-Modern Christians and those interested in the work of Bonhoeffer around 'obedient' thinking and sacred practices.

#### **1.5 Literature Review**

In this study, I have relied upon some of the few notable academic studies of the EC and

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<sup>8</sup> Oden 1995a, 130. Oden used the term 'Paleo-Orthodoxy' to denote the early consensual orthodoxy of Christianity.

Emerging Missional movement, which we have also detailed below, including a typography of Emerging Missional streams provided by missiologist Rick Richardson in “Emerging Missional Movements: An Overview and Assessment of Some Implications for Mission(s)” (2013) and a categorization of the three sub-streams of the Emerging Church supplied by missiologist Ed Stetzer in “First Person: Understanding the Emerging Church.” (2006) Both Richardson and key EC voices, such as Mark Driscoll, would notably rely on Stetzer’s work for their respective typographies.<sup>9</sup> I have also relied upon numerous primary theological and pastoral works by key EC thinkers, including Brian McLaren, Mark Driscoll, Tony Jones, Peter Rollins, Robert Webber, and many more, that I have also listed below.

In addition, it is essential to make our readers aware that due to the largely popular, postmodern, and missiological nature of the Emerging Church movement, EC leaders uniquely catalyzed and fostered much of their conversations, communities, and vital debates via blogs, websites, videos, articles, and interviews, such as can even be seen in the fact that Ed Stetzer’s seminal categorization of three EC sub-streams, which I have detailed below, was published in an online article. (Ibid) Consequentially, I discovered that many leading EC voices and dialogue partners, including Brian McLaren, Mark Driscoll, Tony Jones, Peter Rollins, and even Scot McKnight, also often evidenced their more viscerally honest approaches or responses to issues of theology, doctrine, the church, orthodoxy, and critiques of one another, via blogs, articles, videos, and interviews as well. As such, the EC artifacts found in these more popular and postmodern forms of online communication also demonstrated much of the earliest and clearest evidence of division, heterodoxy, and justifications for revisions of orthodoxy amidst the EC, than was often evident in academic studies on the movement or in their popular-facing books. Thus, in our objectives of providing a snapshot and evaluation of the key debates and theological justifications that caused fracturing of the EC, and their approaches to apostolicity, orthodoxy, and sources of accountability, the popular and internet-based sources that have also been relied upon in this

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<sup>9</sup>See: Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (Zondervan, 2004).

study were used as primary sources; since many key debates and vital conversations were actually often situated in internet sources such as blogs, interviews, articles, and videos.

I have also consulted many additional primary sources provided by our conversation partners for this study including St. Vincent of Lérins' *The Commonitory of St. Vincent of Lérins*. (1886) 2012) Vincent's work has provided a historical blueprint for faithful and flexible reformation and contextualization of doctrine that avoids heresy via accountability to the consensus formed in the Body of Christ. Additionally, in explaining the importance of Vincent's historic method for the EC, I have also relied upon Thomas C. Oden. Oden has helped me to better understand how Vincent's approach to faithful reformation might be explained to postmodern voices, especially those of contextual theology, as seen in Oden's works: *Agenda for Theology* (1979); *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (2009); *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (1995a); and *Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (2002); as well as key articles, including "Then and Now: The Recovery of Patristic Wisdoms" (1990); "Our Time: The Opportunities of a Postmodern Culture" (1995b); and "Our Uniquely Undisciplined Moment." (2007) I have also engaged with primary works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer including *Christ the Center* (1978); *Act and Being* (1931) 2009); *Discipleship* (1937) 2003); *Ethics* (1949) 2005); *Life Together* (1939) 2005); *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1944) 1997); and *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. (2012) Understanding Bonhoeffer's work is vital since it has been used to support deconstructions of orthodoxy by leading EC voice Peter Rollins, with whom I engaged in this study. However, I believe focusing Bonhoeffer's historical lens on such EC uses of his work will provide both critiques of such uses and a historical corrective.

Finally, I have additionally conducted ethnographic research of EC voices via a robust questionnaire as part of a narrative inquiry and analysis. This ethnographic engagement has helped me to further consider trends that I first noted in the primary literature of the EC.

### 1.5.1 Reliability of Sources

Whenever possible, I relied on academic sources. However, due to the nature of the EC

as a missiological movement in which the key voices most often wrote popular level books at best, but more commonly published their work via interviews, videos or blogs, I also had to turn to such popular primary sources for this postmodern movement and yet, whenever possible, I relied upon only those popular and online sources that represented primary sources evidencing vital EC conversations and debates. For our ethnographic work, I also relied upon the direct answers of EC voices to a questionnaire that I created.

### 1.5.2 Originality of Sources

To our knowledge, no one has yet brought Vincent of Lérins into conversation with the EC movement to use his questions and insights to engage with their thinking around accountability for reformation, to provide a narrative inquiry and analysis of their movement, and to suggest a method for faithful yet flexible inculturation of the gospel in current contexts. Further, to our knowledge, no one has yet conducted a thorough narrative inquiry and analysis of Emerging Churches around questions of accountability, orthodoxy, inculturation, and deconstruction, especially in conversation with Bonhoeffer's views on soteriology and the connection of epistemology with sacred belief and practice.

### 1.5.3 A Typography of the Emerging Church

As noted above, one of the most helpful overviews of the EC is provided by missiologist Rick Richardson in "Emerging Missional Movements: An Overview and Assessment of Some Implications for Mission(s)." (2013) Richardson is extremely helpful here in asserting that there is a variety of emerging Christian expressions, conversations and, networks, including the EC, who can be classified together as part of a larger Emerging Missional Movement due to a commitment to similar 'missional' values that influence their forms and practices. Richardson has created a succinct overview of five distinct 'streams' of the larger Emerging Missional movement and organized a typography in conversation with the work of Tom Sine, author of *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (2008), as well as additional conversation partners Craig Van Gelder, author of *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A*

*Community Led by the Spirit* (2007), and Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. (2007)

Per both Richardson (2013) and Alan Hirsch, in his article “Defining Missional” in *Christianity Today* (2008), being ‘missional’ means to focus on authentically moving out into the culture, engaging the larger world and incarnationally inculturating both the gospel and the kingdom of Christ within that world. Thus, according to Richardson, ‘missionally minded’ persons will often critique traditional western forms of church as being too ‘attractional’ via trying to attract the culture into their buildings, organizations, and programs rather than living incarnationally and missionally in the world. In contrast, ‘missional’ persons do not merely want to ‘reach out’ to neighbors, but to inhabit every corner of the world to be “an alternative kingdom community oriented toward service and mission and to be the incarnation-like extension of Jesus’ ministry, values, and presence into the world.” (Richardson 2013)

According to Richardson, movements and expressions that have been categorized as part of the larger Emerging Missional movement include five key streams: an *Emerging Missional* stream, a *Multiethnic* stream, a *Multipling* stream, a *Neo-Monastic* stream and an *Emerging Church* stream. (Richardson 2013; Sine 2008) Though there is some overlap in the five streams of the Emerging Missional movement, and some rejection of the categories by members of the streams<sup>10</sup> due to the inherently dynamic nature of emerging movements, thanks to the work of the missiologists noted above I have been provided with key distinctions that have allowed me to use helpful yet flexible categories for framing our conversations.

According to Richardson, (2013) the first stream of the Emerging Missional movement, the *Emerging Missional* stream, is the most directly influenced by the writing of Lesslie

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<sup>10</sup> See: Hirsch 2008. In disagreement with the classifications provided by Sine and Richardson, Hirsch took issue with the ‘missional’ label being applied to the Emerging Church, claiming it was primarily a renewal movement attempting to contextualize Christianity for a postmodern generation and that being ‘missional’ was more than engaging in social justice. Hirsch countered that to be missional meant to fully engage the world by living out the gospel in every sphere of the postmodern, post-Christian world just as Christ lived incarnationally amidst his culture. Richardson and Sine have provided a broader definition of ‘missional’ in which thinking about and talking about ‘missional’ values, and making efforts to embody them, qualifies as missional.

Newbigin as seen in his book, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (1989) This stream is mostly church-based and includes networks such as the *Gospel and Our Culture Network*. Unlike the Emerging Church stream, this stream also appears less focused on revising ecclesiology or doctrine than on working to understand the language and values of postmodern culture to help mainline and Evangelical churches inculturate the gospel in the wider culture.

The next stream of the Emerging Missional movement that Richardson identified is the *Neo-Monastic* stream. This stream draws inspiration from monastic and friar movements, such as the original Franciscan communities, as well as from 20<sup>th</sup> century intentional Christian communities such as Francis Schaeffer's *L'Abri*, *Youth With a Mission*, or the many small communities that formed concurrent with the Jesus People Movement; including Keith Green's *Last Days Ministries*, John Michael Talbot's *Little Portion Hermitage*, Viv Grigg's *Servants to Asia's Urban Poor* communities and John Hayes' *InnerChange* community. Viv Grigg and John Hayes' communities were especially important late twentieth century examples of new-monastics who in turn were also influenced by urban missional communities founded in the mid-twentieth century, such as John M. Perkins' *Christian Community Development Association* in Jackson, Mississippi.<sup>11</sup> More recent neo-monastic and new-friar communities have subsequently grown out of the collaborative work of Shane Claiborne (*Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (2006), Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (*New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (2008), and other kindred 'New-Monastic' spirits within the network of communities that sprung out of Durham, North Carolina. Key traits of the *Neo-Monastic* stream include a desire to live in intentional community, to agree to a set of commitments or a rule of life together, and to often plant neo-monastic or new-friar communities among situations of poverty.

The next stream of the Emerging Missional Movement is the *Multi-ethnic* stream, which includes multi-ethnic and urban-centered churches and organizations, such as those led by Dave

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<sup>11</sup>I was influenced by time spent living alongside John Hayes' *InnerChange* order, an ecumenical New Friar order among the poor, at which time I was also made aware of the significant impact of John M. Perkins upon many New-Friars who sought to live incarnationally among persons on the margins. For John Hayes' vision for New Friar communities, please see: John Hayes, *Submerge: Living Deep in a Shallow World: Service, Justice and Contemplation among the World's Poor* (Regal, 2007).

Gibbons (*Xealots: Defying the Gravity of Normality* (2011) and John M. Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association and author of numerous important books for emerging communities including, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (1993), and *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right*. (1996) Then too, there is the *Multiplying* stream which includes Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. Both Emerging Missional streams are mostly church-based and are, per Richardson, typically more traditionally Evangelical in their theology, evangelism, and forms of church. However, Richardson claimed they are ‘missional’ in their focus on cultural issues that matter to the larger world. For the *Multiethnic* stream, for instance, they tend to focus on engaging cultural issues such as social justice and racial reconciliation, while for the *Multiplying* stream, they have shown an increased focus on ‘apostolic’ and ‘missional’ training of leaders and networks for holistic engagement with postmodern culture. Thus, though they are both typically church-based, both streams have shown an intense focus on engaging the culture beyond the church instead of only attracting persons inward. Lastly, the *Emerging Church* stream, the main focus of our study, is perhaps most differentiated from other streams by a desire to more radically innovate or reform their methods, language, culture, ecclesiology, and in many cases to also reform or revise their theology or doctrine with a focus on more holistically engaging with the *Zeitgeist* of postmodern culture via deep enculturation or inculturation in that culture. (Richardson, 2013)

In the *Emerging Church* stream, Missiologist Ed Stetzer (2006) also categorized three key sub-streams, which included: *Relevants* who were usually theologically orthodox, but culturally liberal in terms of updating their methods, language and styles to present a more culturally relevant church to the postmodern culture; *Reconstructionists*, who were also usually orthodox, but sought to remix their ecclesiology to present more ancient forms of church community that could holistically engage the postmodern culture; and *Revisionists*, who also tried to engage the postmodern culture but were also often open to revising traditional and orthodox doctrines and theology as well in dialogue with postmodern contexts.

#### 1.5.4 Primary Literature from within the Emerging Church

For the purposes of this study, I have primarily brought our questions around the need for accountability to apostolicity and consensual orthodoxy into dialogue with the Emerging Church stream of the overarching Emerging Missional movement that Richardson has discussed, which I have more often referred to herein as the 'EC.' I have focused our questions on the EC in part because it included the most progressive and controversial attempts to inculturate the gospel within, or to be enculturated by, postmodern western culture via the most radical reforms, innovations or revisions in language, practices, and doctrines. As I focus on the EC, it is crucial also to note the important voices and literature that developed within the EC as well as that produced by outsiders who have provided key classifications or critiques.

##### *1.5.4.1 Early Primary Literature on The Emerging Church*

In the first days of the EC movement, many emerging leaders were more focused on discipleship, innovation, and entrepreneurship within the alternative cultural streams of their generation than in leading a movement, writing books or creating typographies. They were mostly practitioners who spent their time at coffee shops, nightclubs, and skate parks and in writing blogs, seeking to bring the gospel to the places where their peers spent most of their time so that they could introduce them to the gospel via alternative language, worship, and forms not typically found in churches. Thus, since the movement began with practitioners, to trace the beginning of the EC and its literature, we must first turn to participant observations which were mostly recorded in the blogosphere. Unfortunately, many of the once busy EC blogs are now gone. With their passing, we have also lost many of the eyewitness accounts and primary literature of the movement. However, fortunately, much of the best participant ethnography was captured by Andrew Jones, an influential New Zealander who was part of the EC from its beginning and who provided detailed accounts of all things 'Emerging' via his still-active web blog, *TallSkinnyKiwi*.<sup>12</sup> Jones' blogs are a wealth of information about the EC, which he traced

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<sup>12</sup> See: Tallskinnykiwi, (n.d.), accessed Apr. 2018, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/>.

from its beginning in 1985 in Sheffield, England, through the formation of the Emerging Church Network in the U.S.A., in 1998, and then finally to what he termed its ‘death,’ in 2010, (A. Jones 2010a) due to debates and divisions discussed more in-depth in Chapter Two. On his blog, still active as of this writing, Jones continues to provide valuable insights on both the EC movement, which he no longer identifies with, and on other founders of the movement whom he sometimes interviews, or about whom he shares updates. While I have also found a few other original EC voices still active in the blogosphere, including Shannon Hopkins, founder of the *Emerging Church Network*, USA, (S. Hopkins, n.d.) it was Andrew Jones who was the ethnographer of the movement. Jones has often provided better primary source material in his blogs than can be found in any academic studies on the movement and his interviews with many former ‘*Emergents*,’ such as early EC voices Alan Creech, Shannon Hopkins, and Bob Beeman, have also been unparalleled. Thus, his archives are the ultimate source for ethnographic records on the EC.

#### *1.5.4.2 Professional Publications of the Emerging Church*

As the EC began to gain a more cohesive identity in the late 90’s and early 2000’s as a collection of churches, communities and networks who shared similar questions, values and postures, key voices within the movement who had acquired more formal theological training, or who had gained significant platforms as leaders of networks or pastors of successful churches, such as Brian McLaren and Mark Driscoll, began to publish books that touched upon key themes of the EC movement. The flurry of publications by these more professional voices within the EC movement would in many ways create a ‘second wave’ of the movement in which more professional pastors, teachers, thinkers, and authors would replace the original practitioners and evangelists as the most notable voices of the movement. These ‘professionals’ would also both help to define the movement and change its core focus and commitments.

Subsequently, a more pronounced shift from the purely missional voices of the early EC to the more theologically and doctrinally innovative or deconstructive voices of the ‘second wave’ of the EC could be seen in the works of Brian D. McLaren. In 2001, McLaren, the former pastor

of *Cedar Ridge Community Church* in Spencerville, Maryland, published his book, *A New Kind of Christian* (2001) in which he suggested a paradigm shift for Christians from being primarily concerned with orthodox doctrine to alternatively cultivating individual spiritual health and orthopraxis, suggesting, in regards to Christian orthodoxy, that it was more important to be 'good' than to be 'right.' His critiques of traditional Christian values, modes and practices within the modern church would become more pronounced as he subsequently published additional works engaging with issues around the intersection of Christianity and post-modernity, including *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (2002) which focused on placing friendship above 'transactional' evangelism and counting continued relationships with persons as more important than their conversion to Christianity. He followed with, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (2003a), which was co-written with Tony Campolo and showed McLaren's increasing desire to enculturate the church and the gospel with the values of the greater postmodern culture, including being open to a more culturally acceptable stance on homosexual marriage. Then too, McLaren argued, in "The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story," for a volume edited by Leonard Sweet in *Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (2003b), that Christendom had ended, and the church needed to embrace postmodern culture by not only taking the gospel into the culture but allowing postmodern culture a mutually-critical voice. Further, in *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2006a) McLaren argued that Christianity must be primarily centered in a personal relationship with Christ rather than within orthodoxy, beginning to hint at a juxtaposition of individual revelation and orthopraxy over-or-against orthodoxy. As McLaren's works grew increasingly critical of traditional Evangelical Christianity, he would also help to define the EC movement for those who saw McLaren's work as indicative of the EC as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

In 2003, during McLaren's flurry of publications, Dan Kimball, a former punk rocker with a doctorate from George Fox University, who helped lead *Vintage Church*, in Santa Cruz,

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<sup>13</sup> See: D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Zondervan, 2005a). Also see: D.A. Carson, "Faith a La Carte: The Emerging Church," *Modern Reformation Magazine* Vol. 14.4 (July / August 2005b).

California, published his take on the burgeoning EC movement in, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. (2003) This was, in fact, the first book on the EC that made use of the term 'Emerging' in the title itself (narrowly beating out Leonard Sweet's book of essays with McLaren). Here, Kimball provided an overview of the movement as of 2003. Also, in his work, like the more practically-minded 'first wave' of the EC, Kimball primarily focused on missionally bringing the gospel to unreached sub-cultures while also evaluating modern Evangelical forms, language, and methods that had prevented successful inculturation of the gospel in those cultures. Kimball was also slightly critical of the agenda of Brian McLaren to that point (Kimball 2003, 14) and Kimball's more orthodox approach to reformation could be seen not only in this book, but in the documents of his *Vintage Church* community where they stated they were primarily focused on trying to, 'break down non-biblical barriers in regards to leadership and focus on what the Scriptures say (or sometimes don't say) about the goals of church leadership.'<sup>14</sup> As such, they continued to be a church that was community-based and organic in their organization, structure, and practices, but not in accountability to Scripture or orthodox doctrine.

Another notable EC author who began publishing in the early 2000's was Mark Driscoll, the pastor of *Mars Hill* church, in Seattle, a church that was once a major destination for millennials and members of Generation X. In his first major book as a leader within the EC movement, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (2004), Driscoll adopted Ed Stetzer's classifications for the three sub-streams of the EC, *Relevants*, *Reconstructionists* and *Revisionists*, to argue that while attempting to faithfully update and reform the church so that it might better reach the culture with the gospel, Christians must avoid syncretism with the culture. Driscoll critiqued modern forms and methods of church as being so 'culturally irrelevant' that they failed to reach the culture with the message of the gospel but would proceed to simultaneously critique more *Revisionist* EC voices for being in danger of becoming syncretistic. Continuing to weigh in on EC reformation and mission in his follow-up

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<sup>14</sup> See: Vintage Church, (n.d.), accessed Apr. 2018, [www.vintagechurch.org](http://www.vintagechurch.org).

book, *A Call to Resurgence: Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future?* (2005), Driscoll argues that Christians were now living in a 'post-Christian culture' whose core beliefs were not entirely compatible with the gospel, as *Revisionists* might believe them to be. Thus, in Driscoll's view, Christians could only authentically take the gospel to the culture by remaining true to the words of Jesus and the 'essentials' of Scripture. While language and practices might be open to revision, orthodox theology, doctrine, and hermeneutics were not. Here too, Driscoll embraced the EC sub-stream of the more theologically and doctrinally conservative *Relevants* as a key distinctive against the *Revisionist* sub-stream that came to be most identified with Brian McLaren. (Driscoll 2004)

Mark Driscoll would continue his key themes around inculturation of a theologically orthodox gospel versus syncretistic accommodation to the culture in his subsequent works, "Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church" (2006a, 87-93), and *Confessions of a Reformission Rev: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*. (2006b) Despite his more culturally relevant form of church, in terms of allies and their shared views of the church and culture, Driscoll also gravitated toward more hermeneutically, ecclesiological and theologically conservative and Neo-Reformed voices such as John Piper, for whom he contributed the chapter, "The Church and the Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World," for Piper's book, *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*. (Driscoll 2008a)

Also, notably writing concurrently with McLaren, Kimball and Driscoll at the start of the twenty-first century was Stuart Murray, Ph.D., Whitefield University, who became a leading voice in the EC movement in the U.K. within Anabaptist church-planting communities<sup>15</sup> and within *Urban Expressions*, a church planting agency that founded emerging communities in urban centers within the UK. In *Post Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange Land* (2004), Murray also provided an EC critique of Christendom, arguing that the Christian story was no longer central to the culture and that the culture was not only now 'postmodern,' but truly 'post-

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<sup>15</sup> As we will explore in Chapter Four, there is a strong stream of both Anabaptist and Anglican leaders within EC streams, including Murray, Robert Webber, Scot McKnight and Todd Hunter.

Christian' as well. For Murray, the challenge for the church was to see that it no longer stood at the center of culture and must learn to move to the post-Christian culture's new centers, instead of expecting the culture to travel to the church.

Also, in this same period, yet another academically trained EC author, Andrew Perriman, Ph.D., London School of Theology, whom we will return to below, attempted to provide theological and ecclesiological frameworks for the more deconstructionist voices within the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, such as seen in his article "Inclusion and Accountability." (2005a) He argued for an 'open source' theology in which theological innovations were allowed to contend with orthodox doctrines and in which local communities held each other accountable over-and-against a more traditional sense of accountability to orthodoxy.

Concurrently, another key EC leader and author, Steve Taylor, Ph.D., University of Otago, the principal at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, had become an important EC voice in New Zealand. In his book, *The Out of Bounds Church?: Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change* (2005) Taylor shows that the EC movement had gained significant traction as an identifiable movement as of 2005, but that it was also incredibly diverse with voices ranging from missional innovators in alternative worship to postmodern philosophers and even to those who were attempting a more historically faithful recovery of ancient Christian forms and practices. In many ways, Taylor's book serves as a terrific 'snapshot' of the diversity of the larger EC movement at this point, while also revealing significant differences in the sub-streams that would soon lead to fracturing. Taylor also reminds us that the EC movement was not all postmodern deconstructionists and revisionists, such as McLaren, versus more theologically conservative yet 'culturally cool' *Relevants*, such as Driscoll and Kimball, but included practically minded missionaries to alternative cultures, such as the many EC practitioners found in New Zealand, and even renewal movements who were seeking to recover the modes and practices of the early church such as seen in the *Reconstructionist* sub-stream of the EC movement.

Another important voice in the Emerging Church movement at this point, also in the UK, was Ian Mobsby. Mobsby became a Christian in the 1980's at an early EC alternative worship

community in the city of York called *Visions*, which formed concurrently with the *Nine O'clock Service* in Sheffield (which was also a key influence on Mobsby). With an M.A. in pastoral theology from Anglia Ruskin University, Mobsby became an *Emerging Expression* network church planter for the Church of England and, by 2006, had also published *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church. How are they Church and Anglican?* (2006) In this work, Mobsby helped to explain the EC, or 'Fresh Expressions,' to those in the U.K. who wished to understand the movement, asserting they were specifically responding to the postmodern culture. In addition, he would more recently publish, *God Unknown*. (Mobsby 2012)

Another academically trained UK voice, Vineyard pastor, Jason Clark, D.Min., George Fox University, also began writing about the EC at this time, as seen in, "What Does Disciple-Making Look Like in the Emerging Church?," in, *Let My People Grow*. (2006a, 191-204) Clark also provided an early critique of more *Revisionist* movements in the EC in his article "What's Right/Wrong with the Emerging Church." (2006b) Still, while defending orthodoxy against more *Revisionist* deconstructionist movements, he contributed to EC conversations as late as 2010 in "Consumerism and the Emerging Church" (2010a) and "The Renewal of Liturgy and the Emerging Church?" (2010b) in *Christ in the Present Tense*.

Meanwhile, in the sub-stream of the EC that Ed Stetzer dubbed *Reconstructionists*, concurrent with the authors noted above, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch published *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (2005) where they argued for a reformation of a culturally irrelevant modern church via a return to the more missional and incarnational apostolic life and forms seen in the early church. In *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (2006), Frost also provided a blueprint for ways to live a faithful, gospel-centric life in the culture. Further, in *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (2007) Hirsch argued that the church's current modes and forms were broken, but that Christians must not simply update forms of church to feed a consumerist mentality but should rediscover the Spirit-led way of life and incarnational ways of being that propelled the early church out into the culture as agents of dynamic change. Then too, in concurrence with such an Emerging call to

return to ancient Christian' life, worship, and mission, influential *Reconstructionist* voice Robert Webber, who had earlier published *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (1999), would soon after publish *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (2008), during which time he would also collaborate with other leading EC authors, as noted below.

Consequently, wider recognition of the EC as a movement and attempts at providing overviews and classifications of the movement emerged around 2005 with a profile of the EC even appearing on a *PBS* documentary series. (Abernethy 2005) In addition, a notable academic overview of the EC appeared via Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger's *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (2005) in which the authors provided an ethnographic study of EC leaders and communities. Gibbs and Bolger also noted that the movement seemed to have sprung primarily from the fact that younger generations were "disillusioned with institutionalism and see the church itself as an obstacle to faith." (Ibid, 21) Other helpful overviews came via EC dialogue partner Ray S. Anderson's *An Emerging Theology for the Emerging Church* (2006) as well as Scot McKnight's articles "What is the Emerging Church?" (2006a) and "Five Streams of the Emerging Church." (2007a) Then too, McKnight would also raise questions about the orthodoxy of some within the EC, as seen in his article "Emerging and Orthodoxy." (2006b) Another overview of the movement from within the EC itself was seen in *Reconstructionist* Robert Webber's edited volume *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* (2007), which included chapters from *Relevants* John Burke, Dan Kimball, and Driscoll as well as *Revisionists* Doug Pagitt and Karen Ward. Perhaps most notable was that these leaders from different EC streams were still contributing to a volume together as late as 2007 even though significant signs of fracturing had appeared as early as 2005, about the same time that the flurry of popular works on and by the EC began to appear. In this same period, Tony Jones, who would become a key leader of the *Revisionist* sub-stream and help found the Emergent Village, would also join the EC conversation with *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. (2008) Then too, Catholic voices would also join the EC

conversation,<sup>16</sup> showing that the movement was simultaneously gaining in diversity and combustibility.

Although the flurry of books on the EC was still picking up steam in 2009, it had become apparent as early as 2005-06 that there were both potential challenges to Christian orthodoxy within the EC movement and potential sources of fracturing emerging. For instance, in an example explored more in Chapter Two, Brian McLaren and Mark Driscoll found themselves at odds in 2006 after McLaren suggested in an article for *Christianity Today*, in keeping with the EC practice of often using blogs, interviews or articles to make vital points, that since homosexuals had been “hurt by conservative Christians,” Christians did not have the right to speak to issues of homosexuality for five-to-ten years. (McLaren 2006b) McLaren also advocated following what seemed “good to the Holy Spirit and us,” as a way forward above-or-against adherence to traditional Scriptures or orthodox doctrine. (Ibid) Mark Driscoll fired back that McLaren was ordering Christians to ignore Scriptures in place of feelings and cultural values. (Driscoll 2006c) While similar debates did not prevent McLaren, Driscoll, and EC voices who were at odds from completely ejecting from the EC at this point, it did mark a moment in which sub-streams coalesced, and differentiation from one another was sought due to views on accountability to Scriptures and to orthodoxy. Meanwhile, some external critics began to raise questions about the EC as well.

In *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (2005a) Reformed Evangelical conservative theologian D.A. Carson, concerned that the EC was at odds with orthodoxy and Evangelicalism, suggested that “the Emerging Church movement is characterized by a fair bit of protest against traditional Evangelicalism and, more broadly, against all that it understands by modernism.” (Ibid, 36) Carson expressed further concerns about the possible syncretism of the EC in “Faith a La Carte: The Emerging Church.”

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<sup>16</sup> See: Lillian Kwon, “Catholics Join Emerging Church Conversation,” *Christianity Today* (Mar. 14, 2009), accessed Mar. 2017, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/catholics.join.emerging.church.conversatio/22770>.

(2005b) Simultaneously, Reformed Evangelical theologian, Al Mohler, critiqued what he saw as a propositional approach to truth amidst EC thinkers in “What Should We Think of the Emerging Church.” (2007) With even more extreme concern about the EC, Reformed Evangelical pastor, John MacArthur, also labelled the EC movement as ‘paganism’ in "MacArthur: The Emergent Church is a Form of Paganism." (2007) Meanwhile, Neo-Reformed evangelicals, such as Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, questioned the orthodoxy of the EC movement and to what extent it was the antithesis of Evangelicalism in *Why We're Not Emergent*. (2008)

Subsequently, as critiques of EC streams appeared, both from within the EC movement and without, some within the *Revisionist* sub-stream tried to explain themselves to the larger Christian audience, such as seen in Phyllis Tickle's *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (2008) or in Brian McLaren's chapter "Church Emerging: Or Why I Still Use the Word Postmodern But with Mixed Feelings" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (2007), a volume edited by Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones in which they also attempted to explain to Evangelical critics that they were not attacking Evangelicalism, but simply creating 'safe places' for persons to ask questions. For instance, Pagitt and Jones asserted, “The Emerging Church is a place where people have felt the freedom to explore questions and experiment with new forms of lifestyle.” (Ibid, 23.) In this same year, 2008, sympathetic voices who had been a part of EC conversations, such as Scot McKnight, would also note that more ‘*Revisionist*’ members of the EC, such as McLaren, were ironically still attached to an Evangelicalism they had simultaneously sought to deconstruct in favor of mutually critical external voices, showing confusion over the overall EC movement's identity. (McKnight 2008a)

#### *1.5.4.3 Sources on the Decline and Evolution of the Emerging Church*

Except for Doug Gay's excellent work on the EC, *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (SCM Press, 2011), there is still a gap in literature that traces that decline of the EC, the current forms it has morphed into and the critical questions that the EC raised around to what extent Christian reformation or innovation could or should remain in continuity

and congruity with apostolicity and orthodoxy. However, I have partially traced the decline and metamorphosis of the EC via their popular facing books, articles, and blogs. As early as 2008, for instance, via an examination of articles and blogs, we can see that some original EC leaders no longer identified with the EC label and others believed the movement was already dead. In 2008, for example, Url Scaramanga was declaring the EC movement finished in the pages of *Christianity Today* in his article, “RIP Emerging Church” (Scaramanga 2008) doing so with reference to Dan Kimball who also noted the decline of the EC movement at the same time. (Kimball 2008) In 2009, Andrew Jones also noted that *Emerging Church Network* founder Shannon Hopkins had long since ceased to identify with the EC label, commenting that:

Like many missional entrepreneurs, Shannon hasn't used the term 'emerging church' for quite a few years, and she cringes when she hears me say it. The EC conversation got stuck a long time ago, Shannon would say, and no longer described her. No longer described us. (A. Jones 2009a)

Another sign of trouble for the movement came when the ‘Emergent Village’ organization, the most identifiable organization spawned out of the original EC movement, was forced to reorganize toward the end of 2008, as Brandon O’Brien, in his *Christianity Today* article “Emergent’s Divergence: Leaders Hope Decentralizing Power Will Revitalize the Movement,” noted that “As one-time leaders of the emergent movement have recently distanced themselves from the term, the network itself dropped its organizational leader. The decision of Emergent Village's board of directors to eliminate its national coordinator position marked the latest sign that the movement is either decentralizing or disintegrating.” (O’Brien 2008) By 2009, Andrew Jones recognized that the EC was fading as a cohesive movement but, in his “10 Types of Emerging Church that No Longer Upset Your Grandfather” (2009b), he saw ten types of churches he thought the EC movement had morphed into, including:

Culture based communities...Gen X, Post-Modern...Emergent...new monastic orders ...intentional communities...house churches, simple churches...cyberchurch...vonline communities...alternative worship/fresh expression/new-liturgical churches...pub churches...coffee shop churches... contemplative prayer movement...Christians who don't go to church...social enterprises leading to missional communities. (Ibid)

Although Andrew Jones saw the original impetus for the EC continuing via many of the forms of church noted above, he also recognized that by 2010 the EC as a cohesive movement was over. In a January 2010 article, Jones officially said goodbye to the EC and, specifically, to the *Emergent Village* network formed by Revisionists Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt, and noting, in his attempt at a post-mortem for the movement, that it had apparently lost its original missional focus: “In the early days, I joined the leadership of the Young Leaders group (that eventually became Emergent Village) because it was more about uniting churches around mission and equipping people to reach the next 'postmodern' generation. I hope they can shift it back again to its origins.” (A. Jones 2010a) By 2010, external voices, such as Reformed Evangelical, John Piper, were also posting ‘obituaries’ for the EC. (2010) Still others, such as the New-Monastic leader, Shane Claiborne, who had once shared some sympathy for and synergy with the movement, felt the need to declare the EC movement over and note what had gone wrong with the EC. In a June 2011 article “The Emerging Church Brand: The Good, the Bad and the Messy” Claiborne critiqued the EC as having been too self-absorbed and unaware of more extensive movements of reformation:

A decade or so ago, a bunch of young, mostly white evangelicals started seeing similar conversations beginning to spark all over the place about the reshaping of Evangelicalism, the rethinking of missions, and re-imagining what it really means to be the church. Language of “the emerging church” connected many of the dots, which remained primarily white Evangelical men, many of whom had great ideas and led vibrant communities and organizations. Nonetheless it has always been evident that this is not the whole conversation or renewal happening in the church...the fact that the dozens of books and cover stories done on the ‘emerging church’ hailed mostly faces of white men shows the many forces of colonialism, privilege, and all the other principalities and powers that still threaten to hold our faith captive. Entire movements of hip-hop church...missional communities overseas and indigenous movements of first nation Christians have also been stirring up all over the world, though they do not get the same air time or book deals. Eventually, books and brands began identifying as ‘emerging church’ or ‘emergent.’...In my opinion, ‘the movement’ became a bit narcissistic. (Claiborne 2011)

Despite a growing consensus, by 2010, that the EC was over as a cohesive movement, many within the *Revisionist/Emergent-Village* sub-stream continued to argue the EC was alive and still growing. For example, in 2013, the *Emergent Village* was still actively blogging and

sharing their values at their now-defunct site: *Emergentvillage.org*. Also, as recent as 2014, Brian McLaren argued in “More on the Emergent Conversation” (2014) that the EC had now become more impactful than ever as it had successfully woven itself into the DNA of thousands of churches and movements. Also, in 2014, McLaren’s colleague, Tony Jones, similarly wondered in “Is the Emergent Church Relevant” (T. Jones 2014) if the EC might find renewed significance amidst millennials who were ejecting from mainstream churches to seek new forms. Then too, McLaren has more recently argued in *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World’s Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* (2016) that there was an even newer wave of emergence taking place in a more recent mixture of progressive, pluralistic, post-Evangelical, and post-Christendom churches and networks who are coming together in new expression of Christianity that is bearing fruit of earlier emerging conversations.

#### *1.5.4.4 Sources who Continue EC Themes, Work, or Debates*

While the EC movement was experiencing fracturing as early as 2005-2007, as already noted, and was in decline as a cohesive conversation-and-movement by 2008-2009, key conversation partners of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, such as Rob Bell, Peter Rollins and Andrew Perriman continued to publish significant books in the second decade of the twenty-first century as well in which the critical debates within the EC, such as the place and importance of orthodox understandings of Scriptures and doctrines, continued in their movement of postmodern deconstruction.

Perhaps then, the most lasting impact of McLaren, Pagitt, and Jones’ *Revisionist* stream was the theological and doctrinal debates it initiated and the ongoing deconstructive theology and praxis of subsequent authors and theologians in the *Revisionist* stream. For instance, in 2011, Peter Rollins, who had earlier published *How (Not) to Speak of God: Philosophical & Theological Underpinnings of the Emerging Church Movement* (2006), which had an enormous impact on deconstructionist and subjective approaches among *Revisionists*, as I have detailed in Chapter Five, also published “Worldly Theology of Emerging Christianity” in *Church in the*

*Present Tense: A Candid Look at What's Emerging* (2011a) and *Insurrection*, (2011b) in which he leaned on Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Bonhoeffer, Derrida and Slavoj Žižek to propose what he termed a 'pyro-theology' that deconstructed all Christian beliefs and forms to replace them with a materialist 'a/theism,' in which materialist orthopraxis replaced Christian belief. Rollins' work would be praised by Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Phyllis Tickle and Tony Jones, among other *Revisionist* voices in the EC, demonstrating his synergy with most *Revisionist* EC voices and providing them with the apparent support of an academically trained theologian. Also, in 2011, *Revisionist* Andrew Perriman, who had earlier published *The Coming of the Son of Man: New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church* (2005b), focusing on deconstructing eschatological understandings of Christ's second coming, would now publish *Hell and Heaven in Narrative Perspective*, (P.Ost, 2011) also suggesting a narrative-theological reading of Scripture that deconstructed traditional orthodox and Evangelical doctrines on hell. Perriman's work would have synergy with McLaren's earlier, more popular-level questioning of Biblical teachings on hell, as seen in "Brian McLaren's Inferno 2: Are We Asking the Wrong Questions about Hell?" (McLaren 2006c) Still, Perriman would provide a theological weight to the topic that was lacking in McLaren's speculation.

However, it would be another popular facing book on hell released in 2012, Rob Bell's *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (2012), in which Bell questioned traditional doctrines on hell, that would ignite a firestorm around EC deconstruction of traditional theology and doctrine on topics such as hell. While McLaren, Perriman, and others had provided greater challenges to orthodox and Evangelical doctrine than did Bell, Bell's book likely drew more pronounced criticism because it was a best seller. Critiques of Bell's book came from many of the usual critics of the EC who saw Bell's deconstructive approach as lock-in-step with the *Emergent/Revisionist* stream of the EC and as a syncretistic deconstruction of the gospel to gain cultural acceptance. The most severe critiques of Bell's work came in the usual blog and online article forums used for EC attacks, via noted critics of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, including Mark Driscoll, John Piper, and Kevin DeYoung, as

evidenced in DeYoung's article "Rob Bell Rejects Penal Substitutionary Atonement." (2011) Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was persons from within the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, such as Tony Jones, who then came to Bell's defense. (T. Jones 2009) Jones also returned fire at *Revisionist* critics John Piper and Mark Driscoll, calling them 'unloving' and implying that their Neo-Reformed theology had locked them into theological and ecclesiological positions that prevented grace, led to abusive leadership and even to the potential excommunication of both church leaders and family members. (T. Jones 2012)

Brian McLaren would also continue to defend fellow *Revisionist* voices and would keep up his torrid pace of books, including *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*. (2011) However, by this point, even formerly sympathetic friends in the EC conversation, such as Scot McKnight, now saw McLaren as not providing innovative or 'emerging' perspectives as much as simply revisiting liberal deconstructive approaches to Scripture ala Marcus Borg.<sup>17</sup> McLaren would eventually embrace the idea that in many ways, perhaps ironically, the more socially, theologically and doctrinally progressive mainline Protestant denominations in the United States seemed to increasingly have more in common with the *Revisionist/Emergent-Village* stream of the EC than with Evangelicals or fellow EC members.<sup>18</sup> McLaren further also appeared to embrace the idea that he was rediscovering the earlier beliefs of not only Marcus Borg but of progressive 'social gospel' Christians such as Walter Rauschenbusch. McLaren claimed:

When a...Evangelical reviewer said... 'McLaren is nothing more than warmed-over Rauschenbusch'...this challenged me to go back and read Rauschenbusch...I realized that many things many of us were just discovering (about Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom) had indeed been articulated a century ago...I think of Jesus' words about 'scribes of the kingdom' bringing forth treasures old and new. (McLaren 2010a)

Had the EC come full circle? In its fracturing into three distinct streams, while *Relevants* like Driscoll gravitated toward more conservative Evangelical, Neo-Reformed or fundamentalist partners, *Revisionists* such as McLaren gravitated toward liberal iterations of mainline

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<sup>17</sup> See: McKnight 2011.

<sup>18</sup> See: Brian McLaren, "I Hope You are Well," *Brianmclaren.net* (2016), accessed Dec. 2016, <http://brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/i-hope-you-are-well.html>.

Protestantism. Thus, had the EC simply repeated the same issues and divisions of past generations, including between liberal and fundamentalist Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century?

In surveying the development of EC literature, one can see that the EC has provided intriguing models for inculturation/enculturation in the postmodern culture and has also raised critical questions to consider in relation to accountability for reformation of the church and missional incarnation in the postmodern culture. One can also see that the vital questions and debates raised by the EC, including how to read Scriptures, the importance of orthodoxy as a source of accountability and to what extent reformation or innovation that leads to significant deconstruction or revision remains Christian, are questions that transcend the EC movement. Whether the questions and debates have continued in remaining EC forms or streams, in postcedents of the EC or in more traditional Protestant or Evangelical churches, questions of accountability and of *what* forms the basis for authentic Christianity have continued to be vital questions for the entire church moving forward.

#### *1.5.4.5 Additional Primary Sources*

In addition to noting the significance of the key voices and formational works above, I have specifically engaged with additional conversation partners who have intersected with the work of the EC. For instance, in examining *Revisionist* movements of deconstruction, I have briefly noted the influential work of a/theists such as John Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct* (2007), and Slavoj Žižek, “From Desire to Drive: Why Lacan is not Lacanian” (1996), 31-45); *Living in the End Times* (2010); and *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (2012); as well as Jacques Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion” (1988), and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. (1991) Then too, in examining the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I have also briefly noted works such as Karl Barth’s *Christian Dogmatics* (1927) and *Church Dogmatics I/2*. (2004)

Further, I have more vitally interacted with postmodern orthodox thinkers such as James K.A. Smith, who has critiqued EC deconstructionists as not being truly postmodern enough in

*Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church (The Church and Postmodern Culture)*. (2006) Smith also continued to cast a vision for a postmodern intersection with orthodoxy that remains anciently rooted and apostolically faithful, as seen in *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. (2016) Smith's work has also shown synergy with emerging *Reconstructionists*, such as John Frederick, *Worship in the Way of the Cross: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others* (2017), an emerging Anglican priest, who, much like former emerging Anglican voice, Robert Webber, is seeking both rootedness in ancient beliefs and rhythms and a postmodern missiology centered in a cruciform life, which approach has also shown synergy with Bonhoeffer, Vincent and Smith. Further, consulting Robert Webber's additional work, such as in his essay "The Crisis of Evangelical Worship: Authentic Worship in a Changing World" (Webber 2002)--which was, along with Geoffrey Wainwright's essay "Schisms, Heresies & the gospel" (Wainwright 2002), featured in Christopher Hall and Kenneth Tanner's edited volume *Ancient & Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century (Essays In Honor of Thomas C. Oden)* (Tanner and Hall 2002)--has also helped me to trace Webber and Wainwright's connections with both Thomas Oden, Paleo-Orthodoxy, and the EC *Reconstructionist* movement. As such, in then joining Smith and Frederick's voices with Doug Gay (2011), and Scot McKnight, via works, such as *A Community Called Atonement (Living Theology)* (McKnight 2007b), as well as with Paleo-Orthodox voices Webber and Wainwright, whose *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (Wainwright 1997), also helped Doug Gay articulate a vision for an apostolically faithful yet emerging ecclesiology, I also believe I have found a potential 'third' EC approach to orthodoxy that I have addressed in Chapter Six.

#### 1.5.5 Secondary Sources

In this study I also interacted with numerous secondary sources who intersected with our primary EC sources and dialogue partners in vital ways, including Thomas G. Guarino who has provided crucial academic research of St. Vincent, including in Guarino's "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine" (2014), as well as "Tradition and Doctrinal

Development: Can Vincent of Lérins Still Teach the Church?” (2006), and *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine (Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality)*. (2013a) Additionally, Guarino has also brought the voice of Pope Francis into dialogue with Vincent via “Pope Francis Looks to St. Vincent of Lérins” (Guarino 2013b), as has Antonio Sparado in “A Big Heart Open to God: an interview with Pope Francis.” (Sparado 2013)

In engaging with Bonhoeffer, I have also been supported in our views of Bonhoeffer’s soteriology by Eberhard Bethge’s *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (2000), as well as finding further confirmation of our reading of Bonhoeffer via Paul Lehmann’s refutation of any claims that Bonhoeffer followed a ‘death of God’ theology in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*. (Lehmann 1966, 365) Then too, I have also been supported in my reading of Bonhoeffer’s views on confession of sin by Joel D. Lawrence’s terrific work in *Death Together: Thanatology and Sanctification in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. (2006) Likewise, Martin E. Marty’s fantastic biographical insights into historical misuses of Bonhoeffer’s work in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, as provided in Marty’s *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: a Biography* (2011), has also helped to confirm much of our own conclusions.

In examining EC uses of ‘contextual theology’ I likewise found Stephen B. Evans’ work helpful in *Models of Contextual Theology*. (2004) Also, in engaging with liberation theology, in order to discover relationships between different schools of liberation theology and the work of Peter Rollins and Slavoj Žižek, I greatly appreciated Thomas Lynch’s work in “Religion and Revolution: Slavoj Žižek’s Challenge to Liberation Theology.” (2010, 3-10) I also appreciated Ivan Petrella’s *Latin American Theology: The Next Generation* (2005), which also showed key intersections with additional liberation theology voices such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres,’ as seen in “The Time of History, the Times of Gods, and the Damnés de la terre.” (2006, 1-12)

Likewise, in examining Peter Rollins’ synergy with Marxist-Hegelian a/theism, I found K.S. Moody’s work on the more radical stream of the EC helpful, as found in “Resisting Conformity at the Margins of Marginal Christianity” (2014); “Retrospective Speculative Philosophy: Looking for Traces of Žižek’s Communist Collective in Emerging Christian Praxis”

(2012, 182-198); and “The Death and Decay of God: Radical Theology and Emerging Christianity.” (2016, 253-265) I also appreciated Gladys Ganiel and Gerardo Marti’s research on Peter Rollins’ *Ikon* communities, as found in “Northern Ireland, America and the Emerging Church Movement: Exploring the Significance of Peter Rollins and the Ikon Collective.” (2014, 26-45)

#### 1.5.6 Summary of Literature Review

There is a wealth of information from EC voices regarding their beliefs, values, and practices, as well as on their critiques of more traditional church models. One can also find a wealth of critiques of the EC. There is also a small amount of reflection on causes of fracturing. However, there appeared to be a gap in knowledge about the vital questions, challenges and debates about accountability to Scriptures, apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* that were raised by the EC, that continue to challenge the church today and that are important ones for the ongoing reforming work of missional Christians.

In addition to the sources listed above, and those additional primary sources listed below, in subsequent chapters I have also relied upon primary works by EC voices too numerous to list here. Due to the nature of the EC movement, many of the sources were interviews, blogs, or videos in which Emerging leaders used New Media to dialogue about crucial issues. Then, I also reviewed interviews and studies already completed on the EC and conducted our questionnaire and interviews as part of a narrative inquiry and analysis.

### 1.6 Methodology

In this project, I used both the literature of key EC voices and a questionnaire to examine and directly question the thinking of leaders, theologians and laity in the EC as part of a narrative inquiry and analysis of both important sources of debate and fracturing and of justifications or sources of accountability for their movements of reformation, innovation or revision. I then sought to place EC voices into conversation with the historical perspectives of Vincent of Lérins, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and a more recent voice, Thomas Oden, around questions of accountability

to apostolicity and orthodoxy amidst reformation, innovation or revision, as well as potential causes of continued fracturing among those who wish to reform the church, innovatively inculturate the gospel in a postmodern western culture or to revise or deconstruct orthodoxy. By bringing Bonhoeffer, Vincent, and Oden, into conversation with the EC via historical, theological, ethnographic and narrative inquiry and analysis methods, I hoped that the former would serve as both historical guides and perhaps mediators in debates over accountability, helping me to stake out the boundaries and also the areas of flexibility within which might discover what it means to be held accountable to the true Christ in teachings, beliefs, and actions amidst innovation, inculturation and reformation in the present age.

The first voice that I brought into dialogue with Emerging expressions, St. Vincent of Lérins, was a 5th-century monk, theologian and the originator of the 'test of orthodoxy,' providing a method/rule for allowing doctrine to grow while adhering to orthodoxy in service to apostolicity, which has greatly shaped current thinking around consensual orthodoxy and accountability to apostolicity, as well as the thinking of American theologian and Paleo-Orthodox founder, Thomas Oden.<sup>19</sup> Vincent, as a church father and a participant in the Council of Ephesus,<sup>20</sup> surveyed the churches of his time on how they knew that they were following the authentic teachings and practices transmitted by the Apostles. The answers they provided led to the codifying of the 'test of orthodoxy,' also known as the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, which teaches that only that doctrine should be followed that is "believed everywhere, by everyone, at all times," meaning the consensus of all Christians, across all cultures, places and times. (Oden 2002, 74) Thus, in this study, I both consulted critics of Vincent's method within the EC, including Tony Jones, as well as defenders of Vincent such as Thomas Oden, who argued that Vincent's method of orthodoxy was more diverse and contextually flexible than those of

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<sup>19</sup>Lérins and his *Commonitory* were a seminal influence on Thomas Oden's understanding of orthodoxy and faith transmission. In his treatise on consensual orthodoxy, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (2002). Oden uses Lérins work to show that the 5<sup>th</sup>-century church had maintained a strong belief in consensual teachings that were faithfully transmitted from the apostles down through the church and that provided a "chorus" of agreement on the essentials of the apostolic faith.

<sup>20</sup> Lérins (1886) 2012, 111.

postmodern contexts and further questioned whether Emerging expressions, such as Jones, ' have an 'immune system' to guard against heresy. Considering this conversation, I have also considered wither Vincent's method might provide the best method for safeguarding flexible-yet-faithful reformation and creative updating or contextualizing amidst current contexts.

Next, following in Vincent's steps, I conducted a narrative and ethnographic analysis of EC streams and postcedents to place Vincent into conversation with EC thinkers around questions of accountability to Scripture, orthodoxy, and apostolicity both doctrinally and in praxis.<sup>21</sup> I believe that their answers there have allowed me to exegete core points of division as well as the different approaches to epistemology, hermeneutics, soteriology, apostolicity and orthodoxy, the role of the Holy Spirit, confession of sin, the purpose and reality of the Body of Christ, and the question of who Christ truly is *for us* today, in order to reach a clearer understanding of motivations that are both leading to innovation and contributing to continued fracturing, revision or error among EC streams. In doing so, I engaged with EC voices and postcedents via a questionnaire, interviews and a review of literature. I then provided a narrative description of the responses as well as potential critiques of the EC raised by Vincent, Oden and other relevant conversation partners, and their critiques of Vincent.

I next included the voice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in whose questioning of what it means to know the true Christ today, in our actuality, some EC innovators such as Peter Rollins appear to have found a champion for a *Revisionist* deconstruction of orthodoxy that sets one free from the moorings of all doctrines and creeds. Yet, after looking at Rollins' impact upon the more recent movement of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, which he credits in larger part to his reading of Bonhoeffer, I then examined whether, even in Bonhoeffer's apparent willingness to question elements of the creeds, such as in his apparent questioning of the scientific plausibility of the

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<sup>21</sup>Although Vincent of Lérins, Bonhoeffer, and Oden speak from diverse cultural and theological perspectives, each seeks to address key questions of accountability to the authentic Christ of Scriptures. Thus, while paying careful attention to the different contexts out of which they speak, and their unique motivations and challenges, we will explore how they might be placed into conversation around questions of accountability to the Scriptures they each affirmed as a sacred source of truth and revelation.

virgin birth,<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer indeed supported a materialist orthopraxy that has no orthodox boundaries, as does Rollins (which we will explore in Chapter Five of this study). Conversely, I believe Bonhoeffer remained within the boundaries of orthodoxy in trusting the ‘appointed witnesses’ of Scripture on their testimony of *who* Christ is and *how* one should faithfully surrender to Christ. Further, in Bonhoeffer’s arguing for specific sacred practices that demonstrate surrender to Christ, including confession of personal sin,<sup>23</sup> I questioned whether Bonhoeffer might provide a criterion of accountability that match the consensual orthodox witness of *who* Christ is and provide crucial marks of accountability for emerging expressions to know they have met the incarnate Christ and not a ‘Christ of culture.’

In the final analysis, I have sought to discover to what extent accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy is approached by EC expressions today and, if they are not regarded as valuable as a source of accountability, then in what ways or to what extent are accountability to the gospel or to Christ considered? These questions are vital ones if such expressions wish to claim that they are following Scriptures in congruity and continuity with the apostolic and orthodox consensus, or whether they are instead innovating in their hermeneutics, doctrine, and praxis in ways that would not be recognizable to the apostles and their successors. The questions raised out of the fracturing of the EC movement are also critical questions for larger movements of reformation and inculturation of the church and its message moving forward.

Thus also, in our final chapter, I at last examined whether in the work of Vincent, Oden, and Bonhoeffer, together with orthodox EC voices such as Robert Webber, Doug Gay, Scot McKnight, and conversation partners such as Thomas Oden, we may find an approach to accountability for belief and acts that both allows doctrine to grow, provides continuity with apostolicity, and demonstrates an experience of the true Christ via a consensual *confession of orthodox doctrine, confession of sin and surrender to the sacred worshiping life of the church,*

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<sup>22</sup> See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 285.

<sup>23</sup> See: Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 111. Also see: Lawrence 2006, 115. Lawrence claimed that for Bonhoeffer the key marks of accountability were confession of sin, baptism, and communion.

asking not only ‘how’ one's doctrine is orthodox, but whether they have, in fact, responded to the ‘who’ of Christ before them in the unifying sacred life and worship of the Body of Christ.

### **1.7 Methodological Training**

My primary training is in history. I currently teach in a university theology department where I am acquiring additional theological training. I have also taught world religions and anthropology and conducted past ethnographic studies. In this study, I have utilized theological, historical, ethnographic and narrative inquiry and analysis methods. My methods are epistemologically consistent with our topic in that: a) I have examined core issues of fracturing between EC thinkers that led to questions about *how*, to *whom-or-what*, and *to what extent* they are held accountable?; b) I have compared and contrasted debates, questions and conclusions of EC thinkers with historical antecedents in the early church as evidenced by the research of Vincent of Lérins in *The Commonitory*, focusing on the consensual orthodox method of accountability in dialogue with EC voices; c) I have compared questions and answers around accountability provided by the EC and Vincent’s *consensual orthodoxy* with the voices of Thomas Oden and Dietrich Bonhoeffer; d) I have conducted ethnographic research amidst thinkers, churches or communities from each of the three streams of the Emerging Church, *Relevants*, *Reconstructionist* and *Revisionists*, and their partners or postcedents, via qualitative questionnaires conducted with respondents connected with these streams. I have then described twenty-two (22) narratives or perspectives provided by our respondents who primarily came from the U.S. EC streams or postcedents. Their responses have helped provide a satisfying ‘snapshot’ of trends and views on our key questions around reformation, innovation, and accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy. e) I have also conducted narrative inquiry and analysis of the EC that includes secondary-source analysis and participant observation. I have then sought to take their collective knowledge and perceptions and to organize and analyze the collected information in order to make observations, draw conclusions and provide critiques and suggestions.

## **1.8 Scope**

This study includes elements of theological, historical, ethnographic, and narrative inquiry and analysis. Thus, I have chosen to enter conversation with Vincent of Lérins, on his views on accountability for doctrinal growth, to provide a key antecedent who can provide historical context for and evaluation of EC debates. I have then brought Vincent's questions into conversation with EC critics such as Tony Jones, and supporters such as Thomas Oden.

I have next chosen to dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer to explore possible misuses by those, such as Peter Rollins, who wish to use Bonhoeffer for *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodoxy and subsequent pluralistic and materialist movements within their stream of the EC. In so doing, I have explored where Rollins and *Revisionists* may have been more greatly influenced by a/theistic deconstructionists such as Slavoj Žižek. I then engaged also with Bonhoeffer to see how this historic theologian fleshed out related questions around accountability to the authentic Christ of apostolic witnesses in his own time to, at last, place the historical voices of Bonhoeffer and Vincent into conversation with EC voices around the center or boundaries within which innovation and growth of doctrine may occur and remain Christian.

I have restricted our theological focus to questions of accountability for hermeneutics, epistemology, doctrines, and praxis in relation to apostolicity and orthodoxy that were asked and answered by my dialogue partners and their key influences, supporters, or critics. I also limited my narrative inquiry and analysis to the three EC streams, and related postcedents, identified by Stetzer and Richardson. I also conducted ethnographic research only on sample groups in the United States, although one respondent has since moved to Australia.

## **1.9 Outline of Subsequent Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I have examined key EC streams that I chose for my study, essential elements that unite them as 'emerging' and that differentiate them from other Christian expressions. I have especially described several key persons, networks, and streams within the EC

that I have selected to represent the broader EC and how they speak to the vital issues around reformation, inculturation, innovation, orthodoxy or revision. I have also further examined core debates and justifications that divided the EC, as noted by key EC voices, and challenges to apostolicity/orthodoxy found in their approaches to Scripture, reformation, inculturation, innovation, revision or divergence.

In Chapter Three, I have next explored the importance of St. Vincent of Lérins, both for his time and for EC expressions, especially in his concept of *consensual orthodoxy* as an apostolic method by which to both allow and safeguard the contextual growth of doctrine. I have discussed the state of the church in Vincent's day, why he needed to conduct a study, which questions and controversies he was addressing, which key questions he asked, why they were asked, who they were addressed to and what he discovered around accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy that also allowed contextualization. I have then provided details on Vincent's findings, their impact in his day and how such answers shaped his understanding of the church, apostolicity, and orthodoxy. I explained the importance of Vincent's questions and findings for EC expressions, the challenges EC voices have brought to Vincent and the ways in which his method has been defended, especially by Thomas Oden. Consequentially, I then explored ways in which Vincent's method might be applied to EC movements and postcedents today to allow for both contextual flexibility and apostolic continuity-and-congruity.

In Chapter Four, in our ethnographic study of EC streams, I then sought to follow in St. Vincent's footsteps by using his core questions and findings as a template from which to ask questions of current EC voices today via an ethnographic questionnaire. In doing so, I have described sample EC communities and leaders that I have engaged with in an ethnographic study to directly question pastors, theologians and lay leaders about their understanding of apostolicity and orthodoxy and to discover to whom or what they are accountable. I have then described and referenced my ethnographic study of sample EC voices to describe to what extent there is an understanding *of or care for* apostolicity and orthodoxy amidst EC streams today and what factors might lead to different views in conversation with Vincent, with the respondents I selected and

with the broader EC streams that they represent. In doing so, I have also explored Vincent's understanding and views of church, apostolicity and orthodoxy versus those of EC expressions, as well as reasons for possible contrasts; allowing for both identification of points of agreement with Vincent and also areas where he would provide a critique of EC expressions. Additionally, I discovered that while there were points of surprising synergy between Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* and the beliefs and practices of EC *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* today, *Revisionists* seemed to have most greatly departed not only from the other EC streams but from apostolicity and orthodoxy as understood by Vincent.

Thus, in Chapter Five, I proceeded to further examine justifications of the more progressive EC stream's departure from orthodoxy. As such, I examined how some *Revisionists*, as exemplified by Peter Rollins, have attempted to justify their movement to deconstruct orthodoxy as being authentically Christian, including by appropriating the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In doing so, I looked at Rollins' influence on the recent, more radical movements of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC both away from the other EC streams and from orthodoxy. I have also then explored how Rollins sought to justify his deconstruction of orthodoxy, in exchange for a materialist orthopraxy, as being in synergy with Bonhoeffer. Subsequently, I discussed Bonhoeffer's challenges to orthodoxy-as-an-institution and even to the 'how' claims of some creeds. Conversely, I also showed how Bonhoeffer maintained that there must be 'markers' or evidence that one is following the same Christ as testified to by the apostolic witnesses. Thus, I also described Bonhoeffer's marks of authenticity for those who wished to follow the actual Christ of the Apostles, which included confession of sin, surrender to the core teaching of the apostolic faith and faithful adherence to its sacred practices. I also looked at ways Bonhoeffer would critique Rollins' materialist a/theism. Consequentially, I also explored how Rollins, and those *Revisionists* whom he has influenced, may have more authentically grounded their recent movements in the work of a/theistic deconstructionists such as Slavoj Žižek. I also saw evidence that Bonhoeffer's work may share more synergy with Vincent of Lérins than with Rollins and McLaren's *Revisionist* movement.

In my last chapter, I have summarily placed Vincent, Oden, Bonhoeffer and key innovative yet orthodox voices who have taken part in EC conversations, such as Jason Clark, Scot McKnight, James K.A. Smith, Doug Gay, and Robert Webber into conversation on the importance of the core creedal beliefs and sacred practices of the Christian faith. As such, I argued, in contrast with Rollins and McLaren in the *Revisionist* stream, that there is agreement amidst such orthodox EC voices and conversation partners, many of whom were *Reconstructionists*, that core Christian doctrines and practices cannot be separated from the living, worshiping and sacramental life of the Body of Christ as transmitted through the church across all cultures, places and times. Still, while some voices, such as Bonhoeffer and Smith, suggested obedience to historic beliefs and practices as primarily being an act of faith and confession, I also examined ways in which Vincent might have shown that the doctrine of *consensual orthodoxy*, as a witness of the living body to the person of Christ, need not only be adhered to as an act of faith but can also be trusted as evidence of encounter with the same Christ within the body. Additionally, I proceeded to consider whether Vincent's method, in dialogue with Bonhoeffer, Oden and key EC voices, might provide emerging expressions with a method for flexible and contextual listening, inculturation and the growth of doctrine amidst current postmodern contexts, while also ensuring continuity and congruity with the apostolic deposit of faith. Consequentially, in pondering the applicability of Vincent's method for the ongoing reformation, innovation, and inculturation of the EC, I have considered what things Christians must not lose, while also emerging or reforming, to be qualified as authentically Christian; what should be regarded as the essentials, or boundaries, and why; and what key essentials/boundaries must not be abandoned to hold to apostolicity or orthodoxy.

In my conclusion, I then summarized my findings and arguments. I also suggested the applicability of our findings and provided recommendations moving forward.

### **1.10 Delimitations**

I did not try to engage with all partners or perspectives in the EC conversation or only

with those who identified with the label ‘emerging,’ which would have eliminated many of the key voices of the EC, but did specifically seek to engage with those who had generally shared an ethos or intersected with the key work and debates of the three streams of the EC categorized by the conversations of Rick Richardson and Ed Stetzer. Such an identification led me, for instance, to specifically engage with Mark Driscoll’s *Acts 29* Network and Brian McLaren’s *Open/Convergence* network which were the most identifiable organizations to emerge from the EC conversation, as well as with those who shared key distinctives or who had provided key support or critiques of these streams.

I also did not attempt to re-classify EC streams or postcedents beyond the typography provided by the conversations of Richardson and Stetzer but examined current streams and postcedents in relation to their current-or-past connections to the movements and conversations of the *Relevant*, *Reconstructionist* and *Revisionist* streams. Further, I did not attempt to provide an exhaustive description or critique of EC expressions and postcedents or consider all critiques of external voices or theological perspectives but focused selectively on the voices of EC leaders and postcedents themselves, and their key critics or influences, as much as possible, especially around questions of epistemology, hermeneutics, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In so doing, I have also placed them into conversation with Vincent, Bonhoeffer, and Oden, as well as those voices who most connect to their conversations around accountability for reformation, innovation, contextualization, or inculturation.

### **1.11 Research Ethics and Risk Assessment**

I have subjected our ethnographic questions to a university ethics committee due to the sensitive nature of interviewing leaders and laity in local churches. I did not work with groups who had any particular or special vulnerability. However, I provided consent forms for all interviewees and attempted to protect their identities in the study, and their right to withdraw at any time. I also provided the consent forms and all other necessary documentation to the Ethics Committee to ensure our methods of consent and other safety protocols were satisfactory. In

addition, all primary data that I gathered via interviews has been protected from external access and used exclusively by me for my research.

### **1.12 Summary**

In this chapter, I have introduced our research question and provided the context for the necessity of a study of EC expressions, highlighting development of the EC conversation via an examination of key literature and briefly noting some of the debates around accountability, apostolicity and orthodoxy that led to fracturing amidst Emerging streams and voices; which I have explored more thoroughly in Chapter Two of this study. I also then identified the three categories of EC streams that will be explored within the study and provided a literature review.

Additionally, I briefly noted St. Vincent and his work around the concept of ‘*consensual orthodoxy*,’ which we will explore more in Chapter Three, explaining his importance as a conversation partner for the EC, why he matters for current contexts and how his questions have informed our ethnographic work, which is presented in Chapter Four. Further, I introduced the need to hear from Thomas Oden and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to whom we will return in Chapter Five, as conversation partners who helped me make meaning of the common points around accountability, apostolicity, and orthodoxy raised by St. Vincent and key EC voices.

Next, I laid out our methodology, explaining: a) why our research questions are essential for churches today; b) why attention to apostolicity and orthodoxy is being investigated; c) why I have sought to use an ethnographic study to enter into a narrative theological discourse with EC voices; d) which methods I used to conduct our study and report my findings; e) what I planned to do and how I will do it; e) which EC streams I examined and why; f) how and why I planned to link apostolicity and orthodoxy with Emerging expressions and; g) what new findings and responses I have hoped to show.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CAUSES OF FRACTURING AND CHALLENGES TO ORTHODOXY IN EMERGING STREAMS

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we have further considered the distinctives that first united the Emerging Church (EC) movement, as well as the key voices, issues of fracturing and justifications for innovation or revision that later emerged within the three main streams of the EC: the *Relevants*, *Reconstructionists*, and *Revisionists*. We also wished to examine how or to what extent those EC persons and streams who came into conflict with one another considered accountability to apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy*<sup>1</sup> and, if not, what they did consider.

Thus, while we have not provided a complete historical survey of the EC movement in this chapter, we have traced some of the major developments, voices, and debates that both united and later led to a divergence of EC persons and streams from each other and, in some cases, from apostolicity and orthodoxy. Additionally, we have also introduced some of the methods and justifications presented in defense of their hermeneutical, theological or doctrinal innovation, revision or defense, especially among those who sought to deconstruct orthodoxy. At the same time, we have also introduced key voices, themes, and works that have been explored further in subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, as we have explored the key developments, voices, and issues that led to the fracturing in the EC and to challenges to orthodoxy, we were also often forced to rely on the popular sources used by vital EC voices who, as noted in Chapter One, have typically offered primary source material via popular facing books, videos, conferences, web articles and new

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'apostolicity' is here used to refer to the deposit of faith first given to the apostles by Christ. Also, according to Thomas Oden, *consensual orthodoxy* is a concept of orthodoxy which claims that the apostles faithfully transmitted the apostolic deposit of teachings to subsequent generations who, guided by the Spirit, then consensually transmitted and safeguarded those core teachings and interpretations that accurately reflected the apostolic faith. The rule of *consensual orthodoxy*, as codified by St. Vincent of Lérins, was that one could hear the consensus on apostolic teaching by following that which has been believed, "by everyone, everywhere, and at all times." Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (Harper One, 2002).

media. It was especially necessary, for instance, to rely upon EC blogs that provided primary sources for much of the history of the early development of the EC. It is also vital to note that for some EC voices, such as Brian McLaren and Mark Driscoll, their blogs, interviews, and talks also appear to have revealed the core beliefs under-girding their popular facing books, which tended to be less controversial at first and aimed at a broader Evangelical audience.<sup>2</sup> It was only in the last decade that some EC authors' outward-facing books began to reflect the more radical tone seen in their earlier blogs, interviews, and talks, as explored further in this chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, while we have also noted some of the popular-facing academic books of not only the EC movement but also of external critics such as D.A. Carson, there is an overall lack of scholarly work on the larger EC movement following their fracturing. This lack of a greater body of scholarly work, is why we have also proceeded to conduct ethnographic research and interviews with EC voices, in Chapter Four of this study, much as was done by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger in their study of the EC in *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. (2005) Due to the popular-facing nature of the EC movement, Gibbs and Bolger initially relied upon websites and blogs, followed by interviews with EC leaders whom they identified via initial research via the web, conferences or personal contacts.<sup>4</sup> While Gibbs and Bolger's work is a helpful snapshot of the movement as of 2005, we also needed to trace the more recent development of the movement to ask questions around the issues that led to division and fracturing in the EC, which began to noticeably decline after Gibbs and Bolger's work was

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<sup>2</sup>Reformed author Tim Challies, for instance, critiqued Brian McLaren for only slowly revealing his true beliefs. See: Tim Challies, "The False Teachers: Brian McLaren," *challies.com* (2014) accessed Feb. 2018, <https://www.challies.com/articles/the-false-teachers-brian-mclaren/>.

<sup>3</sup> As we have explored further in this chapter, we have seen such a progression in the work of McLaren who was still in the Evangelical conversation when he published *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2006a), but garnered criticism from former supporters such as Scot McKnight, by 2011, with the publication of *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith* (HarperOne) being deemed by McKnight as no longer orthodox. See: Scot McKnight, "Review: Brian McLaren's A New Kind of Christianity," *Christianity Today* (June 5, 2011), accessed Apr. 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20110605055032/http://www.christianitytoday.com/articleprint.html?id=86862>. McLaren would admit to having left Evangelicalism by 2017, choosing to focus on a more pluralistic expression of the faith. See: Brian McLaren, "How Did You Transition out of Evangelicalism?" *Brianmclaren.net* (2017), accessed Aug. 2017, <https://brianmclaren.net/blog/>.

<sup>4</sup>See: Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 44-45.

published. Further, we also wanted to investigate issues of fracturing in dialogue with St. Vincent's concepts of apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy*, which we have introduced in our next chapter, to see if either was considered as sources of accountability for EC reformation, innovation or revisions, or whether they were only accountable internally. However, before engaging with EC streams ethnographically, we first needed to identify causes of fracturing, as highlighted by the approaches of key EC leaders.

Therefore, in this chapter, we have examined the essentials that first distinguished and united EC streams and the key voices with whom the movement was associated. We have done so to introduce important EC themes, dialogue partners, and categorizations that will allow us to also then evaluate the causes of fracturing that divided the EC, their approaches to apostolicity and orthodoxy, and theological justifications for challenges to traditional and orthodox doctrines; as well as their alternative sources of accountability. In so doing, we hoped to provide a snapshot of key issues of fracturing, approaches, and challenges to orthodoxy, and justifications for lack of consideration or revisions of consensual historical understandings of orthodoxy within the EC, so that we may also consider, in future chapters, *how or to what extent*, Emerging expressions might seek to reform, contextualize, innovate, or even revise Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines, to inculturate the gospel amidst current postmodern contexts without severing continuity-and-congruity with apostolicity.

## **2.2 Origins of the EC Movement**

In their seminal 2005 study of the EC movement, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger framed the movement as a collection of "communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures," by following nine common practices: to "(1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm...(3) live highly communal lives...(4) welcome strangers, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities." (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 44-45) Streams of the EC have also often been unified by their critique of traditional western church models and practices that they

thought need to be deconstructed and reformed in order to better bring the ‘essentials’ of the Christian faith into postmodern culture, a culture that far too often could not relate to modern and ‘attractual’ forms of Christianity typically practiced in traditional churches. (Ibid, 29) EC streams were also likely to eject from their original church communities and to instead participate in new communities intentionally located within the hubs of postmodern culture, living out the gospel incarnationally instead of attempting to ‘attract’ persons back into more traditional churches and programs. In addition, some Emerging communities were also primarily virtual communities facilitated via blogs with periodic gatherings in person, while others gathered in pubs, coffee shops or community centers to avoid the typical Sunday-morning forms and patterns of traditional western churches.<sup>5</sup> Still others required members to join an intentional community and commit to shared rhythms.<sup>6</sup> Whatever form these new emerging communities took, they were often organized as alternative life, worship or discipleship communities where persons could ask questions and experiment with new styles, language, forms or methods.<sup>7</sup>

As Scottish theologian Doug Gay pointed out in his participant reflection on EC expressions, published in his book, *Remixing the Church: Toward an Emerging Ecclesiology* (2011, 33-38), key antecedents to the EC movement, that also helped shape the EC movement, can be seen within the twentieth-century *Ecumenical*, *Charismatic* and *Jesus* movements. However, the EC's original, unique contribution to the church, beginning in the 1980's, was its missional inculturation of the gospel within the alternative youth sub-cultures of Generation X, such as skateboarders, goths, punks and metal-heads that most traditional churches were unable or unwilling to reach. (A. Jones 2006) According to EC chronicler Andrew Jones' eyewitness

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<sup>5</sup>Dave Gibbons and his community in Santa Ana, California exemplify a church community who have remixed their ecclesiology by ‘being the church’ in cultural spaces while remaining orthodox theologically. Dave Gibbons, *Xealots: Defying the Gravity of Normal*, (Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>6</sup>See: John Hayes, *Submerge: Living Deep in a Shallow World: Service, Justice and Contemplation among the World's Poor* (Regal, 2007). InnerChange is a New Friar order, started by Hayes in the 1980's, which forms communities in situations of urban poverty.

<sup>7</sup>See: Peter Rollins, *peterrollins.com* (2017), accessed Jan. 2018, <https://peterrollins.com/>. Rollins', a *Revisionist* theologian with whom we engaged more intentionally in Chapter Five, leads a collection of 'Ikon' communities who embrace ‘heterodoxy,’ believing ‘unbelief’ to be more authentically Christian than orthodox beliefs or traditional practices.

accounts of the early EC movement, captured on his ethnographically priceless web blog, *TallSkinnyKiwi*, (ibid) the best estimated starting date for the Emerging Church was 1985 when *Vineyard* founder, John Wimber, spoke at a ‘Signs and Wonders’ conference at the city hall in Sheffield, England and “rocked the English.” (Ibid) After the city hall meeting in Sheffield, Wimber conducted a follow up meeting at *St. Thomas Crookes Anglican Church* in Sheffield where, according to a participant observation by early EC member Neil Hopkins, the Reverend Robert Warren had a vision of young people flooding into his church. (N. Hopkins, n.d.) Following his vision, Warren commissioned a team of young parishioners to pioneer an alternative worship service for Sheffield youth. That service, led by Chris Brain, became the *Nine O’clock Service*, an alternative worship service with a nightclub vibe and Goth-Rock worship. (Ibid) It also became a catalyst for other alternative communities in the UK and beyond.<sup>8</sup>

In that same year, 1985, another significant emerging community, *The Sanctuary*, was started by Bob Beeman in Redondo Beach, California, providing discipleship for “goths, metal heads and punks.” (A. Jones 2006) These first notable alternative worship communities were followed by the *Matthews Party* and *New Song* communities, both formed in California in 1986 to reach Gen X through alternative worship and discipleship. Then, *Parallel Universe*, an alternative worship community in New Zealand, was founded by Mark Pierson and Mike Riddell, in 1989, along with several more Emerging UK communities started in the early 90’s under leaders such as Ian Mobsby and Jonny Baker. (A Jones 2009c)

### **2.3 The Second Wave of the EC Movement**

One of the first steps toward a more formally organized EC movement came with the founding of the *Emerging Church Network* in the United States, in 1998, under the leadership of young missional innovators like Shannon Hopkins who were disenchanted with traditional forms

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<sup>8</sup> *The Nine O’Clock Service*, unfortunately, ended in a sex abuse scandal involving leadership that foreshadowed some of the later fracturing and disillusion surrounding other key leaders in the EC, as described in this chapter and subsequent chapters. See: Tony Cummings, “The Media Scandal Behind Sheffield’s Nine O’Clock Service,” *Crossrhythms* (Oct 1, 1995), accessed July 2016, [http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/The\\_Media\\_Scandal\\_Behind\\_Sheffields\\_Nine\\_OClock\\_Service\\_/40388/p1](http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/The_Media_Scandal_Behind_Sheffields_Nine_OClock_Service_/40388/p1).

of church and desired “new forms of church to reach my friends and people like me.” (S. Hopkins, n.d.) Claiming she was influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's vision for community in *Discipleship* (ibid),<sup>9</sup> Hopkins organized a collection of alternative communities into the ‘Emerging Church Network,’ a network of young leaders formed to reach their generation. (A. Jones 2009a)

By the early 2000’s, the EC had become a more clearly recognizable ecclesiological movement, attracting a slew of professional authors, pastors, church planters and theologians including Brian McLaren, Mark Driscoll, Doug Pagitt, Karen Ward, Phillis Trickle, Tony Jones, Peter Rollins, and many more, who embraced the EC label and capitalized on its popularity with a flurry of publications on the shape of an 'Emerging Church' for the twenty-first century. However, as they shared the spotlight, disagreements soon developed among the new leaders themselves that would eventually fracture the EC into at least three streams by 2006. (Stetzer 2006) Consequentially, reasons for diverging from one another would also coincide with a divergence from orthodoxy by some of the leading voices in one EC stream.

### 2.3.1 Three Key EC Streams and Reasons for Division

Many of the first EC communities, such as the *Nine O’Clock Service*, while being culturally progressive, were theologically “quite conservative, with a strong emphasis on spiritual discipline, prayer, charismatic gifts and ministry.” (N. Hopkins, n.d.) However, by the early 2000’s, some of the ‘second wave’ of EC leaders would take the movement in more controversial directions, as we have detailed below, by questioning orthodox doctrines, hermeneutics, epistemology, and practices or, as we will also consider later in this study in the work of James K.A. Smith,<sup>10</sup> modern Evangelical understandings of these things. In response, some theologically and doctrinally conservative Evangelicals had come to view the entire EC movement with

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<sup>9</sup> EC voices McLaren and Rollins also claimed Bonhoeffer as a key catalyst. In Chapter Five, we have examined whether he has been correctly read or has been misappropriated in the EC.

<sup>10</sup> See: James K.A. Smith, “Stop Blaming the Culture for our Distorted View of God,” *Christianity Today* (Dec. 2013), accessed Mar. 2018, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/december/david-wells-god-when-stop-blaming-culture-for-our-dist.html>. Also see: James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Brazos Press, 2016).

suspicion by 2006, due to the more progressive beliefs being espoused by some in the ‘second wave’ of EC voices and due to suspicions about influences of postmodernism upon the EC.<sup>11</sup>

However, such external critics sometimes misunderstood the diverse nature of the EC movement and the key voices that had already diverged within the movement at this point. Significantly, as noted in Chapter Two, Missiologist Ed Stetzer first noted and categorized three key sub-streams that had developed within the EC by 2006 as: *Relevants* who were typically more theologically orthodox, but were seeking to update their practices in worship and evangelism, via new methods, postures and language, in order to innovatively share the gospel and provide a more culturally relevant church within the postmodern culture; *Reconstructionists*, who were also typically orthodox doctrinally, but viewed current forms and rhythms of church as often being ineffective in reaching the postmodern culture and who wished to reform their ecclesiology, often emphasizing the formation of more anciently-rooted communities, as seen in the book of *Acts*, as sacred communities existing amidst a secular postmodern culture; and *Revisionists*, who were willing to revise not only their methods, language or ecclesiology, but who were also open to revising orthodoxy in conversation with what they sometimes perceived as the mutually critical voices of secular postmodern culture and philosophies. (Stetzer 2006)<sup>12</sup>

The *Revisionist* stream, who came to self-identify with the labels ‘Emergent Church’ or ‘Emergent Village,’ perhaps caused the most confusion for outside observers, some of whom, such as D.A. Carson, might have wrongly assumed that its leading voices, such as Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Karen Ward, Phyllis Tickle and Tony Jones, represented the entire EC movement. (McKnight 2006a) However, the ‘Emergent Church’ or ‘Emergent Village,’ which we will refer to from here on as the *Revisionist* stream, was a narrower stream and organization which diverged from the original larger and more diverse EC movement. Scot McKnight noted:

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<sup>11</sup> An example of such Evangelical critiques can be found in Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck's 2008 book, *Why We're Not Emergent*, (Moody Publishers). DeYoung and Kluck's book is one example of a critical Evangelical and Neo-Reformed response to the postmodern tone of the EC, as also evidenced by D.A. Carson's critique in, Carson 2005a. Common in their critique of the EC was the belief that the EC sacrificed orthodoxy for orthopraxy, pitting beliefs against practices with an overemphasis on cultural relevance.

<sup>12</sup> Also see: Richardson 2013, 132.

A distinction needs to be made between ‘emerging’ and ‘Emergent.’ Emerging is the wider, informal, global, ecclesial (church-centered) focus of the movement, while Emergent is an official organization in the U.S. and the U.K. Emergent Village, the organization, is directed by Tony Jones...Other names connected with Emergent Village include Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Tim Keel, Karen Ward, Ivy Beckwith, Brian McLaren, and Mark Oestreicher. (McKnight 2007a)

Perhaps the greatest example of the issues that caused the EC movement to fracture and diverge could be seen in the conflict that arose between EC leaders such as Brian McLaren, who has since founded the interrelated *Open-and-Convergence* networks,<sup>13</sup> and Mark Driscoll, formerly of *Mars Hill* church in Seattle and now pastoring *The Trinity Church* in Scottsdale, Arizona. In the early 2000’s, McLaren and Driscoll became well-known names due to a string of successful books on EC themes, as noted throughout this chapter, and their collaboration on a speaking team that headlined conferences and seminars around EC conversations.<sup>14</sup> As they pontificated on the greatest problems and solutions for the church's missional engagement with a postmodern world, disagreements arose around Christian positions on sexuality, war, abortion, and interpretation of Scriptures and orthodox doctrines around the unique divinity and centrality of Christ, the need for repentance of individual sin and the reality and significance of the atonement. McLaren, who would become recognized as the leading voice for the more theologically progressive *Revisionist* stream,<sup>15</sup> would increasingly use his popular platform to question and critique orthodox hermeneutics, doctrines, and practices. As he did, more theologically conservative critics began to question McLaren's orthodoxy, especially those suspicious of the entire EC movement;<sup>16</sup> as would EC *Relevants* such as Driscoll.

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<sup>13</sup>See: Convergence. “Convergenceus.org.” (n.d.), accessed Mar. 2018, <http://convergenceus.org/initiatives/>. The Open network of churches is an initiative of the Convergence network. They identify as progressive, post-Evangelical and pluralistic.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church,” *Criswell Theological Review* (2006a), 87-93.

<sup>15</sup>D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Zondervan, 2005). By 2005, D.A. Carson pointed to McLaren as the foremost voice of the EC but was perhaps unaware of the diverging streams that were apparent as early as 2005 and the divergence of opinions between the leaders of the larger EC movement. By 2008, in his article “McLaren Emerging,” *Christianity Today* (Sept. 26, 2008), Scot McKnight was differentiating McLaren’s voice as now being the lead voice in a more progressive offshoot of the ‘broader emerging movement,’ arguing that the broader movement was still located within evangelicalism and supported by orthodox voices such as John Stott.

<sup>16</sup>See: Ken Silva, “Brian McLaren Spreading a Dangerous Heresy in the Emerging Church,” *Apprising Ministries* (Feb. 22, 2008), accessed Mar. 2018, <http://apprising.org/2008/02/22/brian-mclaren-spreading-a->

One of the controversial issues that initially triggered Driscoll's critiques of McLaren and his *Revisionist* stream, for instance, was McLaren's evolving challenges to historic Christian views on sexuality and marriage, with McLaren eventually giving a full public endorsement of same-sex marriage by 2012. Before eventually announcing his full support for same-sex marriage, McLaren had first publicly suggested, in a 2006 article for *Christianity Today*, that since his homosexual friends had been "hurt by conservative Christians," Christians, therefore, did not have the right to speak to issues of homosexuality for "five-to-ten years." (McLaren 2006b) In a justification that we have argued, in subsequent chapters, was also heterodox in departing from the clear consensus of Christian interpretation according to the 'test of orthodoxy' advocated for by St. Vincent of Lérins and the ecumenical councils, a concept we have investigated in Chapter Three,<sup>17</sup> McLaren defended his revision of historic teaching on marriage by claiming Christians should follow what seemed "good to the Holy Spirit and us," as an epistemological way forward on the issue. (Ibid) Outraged by McLaren's justification, in which he thought current experiences and values were placed over traditional interpretations of Scripture, Driscoll sarcastically responded to McLaren that:

For the next 5-10 years you are hereby required to white out 1 Peter 3:15 which says 'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have'...from your Bible until further notice from McLaren because the religious right forget the gentleness and respect part and the religious left forgot the answer the question part. Subsequently, a task force will be commissioned to have a conversation about all of this at a labyrinth to be named later. Once consensus is reached a finger painting will be commissioned on the Emergent website as the official doctrinal position. (Driscoll 2006c)

However, it was interesting that in his rebuttal to McLaren, Driscoll also did not seem to consider it worthwhile to appeal to consensual interpretations of orthodoxy either in refuting McLaren's views, but claimed to only appeal to Scripture alone, while, subsequently, being seen

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generous-heresy-in-the-emerging-church. Also See: Kevin DeYoung, "Christianity and McLarenism (1)," *The Gospel Coalition* (Feb. 17, 2010), accessed Apr. 2, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/christianity-and-mclarenism-1/>.

<sup>17</sup>The 'test of orthodoxy' is the rule of *consensual orthodoxy*, detailed in Chapter Three, that holds that Scripture is prime, then tradition can also serve as a guide in support of Scripture but when debate remains, Christians should trust only that teaching that is in clear alignment with the consensus of all Christians, everywhere, and always. Lérins (1886) 2012, 76-77.

to go against consensual, creedal interpretations of Scripture himself, such as in his teaching that Christ never went to hell and that it was a heresy to teach that he did, as the Apostle's Creed claimed.<sup>18</sup> Without being able to appeal to 'boundary markers' or an 'immune system' beyond his personal hermeneutics, to what could Driscoll then appeal to prove that his reading of Scriptures was correct and McLaren's was false, or that he was orthodox and McLaren was heterodox? Did he fail to appeal to the 'test of orthodoxy,' which we will devote our next chapter to describing, out of lack of awareness of the church's historic consensual approach to divisive issues, or did he not appeal to the test because his interpretations could not pass the 'test of orthodoxy' either?

After waging open war in the media, a divorce between Driscoll and McLaren's camps came quickly. In a 2006 blog post, Driscoll noted of his departure from the EC speaking team with *Revisionists* such as McLaren and Doug Pagitt, that:

I eventually left that team for a variety of practical and theological reasons. Since that time, much of that team has remained together and has evolved into the Emergent stream of the emerging church. Perhaps the best-known leaders in that network are Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt. Since leaving that team I have been increasingly concerned about some of the theological conversations that are taking place, which has led to frustration and anger on my part. (Warnock 2006b)

At the heart of debates about sexuality was a deeper issue of how to correctly read Scripture and, when Christians differed in interpretations, to what they should then appeal to know that they were authentically following the true Christ of the Apostles. While Driscoll believed his hermeneutics and systematic allowed him to even disagree with creeds affirmed by the orthodox consensus,<sup>19</sup> McLaren thought that a telos of loving God and loving others, as understood via his own epistemological lens, compelled him to revise Biblical passages on sexuality, and disregard interpretations and practices provided by the orthodox consensus of the church through the centuries. Then too, in a later interview with *National Public Radio* (Barrick

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<sup>18</sup>See: Mark Driscoll, "Trial: 8 Witnesses from 1 and 2 Peter," *Mars Hill Church Preaching & Theology Sermon Series* (Oct. 28, 2008b), accessed Dec. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epv-JO4JEQM>. Driscoll claimed the final version of the Apostles' Creed was 'heretical' in stating Christ went to hell.

<sup>19</sup> Though it is worth noting the Apostle's Creed was not affirmed in name by a major ecumenical council, Thomas Oden argues that the Apostles' Creed has been continually affirmed by the consensus of orthodoxy, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, to Luther, as the best-condensed summary of the Christian faith. Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (HarperOne, 2009), 10.

2012), at which point McLaren openly supported same-sex marriage, he reflected on the evolution of his views on the topic, which had served as a dividing point for the EC, starting in 2006, and admitted he had actually had an emotional stake in the issue for a while, not only as a pastor ministering to gay congregants but as the father of a gay son for whom McLaren had officiated a same-sex ceremony.<sup>20</sup> However, McLaren argued of his evolving views that “I had gone through my change in this view before I ever guessed that any of my kids might be gay.”

(Ibid) He also argued:

As a pastor, I started having gay people come out to me and what became clearer and clearer to me is that their experience was not explained by the theology I inherited...it would be unjust to continue to uphold what I'd been taught. Maybe I could say it like this: My call to love God and love my neighbor was in conflict with what I'd been taught the Bible required me to say and do... Couple of years after that, when I really in some ways came out myself as a person who no longer supported the traditional view and one of my sons came out to me, I just remember I cried and cried because my thought is 'Oh no, if my son has been going through the same kind of pain so many other people did and I didn't know it, I just couldn't live with that. (Ibid)

The issue of pastoral endorsements of same-sex marriage, though important, was only one of several issues that led to fracturing in the EC, with debates over war, abortion, confession of sin, and understandings of the atonement and the unique salvific work of Christ being examples of many more that led to deep divides; all of which were centered in debates over the epistemology and hermeneutics.

In an example other issues that drove the fracturing of the EC, at a pastor's event I attended in Portland, Oregon, in 2004, I witnessed McLaren respond to a pastor asking for clarification of his views on abortion and sexuality, by saying that Christians must stop focusing on abortion and homosexuality, claiming there were “literally one hundred more important moral issues, like the war.” He argued that, while Christians had “lost the right to speak about homosexuality,” if they were serious about following Christ they should protest George W. Bush over the War in Iraq. McLaren's answer was met with tense silence by some in the room. Subsequently, as a participant observer at an 'Off the Map' conference in Seattle, in 2005, I also witnessed McLaren draw

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<sup>20</sup> See: NY Times Staff, “Trevor McLaren and Noah Ryan,” *NY Times* (Sept. 23, 2012), ST, 18.

critiques from *Relevant* attendees for claiming the story of the 'Rich Young Ruler,' in *Mark 10*, was not about eschatological salvation, but that Christ was instead calling the 'young ruler' to protest empire, through which exegesis McLaren again charged that committed Christians must protest George W. Bush and the War in Iraq as a gospel imperative. (McLaren 2005a) This interpretation did not appear to sit well with more conservative pastors and *Relevant* attendees. Conversely, *Revisionists* were upset that Driscoll had a presence at the conference, via a display table for his *Mars Hill* church; with *Revisionists* making sure to let *Mars Hill* attendees know that Driscoll was a 'misogynist,' for his lack of female leadership at *Mars Hill* and guilty of 'bullying' for debating McLaren's views, which would soon come to a head publicly.

While issues of fracturing in the EC, to this point, appeared to be mostly politically charged, it was the subsequent justifications for competing interpretations of Scripture and doctrine that would further divide the EC. The justifications for contradictory interpretations would also reveal lack of care for apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy*, which, as we have covered in Chapter Three, Vincent of Lérins and the ecumenical councils considered a warning sign of heresy in that diverging from doctrinal unity was to abandon unity and peace in the Body of Christ. (Lérins (1886) 2012, 101-102).

### 2.3.2 An Emergent-Revisionist Justification for Revisions of Orthodoxy

By 2006, as we have examined below, McLaren would begin to publicly justify revisions of historic Christian doctrines and practices, not only around sexuality but also around the salvific atonement of Christ, the reality of sin and the existence of hell. McLaren would do so without reference to apostolicity, *consensual orthodoxy* or the observed process of faith transmission by which, as Methodist theologian Thomas Oden pointed out, one can trace, through the collected writings of the church, how apostolic teaching was transferred and safeguarded through the Body of Christ, from one generation to the next. (Oden 2002, 52-53) Against the shared interpretations of the orthodox consensus of Christians, who had already spoken to the issues McLaren was concerned with, having done so across centuries, continents, cultures, race and gender, McLaren,

conversely, defended his revised readings of Scripture, in support of his current values and experiences, as being authentically Christian by claiming his stream was not only following what seemed “good to the Holy Spirit and us” (McLaren 2006b) but were also providing a more hermeneutically faithful narrative-theological reading of Scriptures, informed by leading historical-contextual analysis into the actualities of the Biblical authors, their situations and their messages. (McLaren 2007) Further, McLaren also claimed that where the creeds failed to match current, more enlightened understandings of scriptural narratives, then “new creeds are needed to give voice to the cry of faith today.” (McLaren 2006a, 28) Thus, just we have, in Chapter Three, noted that the Council of Ephesus charged Nestorius as defending his innovations against the consensus by claiming an enlightened perspective, (Lérins, 42-44, 112) so McLaren appears to have likewise claimed a superior perspective for his interpretation than the historic consensus of Christians. (McLaren 2007)

In McLaren's arguing that a narrative-theological reading of Scripture, which also claimed support in updated historical-contextual analysis, allowed he and his fellow *Revisionists* to assert that they were not simply following their feelings over-and-against Scriptures, as Driscoll had charged, but were being hermeneutically faithful in extracting what they argued were the original meanings and contexts of Scripture, McLaren and his fellow *Revisionists* also appeared to have some synergy with 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann, whom critics such as Al Mohler charged both McLaren and Rob Bell as following. (Mohler 2011) Bultmann had famously argued for a demythologizing of the New Testament to extract the actual historical person of Christ, as seen in his *The New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*. (1984, 77) Bultmann said too, of the witnesses of Scripture, that “They are not read primarily as witnesses to what they report, but as witnesses to their time, out of which they do their reporting.” (Ibid) Thus also, *Revisionists* such as McLaren thought that, in revising orthodox interpretations of Scripture, they were really deconstructing western cultural readings to recover the 'correct' first-century narratives that were not about eschatological or spiritual realities, but Christ's concern for human equality, peace, and justice in present contexts. (McLaren, 2007)

Following McLaren's lead, it was the special emphasis on the Biblical narrative as being primarily about guidance for one's spiritual 'journey' and for present materialist situations, rather than eschatological ones, that would increasingly become a defining characteristic of the *Revisionist* stream, along with their use of narrative-contextual theology as a justification for *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodoxy. For instance, in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger's ethnographic surveys and interviews of EC leaders in *Emerging Churches* (2005), the authors discovered that 'Emergents' (*Revisionists*) would also often cite the work of seminal New Testament Anglican scholar N.T. Wright to attempt to justify their revisions of orthodox understandings of the Biblical narratives. (Ibid, 53-54, 59, 61) As a leading expert on first-century Jewish contexts, N.T. Wright asserted that recovering the original contexts empowered, among other things, a 'new perspective' on Paul's message as well as a historical-contextual recovery of first century understanding of the kingdom of heaven. (Ibid) Gibbs and Bolger, for instance, cited *Emergent-Revisionist* pastors such as Barry Taylor, who at the time led the Episcopal 'Sanctuary' church in L.A., and Karen Ward, who at the time pastored in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, both of whose pastorates have now ended,<sup>21</sup> as examples of *Emergents* who claimed to follow in N.T. Wright's historical-contextual footsteps, despite going much further than Wright in their deconstruction of Scripture; as they not only tried to understand original contexts, but to remove entire voices from Scripture such as seen in their moving away from Paul's epistles as having resonance for present realities, and their moving away from much of the gospels authors' focus on the divinity and atoning death of Jesus as well to instead focus *only* on the materialist acts and humanity of Jesus as understood through a postmodern lens, which Wright would not support.<sup>22</sup> (Ibid, 48) Taylor asserted, for instance, "I needed to stop reading Paul for a while and

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<sup>21</sup>Taylor would be forced to resign in 2015 over charges of embezzlement, interestingly joining almost all of the other EC pastors mentioned in this study is no longer pastoring churches. Robina Gibb, "Barry Taylor Rock'n'Roll Pastor Hits a Bump on the Highway to Heaven," *The Guardian* (Feb. 1, 2015), accessed Apr. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/01/barry-taylor-rock-n-roll-pastor-bump-highway-heaven>.

<sup>22</sup>Although Wright shares many of the same critiques as do EC voices, such as Tony Jones, of Evangelical and Neo-Reformed understandings of penal-substitution, labeling them as being a 'caricature,' he does not then deconstruct all eschatological understandings of atonement, nor the unique salvific work of Christ. See: N.T. Wright, "The Cross and the Caricatures," *Fulcrum-Anglican* (2007) accessed Apr. 2018,

instead focus on Jesus.” (Ibid) Ward added that, even in focusing on Jesus in her 'open' and pluralistic church community, “We focused on the humanity of Jesus and lost all the categories from church history,” meaning that those elements of Jesus’ life that were most helpful to present values and contexts were now accentuated while those having to do with sin or eschatological judgment were excised. (Ibid)

In further support of an *Emergent-Revisionist* deconstruction of orthodox understandings of the gospels, Gibbs and Bolger also revealed that *Emergents* argued that the original narrative understanding of the ‘good news’ of the gospel was also not the death of Jesus for sins, but his “new way of life, in this redemption of the world.” (Ibid, 54) Dieter Zander, the former pastor of Qwest Church and New Song, who is also no longer pastoring,<sup>23</sup> added that he believed the gospel was not primarily concerned with how persons go to heaven, but with “being increasingly alive to God in the world.” (Ibid, 55) Maintaining an *Emergent-Revisionist* focus on a Christ who cares more about the materialist needs of present communities, Karen Ward also highlighted polling of the unchurched in Seattle that she claimed showed that ninety-five percent had a favorable view of Jesus but disliked the church because they did not think the church was following Jesus’ teachings. (Ibid, 48) Ward implied this disconnect between cultural views of Jesus’ teachings and traditional Christian views was due to misrepresentations of his teachings by later Christians, while Ward also argued that non-Christian views of Jesus’ teachings were likely more accurate than those of orthodox Christianity. (Ibid)

Critics, however, eventually questioned whether, in their revisions, such *Revisionists* were honestly seeking to uncover the original narratives or were simply reinterpreting Jesus’ life and teachings through the lens of a postmodern meta-narrative that allowed them to do away with Scriptures they could not reconcile with their postmodern values and actions. Tim Challies claimed, for example, that McLaren was a 'false teacher' who “assumed authority over the Bible

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<https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/the-cross-and-the-caricatures/>. Also see: Tony Jones, *A Better Atonement: Beyond the Depraved Doctrine of Original Sin* (The JoPa Group, 2012a).

<sup>23</sup> See: Vicki Larson, “Stroke Leads Ex-Pastor Dieter Zander on a Different Path to Grace,” *marinji.com* (Apr. 14, 2014), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://www.marinij.com/article/zz/20140414/NEWS/140418753>.

instead of placing himself under its authority. His understanding of Scripture frees him to see Christian doctrine as evolving, and himself as an instrument of this evolution. In this way, he revisits and reinterprets whatever does not accord with modern sensibilities.” (Challies 2014)

Against critiques of *Revisionist* deconstructions, Gibbs and Bolger, however, sympathetically argued that *Revisionists* were not abandoning the core of the gospel but were only “dismantling ideas of church that simply are not viable in postmodern culture. Neither the gospel nor the culture demands these expressions of the faith. Emerging churches remove modern practices of Christianity, not the faith itself.” (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 28-29)

While other voices in EC conversations, such as Alan Hirsch, Robert Webber, Jason Cark and Doug Gay, some of whom we will revisit more intentionally in Chapter Six, may have only been critiquing ideas or forms of church that were hindering Christian engagement with postmodern culture, it appeared that *Revisionists* were, in fact, quite publicly dismantling the core doctrines of the Christian faith as well. For example, McLaren would again lead the way in *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodox doctrines in additionally arguing that there was no such thing as one ‘Biblical Worldview’ that Christians had to follow, but that Scriptures revealed a diverse number of worldviews and situations where the authors were merely recounting their contextual spiritual quests:

We would be wiser to focus on a dynamic quest rather than on a static system. And the Bible provides us, not with material to write a timeless legal constitution, but priceless resources for the quest. So, I wonder what would happen if we talked about ‘the biblical quest’ instead of ‘the biblical world view’...seeing our faith less as a tradition we inherited from our ancestors, and more as a quest which both they and we are on. (Dahl 2010)

In keeping with an interpretation of the scriptural narratives as being primarily about journeys of self-discovery, with the Bible as a ‘resource’ to help current Christians on their own quests to address present materialist concerns, instead of codifying orthodox eschatological understandings of sin and atonement, which McLaren rejected, McLaren also theorized:

I think there are different understandings of the narrative that are...hard to get to because we’ve got so much of the old narrative...influencing the way we read the Bible. I feel like, piece by piece you get a different vision...one of the questions I could raise...is to say, what is the problem with sin? What’s so bad about sin... We have a

vision that the real problem is God wants to kill us all. And we've got to somehow solve that problem. And what that does to me...is that it then minimizes the concern about injustice between human beings...I think that that theology was the perfect theology to enfranchise apartheid, colonialism, segregation in the United States. It enfranchises carelessness toward the poor, disregard for the rights of homosexuals, carelessness toward people with AIDS. It shifts all the attention from God's will being done on earth to what happens to us after we die. And I think that is the kind of thing that would make God furious. (McLaren 2007)

Therefore, McLaren did not believe God was angry about sin that separated humans from God, but only issues which separated humans from fellow humans amidst materialist actualities. McLaren further demonstrated how his *Emergent Village* community was seeking to deconstruct orthodox eschatological concerns, in favor of a humanistic social gospel, in his praise<sup>24</sup> of *Revisionist* Andrew Perriman's work in *The Coming of the Son of Man: New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church* (2005b), a book that influenced McLaren's hermeneutics. In his deconstruction of New Testament narratives, Perriman reinterpreted Jesus' teachings on sin, judgment and hell as having been primarily related to the historical events of 67-70 A.D. and the fall of Jerusalem. Following Perriman's lead, McLaren theorized that Jesus' warnings of judgment may not have been at all about hell, or about persons being left out of the kingdom of God due to sin or for having rejected Jesus' offer of salvation and reconciliation with God-the-Father, but as primarily about the historical destruction of Israel at the hands of the Roman Empire due to their rejection of Jesus' message about peace-making and reconciliation between humans:

The only eschatological horizon...Jesus...and the apostles are talking about, it's not the end of the world. It's...the end of Judaism as they knew it...He's telling the Jewish leaders of His day, that judgement is coming. And that if they choose a path of violence, if they reject His path of peace...there's going to be a horrible consequence to it. And what they would say is it happened, AD 67. The Jewish people rejected Jesus—the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus' message of peace and reconciliation. They chose the path of the zealots...His language of hell fire and language of Gehenna and all that language, was fulfilled in what would happen at that time, AD 67 to 70. (McLaren 2007)

McLaren also argued, in an earlier interview, that “we should consider the possibility that many, and perhaps even all of Jesus' hell-fire or end-of-the-universe statements refer not to

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<sup>24</sup> Brian McLaren, “Interview with Understand the Times,” *Understandthetimes.com*, (2007), accessed June 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070806231227/http://www.understandthetimes.g/mclarentrans.shtml>.

postmortem judgment but to the very historic consequences of rejecting his kingdom message of reconciliation and peacemaking.” (McLaren 2006c) This *Revisionist* movement of placing human-to-human reconciliation at the center of the gospel, over-and-above the need for atonement for individual sin and reconciliation between humans-and-God first, allowed McLaren to further suggest that Jesus' death may have really been more about his allowing himself to be killed in protest to the Roman Empire, as a symbol of resistance against human systems of injustice, than his death being an atonement for individuals as sinners. (Ibid)<sup>25</sup> McLaren's approach, in which he shifted the primary focus of the gospels from concerns about individual sin and relational brokenness between the individual and God to concerns of human-to-human peacemaking and reconciliation, also allowed McLaren to subsequently claim that “universalism is not as bankrupt of biblical support as some suggest. (McLaren 2003c, 103, 182-83) Then too, McLaren also sought to deconstruct belief in eschatological judgement:

If we believe that Jesus came in peace the first time, but that wasn't his 'real' and decisive coming...we leave the door open to envisioning a second coming that will be characterized by violence, killing, domination, and eternal torture. This vision reflects a deconversion, a return to trust in the power of Pilate, not the unarmed truth that stood before Pilate, refusing to fight. This eschatological understanding of a violent second coming leads us to believe...even God finds it impossible to fix the world apart from violence and coercion. (McLaren 2009a, 44)

In addition, McLaren would also then compare the death of Jesus to Chinese students killed in Tiananmen Square, and other examples of heroic human sacrifice, to suggest that the significance of Jesus' death was more about being a 'savior type' and protesting present systems and violence than being about a unique salvific atonement for sin. (McLaren 2007)

Thus, for *Emergent-Revisionists*, who followed and were represented by McLaren's

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<sup>25</sup> See: Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, (Editors), *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (IVP Academic, April 28, 2013). *Reconstructionist* Scot McKnight has critiqued McLaren and Perriman's 'empire criticism' reading of the New Testament, that has tried to remove eschatological concerns and claim, “early Christians...were, in effect, anarchist and rebellious,” and, “repealed the claim of Caesar...have a problem...every time the apostle Paul mentions Rome he is positive. If the apostles truly were anti-empire, there is no way Paul can say what he says in Romans 13.” McKnight adds, “There's another issue here: more than one European has said that empire criticism is...American scholarship,” and, “anti-Bush era political protest, and...there is an uncanny connection between a person's politics and one's posture in the empire critical approach.”

work,<sup>26</sup> elements of the New Testament that they found offensive to current postmodern cultural sensibilities, such as Jesus' teachings on individual sin and hell, were seen as being later added to the original narrative. (Ibid) After dismantling ideas, words or actions in Scripture that they believed to be non-translatable to present contexts, they could instead summarize the importance of the message of Jesus as being primarily focused on service and justice to neighbors in the world, the values they thought most translated from the gospels to the present cultural moment, rather than on sin or salvific atonement. (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 49-50) However, after deconstructing creedal claims and orthodox interpretations of Scripture, especially around the importance of Christ's salvific, atoning life and death, what then about their message could be identified as distinctly Christian?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom we will turn to in Chapter Five of this study, thought that although Christians must emerge beyond religious systems to live incarnationally in the world, still, any reference to Christ was only made possible by “holding fast in humility to the word that has been heard...In the obedience of thinking,” by which he believed Christians must surrender to Scripture as received via the apostolic witnesses to ensure that they were following the same Christ as the apostles and not a Christ of 'culture;' which alignment was primarily evidenced by confession of sin and unity in worship and doctrine. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009), 130-132)<sup>27</sup> However, in their movement to revise orthodox interpretations of Scripture, *Revisionists* did not often seem to consider the ways their concepts of Christ had, in contrast with Bonhoeffer's view, come into conflict and disunity with the consensus of Christians who had received the original apostolic canon of faith and faithfully transmitted his message to the present. As such, by 2010, *Reconstructionist* Scot McKnight, who had worked with McLaren, now argued that McLaren had departed the broader chorus of historic orthodoxy for a narrower, heterodox 'social gospel' that did not match the apostolic faith. (McLaren 2011) However, some *Revisionists* believed they were

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<sup>26</sup> We dialogued with respondents, in Chapter Four, who ascribed to McLaren's thinking and networks.

<sup>27</sup> Also see: Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 111; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4)*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, (1937) 2003), 69.

not alone, but part of an evolved way of thinking as revealed by postmodern deconstruction.

### 2.3.3 Emergent-Revisionists and Postmodern Deconstructionism

In their attempts to justify deconstructions of orthodox interpretations of Scripture, *Revisionists* would additionally seek support in the postmodern, deconstructionist philosophies of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Slavoj Žižek, among others,<sup>28</sup> whom we have seen cited by key *Revisionist* authors such as Tony Jones and Peter Rollins, in Chapter Three and Five, as well as by *Revisionist* ethnographic respondents in Chapter Four. By appealing to postmodern deconstructionist philosophers, *Revisionists* were attempting to not only claim their revised hermeneutics were informed by better historical-contextual understandings of Biblical narratives that they had recovered, but that their revisions were additionally supported by new insights into the limits of language, its relationship to power, and the ability of a human mind to know or describe truth, which Derrida claimed was always trapped within ‘context.’<sup>29</sup>

*Revisionist* leader, Tony Jones, would, for instance, cite atheist French philosopher Michel Foucault, who claimed all knowledge is shaped by power,<sup>30</sup> to argue against orthodox doctrine, claiming even the “orthodox articulation of Christology” is a human ‘construction’ formed by systems of power. (T. Jones 2007, 16) Then too, *Revisionist* philosopher Peter Rollins would claim that the critiques of systems brought by Derrida, as well as Marx and Nietzsche, would influence his own movement to deconstruct Christian belief as seen in *How (Not) to Speak of God: Philosophical & Theological Underpinnings of the Emerging Church Movement* (2006, 139). Rollins would also credit the deconstructionism of postmodern Marxist-Hegelian a/theist Slavoj Žižek in *Insurrection: To Believe Is Human To Doubt, Divine*. (Rollins 2011b, 38, 44, 46, 86) McLaren would also praise Rollins' demonstration of the “creative and constructive power of what is commonly called *deconstruction*,” which he also thought was helpful for extracting true Christianity from Christianity as a religion. (McLaren 2006d) Therefore, for such *Revisionists*, the attraction of deconstructionism was that if all narratives or doctrines, even those of orthodoxy,

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<sup>28</sup> See: James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church (The Church and Postmodern Culture)* (Baker Academic, 2006), 33-38, 74-75, 99, 116.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” trans. Samuel Webber, in *Limited Inc*, (Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136.

<sup>30</sup> See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (London, Penguin, 1991), 23.

were simply contextually bound interpretations, it then followed that if a Scripture contradicted current cultural values it could possibly be dismissed due to the contextual biases and limitations of the Biblical authors, and those reading their words today. However, the narrative itself could still be rescued and extracted from Scriptures for free usage by postmodern persons in their present dynamic communities' situations. By marrying narrative-theology with postmodern deconstructionism, *Emergent-Revisionists* were thus empowered to jettison traditional orthodox Christian doctrines due to what they believed to have been the 'limitations' and 'biases' of the authors of Scripture and the limiting contexts of the ancient cultures that they were trapped within; consequently allowing *Revisionists* freedom to repurpose Biblical narratives for application in current contexts, and in service to current values, instead of being held accountable to the original intent of the authors or the interpretation of their apostolic meaning as understood via the consensus of orthodoxy. However, in their embracing of a postmodern deconstructionist rejection of all meta-narratives and truth-claims as being only contextually-bound, such *Revisionists* also appeared to be pulling a *sleight-of-hand*. After *first* deconstructing past meta-narratives and truth claims under the guise of narrative-theological or contextual care, they appeared to then, *secondly*, simply be replacing consensual orthodox interpretations with a new postmodern orthodoxy that was subsequently used to revise Scriptures in ways that better fit postmodern sensibilities.

However, in a *Revisionist* repurposing of the Biblical narratives in such a way that Jesus and his message could be seen to fit their current values, without serious reference to apostolicity or faith transmission, some critics again claimed that McLaren, Jones, Rollins and fellow *Revisionists* appeared to be simply repeating 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal theological movements which shaped biblical narratives to fit their own sensibilities. Mark Driscoll, for instance, argued that between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal theology and postmodern *Revisionists* "The only difference is that old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity." (Driscoll 2006b, 22-23) Had *Revisionists* emerged from mostly Evangelical expressions, only to repeat movements of 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal Protestants, such as Bultmann or

Walter Rauschenbusch, only with a postmodern flavor?<sup>31</sup> Further, if they were simply placing the voices of self or secular culture into a mutually-critical position with those of Scripture and the creeds, did they then run the risk of also becoming so enculturated by postmodern culture that there was no longer anything distinctly Christian about them? Even fellow EC practitioner, Jason Clark, who had worked with McLaren, Jones and Rollins, would, in a critique we will revisit in Chapter Six, charge that amidst their focus on deconstruction of historic Christianity as 'wrong,' many *Emergents* failed to recognize that their own interpretations were just as tainted by sin and power as those they sought to deconstruct. (Clark 2006)

The deconstruction of orthodox interpretations and doctrines on the part of *Revisionists*, in apparent service to postmodern values, also predictably led to pointed critiques from Evangelical theologians. D.A. Carson (Carson 2005b), for instance, questioned whether McLaren and *Revisionists* were making the mistake of merely replacing one set of cultural doctrines and interpretations with another, asking, "Is there at least some danger that what is being advocated is not so much a new kind of Christian in a new Emergent Church, but a church that is so submerging itself in the culture that it risks hopeless compromise?" (Ibid, 44). Like Clark, Carson also questioned whether, in their deconstruction, *Revisionists* were willing to be as critical of postmodern narratives and truth claims as they were of the historic church, its doctrines, and interpretations, charging that for McLaren:

Postmodernism itself becomes the uncritiqued matrix in which we must work out our theology...I have not yet seen from McLaren, or anyone else in the Emergent Church movement, a critique of any substantive element of postmodern thought. (Ibid, 26).

Then too, Chuck Colson argued, in a letter to McLaren, that, in what Colson saw as his 'uncritical' embracing of postmodernism, he had simply replaced a modern ideological lens with a postmodern one, thereby exchanging one human system for another, and, more importantly, preventing encounter with revelation:<sup>32</sup>

The issue you and I might have, I think, is...over postmodernism...when you add the

<sup>31</sup> See: Brian McLaren, "Q & R: Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants" *Brianmclaren.net* (2010a), accessed June 2015, <http://brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/post-31.html>. McLaren praised Rauschenbusch's work, saying that he was, in fact, recovering many of the things he said.

<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 111, 132. In Chapter Five, we see Bonhoeffer making a similar argument.

“ism” to an era or any subject for that matter...you turn it into an ideology—a set of ideas and pre-suppositions that form a strong view about politics or behavior or life...ideology is the enemy of Revelation. (Colson 2004)

#### 2.3.4 To Whom or What are EC Streams Accountable?

As various voices in the EC, and those who intersected with its conversations, such as Driscoll, McLaren, Jones, Rollins, Perriman, Phyllis Trickle, Doug Pagitt, Dan Kimball, Karen Ward, Rob Bell, Francis Chan, Robert Webber, John Piper, and many more, debated not only interpretations of Scripture but questions of war, sexuality, and the importance of traditional Christian doctrines on topics such as sin, hell, the Kingdom of God and the nature and importance of Christ’s salvific work, another key question that emerged was: *how* and *to what extent*, amidst reformation and innovation in theology, doctrine, language, ecclesiology or practices, were EC expressions accountable to the same Christ and gospel transmitted by the apostolic witnesses?

On the question of accountability in the reading of Scriptures, theology, doctrine, and praxis, *Revisionist* Andrew Perriman suggested *Emergents* needed only “internal accountability” provided by their local communities, trusting in their relationships to provide all necessary accountability. (Perriman 2005a) Tony Jones agreed, claiming that their Emergent-Village community was grounded in the Spirit and provided accountability. (T. Jones 2007) Evangelical critics, such as Al Mohler, however, questioned whether ‘internal accountability’ could keep *Emergents* from diverging into heresy, especially as they embraced secular postmodernism. (Mohler 2009) At the same time, as we have explored in Chapter Five, *Revisionist* theologian Pete Rollins (Rollins 2011b, xiv) pointed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his question, “Who is Christ actually for us, today?” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 279) as the key question of accountability, interpreting Bonhoeffer to mean that revelation in the incarnate Christ *now*, in actuality, is what takes precedence in any discussions of accountability for epistemology, hermeneutics, theology, doctrines or practices, and what grounds all belief and practice. (Rollins 2011b, 119-121) However, in a postmodern movement that may have proven Mohler's critique as correct, Rollins

then argued that the antidote to false human constructs was to embrace an a/theistic<sup>33</sup> death to all knowing about God so that persons could then be met by Christ in materialist actualities rather than in religious belief, doctrines or practices. (Ibid, 20-21)

Consequentially, in our next three chapters, we have examined how Bonhoeffer and Vincent have provided critiques of such a movement as being heterodox. We also noted additional Christian voices, such as Thomas Oden, who, as part of the Paleo-Orthodox movement,<sup>34</sup> has asked whether the root problem, amidst fracturing and heterodoxy, is that Christians are more in danger of falling prey to heresies if they are only accountable to their own interpretations, local community, or experiences than if they surrender to the unity of the 'Body of Christ,' through the method of *consensual orthodoxy*. (Oden 2002, 119-121)<sup>35</sup>

Considering both Oden and Vincent's emphasis on the consentient voices of orthodoxy providing boundaries within which to settle debates and prevent heterodoxy, in continuity and congruity with the apostolic deposit of faith, it has also been fascinating that neither EC *Relevants*, *Revisionists*, nor some of their partners, appeared to consider apostolicity or *consensual orthodoxy* as sources of accountability. Instead, most EC leaders and the persons who orbited their conversations seemed to only consider accountability as being provided by either local communities or a specific systematic or hermeneutic lens through which they believed they could read Scriptures correctly. For instance, John Piper, who had critiqued *Revisionists* for being 'reactionary' to doctrine and questioning objective truth, while supporting Mark Driscoll and praising him for "Biblical faithfulness" (Piper 2008a), also claimed he interpreted Scripture correctly as the meaning became 'self-evident' in his study of Scripture:

I have tried to develop the mindset that measures intuitively...instinctively...virtually every truth claim and every attitude by the Bible. I try to treat my mind like a concordance. And when I am faced with a question about what I should think about something or what I should feel, I type on the keyboard of my mind relevant words or ideas, and I push the button and start the concordance running to see what passages or

<sup>33</sup>Rollins defines a/theism as an experiential loss of God. Rollins 2011b, 20-21.

<sup>34</sup>See: Oden 1995a, 130. Paleo-Orthodoxy is an Ecumenical Christian theological movement that seeks to place itself under the consensual teachings the fathers, ecumenical councils, and creeds. The word 'paleo' was used by Oden to distinguish this movement from others using the term 'orthodox,' such as "Neo-Orthodox," and to emphasize a focus on early catholic orthodoxy before the major schisms.

<sup>35</sup>Also see: Oden 1995b.

verses in the Scripture will come up that will shed light on this. (Piper 2016)

In Piper's claim that the truth of Scripture was 'self-evident' in his own reading, without additional sources of accountability for his hermeneutics and epistemology, other than a local group of friends, such an approach may have also actually enabled the movements of Revisionists. Piper has also admitted that his only rebuttal to a person arguing that they were reading Scripture correctly, and he was not, was to simply respond, "Well, one of us is wrong," without any further method or rule to appeal to in order to refute heresy and prevent fracturing. (Piper 2018) As such, as we have seen, Brian McLaren also claimed he could discern the truth of Scripture through the guidance of the Spirit, and his own reflection. (McLaren 2006b) How could Piper then show that McLaren's interpretations were wrong if each person was left to simply interpret Scripture under individual guidance in the Spirit and with only the accountability of their local church or small group of friends? Then too, Tony Jones, also critiqued both Piper and Driscoll, arguing that while they claimed they were accountable to Scripture, by way of *Sola Scriptura*, they had not demonstrated accountability to Christ or Christian community, as revealed in the Bible, in the ways they had treated fellow Christians in their ministries. (T. Jones 2012b) Referencing Piper's excommunication of his son for 'unbelief,' and Driscoll's alleged abuse of fellow leaders at *Mars Hill* church, Jones blamed both men's Biblically 'untenable' theology, which he thought they had placed over Scriptures, and their consequential lack of accountability amidst their doctrinal 'rightness,' for causing them to act in contradiction with Biblical themes of love and mercy within their ministries, saying, "Theologies have consequences." (Ibid) At the same time, Jones argued that while Piper and Driscoll were only accountable to themselves and their systematics, he was accountable to a community within the *Emergent Village*. (Ibid)

Therefore, since both sides appealed only to their hermeneutics, theologies, epistemologies, or praxis in the local community to evidence correct interpretations of Scripture, neither side appeared to have a method or rule by which to demonstrate continuity or congruity with apostolic interpretations or to settle debates or prevent fracturing. Then too, Thomas Oden also pointed out that they had no immune system by which to prevent heresy. (Oden 1998)

Without identity ‘marks’ to show that they were in continuity and congruity with apostolicity, and to settle debates, would they simply continue to fracture into a plethora of expressions that no longer had fellowship with each other nor bore any recognizable DNA of the apostolic faith?

### 2.3.5 The Decline of the EC Movement

Despite the three EC streams sharing the core distinctives identified by Gibbs and Bolger, and confirmed by leading *Reconstructionist* voice Alan Hirsch,<sup>36</sup> a shared focus on incarnational, missional engagement was not enough to hold the movement together. They had no framework by which to settle disputes or prevent disunity and heresy. As such, the movement was largely fractured by 2009-2010. Around this same time, obituaries for the EC movement also began to appear<sup>37</sup> and even the *Emergent Village*, the leading evangelists for the EC brand, would soon have to downsize amidst waning interest in the EC.<sup>38</sup>

By this same period, many original EC leaders who had begun their ministries among the alternative youth cultures of Gen X had also lost resonance with the EC brand, as redefined by the ‘professional’ authors, pastors and theologians in the *Relevant* and *Revisionist* camps. For instance, Andrew Jones and Shannon Hopkins claimed to have become disenchanted with the movement and found the Emerging label “problematic.” (A. Jones 2009a)

Regardless of the causes for the decline of the EC, there did not appear to be any coming-back from the debates that split the movement. With authors such as Tim Challies eventually labelling McLaren a ‘false teacher’ (Challies 2014) and Scot McKnight (2011) and Jason Clark (2010), also earlier implying that McLaren and Rollins, respectively, had taken heterodox turns from the center of historic Christianity, it became apparent that reconciliation was unlikely in the EC.

McLaren subsequently announced he had left Evangelicalism (2017) to form pluralistic, open-and-affirming, and politically progressive ‘spaces for being’ in his new *Convergence/Open*

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<sup>36</sup> See: Hirsch 2009, 68.

<sup>37</sup> See: A. Jones, 2010b; Scaramanga 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Brandon O’Brien, “Emergent Village Fires Leaders” *Christianity Today* (Jan. 6, 2013), accessed Apr. 2018, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/january/6.13.html>.

networks. (McLaren 2015) Peter Rollins would also even embrace the term ‘heretical’ to describe the movement of his Ikon collective to deconstruct all Christian belief. (Rollins, n.d.)

By 2013, Mark Driscoll, who defended traditional interpretations of Scripture against *Revisionists*, but also did not appear accountable to *consensual orthodoxy*, or to his church’s leadership, would be compelled to leave his church in Seattle, *Mars Hill*, and the church-planting network he founded, *Acts 29*, amidst allegations of fostering a “domineering and abusive workplace environment,” for his staff. (Connelly 2014) Driscoll’s resignations in many ways ended the public battles between the *Relevant* and *Revisionist* streams for the soul of the EC, but likely also marked the end of the EC’s cohesion and shared relevance.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

While the EC has ended as cohesive movement, in our subsequent research we discovered that the three EC streams have continued via new or revised forms or postcedents, which, as we have presented in Chapter Four, include a burgeoning early-church recovery movement within the *Relevant* stream, as well as a similar convergence to recover ancient ways of church amidst *Reconstructionists*. Further, we also found that *Revisionists* have continued to evolve via communities such as McLaren’s *Open-and-Convergence* networks and Rollins’ *Ikon* collective, yet in ways that have perhaps caused them to diverge from historic Christianity. Thus, it is to the more recent metamorphoses of these EC streams, and the development of their approaches to epistemology, hermeneutics, apostolicity, and orthodoxy, that we have trained our gaze in subsequent chapters. In doing so, we believe we have discovered some fascinating trends, including a similar approach to orthodoxy, amidst many *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* voices, in which orthodoxy and orthopraxy are centered in an incarnational life in Christ and still, in potential synergy with Vincent and Bonhoeffer, one evidences unity in the body through surrender to the creedal belief and sacred practices of the historic faith.

In examining the metamorphoses of EC streams, we also believe that the questions and debates raised by the work and controversies of the EC movement, continue to be vital ones for

emerging and missional Christians of the twenty-first century, especially regarding to *whom* or *what* one is accountable for reformation, innovation, contextualization, and inculturation. Is it only the cultural form of the modern western church and its values, language and methods that are open to revision, to better live-out and inculturate the gospel, or are the core doctrines and hermeneutical understandings of orthodoxy open to revision as well? More precisely, how does one know that it is truly the gospel that emerging reformers, or any Christians, are living-out and inculturating and not a syncretistic cultural version instead? Further, if accountability for the faithful interpretation and living-out of Scriptures and doctrines is only internal, being to one's own interpretations, experiences, to a local community, to a specific culture, or even to the specific systematic, how do Christians then know that their hermeneutics, theology, doctrines, and practices are not only those of one's self or current contexts, apart from the larger consensus of orthodoxy?

In our next chapters, we have attempted to answer these questions by conducting ethnographic dialogue with current pastors and lay leaders who fit within or share close synergy with the *Relevant*, *Reconstructionist* and *Revisionist* streams, as well as further consulting key EC authors, such as Peter Rollins, to discover how they understand the church and view accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy or, conversely, provide other sources of accountability for their movements. We have also then placed Emerging voices into dialogue with Vincent of Lérins, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Oden to engage in a historical and narrative theological discourse in which we will examine whether there is an understanding of or care for apostolicity or orthodoxy amidst both Emerging voices and those who have influenced or critiqued their movements, in order to ultimately discover to *whom* or *what* these voices are accountable in their reformation, contextualization, innovation, or revisions and what they believe must be kept at the center of the Christian faith in order to remain genuinely Christian.

## 2.5 Summary

In this chapter, we briefly noted the origins of the EC movement, its evolution via a more professional ‘second wave’ in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, and its subsequent fracturing. We then described several key persons, networks, and streams within the EC that we have selected to represent the broader movement and noted ways in which they spoke to vital issues around orthodoxy, reformation, inculturation, innovation, or revision. We also examined essential elements that united these streams as ‘emerging’ and that differentiated them from other Christian expressions.

We next examined core debates and justifications that divided the EC, as noted by key EC voices whom we chose to represent their streams, as well challenges to apostolicity and orthodoxy found in their approaches to Scripture, reformation, contextualization, innovation, or revision. In so doing, we also noted lack of care for apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* by some *Revisionist* and *Relevant* leaders, while more *Reconstructionist* voices, such as Scot McKnight, did appear to note orthodoxy.

In our next chapter, Chapter Three, considering the claims of those EC voices who have appeared to deconstruct orthodoxy, while also arguing that they were following the authentic Christian faith, we have, consequentially, observed the historic method of St. Vincent of Lérins. We have examined Vincent’s method of *consensual orthodoxy* to consider how or to what extent Vincent’s method, which was the same method used to refute the heresy of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus and to demonstrate the consentient chorus of orthodoxy, is also applicable to the debates and contexts of Emerging expressions today. Then too, we have also explored ways in which Vincent’s method might also, as Thomas Oden has argued, allow for more contextual flexibility and listening amidst postmodern situations than some *Revisionist* approaches to contextualization, while also ensuring apostolic continuity-and-congruity.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF ST. VINCENT’S METHOD OF CONSENSUAL ORTHODOXY FOR EMERGING EXPRESSIONS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Two, we introduced key questions and debates that led to fracturing within the Emerging Church (EC) movement in the early 21<sup>st</sup>-century. In this chapter, we will now explore the importance of St. Vincent of Lérins as a conversation partner who provides a vital historic lens through which to examine the movements of EC streams, especially in relation to questions of accountability in the interpretation and application of Scripture and doctrine. In doing so, we will examine the value of Vincent’s work both for his own time and for EC expressions today, discussing what he discovered around accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy, why Vincent needed to engage in an explanation and defense of his conception of orthodoxy and the key questions he answered about his method; which also have resonance with the issues and challenges of emerging expressions today.

Most important, for the purpose of this study, is the fact that Vincent also brings to the recent debates of emerging expressions an idea of orthodoxy that, instead of being only the perspectives of ancient contexts systematized as a tradition, which does not account for the settings or voices of persons living today, is instead conceived of as the shared belief and testimony of the living chorus of the Body of Christ. Such a dynamic view of orthodoxy may also allow persons the freedom to speak out of current contexts and to consider contemporary voices in concert with the chorus of the living Body of Christ across all cultures, places and times. Therefore, we will also consider how Vincent’s conception of orthodoxy as being grounded in the living ‘chorus’ of the Body of Christ, that speaks across all cultures, places, and times, may provide guidance for emerging expressions today in how they might consider current contexts, perspectives, and epistemological limits, and also allow for growth of theology, without losing continuity or accountability with the same faith transmitted by the Apostles.

### 3.2 Overview of St. Vincent’s Life and Discovery of The Consensual Method

Not much is known about the life of St. Vincent of Lérins, save for what is provided in his writing and a brief mention by the 5<sup>th</sup>-century historian Gennadius, who says of Vincent:

Vincentius, the Gaul, presbyter in the Monastery on the Island of Lérins, a man learned in the Holy Scriptures and very well informed in matters of ecclesiastical doctrine, composed a powerful disputation, written in tolerably finished and clear language, which, suppressing his name, he entitled *Peregrinus against heretics*. The greater part of the second book of this work having been stolen, he composed a brief reproduction of the substance of the original work and published in one [book]. He died in the reign of Theodosius and Valentinianus. (Gennadius 2007)

Vincent was believed to have been a 5<sup>th</sup>-century A.D. soldier, turned monk, who lived in Lérins Abbey, on the island of Saint-Honorat, off the coast of Gaul. According to his writings, Vincent claimed he took part in the Council of Ephesus, in 431 A.D.<sup>1</sup> He subsequently defined the ‘test of orthodoxy’ in his sole surviving work, *The Commonitory*, and was suggested as the author of the *Athanasian Creed* which was written after *The Commonitory* and contains similar language (Lérins (1886) 2012, Introduction).<sup>2</sup>

In St. Vincent’s time, Christianity had been legalized for a century. While there were periods of upheaval, the most pressing concern addressed in Vincent’s work seems to have been attacks on orthodoxy from leaders within the church itself, as seen in the heresy of Nestorius, which Vincent helped to refute at Ephesus, and in the dangerous precedents created by heretical antecedents such as Origen and Tertullian.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in his *Commonitory*, amidst the challenges to the church presented by heresy, error and fracturing,<sup>4</sup> that most-often came from within the

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<sup>1</sup>St. Vincent of Lérins, *The Commonitory of St. Vincent of Lérins*, trans. Rev. C.A. Heurtley, D.D., ed. Paul A. Boer, Sr., (Veritas Splendor Publications (1886) 2012), 111. Vincent’s first-person accounts of the Council of Ephesus in his work, *The Commonitory*, suggests he played a key role in the decisions of the council. In Chapter XXXI, for instance, Vincent uses ‘first-person’ language about the work of the council, such as, “After the preceding we added also the sentence of blessed Cyril...”

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Anthelmi, *Nova de symbolo Athanasiano disquisitio*, (1693), as referenced in Lérins, *The Commonitory*, Appendix I. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century French historian, Joseph Anthelmi attributed the *Athanasian Creed* to Vincent based upon its early 5<sup>th</sup>-century Gallic authorship and due to similar language and phrases found in *The Commonitory* and that creed. The editor of *The Commonitory* into English, Paul A. Boer, Sr., claims that if Vincent was not the author of that creed, then “the author of the creed must have been familiar with *The Commonitory* since the creed bears traces of these writings by Vincentius.”

<sup>3</sup>Lérins (1886) 2012, 60-71. Vincent outlines the falls of Origen and Tertullian, claiming that proceeding their heretical doctrines, their first sins were possessing exalted opinions of their learning which caused them to place their interpretations of Scripture over “the universal and ancient faith,” and its unity.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 85. Vincent defined the church as, “all the faithful of all ages...incorporated in Christ the Head, through the Catholic faith.”

church's leadership,<sup>5</sup> Vincent questioned how the true church and its doctrines, which had been carefully transmitted from the apostles to the present time, could be continually distinguished and protected from a doctrine that was new, novel and false, especially when both sides equally appealed to Scripture. His answers would come both through his work at the Council of Ephesus, in 431 A.D., and in his subsequent inquiry of clergy and laity about a rule that might be used to continually distinguish that authentic teaching which reflected the 'ancient faith' transmitted by the apostles versus that which was novel and false. (Lérins (1886) 2012, 4)

At the Council of Ephesus, Vincent claims that he was among the consensus there who refuted the heresy of Nestorius and sought to clarify the orthodox position.<sup>6</sup> In their refutation of Nestorius' teachings about the nature of Christ, Vincent reports that the council referred to both Scripture and the consensual voices of past and present Fathers, consulting universality and antiquity, and "believing their witness, submitting to their judgement without haste, without foregone conclusion, without partiality, gave their determination concerning the Rules of Faith." (Ibid, 108-110).<sup>7</sup> This method is what Vincent would later refer to as the 'test of orthodoxy,' and he explained that their method was as follows:

We said...it has always been the custom of Catholics...to prove the true faith in these two ways; first by the authority of the Divine Canon, and next by the tradition of the Catholic Church...in the Church itself regard must be had to the consentient voice of the universality equally with that of antiquity, lest we either be torn from the integrity of unity and carried away to schism, or be precipitated from the religion of antiquity into heretical novelties. (Ibid, 76-77)

Thus, for Vincent, the 'test of orthodoxy' was a rule that held that Scripture was prime, and then tradition could also serve to support of Scripture but when there was still debate between

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 42-44. Along with Origen and Tertullian, Vincent named Nestorius, Apollinaris, and Photinus as examples of church leaders whose heresies challenged orthodoxy.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 36. Vincent said that Nestorius "holds two distinct substances in Christ" and "would have two sons of God, two Christs...one, God, the other, man." Vincent reported that Nestorius also taught that "Christ was born at first an ordinary man and nothing more." In response, Vincent claimed that the Catholic Church held that Christ was only "One Person...but two substances."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 79-80. The Council of Ephesus, called by the Emperor Theodosius at Whitsuntide in 431 A.D., appealed to the consentient voices of Christian Fathers to refute Nestorius. Vincent lists those whose writings were cited to show the universal consensus against the novel innovations of Nestorius. His list includes St. Peter of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, St. Theophilus, Cyril of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Basil of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Felix, St. Julius, Cyprian and St. Ambrose. He adds, "A much greater number of the ancients might have been adduced; but it was needless."

different persons speaking from different opinions or contexts, then Christians should consult the unifying voice provided by the consensus of *all Christians, in all places and at all times*. (Ibid) However, while the Council of Ephesus had intuitively used the 'test of orthodoxy' in gathering the consentient opinions of the church past and present, they had not yet codified the rule or method, which Vincent would subsequently take it upon himself to do. Vincent appeared to be motivated to codify the rule, following the council, when he saw that the 'test of orthodoxy' used to refute Nestorius, in which the council appealed to Scripture first, and then to the orthodox interpretation of Scripture held by the universal ecumenical consensus of Christians from the time of the apostles, now needed to be further explained and defended against critics. Those critics likely included Prosper of Aquitaine<sup>8</sup> who might have suggested that Vincent, or those who claimed a unified orthodox consensus, were perhaps only using a guise of orthodoxy to promote their own interpretations. (Ibid, Note 423)<sup>9</sup>

In response, Vincent wrote his seminal work, *The Commonitory*, around 434 A.D.<sup>10</sup> to serve as a 'remembrance' of what he had learned from the council and, also, to report on the subsequent inquiries that he made of 'learned' persons after the council to discover whether the method used by the council to refute Nestorius matched how Christians had always dealt with similar challenges to orthodox interpretations of Scripture. (Ibid, 4) Vincent states:

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical privity. (Ibid)

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<sup>8</sup>Vincent does not directly cite the sources of the critiques, depriving us of knowing precisely which contemporaries he is debating. However, he appears to address common critiques of his method, in *The Commonitory*, and there also provides a defense of the method. It is, however, likely that at least some of the critiques were coming from supporters of St. Augustine, such as Prosper of Aquitaine, who would later write a book against St. Vincent, *Pro Augustino responsiones*.

<sup>9</sup>See: Gerardus Vossius, *Histor. Pelag.* (1618), 246, as cited in Lérins, 3, Footnotes. Dutch historian Gerardus Vossius believed Vincent used the pen name, Peregrinus, for *The Commonitory* to conceal that he was also trying to address debates around St. Augustine of Hippo's doctrines of grace and predestination, as ideated by Augustine's follower Prosper, as needing to be subjected to the 'test of orthodoxy' used at the Council of Ephesus to determine whether newly ideated doctrines matched the consensus since the time of the apostles. Strengthening the case that Vincent was, in part, likely addressing Augustine's followers such as Prosper, in *The Commonitory*, is the fact that Prosper directly wrote against Vincent in his *Pro Augustino responsiones*, following the publication of *The Commonitory*. Lérins (1886) 2012, Introduction, 86-89, Appendix ii.

<sup>10</sup>Paul A. Boer, Sr., in Lérins, editor's Note 519. Since Cyril died in 444 and was alive when Vincent wrote, Boer claims Vincent is writing between 431 and 444, after the council but before Cyril's death.

What Vincent discovered from talking to ‘learned’ and ‘sanctified’ respondents, was that the majority that he interviewed grounded their doctrine in the Canon of Scripture first, but when there was disagreement over an interpretation of Scripture they would then “hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” (Ibid, 6). Thus, when there was contention over an interpretation of Scripture, as was the case in almost all heretical challenges to the church, they would then examine the spectrum of Christian writings both past and present and would only follow that teaching that had been clearly received and held from the earliest times of the church by the consensus of all Christians in all places. In using the phrase, ‘all Christians,’ they meant both men, women, clergy, laity, the consensus of councils and the consensus of Church Fathers who remained in communion with the Catholic Church until their deaths. (Ibid, 421) Vincent subsequently codified their method as the ‘Vincentian Rule’ or ‘test of orthodoxy’ that Vincent did not invent but claimed to have learned from the chorus of voices whom he interviewed. He also believed that this rule was simply the same method that had been continually used by the consensus of Christians across cultures, places and times to distinguish orthodox teaching from false; ensuring continuity from Moses to Paul and the Apostles and continuing through the early church to the present age. Summarily, the rule allowed that while Christians could see growth in their doctrine, regarding clarification and refinement, they could not change those core teachings or interpretations of Scripture that had been held from the beginning, by the consensus of Christians, in all places and at all times. In support of the rule, quoting *Proverbs 22:28*, Vincent stressed that Christians must “Remove not the landmarks, which thy fathers have set.” (Ibid, 75)

In creating *The Commonitory*, Vincent therefore provided an apologia for how and why the ‘test of orthodoxy’ was effectively used to refute Nestorius, how such a rule also matched the methods of past councils, and how it would have likewise disqualified past heretical teachers such for their departure from consentient doctrine. He additionally demonstrated that those whom he interviewed beyond the council also showed that the method, before being codified by Vincent, had always been used by Christians around the world and across the centuries as a method to distinguish orthodox teaching from false, when both sides equally appealed to Scripture.

After explaining both the rule and its origins, in *The Commonitory*, Vincent then also provided answers to the key questions critics were asking about the validity and applicability of *consensual orthodoxy* in Vincent's day. Vincent's answers to these questions, which we will touch upon below, are also important for Emerging Church/Emerging Missional<sup>11</sup> conversations today in that they likewise answer emerging voices who have both critiqued and redefined orthodoxy within their movements, as we will briefly touch upon below.

Further, Vincent also provides a refreshing view of orthodoxy that gives differentiation from the ways orthodoxy has been ideated by some *Relevants* and *Revisionists* amidst emerging expressions. Rather than viewing orthodoxy as being a set of frozen beliefs or, conversely, as subjective and evolving beliefs open to revision by current contexts, Vincent presents *consensual orthodoxy* as, what Thomas Oden has called, a living 'chorus' in the Body of Christ (Oden 2002, 162), a body whose shared song, or belief or witness, has freedom to grow in terms of understanding, elucidation, and contextualization, but must also be congruent with its identifying characteristics at birth, if it is, in fact, the same body of testimony transmitted by the apostles. (Lérins (1886) 2012, 80-82) Conceiving of orthodoxy as the shared chorus and witness of a living body, with freedom to grow and also key harmonies, or points of testimony, that may not be departed from, may, consequentially, if applied to the work of the Emerging Church (EC), also show emerging voices *where, how* and *to what extent* they might find freedom to innovate and consider new contextual realities, while simultaneously being provided accountability by the relational boundaries found in the shared chorus or testimony of the unified Body of Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> See: Richardson 2013, 132; Ed Stetzer, "First Person: Understanding the Emerging Church," Baptist Press (Jan 06, 2006), accessed Jan. 2018, <http://www.bpnews.net/22406/firstperson-understanding-the-emerging-church>. As noted in Chapter Two, in conversation with Ed Stetzer and Tom Sine, Richardson classifies the Emerging Church as being part of a larger Emerging Missional movement whose members share a commitment to similar 'missional' values that cause them to focus on moving outward into the culture rather than seeking to only attract the culture into their church structures and that influences their forms and practices. Stetzer also identifies three sub-streams in the Emerging Church: theologically conservative *Relevants* who are seeking to update practices; theologically orthodox *Reconstructionists* who are looking to return to an ecclesiology rooted in the early church, in conversation with postmodern contexts and theologically and doctrinally progressive *Revisionists* who are willing to see hermeneutics, theology, doctrine, praxis and even creedal claims revised in service to postmodern contexts.

### 3.3 St. Vincent's Impact

Following his lifetime, St. Vincent seems to have been relegated to obscurity, with little information remaining on his contemporary impact outside of what he shares in *The Commonitory* and scant mentions such as that provided by Gennadius. (2007) Catholic theologian and orthodox ecumenist Fr. Thomas G. Guarino, a leading authority on Vincent, alongside Thomas Oden, posited, in his recent work on Vincent's impact on the development of doctrine "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine" (2014, 103-117), that Vincent's obscurity, after the early 5<sup>th</sup>-century, may be due to the fact that *The Commonitory* manuscript was buried in an archive,<sup>12</sup> which along with the loss of Vincent's other works, meant that none of Vincent's writings were in circulation. (Ibid) Then too, Guarino wonders if Vincent's relegation to obscurity may have also been due to perceptions that he was an opponent of St. Augustine of Hippo,<sup>13</sup> who conversely grew in popularity after his lifetime, thus perhaps leading Vincent to be 'buried' as an afterthought in a period of intense theological debate. Vincent was rediscovered in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when a manuscript of his *Commonitory* was unearthed, and both Protestant and Catholic theologians may have then seen Vincent as a valuable voice speaking directly to the core of the faith amidst a time of dramatic fracturing in the *Reformation* and *Counter-Reformation*. (Ibid)<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, at least twenty editions of *The Commonitory*

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<sup>12</sup>See: Lérins (1886) 2012, 419, note 409. Not only was Vincent's manuscript apparently lost until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but, according to Gennadius, who is writing between 467-480 A.D., Vincent also claimed to have originally written two parts to *The Commonitory* and to have had the second part stolen while he was still alive, thus also robbing history of much of his life's work. Further, the *Objectiones Vincentianae*, which he may have written in conversation with Augustine of Hippo, is also lost, leaving us with none of his original work, beyond *The Commonitory*.

<sup>13</sup>See: Lérins (1886) 2012, Introduction, 86-89, Appendix ii, for discussions of Vincent's possible debates with Augustine. As noted above, Gerardus Vossius believed that Vincent was critiquing Augustine's theology (Vossius 1618, 24), and Vincent did appear to side with the priests in Gaul, in the early 5<sup>th</sup>-century A.D. who questioned some of St. Augustine of Hippo's doctrines. However, Thomas Guarino defends Vincent and his method as having wrongly been dismissed by those doing so over his opposition to Augustine, arguing it may be a mistake by Vossius to suggest that Vincent's concerns were actually about Augustine's theology. Guarino further argues that debates around the 'sovereign priority of grace' and questions of whether Vincent disagreed with Augustine's views on this issue, were not central to Vincent's writing or concerns, which were focused on testing doctrines via consensual orthodoxy, nor were such theological debates yet settled amidst orthodox consensus in the 4<sup>th</sup>-century. Then too, Vincent's position is never made clear. Further, Guarino holds that Vincent was more concerned with the possibility of major heresies, such as Arianism, returning rather than fighting over second-order doctrines. Guarino 2014.

<sup>14</sup>Guarino argues Vincent was likely attractive to Protestants due to how the 'test of orthodoxy' could be used to question the state of the papacy and Catholic views of communion, which did not appear to pass the

appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Guarino notes that Catholic theologians such as St. Robert Bellarmine referred to *The Commonitory* as a 'golden book.' (Ibid)<sup>15</sup>

In the following centuries, Vincent became a somewhat obscure name once more in Protestant circles, while, conversely, Vincent's importance slowly grew within late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic conversations about the development of doctrine.<sup>16</sup> For instance, *Vatican I* cited Vincent directly in that council's carefully worded statement about how Catholic dogma and doctrine might be allowed to develop and 'flourish' in terms of providing a better comprehension of what was said in the past so long as it did not in any way alter the original meaning:

For the doctrine of faith, which God has revealed has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention, to be perfected by human ingenuity. That meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our holy Mother the Church has once declared; nor is that meaning ever to be departed from, under the pretence or pretext of a deeper comprehension...Let then the intelligence, science and wisdom...of individuals and of the whole Church...increase and flourish in abundance and vigour; but...in one and the same doctrine, one and the same judgement (Lérins, n. 28)<sup>17</sup>

Subsequently, Vincent also proved an inspiration for Catholic Cardinal John Henry Newman in his views about how doctrine might be allowed to develop, as seen in, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. (1878) 1909, 125) Vincentian scholar, Thomas Oden, notes

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test of universality, antiquity, and consent, while allowing doctrine to develop. Conversely, Catholics used Vincent to critique Protestant understandings of 'Sola Scriptura,' in which interpretations might exist apart from the consensus, and in their departure from the unity of the whole.

<sup>15</sup>It is possible that Robert Bellarmine's *On the Marks of the Church* (Mediatrix Press, 1843), in which he presents 15 marks of the true church, may have been influenced by his reading of St. Vincent. However, Bellarmine adds marks not found in Vincent's work, such as the episcopal succession of bishops in the Catholic institution evidencing orthodoxy and catholicity, as well unity under the Pope. This last 'mark,' regarding the Pope, may have created conflict with Vincent too in that, though Vincent supported the Bishop of Rome in his time, in the early 4<sup>th</sup> -century, Vincent also made it clear that even apostles were not infallible and would error, and thus must also submit themselves to the 'test of orthodoxy,' regardless of their apostolic station. See: Lérins, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> See: Thomas G. Guarino, "Tradition and Doctrinal Development: Can Vincent of Lérins Still Teach the Church?" *Theological Studies* 67 (2006), 39. Guarino suggests, as further examples of Vincent's influence on the development of Catholic doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, his influence upon Johan Adam Möhler who claimed, in *Symbolism*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: Crossroad, (1832) 1997), 301, note 1, that Vincent helped him see how doctrinal exploration was permissible, just as with the sciences, but not in ways that changed the doctrines of grace. Guarino also notes Vincent's influence on 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic theologian Johann Von Kuhn of whom he says Josef Geiselmann observes that *The Commonitory* showed him to what extent Catholic teaching could be developed. See: Josef Rupert Geiselmann, *Die lebendige Überlieferung als Norm des christlichen Glaubens: Die apostolische Tradition in der Form der kirchlichen Verkündigung—das Formalprinzip des Katholizismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Traditionslehre von Joh. Ev. Kuhn* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959), 204, as cited in Guarino 2006, 39.

<sup>17</sup> As also cited in Vatican I, "Of Faith and Reason," *First Vatican Council: Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith* (1870), chapter iv, accessed Jan. 2018, <http://www.piustheninth.com/apps2/app8.htm>.

“Newman translated Vincent's metaphor of doctrinal development as the template for his own work, writing: ‘Let the soul's religion imitate the law of the body, which, as years go on, develops indeed and opens out its due proportions, and yet remains identically what it was.’” (Oden 2002, 174)<sup>18</sup> However, Vincent was bypassed by Vatican II, according to Guarino’s reading of Joseph Ratzinger, due to fears that his emphasis on doctrinal growth was too progressive, while he would likewise be critiqued by Karl Barth who saw Vincent’s method as not only defending doctrine but believing “apostolic tradition could develop beyond the letter of Scripture,” which scared Barth. (Guarino 2006, 70, note 17)<sup>19</sup>

Such a use of Vincent, as a guide for the faithful development of doctrine, has also been seen in the work of Pope Francis. Francis has recently stated that Vincent might provide a way forward for the growth of theology and doctrine in the Catholic Church in its conversations with post-modern contexts, while also remaining within the boundaries of faithful continuity with apostolicity. (Sparado 2013) While Pope Francis may take a more progressive view of doctrinal growth that St. Vincent's method actually allows, as we have explored further below, in his appeals to Vincent he appears to stand within a movement of recovery of Vincent as a key dialogue partner for the Catholic development of dogma and doctrine from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries.

Vincent has also enjoyed a renewed influence upon 21<sup>st</sup>-century orthodox ecumenists such as aforementioned Vincent scholar Thomas Guarino, the co-chair of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, who has worked to recover the influence of Vincent upon the development of Catholic doctrine, as well as American Methodist theologian Thomas Oden, whose *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (2001), a herculean effort to recover and compile a compendium of ancient Christian commentaries on Scripture, was inspired by Vincent’s work.

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<sup>18</sup> Oden here notes Newman’s quote of Lérins, 29, as cited in Newman (1878) 1909, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Also see: Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Henry Traub (New York: Paulist, 1966) 20–21; and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2* (T&T Clark, 2004) 548, 551, as cited in Guarino 2006, 70, note 17. Interestingly, as we will note further in Chapter Five, Dietrich Bonhoeffer would in turn later critique Barth for a positivist doctrine of revelation which makes persons either, “Like it or lump it...swallowed as a whole or not at all.” Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 48.

(Oden 2002, 29) Then too, Oden's work toward a renewal of orthodox ecumenism was likewise influenced by Vincent. Thus, interestingly, both Guarino and Oden also saw Vincent as having not only provided an important method for examining debates over the interpretation of Scripture or the growth of doctrine,<sup>20</sup> but as also providing an orthodox center for ecumenism, toward which both persons have worked.<sup>21</sup>

The renewed interest in Vincent as a voice for orthodox ecumenism, and for the faithful growth of theology and doctrine in conversation with post-modern contexts, are points which we believe will also make Vincent a vital conversation partner for the work of emerging expressions to inculturate and incarnate the gospel amid current contexts in ways that are faithful to apostolicity as transmitted by *consensual orthodoxy*. As such, we will return to the importance of Vincent's method for emerging expressions in our summary of this chapter.

### **3.4 Challenges to Vincent's Method**

In contrast with the renewed interest and acceptance of St. Vincent's *Commonitory* among some key orthodox ecumenists and those who wish to see the contextual but apostolically faithful growth of theology and doctrine, Vincent has remained a somewhat obscure voice to this point and one that has also met with resistance. Thus, next, we will explore additional questions, challenges and misunderstandings about Vincent' method, both in his lifetime and today, including those raised by emerging expressions, that may have kept his rule from being more widely adopted. Then, we will also highlight how both Vincent and his modern users, such as Thomas Oden and Pope Francis, have attempted to address many of the challenges or misunderstandings about his method. In exploring their answers, we also hope to show that Vincent's idea of *consensual orthodoxy* might provide a holistic method for approaching debates

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<sup>20</sup> See: Guarino 2006, 35. Guarino believes that for current Catholics Vincent should still be, "invoked to advance and develop an understanding of tradition that properly balances the twin imperatives of continuity and change intrinsic to Christian life and thought while carefully avoiding the aporias of perceiving "living tradition" as either stolid repetition or protean heterogeneity," both of which approaches we have argued are evident amidst *Relevants* and *Revisionists*.

<sup>21</sup>See: Guarino 2014, 103-117. Guarino sees Vincent as a key voice for modern ecumenism. Likewise, Oden 2002, 186, asserts that following Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* will lead to ecumenism between Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants.

over Scripture, doctrines, and praxis amidst emerging expressions today; by applying a method that considers both tradition and contextual and experiential perspectives in a conversation grounded within the Body of Christ through the work of the Spirit.

#### 3.4.1 Is Consensual Orthodoxy a Guise for Systematizing Innovation?

In his lifetime, even while writing *The Commonitory*, Vincent apparently felt the need to answer critics who thought that Vincent, and those who had appealed to *consensual orthodoxy* to refute Nestorius, were simply using the idea of orthodoxy as a guise to defend or systematize their own innovations and suppress the voices of others. (Lérins, 111-112). Against his unnamed critics,<sup>22</sup> Vincent explained that the council did not refute Nestorius based on *their* authority or opinions. They had such a great assembly of priests, metropolitans, and theologians, who were experts on doctrine that he says you might think that they would have been tempted to have shared their own theological opinions, to have innovated, or acted out of their own authority in condemning Nestorius. However, instead, Vincent claims:

They innovated nothing, presumed nothing, arrogated to themselves absolutely nothing, but used all possible care to hand down nothing to posterity but what they had themselves received from their Fathers. And not only did they dispose satisfactorily of the matter presently in hand, but they also set an example to those who should come after them, how they also should adhere to the determination of sacred antiquity and condemn the devices of profane novelty. (Ibid, 111)

Vincent also shows that not only did they make all efforts to avoid promoting their opinions or innovations, instead seeking to echo only apostolic teaching, but they further took care to do so because they recognized that one of the greatest continuing threats to apostolic teaching was the presence of gifted and persuasive theologians and teachers who were willing to innovate rather than submit to universality, antiquity, and consent, due to pride in their own reputations, abilities or opinions. Vincent warned that it was the acclaim awarded to famous theologians and teachers that had also historically led persons to follow such individual's opinions blindly in descending into heresy. As an example, Vincent noted the case of Origen,

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<sup>22</sup> See: Lérins, Note 423.

whom Vincent called the greatest Christian theologian who ever lived and a genius so revered that there was a saying that persons would “rather be wrong with Origen than be right with others.” (Ibid, 63) Still, Vincent warns, Origen followed the “bent of his own genius” and presumed he “knew more than the world besides, despising the traditions of the Church and the determinations of the ancients, and interpreting certain passages of Scripture in a novel way.” (Ibid)

Vincent provides the example of Origen, along with others such as Tertullian and Nestorius, to show that the true sin and clearest evidence of those who are actually attempting to entrench their own innovation is that they will not be willing to submit their teachings or interpretations to the unity of the whole body, via the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, since they likely know that bringing their teaching into conversation with all the writings of the fathers and historic voices in the church will show them to be in clear disunity with the Body. (Ibid, 72, 85-86) Further, Vincent suggests, when confronted with the consensus of orthodoxy as clearly held by the consensus of all Christians, in all places, and all times, persons choosing to persist in heresy or error will, once confronted, refuse to submit to the ‘test of orthodoxy’ and prove the truth of their doctrine in the consensus, instead choosing schism and withdrawal from the unity of the whole. He says, “Whoever originated a heresy that did not first dis sever himself from the consentient agreement of the universality and antiquity of the Catholic Church?” (Ibid, 86)

In contradiction with Vincent's explanations, some progressive EC theologians today are still not convinced that such an idea of orthodoxy is not really a codifying of past innovation and contextual perspectives used to transmit or defend one’s innovations, or those of the past, and to marginalize other perspectives. For instance, in our ethnographic questionnaires conducted for this study, which we will cover fully in our next chapter, a respondent whom we have called, Evan,<sup>23</sup> a former leader in the *Emergent-Village*, the network that served as the center of dialogue for the *Revisionist* wing of the EC, and who has also authored key publications on the

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<sup>23</sup>Evan’s answers were provided in response to an ethnographic questionnaire that was used as the basis for Chapter Four of this study. As part of our ethical standards for that ethnographic work, respondents agreed to share honest reflections in exchange for having their identities protected. To that end, in Chapter Four we also referred this respondent as ‘Evan’ there as well.

development of the EC, shared that while they consider heresy to be a problem, they have also been heavily influenced by post-modern deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida. Thus, influenced by Derrida's claim that everything is bound within contexts,<sup>24</sup> they also believe that all scriptural interpretations are contextually bound. Therefore, their perspective, which they are aware is also culturally-contextually bound, is that even orthodoxy was also originally 'innovation,' and also contextually bound, and thus even the creeds are contextually bound interpretations as well, since "even if a person or a group could regurgitate exactly what they were taught...they would already have altered the substance of the teaching because their context would have changed" and, thus, "a prior groups' innovation...is now being passed on as though it is something other than interpretation."

Such a Derridian critique of orthodoxy also shares synergy with the ways in which 'contextual theology' is also seen as important for many EC voices today. For example, in his book *Emerging & Fresh Expressions of Church* (2007, 28), Ian Mobsby, a leading EC theologian in the UK, specifically notes contextual theology as being vital for the reforming and inculturating work of the EC. Mobsby builds upon Stephen B. Bevans' definition of contextual theology as a "way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture." (Bevans 2004, 1) Building upon Bevans' definitions, Mobsby posits that an 'emerging contextual theology,' is specifically needed for post-modern contexts. (Mobsby 2007, 30) "The church needs to be contextual and needs to change," Mobsby argues, allowing it to better "engage with a postmodern social context or share the values identified." (Ibid) Meanwhile, another *Emergent-Village* voice, in the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, Doug Pagitt agrees that a contextual theology that accounts for the fact that persons live in different contexts than those who interpreted Scriptures in the past is needed to allow persons to "ask new

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<sup>24</sup>See: Brian D. McLaren, "Q & R: Reactionary?" *Brianmclaren.net* (2013), accessed Aug. 2017, <https://brianmclaren.net/q-r-reactionary/>. McLaren notes Derrida's influence on his deconstruction of Scripture. Also see: Derrida 1988, 136.

questions-questions that people 100 years ago would have never thought of asking...Perhaps we as Christians today are not only to consider what it means to be a 21<sup>st</sup>-century church, but...what it means to have a 21<sup>st</sup>-century faith.” (Pagitt 2005, 17-19) Still, does Vincent’s conception of *consensual orthodoxy* marginalize current experiences or contexts or did it also simply systematize the innovations of past persons or cultures?

In consideration of the above comments about the need for contextualization and growth amidst postmodern contexts, it is important to note that, for Vincent, as we will discuss further below, the ‘test of orthodoxy,’ while safeguarding congruity and continuity with apostolicity, did not then negate the growth or contextualization of doctrine, nor disallow newer declarations to be accepted, which would include many of those that emerged from the Reformation or even in the modern era. (Lérins, 75) However, one who followed Vincent’s method would seek to place more recent declarations and interpretations into conversation and accountability with the consensus of orthodoxy. For instance, as we saw noted above, Thomas G. Guarino has claimed that Vincent was used by Protestant Reformers to both critique what they saw as a divergence from apostolicity by later councils and to support the Reformation, thus seeking both adherence to apostolicity and support for newer statements. (Guarino 2014, 103-117)<sup>25</sup>

In emphasizing both the contextual flexibility and care for unity and continuity that Vincent’s method provides, it is important to also consider Thomas Oden’s views on *consensual orthodoxy*. Oden, who helped to lead a revival of recent interest in both St. Vincent’s rule and in *consensual orthodoxy* and also defended *consensual orthodoxy* against critiques by modern and postmodern critics, especially in his book *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (2002), said that he was once a theological innovator who was simply making things up, until his discovery of patristics, such as Vincent, transformed his faith and approaches to theology and doctrine by helping him learn to surrender to the ancient consensus as seen in the creeds. (Ibid, 82-96) Vincent also especially helped Oden see that the idea of *consensual orthodoxy* was not about stifling the growth of

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<sup>25</sup> Also see: Oden 2002, 45, 64.

doctrine but showing that any growth must be in continuity and congruence with the chorus of the Body of Christ instead of being dictated by the voices of only one context, especially if current voices are in contrast with the multitude of voices brought into conversation in the Body of Christ via the work of the Holy Spirit that gathers persons from across situations and times; showing that current perspectives are not all that matter. (Oden 2015) Oden summarizes his understanding of Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy* as being the:

*Ancient consensual scriptural teaching...the doctrine taught during the period of ancient ecumenical Christianity...by 'consensual,'...I mean the teaching that has been duly confirmed by a process of general consent of the faithful over two millennia...this means the teaching of the...creeds and early liturgies—confirmed by due process especially through the action of ecumenical councils that have been widely acknowledged and received as authoritative by the faithful worldwide.” (Oden 2002, 29)*

Oden also argues that, in the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, each generation of Christians is not asked to accept tradition without question, but to go back and wrestle with the writings of the apostolic witnesses in the gospels themselves, since “for the faith to be delivered to each new cultural setting, each succeeding generation must come to grips with the original apostolic witnesses.” (Oden 1979, 103) The Vincentian idea of *consensual orthodoxy* then, in this perspective, does not seek to replace the vital mission of each generation to understand the Scriptures anew from within their contexts, but it instead brings current persons into discussion with *more* contexts within the diverse chorus of voices in the ‘worldwide community of believers,’ who carefully listen to what has been believed “everywhere, always, and by all,” so as to hear how the Spirit is bringing consensus out of the freely speaking voices of Christians across all places, cultures and times. (Oden 2002, 162) Further, in the Vincentian conception of orthodoxy, a core belief could also not be accepted ecumenically within the universal church if it could only be found in the major writings of the early church councils, or the fathers, but it had to be found everywhere throughout the history of the church, from the Apostles to the present, thus also making it hard for only one generation or context to systematize their innovation as doctrine for the whole. (Oden 2015) Oden adds:

If a dogmatic statement is not found everywhere in the whole range of the universal church, it cannot be ecumenical...And it must have a continuous tradition of being

remembered as received. But received what, received memory of the apostolic tradition. In other words, these ancient Christian writers were not just speculating out of nowhere...I read Vincent before I read the fourteenth volume of the Nicene/Post-Nicene Fathers. And that really changed my mind. I mean, I realized how the Church fought, how the Church arrived at its dogmatic decisions, and then...I began gradually to trust the Holy Spirit...It's the Holy Spirit guiding the church towards the unity of the Body of Christ...towards the consensual memories of the apostles. (Ibid)

Thus, in Oden's explanation and defense of Vincent's rule, awareness of context matters, but it must not only be an awareness of one's own context. Rather, in *consensual orthodoxy* the universal voices of the entire Christian church must be brought into conversation, speaking from the diversity of contexts that span the history of the church, and even 'fighting' or debating together to reach agreement on doctrines or dogma if necessary, so that one generation or one contextually bound perspective is not allowed to press its views upon the entire body. Consequentially, it could be argued that such an approach also actually prevents the systematization of only *one context* at the expense of others, serving as a safeguard to prevent merely human innovation, speaking out of only one generation or situation, from becoming entrenched as core doctrine or dogma for all. Still, the concept of *consensual orthodoxy* should also, again, care about emerging contexts as well. Oden explains that "To walk in the orthodox way as a *Christian* means to think and live within the boundaries of the ancient Christian consensus of teaching from the prophetic and apostolic witness," while also "applying that teaching contextually within ever-emergent cultural situations." (Oden 2002, 30) However, *consensual orthodoxy* cannot, again, be reduced to only attempting to apply the gospel in present communities or situations since, Oden argues that the Apostle Paul made it clear that it was the apostolic mission to "show the gospel's universal relevance," a gospel not just for the Jews, or one might add for postmodern contexts, but for the entire world in which "the apostolic teaching is not reducible to a particular, culturally relativistic premise; it is offered to all cultures and remains intrinsically transgenerational." (Ibid, 174)

Conversely, showing where even this more nuanced explanation of Vincent's *consensual orthodoxy* is still at odds with many *Emerging-Revisionist* approaches, Evan, the aforementioned former leader in the *Emergent-Village*, whose approach is influenced by an understanding of

contextual theology through the lens of Jacques Derrida's influence on post-modern deconstructionism, argued, in their responses to our questionnaire, which we will share more fully in Chapter Four, that persons can never truly arrive at a consensual idea of truth, because they can never prove truth to others beyond their own contexts and perspectives. Rather, Evan believes that contexts, language and biases forever prevent the discovery of one truth and so persons can only ever "discern the relative truth of their experience."

Oden again took up the task of defending Vincent's concept of orthodoxy against such charges, contending that it is, in fact, *because consensual orthodoxy* is aware of the potential bias and limits of cultures, generations, and contexts that there is, in fact, within *consensual orthodoxy*, "a meekness and vulnerability to the way the orthodox consensus approaches the truth of revelation," fully aware of the "egocentric temptations, social location, racism, sexism, and nationalism" that threaten to bias perspectives and interpretations. (Oden 2002, 49) It is also precisely because the consensus is humbly aware of the limitations imposed by such limits and biases that it maintains that any "particular assertion of Christian truth must stand under the constant corrective of the cumulative consent of the faithful over a wide range of time." (Ibid) Oden adds: "within this huge language universe, orthodoxy makes time and room for many shades of permissible interpretation" and seeks not to impose only one past contextual view onto all persons, but to instead "make peace between Scripture interpreters of different languages, periods and moral traditions who yet share the same faith in the same Lord and the same baptism by the one God," even being gracious to those in error by letting them also speak, and then only become critical when forced to do so by "persistent errors" that challenge the clear consentient view on the core apostolic teachings. (Ibid, 120)

### 3.4.2 Is Consensual Orthodoxy Truly Consensus?

A closely related question that Vincent also sought to address in *The Commonitory* was how persons can know that those who promote the 'orthodox consensus' have found a clear consensus when it appears to some that there is always a diversity of opinions among Christians?

The implication is that if consensus cannot truly be evidenced, but it is shown that there has always been a diversity of views, then the ‘test of orthodoxy’ fails as a method.

While, again, Vincent does not name his critics directly, it is possible that Prosper of Aquitaine may have brought such a charge when he also accused Vincent of Semi-Pelagianism in his *Pro Augustino Responsiones* (Lérins, Introduction, 86)<sup>26</sup> Such a charge against Vincent, if true, would appear to undermine Vincent’s arguments about how the ‘test of orthodoxy’ should be applied to others; especially if he did not, in fact, match the universal consensus himself, but fell sway to the minority view of Semi-Pelagianism, which was later condemned as a heresy by the Council of Orange in 529 A.D.<sup>27</sup> While there does not appear to be solid evidence proving Vincent himself was actually a Semi-Pelagian, and his own words in *The Commonitory* seem to cast doubt on such a charge,<sup>28</sup> this exact same charge against Vincent has recently been brought up again by Tony Jones, a leading voice in the *Revisionist* stream of the EC and a former co-leader of the *Emergent Village* with Brian McLaren. In an essay titled, “Whence Hermeneutic Authority” that Jones authored for the *Wheaton Theology Conference* (2007), Jones likely repeated this charge against Vincent for perhaps the same reason it was first produced, to question whether Vincent’s rule of *consensual orthodoxy*, when being leveled against one’s theology or doctrines, might be dismissed if those who claimed to adhere to the rule did not pass the ‘test of orthodoxy’ either, in matching a clear universal consensus. Jones’ desire to dismiss Vincent’s test may, in his own case, be due to the conflict between what he describes as his commitment to a “theological/ethical response” to the pluralistic contexts of post-modern persons today that is “both Christian and

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<sup>26</sup>See: Lérins, Introduction, 89. The term, Semi-Pelagian, was not in use yet at this time, but would later be used to define the doctrine of some churches in Southern Gaul who taught that “the first step of salvation must be from ourselves.”

<sup>27</sup> See: Council of Orange, *Canons on the Council of Orange* (529 A.D.).

<sup>28</sup>Against the charge that Vincent was Semi-Pelagian, the evidence of Vincent’s attacks on Pelagius make it clear that Vincent was opposed to the idea that free-will could achieve anything apart from God’s grace. Vincent, for instance, said of Pelagius, who was declared heretical by the Council of Carthage in 418 A.D, “For whoever before that profane Pelagius attributed so much antecedent strength to Free-will, as to deny the necessity of God’s grace to aid it towards good in every single act?” Lérins, 86. While Semi-Pelagians believed in the ability of persons to come to salvation on their own, with grace being subsequently required for sanctification, quotes such as the one above seem to suggest that Vincent’s position cannot be conclusively categorized as Semi-Pelagian based upon his known works. Lérins, Introduction, 89, 125.

pragmatic/realistic,” even for those who are in “‘Open’ marriages or are practicing polyamory,” and the conflict of such an approach with Vincent’s rule that Christians must instead follow only that which has been clearly believed by the consensus of ‘all Christians, in all places and at all times.’ (T. Jones 2011) In attacking Vincent’s idea of consensus, in his essay for the *Wheaton Theology Conference*, Jones says that Vincent’s idea of consensus is impossible since “There’s no such beast, and you’ll search in vain to find it. In fact, I’m surprised that this icon doesn’t show Vincent with one hand behind his back, with fingers crossed...The Vincentian Canon of universality, antiquity, and consensus is met head-on by the postmodern canon of radical locality, the biases of history, and dissensus.” (T. Jones 2007, 13) Jones also adds that “What makes Vincent’s claim” about the orthodox consensus “doubly ironic is that Vincent himself was accused of Semipelagianism.” (Ibid) While Jones provides no evidence to support his charge of heresy against Vincent, and no conclusive evidence has yet been presented historically, such a charge is at the center of his attack on the idea of orthodox consensus as simply being an illusion, while, instead, he argues that there is only ever a diversity of contexts. Additionally, he also attaches to his attack on Vincent an *Emerging-Revisionist* post-modern deconstructionist belief that ancient persons, such as Vincent, also could not have realized the limits of their own contexts, biases, and narratives, nor could they have anticipated the evolving realities of post-modern culture either. Jones adds that “Postmodernism is, of course, famously characterized by an incredulity toward just such metanarratives,” as he categorizes Vincent’s idea of *consensual orthodoxy*, and “our world of blogs and 24-hour news channels” and global diversity “show us just how unreasonable Vincent’s universal vision is.” (Ibid) Further, Jones argues that “even in the pages of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*,”<sup>29</sup> compiled by Oden in support of Vincent’s method of reading the voices of ancient Christian authorities in concert, Jones charges that while he appreciates reading the fathers, “one finds those hallowed fathers sometimes at odds,” meaning Jones believes there was never even true consensus among the fathers. (Ibid, 14)

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<sup>29</sup>See: Oden 2001.

Finally, Jones critiques Vincent's claim that, as Oden has summarized, "It's the Holy Spirit guiding the church towards the unity of the Body of Christ...towards the consensual memories of the apostles" (Oden 2015), with Jones asking, and "How is this reliance on the Holy Spirit's intervention not a theological copout? How do we not use the Spirit's activity as a conversation-stopper when our hallowed texts and histories are deconstructed?" (T. Jones 2007, 17)

While Vincent does not have the benefit of being allowed to answer Jones' charges directly, to those who questioned the tenability of orthodox consensus in his time, he answered by asserting that at the Council of Ephesus, where the 'test of orthodoxy' was applied against Nestorius, they did not attempt to create an appearance of consensus by selectively using only the teachings of fathers or doctors who agreed with them, as he claims heretics will do in claiming only those voices who might seem to support their cause. (Lérins, 99) Instead, the council looked at a wide breadth of Christian writings together so that "By collating the consentient opinions of the ancient masters, the profane novelties of heretics may be detected and condemned." (Ibid) As an example of how this approach also actually allowed a diversity of voices to speak, Vincent suggests that during the Council of Ephesus they even allowed Nestorius to speak and attempt to make his case. (Ibid, 112) However, while Nestorius appealed only to a select number of voices, before finally emphasizing his own authority against all who came before him, despite being able to appeal to any and all in his defense, the council was able to appeal to the breadth and depth of the universal teachings of the church, allowing all voices to speak equally from all contexts. (Ibid) In so doing, in allowing the entire chorus of the church to speak, they were able to, in fact, show that a consentient interpretation becomes evidentially clear when all of the opinions are 'collated,' even those who disagree on points. At the same time, when all voices and contexts in Christianity are truly allowed to speak, dissonant voices are contrarily shown as being alone and out of sync with all other contexts. In other words, the more voices that are allowed to speak across the vast array of all Christians, in all places and at all times, the easier it is to see consensus in and through the chorus of voices, while those teachings that do not match also become obvious in their dissonance. Thomas Oden also explained about Vincent's method that consent could not

be claimed if it was not clear across the universal voices of the church, since “There can be no true consent if the consent achieved is not global,” then too, it could not only be the consent of one culture, time, or even one council, since “Regional consent is not ecumenical consent. Insofar as possible, orthodox teaching must be shown to be received and owned worldwide by the worshipping community. Having once been shown, the consensus does not need to be forever retested, however.” (Oden 2002, 165) It is especially important to note here, for later purposes, that Oden is referring to the universal ecumenical worshipping community and not only that of a local expression or context as, conversely, some progressive *Revisionist* voices within the EC will be seen to do.

Vincent additionally countered, against critics of the idea of consensus that those in danger of heresy or error will typically attempt to question consensus as part of their effort to in truth argue that their voice should be believed above that of the consentient voice of the universal church across the ages. (Lérins, 101-102) In doing so, Vincent thought they were cutting out the Apostles who received the word of God, and the consensus whom they faithfully transmitted both Scripture and apostolic interpretation through, with those seeking to innovate new teachings making themselves the receivers and interpreters of the gospel over-and-against the Apostles and the consentient voice of the church that provides continuity through the ages:

And lest anyone, disregarding everyone else, should arrogantly claim to be listened to himself alone, himself alone to be believed, the Apostle goes on to say, ‘Did the word of God proceed from you, or did it come to you only.’ (Ibid, 102)

Further, Vincent argues that heretics such as Nestorius, in their pride, not only disdained the consentient voice of the church and refused to humble themselves before their fathers but also claimed that both antiquity and the consensus were in error, failing to have the insights and understandings available to innovators of new doctrine, such as Nestorius. In doing so, Nestorius claimed a newer enlightened perspective from which to deconstruct the past teachings and doctrines of the church. Vincent reports that at the Council of Ephesus:

We inveighed also against the wicked presumption of Nestorius in boasting that he was the first and only one who understood holy Scripture, and that all those teachers were ignorant, who before him had expounded the sacred oracles, forsooth, the whole body of

Confessors and martyrs...In a word, he confidently asserted that the whole Church was even now in error, and had always been in error, in that, as it seemed to him, it had followed, and was following, ignorant and misguided teachers. (Ibid, 112)

In further answering Tony Jones' contention that, since the church fathers disagreed on issues, Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* is untenable, it is important to note that Vincent did not claim that the fathers had to agree on all points, and instead agreed that Christians would always differ on interpretations. (Lérins, Introduction) Rather, Vincent instead taught that consensus is only claimed when it can clearly be seen that a belief has been the, 'acknowledged belief' of all, or of 'almost all' from the apostles to the present across all cultures, places and times. (Ibid) In further defense of Vincent on this point, Thomas Oden added that *Consensual Orthodoxy* also does not "assume that absolute unanimity is required for ecumenical consent. If they did, no question could ever be settled." (Oden 2002, 118) Oden additionally alleged that the 'learned' respondents to Vincent's inquiries about how they also settled disputes over interpretation, likewise:

Did not absolutely insist that all consent must be plenary or perfect; they did agree, however, that it must be reasonably firm. It is seldom (if ever!) possible within any historical process to obtain an absolute, hundred-percent vote, nor is it required...he seeks not an absolute of unanimous perfectionism, then, but a reliable reverberation of the symphony of faith. (Ibid, 163)

Oden also asserted that the orthodox consensus has also never suggested "everything worth knowing could be crammed uniformly into one single language pattern or cultural perspective...diminishing the importance of other...forms of language and culture" but have, instead, "rejected only those terms and ideas that would mislead the community of believers into false premises or conclusions contrary to the original apostolic deposit of the faith." (Ibid)

Lastly, in answering the additional charge, by Jones, that relying on the Holy Spirit to form consensus is a 'copout,' it may be expedient to point out that Jones, in explaining the difficulty of agreeing on a statement of faith in his *Revisionist* community, the *Emergent-Village*, claimed they had instead agreed to remain open on doctrine since they were a dynamic community shaped by "an eager attention to the dynamism of the Spirit's disturbing and comforting presence, which is always reforming us by calling us into an ever-intensifying

participation in the Son's welcoming of others into the faithful embrace of God;" thus showing that he also appealed to the necessity of the Spirit's work in defense of his own community's consensus that they could *not reach consensus* on doctrines and praxis. (T. Jones 2007, 17) In reply to Jones' charge, Thomas Oden once again defends *consensual orthodoxy* by claiming that orthodox appeals to the work of the Spirit are not meant to claim that the Spirit 'mechanically' or 'magically' forms consent, but that the Spirit works instead in the very human processes of "debate, inquiry, parliamentary deliberation, voting, and the apparatus of policy formation." (Oden 2002, 47) Thus, *consensual orthodoxy* trusts that if the whole confessing Christian community is brought into conversation, not only in one generation or culture but across the expanse of all those incorporated into the Body of Christ, then that larger conversation in the body, guided by the Spirit, will yield a consensus more trustworthy than the opinions of an individual or expression speaking from only one generation or situation.

In the same essay, Jones, however, then brings further critiques to the idea of consensus in service to the perspectives of *post-modern deconstructionism*, *contextual theology*, and *liberation theology*. For example, he additionally charges that the claim of consensus is also suspect due to the 'structures of power' out-of-which he supposes those *in* power must have exercised their "theological muscles" to silence "all of the brilliant voices of the ancient church," whom he assumes were not in agreement with the consensus, such as, "ancient mothers...theologians of color" and "slaves," whom he believes could not have been allowed to express their dissent with orthodoxy. (T. Jones 2007, 14) Jones also states as a matter of fact that "These silenced voices were not a part of Vincent's venerated antiquity, and their silence haunts our appropriation of ancient sources." (Ibid) Additionally, citing the influence of atheist Post-Modern French philosopher Michel Foucault, who claimed that power controls knowledge,<sup>30</sup> Jones adds that since it is true "power is endemic to the human situation," then even the "orthodox articulation of Christology" is simply a 'theological construction' that has "human

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<sup>30</sup> See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), 23.

fingerprints all over it,” in a process that is also “rife with power and politics” (Ibid, 16)

Subsequently, Jones charges that “While Vincent exhorts us to hold fast that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all, you’ll have about as much luck finding that elusive thing as you will be hunting Jackalope...No such universal, a-contextual orthodoxy exists. Instead, orthodoxy is a mess, a beautiful mess.” (Ibid, 13-15) Suggesting a way forward, Jones then cites Gambian liberation theologian, Lamin Sanneh, to argue Christians “should not quest after an unrealizable consensus, a Global Christianity,” as Vincent sought to do, “but instead should embrace a World Christianity in all its mosaic beauty.” (Ibid, 15)

In reply, in *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, Thomas Oden placed Vincent’s method in conversation with such critiques, and also defended the tenability of orthodox consensus, by suggesting that *first*, we do not know that minority voices were marginalized in the process of seeking *consensual orthodoxy* and they likely were not (Oden 2002, 108-120); *second*, the history of orthodoxy reveals that those who followed the orthodox consensus were typically those outside of the systems of power and thus without the ability to use power to control knowledge (Ibid, 52-53); and *third*, that those who followed orthodoxy were usually marginalized and oppressed for their beliefs, giving their lives as martyrs in defense of the core doctrinal beliefs of the consensus against the tide of empires and cultures that tried to change those beliefs by force. (Ibid)

In examining Oden’s *first* point of rebuttal in more detail, Oden argued that it is a disrespect for premodern contexts, and their assumptions, to apply “modern criteria of justice to judge the sins and inadequacies of the ancient exegetes,” such as may be seen in Jones’ assertion that exegetes such as Vincent and the early councils marginalized the voices of women, slaves and persons of color. (Ibid, 108). Instead, Oden argued that ‘fair-minded’ analysis should seek to understand ancient Christian voices “empathetically from within their own historical assumptions, limitations, scriptural interpretations, and deeper intentions,” in the course of which he thought, for example, that the ancient Christians would not “recognize themselves in charges of anti-Semitism and gender preference,” especially since, he claimed, they were far more diverse and egalitarian than the modern era. (Ibid) For example, Oden pointed out that the ancient idea of

ecumenism in the universal church included the whole world (Ibid, 115), consisting of persons from every class and at least fifteen ethnicities, including persons hailing from locations stretching from modern-day Iran, to Asia and North Africa, just from the beginning of the church in *Acts* alone; none of whom were part of the modern European culture. (Ibid, 117) Then too, he pointed out that the universal church and the voices of *consensual orthodoxy* also spanned “many generations,” while modern ideas of diversity typically listen to only one century or less and have “no time to listen to other generations,” especially those that are premodern. (Ibid, 115)

Subsequently, Oden contended that current ideas of diversity are typically ideated to “favor the power of knowledge elites” in the west instead of truly listening to such a wide array of voices as found in the ancient ecumenical consensus. (Ibid, 112) Summarizing his point that *consensual orthodoxy* not only listens to a greater array of contexts than do most modern critics of orthodoxy, but that it also more sufficiently acknowledges and accounts for the limits of contexts and bias, Oden further asserted, “Orthodoxy offers two millennia of intellectual options, not a single century...It offers vast varieties of intellectual alternatives, acknowledging that those alternatives all come with boundaries” (Ibid, 116) and that it also actually “frees critical reasoning from the templates of narrow modern ideological advocacy,” thus, providing more qualitative reasoning than provided by those communities who are only approaching truth from within current contexts. (Ibid, 117) Even more, Oden reasoned that *consensual orthodoxy* is the 'global mosaic' that critics such as Jones attain to, since, in hearing the 'corrective' of *consensual orthodoxy*, one actually:

Goes back and studies ever more carefully the varieties of expression of the one apostolic mission in its beautiful, two-millennia-spanning multilingual variations--Eastern and Western, African and Asian, Roman and Syrian...Heed those most aware of the enormous flexibility and variability of orthodoxy, of its unique ability to transform various cultural traditions, yet who are able to behold within all this variety the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. (Ibid, 120)

On the *second* and *third* points of rebuttal that Oden brings to Jones' critiques of Vincent's method, Oden, in *Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (2002), additionally referred to the history of the development of orthodox creeds to show that most of those who transmitted the core doctrines of the orthodox consensus did not impose orthodoxy by power, or via empire, seldom having

control over the instruments of power that might allow them to control the knowledge or truth, but were instead persecuted and suffered martyrdom for their beliefs, such as was seen in the Roman Empire's adoption of Arianism and its subsequent suppression and persecution of Athanasius and the orthodox authors of the Nicæan Creed. (Ibid, 52) In considering how often orthodoxy was transmitted by martyrs *against* the opposition provide by structures of powers that sought to suppress the defenders of orthodoxy, from the Apostles to many of the authors of the creeds, Oden also claimed that the persistence of orthodox beliefs by so many amidst so much resistance and suffering also provides evidence that, in the rejection of doctrinal relativism by the orthodox martyrs, they showed over time that those orthodox beliefs which they died for, and that also persisted across cultures, places and times, despite persecution, were not only the beliefs of one generation, context or structure of power, but rather that they existed despite such structures, by what could only be described as the protection of the Spirit in faith transmission. (Ibid, 52-53) Even more, Oden asked of critics, such as Jones, "What deconstructionist is willing to die for his or her teachings? Name the postmodern critics who are laying their lives on the line. The very idea is laughable, because martyrdom would be entirely inconsistent with such critics' commitment to absolute cultural relativism" and, he claimed, it is only the apostolic faith transmitted via *consensual orthodoxy* that has consistently led to such consistent and continual martyrdom of Christians over the centuries, while based only on naturalistic explanations "there would be no way reasonably to explain the faith of confessors, in chains or in prison, who over the centuries have been prepared to die for apostolic faith in Christ." (Ibid, 51-53)

*Is Consensual Orthodoxy Stifling Necessary Growth of Theology or Doctrine?*

Another question contemporary opponents apparently leveled at Vincent and the orthodox consensus, according to the answers he addressed to his anonymous critics, in *The Commonitory*, was whether the orthodox consensus was unnecessarily stifling the healthy growth of theology and doctrine in the present age, as well as silencing new voices and honest debates. This has also been a question raised in the more progressive *Revisionist* stream of the EC where leading voices such as Brian McLaren have seen traditional understandings of orthodoxy as being

rigid and unable to change to meet the needs and values of current persons and situations.

(McLaren 2006a, 28) However, rather than rejecting the idea of orthodoxy completely such *Revisionists* have also sometimes attempted to redefine it in such a way that even the creeds are able to evolve. McLaren, for instance, when he wrote *A Generous Orthodoxy* at the height of the EC movement's popularity, in 2006, was at that time attempting to ideate a new kind of orthodoxy that “upholds and affirms the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.” (Ibid) However, in clear contrast with Vincent's *consensual orthodoxy*, McLaren's new conception of orthodoxy:

Also acknowledges (rather perversely) that a number of items many hold as vital for orthodoxy are found nowhere in these seminal creeds and adds...the creeds should never be used as a club to batter into submission people with honest questions and doubts. It also affirms...Scripture itself remains above creeds and that the Holy Spirit may use Scripture to tweak our creedal understandings and emphases from time to time, so that new creeds are needed to give voice to the cry of faith today. (Ibid)

It is fascinating here that McLaren was both arguing that the ecumenical creeds, and orthodoxy, did not speak to all current contexts today, while he then appeared to be pitting a Protestant idea of 'sola scriptura' against an idea of 'orthodoxy-as-tradition' in which even the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed were open to change, if he could claim that a faithful application of 'sola scriptura' justified revisions to creedal interpretations of Scripture in light of the needs and perspectives of current contexts. Against such a movement, Evangelical-Reformed thinker Tim Challies critiqued McLaren as having become a ‘false teacher’ in his having “assumed authority over the Bible, instead of placing himself under its authority,” in order to free himself to “see Christian doctrine as evolving, and himself as an instrument of this evolution.” (Challies 2014) Challies claimed that McLaren did so to subsequently deny “the literal nature of hell” and “the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ...Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father,” all to, Challies’ claimed, be able to at last affirm “homosexuality as good and pleasing to God.” (Ibid) Consequentially, amidst such critiques, McLaren has since left the Evangelical and orthodox EC voices with whom he was in conversation with about redefining orthodoxy, during the time he wrote *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2006a), transitioning to a new community that, instead of considering orthodoxy, now

embraces a progressive and evolving approach to doctrine.<sup>31</sup> As such, he has also likely now abandoned attempts to justify revisions of interpretations of creeds or Scripture to the Evangelical community, saying of his final departure from Evangelicalism, “I was seen as outside the camp’ because I publicly affirmed the full equality of LGBTQ people, including regarding marriage equality, because I lost confidence in the conventional view of hell, and because I stopped affirming the theory/doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement.” (McLaren 2017) After leaving Evangelicalism, McLaren has helped to form a new ‘progressive’ community of people, networks and churches called the *Convergence-and-Open* networks which state that their core mission is to gather a progressive community who believes: “In equality for all people, advocates for the rights of immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ people, and believes we should work together to heal and protect our planet.” (Convergence, n.d.) Rather than having to justify his revised view of orthodoxy in his new community, McLaren said he at last “found peers and mentors with whom I felt safe and free to be myself...The other good news is that new networks are forming to create new, more expansive spaces for belonging.” (McLaren 2017) Still, while McLaren's new focus seemed to be on living out a correct 'orthopraxis' amidst the contexts, needs and social activism of current persons and communities in his network, was his earlier view of orthodoxy, as a rigid system that stunts the growth and applicability of doctrine for post-modern contexts, resists questions, and uses the creeds as a club to “batter people into submission” (Ibid), a view of orthodoxy that also applies to Vincent's conception of *consensual orthodoxy*?

In response to the concern that *consensual orthodoxy* is only a conception of *orthodoxy-as-tradition* that blindly adheres to the past and stifles questions and growth in the present age, Vincent took care to show that in his conception of orthodoxy *as the living chorus in the Body of Christ*, and not only tradition, new theological language and understandings of doctrine could be developed. However, he also stressed such changes must be consistent with the body of teachings

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<sup>31</sup> See: Convergence, n.d. We will also touch upon the approaches to orthodoxy of persons within McLaren’s new network in Chapter Four of this study, via the responses to our questionnaires from *Open/Emergence* network members.

clearly received by the church from the time of the apostles, just as the growth of an adult has continuity with their childhood form and does not become an entirely new person: “Someone will say, perhaps, shall there, then, be no progress in Christ’s Church? Certainly; all possible progress...yet on condition that it be real progress, not alteration of the faith.” (Lérins, 80)

Vincent stressed that Christians could be creative in bringing further clarity and contextualization to doctrine and speak in a new and creative fashion, but could not teach new truths:

Let that which formerly was believed, though imperfectly apprehended, as expounded by thee be clearly understood...Yet teach still the same truths which thou hast learnt, so that though thou speakest after a new fashion, what thou speakest may not be new. (Ibid, 78)

Likewise, Vincent quoted *1 Tim. 6: 20*, where Paul says, “O Timothy, guard the deposit, shunning profane novelties of words,” as further evidence that the growth of theology or doctrine was not the same as adding novel teaching that was incongruent with that which was transmitted by the apostles. (Ibid, 75) Again, for Vincent, there was room in orthodoxy for the growth of doctrine, and likely for emerging practices in new contexts as well, but he was concerned that amidst such growth and innovation the core apostolic teachings should not be altered.

For his part, Tony Jones who admitted that his *Emergent Village* community once discussed creating a statement about orthodoxy, but eventually abandoned authoring a statement of faith after realizing it would limit the fluidity, freedom, and evolution of their movement. Instead, they ended up defining their movement as “dynamic rather than static,” with Jones adding that in his critique Vincent’s *consensual orthodoxy*, “There is no orthodoxy out there somewhere, only here, in me and in you and in us when we gather in Christ’s name...there is no orthodoxy until it’s lived. It is an event that happens when we gather to worship, when we change a diaper, when we read a book, when we present a paper.” (T. Jones 2007, 18, 24) As we will see, Jones and his EC community’s belief in orthodoxy as being not only about doctrine but about life and worship together in Christ does, perhaps, share an important element in common with Vincent’s concept of *consensual orthodoxy* in which sacred life, worship and practices together in Christ, and not only intellectual consent to its teaching, is at the center of a healthy and living orthodoxy. However, for Vincent’s *consensual orthodoxy*, one must not only be centered in life

and worship together in the local or current context, but rather in the universal ‘worshiping community,’ (Oden 2002, 165) the greater ‘Body of Christ’ together, (Lérins, 72) in which, also then, faithful adherence to the consensual interpretations of Scripture and doctrine across all cultures, places and times is a consequential evidence that persons have become participants in the greater unity *in* Christ and *his body*, not only within a local expression or current context but across all cultures, places and times. (Lérins, 91) Still, returning again to Jones’ main charge here, in regard to the potential limits of ideations of traditional orthodoxy, including that of Vincent with whom Jones is directly engaging here, does *consensual orthodoxy*, truly fail to allow any growth of theology or doctrine in conversation with the dynamics of post-modern contexts?

In a famous 2013 interview with Pope Francis we can see a fascinating example of the ways in which Vincent’s views on the relationship of orthodoxy and the growth of doctrine are being applied to post-modern contexts today, and also possibly misunderstood. In his interview with the pope in the *America Jesuit Review*, Antonio Sparado, S.J., asked the pope about the potential for a post-modern updating of understandings of human anthropology (i.e., human sexuality, an issue also at the forefront of EC debates). Sparado argued, regarding what he assumed was the difficult task of applying orthodoxy to current contexts, that “We now interpret ourselves in a different way than in the past, using different categories. This is also due to the great changes in society, as well as a broader conception of what it means to be human.” (Sparado 2013). In reply, the pope paraphrased from *The Commonitory*: “Even the dogma of the Christian religion must proceed from these laws. It progresses, solidifying with years, growing over time, deepening with age.” (Ibid) Then, the pope informed Sparado:

St. Vincent of Lérins makes a comparison between the biological development of man and the transmission from one era to another of the deposit of faith, which grows and is strengthened with time...The view of the church’s teaching as a monolith to defend without nuance or different understandings is wrong...Even the forms for expressing truth can be multiform, and this is indeed necessary for the transmission of the gospel in its timeless meaning. (Ibid)

While Pope Francis has been influenced here by Vincent’s view of the growth of doctrine being centered within the growth of the Body of Christ across the centuries, under the guidance of

the Holy Spirit, instead of in the canonization of tradition itself, he might not additionally share Vincent's suspicion of genius being exalted over consent as being a key historical ingredient leading to heresy.<sup>32</sup> For example, after quoting from Vincent's *Commonitory*, Francis subsequently claimed about the growth of doctrine that "The thinking of the church must recover genius and better understand how human beings understand themselves today, in order to develop and deepen the church's teaching" (Sparado 2013), while Vincent himself continually warned throughout *The Commonitory* that it was the greatest minds of the church, such as Origen, that had always innovated heresy out of their love for their own genius and then also led many people astray due to the respect persons held for that same brilliance. (Lérins, 42-45) However, what Pope Francis has clearly drawn from Vincent is the idea that overseeing the growth of doctrine while also carefully guarding the faith from corruption, is, as Thomas G. Guarino points out in his reflection on Francis' interview with Sparado, the job of "both the entire body of bishops and the universal Church in general." (Guarino 2013b) On this point, Guarino reflected:

Francis explicitly recalls the ancient Catholic doctrine of the faithful possessing 'infallibilitas in credendo' (the infallibility of the Christian people as a whole)...It is a vigorous theology of communion which sees in all aspects of ecclesial life "pope, bishops, faithful and theologians" the living and dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in the Church's task of preserving and authentically developing the Christian faith. (Ibid)

Additionally, the orthodox-ecumenist Guarino stressed that, like the pope, "Vincent is equally concerned...that 'development' can never mean a substantial transformation, a change in the very essence of a church teaching...Vincent argues that any doctrinal growth must be warranted by the entire Church, under the Holy Spirit." (Ibid) Thus, here, in the renewed interest in Vincent amidst leading Catholic voices, we see not only another recovery of his idea of *consensual orthodoxy*, but also its importance for showing the ways that doctrine and theology can grow and address the needs of post-modern contexts but in a way that also seeks continuity *with* and accountability *to* the faith transmitted by the apostles.

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<sup>32</sup> See: Lérins, 63.

### 3.4.3 Does Consensual Orthodoxy Contradict Sola Scriptura?

A further challenge to the ‘test of orthodoxy’ that Vincent addressed, in *The Commonitory*, was the suggestion that *consensual orthodoxy* undermines the sufficiency of Scripture: *isn't Scripture alone all sufficient to learn the truth and refute heresy?* While this is the question Vincent indicates was being asked in his time,<sup>33</sup> perhaps one of the reasons that Vincent is still mostly overlooked by many Protestants and Evangelicals today is a similar suspicion, following the *Protestant Reformation*, that *consensual orthodoxy* seeks to replace ‘sola scriptura’ with the traditions of the church. Such a charge can, for instance, be found in an essay by Stephen R. Lewis, the president of Rocky Mountain Bible College and Seminary, in Denver, titled “Consensus Theology Taints Biblical Theology.” (2010, 27-41) In his essay, in response to his reading of Thomas Oden’s *Rebirth of Orthodoxy* and Oden’s explanation of Vincent’s method therein, Lewis argued that the danger of reading the Bible in conversation with *consensual orthodoxy* is that “traditions sometimes blind us to the clear meaning of Scripture.” (Lewis 2010, 37) He continued that while “No one should discount the role of history in helping us understand how the earliest interpreters understood the Scriptures” (Ibid, 39), nevertheless:

Believers today must renew their commitment to the Scripture itself... The only real issue is whether a doctrine or belief is Biblical. There is no more sound approach to the formation of our beliefs. It is time we rescued Christian theology from the theologians and put it back in the hands of Biblical exegetes and Biblical theologians. (Ibid)

Vincent addressed a similar question in *The Commonitory*: “But here some one perhaps will ask, since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation?” (Lérins, 6) In reply, Vincent clarified that Scripture itself is indeed sufficient and that Biblical exegesis is where one must begin the formation of beliefs, but he then proceeded to point out that, unfortunately, fallible human beings can error in their individual interpretations, asserting that this is why *consensual orthodoxy* is also then needed “because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another

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<sup>33</sup> Lérins, 6.

in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters.”

(Ibid) Vincent adds that those promoting heresy or error will also appeal to Scripture, sometimes very cleverly,<sup>34</sup> but will revise the consentient interpretation in disregard for the orthodox consensus and will instead introduce their own interpretations. Therefore, since Scripture can be twisted and misused by those promoting heresy or error, and even by the Devil, a rule is needed to judge between the faithful Biblical exegete and the false teacher in their competing interpretations of Scripture. Vincent said:

One difficulty which is not unlikely to perplex a simple Christian is the readiness with which heretics appeal to Scripture, following therein the example of their arch-leader, who, in his temptation of our Lord, dared to make use of arms drawn from that armoury. This leads to the question, how are we to ascertain the true sense of Scripture? (Ibid)

Vincent also asked:

Do heretics also appeal to Scripture? They do indeed, and with a vengeance...hardly ever do they bring forward anything of their own which they do not endeavor to shelter under words of Scripture...they know that the evil stench of their doctrine will hardly find acceptance...They sprinkle it over, therefore, with the perfume of heavenly language, in order that one who would be ready to despise human error, may hesitate to condemn divine words. (Ibid, 64)

For Vincent, then, while the ‘test of orthodoxy’ does not in any way replace Scripture, or claim a mutual authority, it does serve as a secondary set of boundary markers, or a fail-safe, to prevent novel or heretical revisions of interpretations of Scripture against that which has been clearly held and taught by the consensus of Christians from the beginning of the faith. (Ibid)

Considering Vincent's argument for the necessity of the 'test of orthodoxy' as a rule to settle disputes when there are disagreements over interpretations of Scripture, it is also interesting to consider how the Emerging Church (EC) movement realized, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as noted in Chapter Two of this study, that not only could their leading voices not agree on interpretations of Scripture over issues including the divinity and salvific work of Jesus, the significance of the atonement, the reality of personal sin, or its applicability to

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<sup>34</sup>Lérins, Appendix II, 122. Editor Paul A. Boer, Sr. claims Vincent may have had St. Augustine in mind in his description here of ‘clever men’ who twist Scripture. Boer contends that this claim is tangentially supported by *Prosper's Letter to Augustine*, as cited in *St. Augustine's Works*, Appendix, Tom. X. coll. 2535., Paris, 1836 where Augustine's defender, Prosper, lists complaints about Augustine's doctrines of irresistible grace and predestination being brought by clergy in Gaul, which match Vincent's charges here.

debates over war, abortion, sexuality, and roles in the church, but they also disagreed even on the meaning of 'sola scriptura' or orthodoxy, as we have examined below, showing why Thomas Oden questioned whether the EC to any extent had an “immune system to resist heresy,” or would in the future continue to bear any resemblance to the apostolic faith? (Oden 1998) Their radically divergent debates would also seem to support Vincent's point that a 'fail-safe' is needed when an interpretation of Scripture is in dispute.

In an example of the divergence of opinions in the EC just over concepts of 'sola scriptura' and orthodoxy, it is interesting to again consider Brian McLaren's argument, in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, that he was in following a more authentic form of 'orthodoxy' than the more rigid 'orthodoxy-as-tradition' of most Evangelicals in that his 'generous orthodoxy' was entirely based in an idea of 'sola scriptura' that enabled him to revise elements of the creeds or doctrines that did not account for the current contexts that Christ was seeking to engage, arguing that “the Holy Spirit may use Scripture to tweak our creedal understandings,” a method which he proceeded to apply primarily to issues of sexuality in alignment with current postmodern secular values. (McLaren 2006a, 28)<sup>35</sup> In sync with fellow *Emerging-Revisionist* theologian Andrew Perriman,<sup>36</sup> McLaren also sought to use *liberation theology*, *post-modern deconstructionism*, and *historical-contextual analysis* to question whether many of the scriptural interpretations entrenched in what he conceived of as *orthodoxy-as-tradition* had, in fact, been hijacked by later interpreters who had lost the actual historical contexts of the gospel narratives and thus also misconstrued much of the authentic message of Jesus.<sup>37</sup> Thus, as detailed in Chapter Two of this study, in McLaren's questioning of the ability of tradition to authentically mediate debates over interpretations of Scripture, if tradition could be shown to be corrupted, much as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformers believed possible, he then, again, could appeal to a concept of 'sola scriptura' to justify revisions of doctrines or creeds. However, 'sola scriptura' seemed to mean his

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<sup>35</sup> Also see: McLaren 2006b; Barrick 2012.

<sup>36</sup> See: Perriman 2012.

<sup>37</sup> See: McLaren 2007; McLaren 2006c.

reading of Scripture alone, through new theological, historical and contextual perspectives that better retrieved the original narratives. (Ibid)

McLaren's concept of 'sola scriptura' and redefining of orthodoxy in which traditional orthodox doctrines, hermeneutics, and creeds could be revised, caused concern amidst leaders in the more conservative *Relevant* stream of the EC, such as Mark Driscoll. As noted in Chapter Two of this study, amid the fracturing of the EC, Driscoll critiqued McLaren's for ignoring Scripture.<sup>38</sup> While, as part of an EC movement that together cared about missional inculturation of the gospel in postmodern culture, Driscoll also thought that not all questions could be answered or explained by Scripture and that Scripture must, therefore, be unpacked via contextually relevant methods, still, unlike *Revisionists*, he maintained that amid current contexts, persons needed to always check their questions "by Scripture...to see that it agrees with Scripture." (Driscoll 2011) While thus sharing the same critiques of outdated Christian' postures and practices as other EC streams, Driscoll contended Christians must update their language and methods, while, however, doctrine itself must be 'frozen,' and never changing:

Scripture commands us to 'contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3). Therefore, the truths of Christianity are constant, unchanging, and meant for all people, times, and places. But the methods by which truth is articulated and practiced must be culturally appropriated, and therefore constantly translated (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). If both doctrine and practice are constant, the result is dead orthodoxy, to which the Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists are each reacting...If both doctrine and practice are constantly changing, the result is living heresy, which is where I fear the *Revisionist* Emergent tribe of the Emerging church is heading. But if doctrine is constant and practice is constantly changing, the result is living orthodoxy, which I propose is the faithful third way of the Relevants and pray remains the predominant way of the Reconstructionists.<sup>39</sup> (Warnock 2006a)

Driscoll's 'living orthodoxy,' in which methods or practices could be updated perhaps appeared, at first glance, to share more synergy with Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy*, in terms of a belief in maintaining the integrity of core doctrines while also being flexible in seeing language grow, than did McLaren's view of a subjective and 'evolving orthodoxy' in which

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<sup>38</sup> Driscoll 2006c.

<sup>39</sup> In Chapter Six, we have examined the approaches to orthodoxy of some *Reconstructionists* and have attempted to show how their approaches are both different than Driscoll's and perhaps also more accurately show a 'third' way that may also share synergy with Vincent's approach.

doctrine or creeds could change to fit the needs or values of postmodern persons and contexts. However, in apparent differentiation with Driscoll, for Vincent, it did not appear to be the language or practices that were considered 'living,' but the consentient body itself. Vincent said to belong to the true church one must both love “the truth of God...the Church” and “the Body of Christ” together, and within the Body of Christ across all cultures, places, and times, the interpretations, doctrines, and creeds agreed upon by the consentient voices of orthodoxy did not simply then become concepts to be extracted and frozen in time, but to be rather the living chorus of that body’s members. However, Driscoll appeared to view the doctrines and creeds of the orthodox consensus as claims that could be extracted from the consensual dialogue within that body to be considered trans-subjectively (Lérins, 72).

As an example of Driscoll’s differentiation from Vincent on this point, while Driscoll claimed that doctrine must not change, he then showed times when he felt free to interpret Scripture or doctrine apart from dialogue with the orthodox consensus and to likewise bring previous consensual interpretations into question, based upon his hermeneutics or those of his theological tradition over-and-against that of the consensus. For instance, in a sermon on *1 Peter 3: 18-20*, given at *Mars Hill* church, in 2008, Driscoll claimed that the reference to Christ going to hell in *1 Peter* was wrongly understood as referring to hell and that, further, the teaching of the *Apostle’s Creed* that Jesus indeed went to hell, was a heretical view of Christ’s atonement.

(Driscoll 2008b) To support his charge of heresy, Driscoll claimed that the *Apostles Creed* was:

A summary doctrinal statement put together by early church Bible teachers and the original version did not say that Jesus went to hell. There was an edited version that came out in 400 A.D., but the original version did not say that. I believe the original version is right and the edited version is wrong. I don’t think Jesus went to hell because he said today you will be with me in paradise. (Ibid)

In the same sermon, Driscoll proceeded to tell his congregation that it was clearly wrong to claim Jesus went to hell, stating, “Jesus did not go to hell.” Thus, instead of entering the conversation with the historic consensus that determined together which versions of the creeds to hold and transmit throughout history, Driscoll sought to make creedal and doctrinal judgments based upon his exegesis and interpretation of which versions of the creed to trust. (Ibid) While

this did not mean that his opinion could be heard, still, in refusing to engage in conversation with the consensus, in humility, he appeared to have instead extracted doctrine from the consentient dialogue in the body and, while claiming it could not change, then proceeding to show that interpretations of doctrines or creeds were indeed open to reinterpretation outside of the one body that formed, received and transmitted the creeds. Thus, in the approaches to orthodoxy of both McLaren and Driscoll, neither EC leader's view of orthodoxy appeared to account for Vincent's additional belief that orthodoxy could not be separated from faithful surrender to and participation in the universal, ecumenical and living Body of Christ that testifies together to the truth across culture, contexts and centuries. (Lérins, 8, 72, 86) For Vincent, Christ set in place the voices of the Apostles, and the orthodox consensus through the ages who have joined them in affirming their teachings, to not only guard the core meaning of the doctrine first received from the Apostles but to become unified in 'one mind' as the Body of Christ. (Ibid, 101-105) In other words, cannot separate doctrine from the consentient body that has faithfully received it: the body, its life in Christ and the doctrine that is inherited and transmitted in that body are wed. Thus, for Vincent, those who refuse to submit to the teachings of the Apostles, ancient Fathers and the consensual opinion of orthodoxy through the ages, are also vessels of division and fracturing who stand not only against orthodox understandings of Scripture and doctrine but also against the peace and unity of the Body of Christ itself through the ages. Therefore, according to the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, both McLaren and Driscoll's departure from the orthodox consensus would be heterodox since they have, at the core, departed from the unity of the body in which consensual agreement on doctrine is an evidence of unity in that same body, an act of humility that Vincent claimed heresiarchs such as Origen, Tertullian, and Nestorius refused to do. Vincent warned:

Whosoever, therefore, shall despise these, who had their appointment of God in His Church in their several times and places, when they are unanimous in Christ, in the interpretation of some one point of Catholic doctrine, despises not man, but God, from whose unity in the truth, lest anyone should vary, the same Apostle earnestly protests, 'I beseech you, brethren, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.' [1 Cor. 1:10] But if anyone dissent from their unanimous decision, let him

listen to the words of the same apostle, ‘God is not the God of dissension, but of peace;’ [1 Cor. 14:33]. (Ibid, 101-102)

Likewise, Thomas Oden, in his defense of Vincent, also stressed the importance of understanding the *consensual orthodox* way as requiring surrender to the Body of Christ and its sacred practices, and not only intellectual consent to its teaching, saying:

If one tries to impersonate consensus without entering deeply into the worshipping community, without singing the hymns, without being immersed in the written word, without walking daily in the way, without living life in Christ, his for her voice will quickly betray itself with evidence of dissonance. (Oden 2002, 119)

Therefore, the primary evidence of alignment with the teachings *from* and *about* Christ, as transmitted by the apostolic witnesses was to surrender to Christ and enter into life together in the Body of Christ in which body the deposit of apostolic testimony has also been received, transmitted and safeguarded from the beginning, with faithful adherence to the consensual doctrine then being the evidence of that humble life in Christ and in his body. Conversely, Vincent charged that those who do not belong to the body will soon reveal themselves as false by disregarding all those who came before them in the faith, despising continuity in the body and sowing division by tearing doctrines to pieces without regard for the peace of the body: “But what saith the Saviour? “By their fruits ye shall know them;” that is...the doctrine of the Church torn in pieces.” (Ibid, 91)

Additionally, among further evidences Vincent cited to demonstrate that a person was not in continuity with the living consensus in the body, he claimed that those descending into heresy and error would also try to pick and choose which portions of orthodox doctrine or Scripture to follow or apply, departing from the chorus. (Ibid, 99) However, he argued that if they abandoned one part they lost the whole, since it is through the continuity of the consensus found in the one Body of Christ that all Scripture and orthodox doctrine have been transmitted and affirmed. Vincent said: “If any one part of Catholic truth be given up, another, and another, and another will thenceforward be given up as a matter of course, and the several individual portions having been rejected, what will follow in the end but the rejection of the whole?” (Ibid, 82-83)

Vincent additionally argued that another evidence of incongruity with the body was that those in heresy and error would also say that some Scriptures were only meant for particular cultures or contexts and not for the whole body, in all places, cultures and times. For instance, Vincent pointed to *Gal. 1:8*, where Paul warned the Galatians, "As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." To critics who suggested Paul's warning was only for the Galatians, Vincent argued that one would then have to ignore Paul's encouragements as applying to current persons:

But, possibly, this warning was intended for the Galatians only. Be it so; then those other exhortations which follow in the same Epistle were intended for the Galatians only, such as, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit'...which alternative if it be absurd, and the injunctions were meant equally for all, then it follows, that as these injunctions which relate to morals, so those warnings which relate to faith are meant equally for all." (Ibid, 29-31).

As such, Vincent said the same Apostle who shared the message of *grace* was the same who showed Christians *how to live* in the new reality of that grace, including directions on how to walk in the Spirit and warnings to not change the gospel or engage in immorality.

For Vincent then, one cannot separate Scripture and hermeneutics from the consentient chorus that has both received and transmitted Scripture, its consensual interpretation, and the core creedal and doctrinal beliefs from the Apostles to the present. It is also that same consensus to whom one must listen for the work of interpretation today. To those who wish to trust their own hermeneutics or theologies above the consentient doctrine believed from the first in the body, Vincent declared one should not "prefer his own opinions to those of every one besides" nor "recede from the belief of the whole body...united to each other by faith...equaled with each other by humility." (Ibid, 102) He also warned that in the fall of such great theologians as Origen and Tertullian, even before the development of their heretical doctrine, their first sin was their pride and their failure to humbly submit to the consensus of the whole body, which then caused them to place their own interpretations of Scripture over the doctrine of "the universal and ancient faith" and then led them away from unity, an evidence of corruption. (Ibid, 60-71)

### 3.4.4 Why Would God Allow Heresy or Need Christians to Refute it?

A last related question Vincent felt the need to answer was why God would allow so many leading Christian theologians throughout history, such as Origen, Tertullian, and Nestorius, to lead persons into heresy? Also, why would God give such person's rare gifts and followings within the church only to later allow them to fall into error? Vincent answered:

Wherefore, in God's providence, were persons, eminent for their attainments and their piety, such as Photinus, Apollinaris, and Nestorius, permitted to fall into heresy? To which the answer is, For the Church's trial. (Ibid, 412)

Vincent claimed heresy is allowed to arise so that God may test, refine and strengthen his body. Trials also cause believers to turn to God for wisdom, patience, and courage and further allow them to develop clarity in their theological language, as well as unity and perseverance among those who remain faithful. Through trial they become the church in actuality and not only theory. Additionally, heresy allows the vine to be pruned, with those who will not surrender to unity, departing into isolation. Vincent adds Paul's words in *1 Cor 2:9*:

'There must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you,' ... This is the reason why the authors of Heresies are not forthwith rooted up by God, namely, that they who are approved be made manifest; that is, that it may be apparent of each individual, how tenacious and faithful and steadfast he is in his love of the Catholic faith. (Ibid, 72)

Vincent also answered why God would allow heresies by referring to Moses' words, in *Deut.*

*13:1*, "If at any time a Doctor in the Church have erred from the faith, Divine Providence permits it in order to make trial of us, whether or not we love God with all our heart and with all our mind." (Ibid, 71) Therefore, again, the task of dealing with heresy has not only allowed refinement and unity amidst the body, but it has further tested love of God over love of one's own knowledge, opinions, perspectives, and contexts or those of one's community or culture.

### 3.5 Conclusion

After considering Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy*, as described in this chapter, and additionally observing the work of Thomas Oden to place Vincent in dialogue with EC critics, we believe *consensual orthodoxy* is a potentially viable method for Emerging

expressions to consider. It should be considered by Emerging expressions because it allows the voices of diverse persons and contexts to be heard, and also for doctrine and theology to grow, in terms of understanding, elucidation, and the contextualization necessary for inculturation, while retaining continuity *with* and faithfulness *to* apostolicity. Vincent's concept of orthodoxy is able to do so because it is not simply that of *orthodoxy-as-rigid-tradition*, in which doctrines and practices can never grow or be inculturated within current contexts, which we noted *Relevants* and *Revisionists* seeing as a problem in the quotes of Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Mark Driscoll; nor is Vincent's method one of *orthodoxy-as-contextual-relativism* or an *orthodoxy-always-evolving* where apostolic creeds or doctrines may have their consensual meanings revised to match the dynamics or values of current contexts, as McLaren and Jones appear to advocate for; nor again is Vincent's method even a *living orthodoxy*, as Driscoll used this term, in which only practices or language might be updated, but in ways that still leave orthodoxy as a set of frozen concepts that can exist independent from modes of being and surrender within the life found in the Body of Christ. *Consensual Orthodoxy* is instead the shared and ongoing belief and worship,<sup>40</sup> or shared testimony, of the living Body of Christ across the ages where believers are formed in unity, by the Spirit, in both life, worship, and witness together across *all cultures, places and times*; and in which they collectively receive not only Scripture but interpretation and doctrine as an apostolic 'deposit of faith' that belongs to that body alone and cannot be extracted from it. The Apostolic 'deposit of faith' is also then safeguarded, transmitted and proclaimed by that same body in humble service *to* and continuity *with* the apostolic message first preached. Due to *Consensual Orthodoxy's* flexibility, current contexts and perspectives can be heard, and doctrines and practices can grow, but such growth must always demonstrate both congruence-and-continuity *with* the consensual agreement of the entire body of all Christians in all places and at all times, from the Apostles to the present. However, while we believe the Vincentian approach, which begins in humility, unity and listening together within the Body of Christ, could be helpful

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<sup>40</sup> See: Guarino 2013, 42. Guarino claimed, "for Vincent tradition is a living and active process."

for informing what faithful updating, reformation or inculturation might look like in emerging contexts today, and to mediate debates over interpretations of Scripture and doctrines, we believe it will likely not be adopted by most *Relevants* or *Revisionists*<sup>41</sup> since it would require submitting one's epistemology, hermeneutics, and practices, or those of their community or systematic, to the process of consensual knowing.

Thus, the greatest challenge in applying *Consensual Orthodoxy* may be that it requires persons to first meekly enter into conversation with the living chorus in the Body of Christ, which requires taking the time to read and listen extensively to the voices of the entire church, a process that Thomas Oden has tried to support by publishing his compendium of *Ancient Christian Commentaries on Scripture*. (Oden 2001) Then too, the method next requires that persons be willing to surrender their hermeneutics, contexts, perspectives, and biases and truly be open to hearing God and others speak within the consensual conversation, a process that takes humility, work, patience, and time. However, taking time to listen and discern in concert with the consensus of all believers, and not simply in one's individual studies of the voices of the church, and even also being willing to allow that conversations about interpretation or doctrine may have to continue across generations, also helps to guard against the bias of only one generation, culture or context. (Oden 2002, 49) Further, Oden also added that the "general consent of the people of God, measured over very long stretches of time and space" additionally "provides concrete empirical and historical evidence of the durability and unity of the community of faith." (Ibid, 47) Subsequently, Oden stated that if Christians do truly care to listen for the orthodox consensus and are willing to submit themselves to the process of entering the conversation in the body then there are clear guidelines that the consensual orthodox method provides for debates over interpretations of Scripture or doctrine: 1) "The universal prevails over the particular;" 2) "the older apostolic witness prevails over the newer alleged general consent;" 3) "conciliar actions and decisions prevail over faith-claims as yet untested by conciliar acts;" and, 4) "where no conciliar rule

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<sup>41</sup> In Chapter Six, we consider whether Vincent's method might better fit the views of *Reconstructionists*.

avails, the most reliable consensual ancient authorities prevail over those less consensual over the generations.” (Oden 2002, 171-172) Also, if there is still an issue of division persons may at last “Refer the issue to a conciliar process...in accordance with the unity of the faithful in all times and places” and then “look diligently for what is consistent with apostolic teaching as generally received cross-culturally and intergenerationally.” (Ibid, 167-168) As seen in Oden’s steps, following the method requires work, but it may also bring the greater assurance of prayerful and diligent consideration over freestyling innovation and revision. At the same time, while Thomas Guarino believes Vincent’s method might have remained largely unused due to its appearing to have an ‘unwieldiness’ in application, (Guarino 2014) Thomas Oden has questioned whether such an objection is really an excuse put forth by persons who wish to choose a new or novel teaching *over* the clear consensus, and are looking for reasons to dismiss the method. (Oden 2002, 171-172)

In conclusion, while discerning consentient orthodox belief can involve a long process, it also allows Christians an opportunity to surrender their pride, consider the limits of their own contexts, listen to the diverse voices of others, and surrender to the accountability, formation, and consensual knowing provided in the living Body of Christ, in which they have not been left to know Christ or interpret Scripture alone, in present situations only, but are surrounded by a great ‘cloud of witnesses’ who listen, speak and testify to the truth together across all cultures, places, and times. (Lérins, 102) Thus, in entering the conversation with the orthodox consensus it is also paramount that Christians must, above all, surrender *to* and pursue unity *in* Christ together, within his living body, making sure, Vincent says, to be “united to each other by faith...equalled with each other by humility” (Ibid) and, as Oden added, making sure we are also “entering deeply into the worshiping community...singing the hymns...immersed in the written word...walking daily in the way...living life in Christ.” (Oden 2001, 119) Then too, within that worshiping community, faithful adherence to the consensual interpretations of Scripture and doctrine provided by the living body across all cultures, places, and times also evidences that persons have actually surrendered to unity *in* Christ’s body and not only to the local community or current context and

its contemporary worship or experiences, (Lérins, 91) such as seen in *Revisionist* ideations of an evolving orthodoxy alive only within current and local communities. (T. Jones 2007, 18, 24)

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter, we examined reasons why St. Vincent of Lérins wrote his *Commonitory*, with his main purpose being to explain and defend the need for a consistent rule by which to distinguish true-and-apostolic interpretations of Scripture from those that are new, novel and false. He also stated that he learned his rule, the 'test of orthodoxy,' from both the Council of Ephesus and also from those respondents whom he interviewed after the council. It was these 'learned' persons who taught him that when there were debates over interpretations of Scripture, the universal consensus of Christians had always appealed to the Canon of Scripture first, but then when disagreements over an interpretation of Scripture persisted, they would subsequently only follow that teaching that had been clearly received and held from the Apostles to the present age, "everywhere, always, by all," meaning by the clear consensus of all Christians, across all cultures, places, and times. (Ibid, 6)

We also saw in the recent appeals to Vincent by Pope Francis, Thomas Guarino and Thomas Oden, as well as in earlier uses of Vincent by John Henry Newman and Vatican I, that though he has still not often received wider recognition, Vincent has nonetheless become a vital voice for both the faithful development of doctrine and for a new movement of ecumenism centered in orthodoxy. (Oden 2002, 63-67) Additionally, we saw that what further makes Vincent an important conversation partner for EC expressions is that he perhaps provides a concept of orthodoxy in which updating, reformation, and inculturation of the gospel, in conversation with postmodern contexts, might be held accountable by an orthodoxy that is not bounded only by tradition, nor subjective or always evolving in service to present contexts, but that is instead centered within the faithful fellowship and unity of the Body of Christ across all places, cultures and times, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

In the next chapter, I have used Vincent's questions and answers, as provided in *The Commonitory*, to form the questions that I have asked directly of persons in EC streams today or those who have descended or diverged from the movement. I have done so to place Vincent and his understanding of apostolicity and orthodox consensus into conversation with EC streams to compare understandings of church, reformation, innovation, accountability, apostolicity and orthodoxy, and to provide a critique of EC expressions through the lens of Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy*.

Subsequently, in Chapter Five, I have next examined the approaches to Scripture, orthodoxy, creeds, doctrines, and accountability of Dietrich Bonhoeffer whom some *Revisionists* today, such as Peter Rollins and Brian McLaren, have claimed to justify their revisions of orthodoxy. I have then explored whether Bonhoeffer has indeed enabled *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodox interpretations, creeds, doctrines, and practices, or whether he instead provides a different agenda. Within the same conversation, I have also placed Vincent's concept of orthodoxy into conversation with Bonhoeffer. We have done so to explore whether Bonhoeffer potentially shares more synergy with Vincent's concept of a *consensual orthodoxy* centered in the living Body of Christ in ways that might provide an even more holistic view of accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy for the work of emerging expressions today.

At last, in Chapter Six, we have also compared Vincent's method with the voices of Thomas Oden, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and orthodox or *Reconstructionist* EC expressions, to hopefully suggest a way forward in the post-modern era for faithful reformation that is accountable to *consensual orthodoxy* and apostolicity, and that produces unity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ETHNOGRAPHIC DIALOGUE WITH EMERGING EXPRESSIONS: A MATTER OF ACCOUNTABILITY

#### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, we examined the concerns that led St. Vincent of Lérins to write his *Commonitory*, especially his question of how the church might discern between the teachings that had been faithfully transmitted by the Apostles and those that were novel or false when both the orthodox and those in heresy equally appealed to Scripture. (Lérins (1886) 2012, 4) We also saw how Vincent learned his method for differentiating true apostolic teaching from false by consulting the Scriptures, the church fathers, and the consensus of 'learned' and 'sanctified' persons in the church of his day. (Ibid) The method he learned from his respondents, also known as the test of orthodoxy or *consensual orthodoxy*, was that when there were disagreements over Scriptures or doctrine, Christians should only trust that teaching which had been affirmed by the ecumenical consensus of 'all Christians, in all places and at all times.' (Ibid, 48)

The answers provided in Vincent's work also appeared helpful for the debates of emerging expressions today, including the Emerging Church (EC), the overlapping *Emerging Missional* movement<sup>1</sup>, and their successors, who have tried to reform the church's forms, language, practices, or approaches in order to better inculturate the gospel in postmodern contexts, but who have also often diverged from each other and, in some cases, even from orthodoxy over competing interpretations of Scripture, doctrines, and practices. Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* seemed particularly intriguing for potential application in the work and debates of emerging expressions because, as we saw in the last chapter, Vincent's method conceptualized orthodoxy as the unified belief and witness of the living chorus of the Body of Christ within which body one must center their life, liturgy, worship, and praxis in the incarnate

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<sup>1</sup>See: Stetzer 2006; Richardson 2013, 132. As noted in Chapter One, in conversation with Stetzer, Richardson classified the Emerging Church as part of a larger, often overlapping Emerging Missional movement whose members shared a commitment to 'missionally' engaging the larger culture.

Christ, along with their doctrine. (Ibid, 8, 72, 86)<sup>2</sup> Within this chorus there was a diverse song, or conversation, that also allowed the voices of current contexts to be heard and, additionally, even allowed for the harmonious growth of doctrine; providing both humble listening and an important antidote to the biases of individual generations, cultures, or systems that might enforce only one perspective upon the whole. (Ibid, 54)<sup>3</sup> At the same time, this method also provided accountability to apostolicity by asserting that if one had truly surrendered to the incarnate Christ, they would surrender to the unity of not only the life, worship, and practices of the one Body of Christ but seek to align with its shared consensual interpretations of Scripture and doctrine as well. (Lérins, 91)<sup>4</sup> Thus, this it appeared that this method might provide a concept of orthodoxy that provides for innovative and humble contextualization amidst postmodern situations, while also providing accountability to apostolicity through surrender to the unity of the Body of Christ that, in his Spirit, spans all cultures, places and times.

Therefore, because we believe Vincent is a potentially vital conversation partner for the reforming and inculturating work of emerging expressions, in this chapter, we used Vincent's questions and answers--provided in *The Commonitory*--as a baseline to form the questions we asked directly of respondents in EC expressions, postcedents, or closely related partners. This was done to discover how they viewed apostolicity, *consensual orthodoxy*, Scripture, doctrine, and potential causes of continued fracturing amidst reformation of the church and contextualization and inculturation of the gospel in current contexts; and to what they are accountable. In so doing, we found surprising similarities between Vincent and EC expressions in approaches to Scripture, church, reformation, innovation, doctrine, heresy, apostolicity and orthodoxy. Then too, we also discovered beliefs, methods, and practices Vincent would likely find alarming.

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<sup>2</sup>See: Lérins (1886) 2012, 54, 101-105.

<sup>3</sup>Also See: Oden 2002, 49, 174. Oden claimed consensual listening also helped to guard against bias.

<sup>4</sup>See: Lérins, 75. Vincent quoted *1 Tim. 6: 20* where Paul said, "O Timothy, guard the deposit, shunning profane novelties of words," to argue that, while doctrine and theology may grow, its interpretation must be congruent with the same meaning as first transmitted by the apostles.

## 4.2 Purpose of the Questionnaire

In previous chapters, we covered several issues of fracturing amidst streams<sup>5</sup> in the EC movement, including debates about individual sin, the unique divinity and salvific work of Christ, the atonement, sexuality, war, epistemology, and hermeneutics. In order to defend their positions amid debates, many of the most recognizable personalities in the EC movement of the early twenty-first century, including--Mark Driscoll, Brian McLaren, Andrew Perriman, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Karen Ward, and Peter Rollins, among others--seemed to most often appeal to their own theologies or philosophies, new or revised historical or contextual narratives, or their hermeneutical understanding of Scripture. We also saw, in Chapter Three, appeals to at least two different ideations of orthodoxy,<sup>6</sup> both of which allowed orthodox doctrines and creeds to be revised. However, neither side of the EC debates appeared to agree *with*, appeal *to* or be willing to submit to *consensual orthodoxy*, as defined by Vincent of Lérins, in conversation with Thomas Oden. Further, some EC leaders, such as Tony Jones, even critiqued Vincent's method by name and called his belief that the Holy Spirit could form consensus on any issue, let alone Scripture or doctrine, a “copout” that simply used appeals to the Spirit to support past innovation in the guise of orthodox consensus; a charge that, as noted in Chapter Three, Thomas Oden defended Vincent against.<sup>7</sup> (T. Jones 2007, 17) Furthermore, while most vital voices in the EC movement whom we have previously encountered seemed unwilling to appeal *to* or submit *to consensual orthodoxy*, in service to continuity and congruence with apostolicity, and have also continued to diverge both from one another and from most historical understandings of orthodoxy as a whole, would the same be true of the many pastors and laity who had planted churches, joined churches or served

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<sup>5</sup>See: Stetzer 2006.

<sup>6</sup>See Chapter Three of this study for a discussion of EC leaders Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Mark Driscoll's competing interpretations of orthodoxy and 'sola scriptura' in contrast with that of Vincent.

<sup>7</sup>See: Oden 2002, 47-49. As seen in Chapter Three, Oden argued that, despite plurality, division, or systemic oppression amidst the church at various points in history, clear consensus always emerged on core orthodox doctrines over time via the work of the Spirit; an ongoing work that has eventually brought the consensus of Christians back to faithful unity around the same orthodox teachings and doctrines supported by the first seven ecumenical councils, not just in one context or region, but across the global ecumenical consensus. Also, consensus could not be claimed if it was not clear across the universal voices of the church.

within congregations in the often diverse EC movement or overlapping Emerging Missional conversations?<sup>8</sup> Or, might they demonstrate a sense of continuity and congruence with apostolicity that the more famous leaders of the EC did not, either knowingly or intuitively, via what Vincent and his interpreters would claim is the ongoing, unifying work of the Holy Spirit?<sup>9</sup>

Since Vincent considered orthodoxy not only as tradition alone but as the consentient beliefs and teaching of the entire living Body of Christ, that must be consented to in unity, saying, “It is not enough to be counted as sound doctrine unless believed, ‘by all, equally, with one consent, openly, frequently, persistently.’” (Lérins, 8) He consulted not only the leading theologians and church doctors of his day but also inquired of 'learned' persons among the clergy and laity to make sure that those who claimed orthodox consensus were not only promoting current opinions or the voices of only a few in the guise of consensus. (Ibid, 4) Thus, in order to hear the perspectives of diverse persons in emerging streams and not only the voices of famous EC leaders or of only one narrow EC stream, we decided to likewise directly inquire of persons in the three EC streams, or with those most closely descended from or related to their past streams, rather than only considering the opinions of EC leaders--Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Mark Driscoll, and others. Thus, we asked questions of practitioners in emerging expressions as part of a narrative inquiry and analysis that would allow us to place them into conversation with Vincent of Lérins as well as EC voices we previously considered in Chapters Two and Three to discover similarities or differences in how they view Scripture, hermeneutics, doctrine, epistemology, and issues of continued fracturing amidst EC reformation, contextualization, or inculturation. We also

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<sup>8</sup>In this study we discovered that although the word 'emerging' was rarely used by respondents, despite having often belonged to EC or related Emerging Missional churches or networks at one point, the term 'missional' was still highly used, with eleven persons referring to themselves by this term. It also appeared that EC categories have become less defined but the larger 'Emerging Missional' distinctives, outlined in Chapter Two, were still present among many respondents.

<sup>9</sup>See: Thomas Oden, “The Remaking of a Modern Mind: A Conversation with Thomas Oden” *almohler.com* (March 16, 2015), accessed Oct. 2017, <https://albertmohler.com/2015/03/16/thinking-in-public-thomas-c-oden> Also see: Thomas G. Guarino, “Pope Francis Looks to St. Vincent of Lérins,” *First Things* (September 24, 2013), accessed Apr. 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/09/pope-francis-looks-to-st-vincent-of-lerins>. Both Oden and Guarino saw a clear theme in Vincent's work: that it is the Spirit who forms unity and consensus regardless of whether persons are aware of the 'test of orthodoxy.' Vincent claimed he did not create the rule, but that it was the codification of how Christians had always differentiated between true and false teachings in the church. (Lérins, 4)

hoped to discover to what extent accountability to a Vincentian idea of apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* was considered or approached by EC voices today, either knowingly or intuitively, such as Thomas Oden, Thomas Guarino and Pope Francis claimed would happen in the Spirit's unifying work to bring the church to doctrinal consensus over time.<sup>10</sup> If they were not considered, then we hoped to discover in what ways or to what extent accountability to the gospel or to Christ was considered or handled, if at all.

In questioning EC voices directly, we saw some surprising trends emerge. For instance, we expected--much like the leading authors of the EC movement, some of whom we engaged with in Chapter Two and Chapter Three--that most respondents questioned in our ethnographic research would likewise not affirm or follow an idea of *consensual orthodoxy* in any significant ways. We did discover some respondents, most prominently amidst the *Revisionist* stream, who either rejected the idea of orthodoxy entirely or redefined orthodoxy in such a way that it was seen as being dynamic and evolving in synergy with the perspectives and experiences of current contexts. In the latter, we noticed the emphasis being placed on correct orthopraxy over correct belief, much as we saw the leading voices of that stream, such as Brian McLaren and Tony Jones, claiming in previous chapters. Then too, we also saw some respondents who have likely stayed in step with views of orthodoxy that are consistent with the *Relevant* views of Mark Driscoll, in which doctrine is seen as a frozen set of truth claims that stands apart from the living consensus of orthodoxy but, in a one-way transaction, can be translated into current contexts by way of new language or methods.<sup>11</sup> However, we unexpectedly discovered a trend toward rooting both orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a shared incarnational life in Christ, among many other respondents in the *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* streams, in which then alignment with ancient Christian approaches, creeds, and consensual voices was vital as well. This trend, which we have highlighted below, also caused us to question whether Vincent's belief, that the Spirit would bring

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<sup>10</sup>See: Oden 2015; Oden 2002, 47; Guarino 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See: Adrian Warnock, Interview with Mark Driscoll," *Adrian's Blog* (2006a), accessed July 2016, [http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2006/04/interview-with-mark-driscoll\\_02/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2006/04/interview-with-mark-driscoll_02/). Driscoll claimed orthodoxy was a frozen set of beliefs, but language and methods could change.

the Body of Christ into consensus over time, is being evidenced in a shared movement of recovery of ancient consensual orthodoxy.

### 4.3 Methodology

For the ethnographic portion of this study, we conducted qualitative research through robust questionnaires that were completed by emerging leaders in churches, communities or networks whose views or affiliations fit with the *Relevant*, *Reconstructionist* or *Revisionist* streams of the EC movement, either currently or in the past, based upon the categorization of these streams as provided in Chapter Two of this study, in comparison with their responses to the questionnaires and material provided on their websites, books or blogs. We primarily questioned persons in these streams to discover how they approached Scripture, hermeneutics, epistemology, heresy, potential points of fracturing, and ideas of apostolicity and orthodoxy in their movements of innovation, reformation, and inculturation. If they did not consider apostolicity or orthodoxy, we then wanted to see what else they might turn to as evidence that they are following the true Christ. We also wished to discover *how* or *in what ways* they had evolved since the fracturing of the EC movement in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

#### 4.3.1 How Participants Were Identified

We identified participants in several ways. Some persons were identified via an online search of membership in the *Acts 29* network, a church planting network founded and formerly led by Mark Driscoll at the height of the EC movement that served as the most recognizable center of the *Relevant* stream. *Acts 29* members currently describe themselves as a collection of missional communities standing in the “tradition of historic Evangelical confessionalism,” including believing in the “gospel centrality in all of life” and “the sovereignty of God in saving sinners.” (Acts 29, n.d.) We also identified potential participants through a search of members in the *Open* network, a network of churches that has been gathered as an initiative of *Convergence*, an organization co-founded and co-led by Brian McLaren that served as his follow-up to the *Emergent-Village* organization, which had previously provided the most recognizable center of

the *Revisionist* stream of the EC and also included other *Revisionist* leaders such as Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt, among others. McLaren's *Convergence/Open* networks identify themselves as including 'progressive-Evangelical,' and 'post-Evangelical' communities who are seeking to gather congregations who believe in “equality for all people, advocates for the rights of immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ people, and believes we should work together to heal and protect our planet,” as well as “all who wish to live in progressive Christian ways.” (Convergence, n.d.) Beginning our research with the *Acts 29* and *Open* networks was key because they are the most identifiable organizations to emerge from the fracturing of the EC. Additional respondents were identified via recommendations of persons in those networks, contacts from our time in EC conversations in Seattle, and through current networks of emerging and missional leaders in Phoenix, the greater Seattle area, and greater Los Angeles.

#### 4.3.2 How Participants Were Contacted

Hundreds of potential participants were contacted by email, phone, or in person and invited to join Emerging and Emerging-Missional leaders<sup>12</sup> in answering a questionnaire on the importance of apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* for the reformation, innovation or inculturation of emerging expressions. We also followed up with several respondents in person to seek additional clarification. We hoped for thirty responses in total: ten responses from persons who fit within each of the three EC streams. Several months into our questionnaire collection process, we noted that the lowest response rate was coming from those in the *Revisionist* stream, which also now had the fewest identifiable members of any stream or network.<sup>13</sup> Further, it was also the only stream in which several persons withdrew initial offers to respond due to either 'not having time,' finding the questions 'too complex,' or reportedly not knowing 'how to engage with

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<sup>12</sup> We also included the word 'missional' because, as noted in Chapter Two, many in the *Relevant* stream identified with this term more than 'emerging,' which we found to be true in this questionnaire as well.

<sup>13</sup> With the *Emergent-Village* now gone and many former *Revisionist* leaders no longer a part of emerging conversations, as noted in Chapter Two, outside of Brian McLaren's *Open/Convergence* network, it was hard to find a publicly identifiable organization via which to demonstrate engagement with the *Revisionist* stream. However, we did both engage with McLaren's network and tracked down some former *Emergent-Village* leaders who graciously shared their views in this study.

the questions.’ Therefore, we expended significant effort to track down more respondents from this stream and perspective by circling back to persons in the *Open/Convergence* networks who had been supportive of the study and asking them to please put out a 'call' for responses. Fortunately, this led to a bit more response. So, while we did try to encourage more people to share in this study from the *Revisionist* or *Open/Convergence* stream, to gather a balanced number of responses from all streams, we did not seek to limit the number of persons who responded to the study or those from any perspective. Thus, the responses represented in this study, and the final number of persons who represented each stream, include all those who were part of emerging-missional conversations or expressions who responded to our questionnaire.

#### 4.3.3 How Our Questions Were Formed

In forming the questions that we asked respondents, we first examined the core questions that St. Vincent posed in *The Commonitory*. We determined that his primary concern was the question: *how the true church and its doctrines, which had been carefully transmitted from the apostles to the present-time, could be continually distinguished and protected from a doctrine that was new, novel and false, especially when both sides equally appealed to Scripture.* (Lérins, 4) Secondly, Vincent was also concerned about the question of *whether true consensus could be found and, if so, how?* (Ibid, 71) The answers Vincent received in his time, were that Christians could test their hermeneutics and doctrines against what had been ecumenically believed by the universal consensus of all Christians in all places and at all times; and that there was indeed a consensus of orthodoxy from the time of the Apostles to the present that was found not by selectively using the teachings of only those church fathers who agreed with the current consensus, but by hearing the entire body of Christian voices together. (Ibid, 71, 76-77) Vincent also claimed not to have led persons whom he interviewed to this rule; stating instead that he learned the rule from the consensus of those 'learned' persons with whom he consulted across the church of his day. (Ibid, 4) He also professed that the very same method was used across the ecumenical consensus of the church through the ages. (Ibid, 76-77)

Therefore, in our questionnaire, we likewise sought to engage a broader array of emerging/missional voices, and not only the writings of only the leading 'doctors' of the EC, to see if persons in emerging expressions, or the postcedents of those expressions today, would, as with those consulted by Vincent in his time, provide similar answers about what to do if persons disagreed about interpretations of Scripture or doctrine, or if cases of potential heresy or error arose. We further wanted to explore whether they thought Christians could reach consensus today and, if so, how. We additionally wanted to discover how they conceived of orthodoxy as well as whether Vincent's concept of orthodoxy--as the shared belief and testimony of the living chorus that was congruent and continuous with apostolicity--could still be found without artificially leading respondents to such an answer. If it was not evident, we wanted to know, what, if anything, they considered sources of accountability for discerning truth and refuting error. Secondly, we also hoped to see in what theological and ecclesiological directions they were moving in the aftermath of the breaking apart of the EC movement in the last decade.

We thus set out to make the questionnaire as qualitative and open-ended as possible, allowing respondents to share their thoughts without being too greatly led. In so doing, in addition to using Vincent's questions in *The Commonitory* as a starting point for the formulation of our questionnaire, we also observed the methodology utilized by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger in their study of EC leaders and expressions, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005),<sup>14</sup> considering both the ways that they identified respondents, via websites, blogs, and leads from those first contracted, and then also examining the questions they asked EC respondents as an additional guide for the formulation of our questions.

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<sup>14</sup>See: Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 44-45, for an examination of their methodology. Due to the internet-based nature of EC expressions, they utilized websites and blogs as a first-step toward identifying key respondents and then formulated questions that sought to identify the categories that EC leaders self-identified with as well as to exegete their core shared traits and values.

#### 4.3.4 Categorization of Data

We received twenty-two (22) responses to our questionnaire, included in full in the *Appendix*, which came from persons who were or currently still are involved with or connected to emerging networks, churches, communities and conversations. While this sample is not large, we believe the responses we received from our twenty-two (22) respondents provided a fair reflection of the information one would be able to obtain even if there was a greater sample. We next sorted and categorized the respondents into one of the three EC streams based upon their self-identified churches, networks, backgrounds in emerging conversations, or theological affiliations and approaches to Scripture, doctrine, theology, and ecclesiology in comparison with the EC categories and criteria as defined in Chapter Two, based upon Ed Stetzer's work (2006), as well as that of Rick Richardson. (2013) Out of twenty-two (22) responses, eight (8) persons were categorized as most closely related to *Relevants*, nine (9) were categorized with *Reconstructionists* and five (5) with *Revisionists*. This categorization of respondents was also made possible by our intentional search for persons who had evidenced connections with these three streams currently, in the past, or through previous emerging-missional conversations. We also discovered that there had been continued development, divergence, and convergence amidst the categories developed by Stetzer in 2006, which have been further described in this chapter.

After sorting the respondents into one of the three EC categories, based upon their responses to our questionnaire, we then extracted statistics and created data categories listing the number of persons who shared commonly reoccurring affiliations, identities, backgrounds, beliefs or practices. We additionally extracted and organized key quotes from the respondents in response to each set of questions in the questionnaire. We then compared the data and quotes and discovered common themes, trends, and differences that emerged on topics such as approaches to Scripture, liturgy, salvation, creeds, hermeneutics, and praxis, allowing us to see the narrative points that most needed to be described. We also discovered the narratives that emerged were sometimes quite surprising. For instance, based upon the writing of some leading EC voices, as described in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, we expected to find little adherence to Vincentian

ideas of apostolicity or *consensual orthodoxy* amidst emerging streams, with most trusting their own hermeneutics, approaches or the contextual voices of their communities or cultures to settle debates. We instead found a trend of a return to ancient practices, creeds, and often even orthodox ecumenism amidst two of the streams.

#### 4.4 Questionnaire Responses

##### 4.4.1 Backgrounds and Affiliations of Respondents

The first set of questions asked were: *Where are you from? How would you describe your Christian journey? How did you arrive in your current church, ministry, or role? How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any theological expressions or movements of church renewal such as Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?*

Among the twenty-two (22) respondents, seventeen (17) were male, and five (5) were female.<sup>15</sup> All but one (1) of the respondents currently live, work, or minister in the United States, with one having moved to Australia during this study. Seventeen (17) of the respondents are originally from the United States, four (4) were born in Canada, and one (1) was born in Guatemala. Twelve (12) persons currently live in the Phoenix area, four (4) in the Seattle area, two (2) in the Denver area, one (1) in San Francisco, one (1) in the Los Angeles area, one (1) in Fort Worth, Texas, one (1) in Pittsburgh and one (1) lives in Australia. Additionally, fifteen (15) of the respondents currently serve as a pastor, priest, chaplain, or professor, three (3) as an elder or deacon, and five (5) work as lay leaders.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>All eight (8) *Relevants* were male, while three out of five (3/5) *Revisionists* were female.

<sup>16</sup>Three out of five (3/5) lay leaders in the study were in the *Reconstructionist* stream and were also ACNA Anglicans, while two out of the five (2/5) lay leaders were in the *Revisionist* category.

Eight (8) respondents were or currently are a part of the *Acts 29* network founded by Mark Driscoll,<sup>17</sup> a network of churches that is still growing and includes over 600 churches.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, three (3) respondents either belonged to or had connections with Brian McLaren's *Open/Convergence* network, the follow-up to his *Emergent-Village* organization. Further, two (2) of the respondents were once key leaders in the EC conversation, one in Driscoll's leadership circle and one in McLaren's, and most additional respondents also shared key beliefs, practices, affiliations or conversations in common.

Among those who belong to *Acts 29*, based upon a study of their questionnaires, websites, and church resources, three (3) continue to pastor churches that share some resemblance to the forms and ethos of church as conducted by Mark Driscoll, in that they are mostly conservative theologically, are led by strong preaching pastors, and follow an updated western Evangelical ecclesiological form, while also attempting to be relevant to the current culture in terms of language and style and, additionally, identifying with Reformed/Calvinist theology. Meanwhile, three (3) other *Acts 29* network members are now a part of *Soma*, a collection of elder-led missional communities within *Acts 29* who are seeking to return to more community based, missionally driven, and ancient forms of church. They describe themselves as a “family of churches...committed to unity and diversity...unified around theology and ecclesiology and diverse in our missiology” and believe that, instead of typical western church forms, the form of ‘missional communities’ is the “primary structure for making disciples.”<sup>19</sup> With the rise of *Soma* communities, which we have also seen growing around us in Phoenix, we can observe an important development that has taken place amidst Driscoll's former network in the last decade with *Soma's* 'early-church,' 'Acts- style' missional communities gaining traction as an alternative to the charismatic-teaching-pastor led, contemporary mega-church form that Driscoll modeled

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<sup>17</sup>See: William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement* (B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 245.

<sup>18</sup>Yoshito Noguchi, “Celebrate our 600th Church” *Acts29.com* (Aug 2, 2016), accessed Oct. 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/celebrate-600th-church/>.

<sup>19</sup> *Soma*, “Our Distinctives,” (n.d.), accessed Apr. 2018, <http://wearesoma.com/our-distinctives..>

before his controversial departure from the network.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, one (1) respondent, James,<sup>21</sup> who was once an ministry important partner with Driscoll, and who has now ejected from *Acts 29* and from emerging conversations, symbolizes many more who have left the network in search of something new after the tumult surrounding Driscoll's final days,<sup>22</sup> including one (1) additional former *Acts 29* leader, Rick, who has now joined many more respondents in this study in a new Anglican expression.

We also found that two of the three (2/3) respondents who belong to Brian McLaren's *Open* network, or who once shared a connection with that network, seem to have followed McLaren's evolution in the last several years in also moving toward a convergence of *Revisionists* with progressive expressions of mainline Protestantism and who thus now identify more as 'progressive' or 'post-Evangelical' more so than as *Emergent/Emerging*; much as we also noted Brian McLaren doing in Chapter Two of this study in his embracing of progressive expressions of mainline Protestantism as being truly 'emerging.' (2016) However, while we did discover many *Revisionists* following McLaren's recent trajectory, conversely, much as with Driscoll's former ministry partner, James, one (1) leader, Evan, who was once a partner with Brian McLaren in *Emergent-Village* conversations, at the center of the *Revisionist* stream, has, like James, also now ejected completely from the 'emerging' conversation, rejecting much of that previous conversation as unhelpful and instead focusing on local ministry. Beyond those who currently belong to the *Acts 29* and *Open/Convergence* networks, other respondents we engaged with either

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<sup>20</sup>See: Ruth Moon, "Acts 29 Removes Mars Hill, Asks Mark Driscoll to Step Down and Seek Help," *Christianity Today* (August 8, 2014), accessed Aug. 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday/news/2014/august/acts-29-removes-mars-hill-asks-mark-driscollmatt-chandler.html>. As noted in Chapter Two, Driscoll resigned from both his church and his church-planting-network, *Acts 29*, amidst charges of abusive leadership and lack of accountability. His former leadership role in *Acts 29* is currently being filled by Matt Chandler.

<sup>21</sup> We have used pseudonyms for all respondents to our questionnaire to protect their anonymity.

<sup>22</sup>See: Kate Shellnutt and Morgan Lee, "Mark Driscoll Resigns from Mars Hill," *Christianity Today* (Oct. 15, 2014), accessed July 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday/ct/2014/october-web-only/mark-driscoll-resigns-from-mars-hill.html>. The official statement by his church board at *Mars Hill* stated that he had, "been guilty of arrogance, responding to conflict with a quick temper and harsh speech, and leading the staff and elders in a domineering manner," with most of the charges having to do with abusive treatment of employees and ministry partners. However, they also clarified that he was not guilty of, "immorality, illegality or heresy," and claimed they had apparently asked him not to resign.

belonged to *Acts 29* or the *Emergent-Village* in the past or were a part of larger emerging conversations and have now diverged in new directions. Others are currently connected with emerging conversations as postcedents to the EC.

When we asked respondents about expressions, denominations, traditions, or movements that they were currently affiliated with or identified with, most respondents identified with multiple labels or expressions, while two (2) rejected the categories as unhelpful.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, despite a few of the respondents having been early leaders in the EC movement, only three (3) now identified as *emerging* or *emergent*, which matches the overall trend in the declining usage of those labels that we observed in Chapter One and Chapter Two. Eleven (11) respondents, however, still identified as 'missional,' with persons in the *Relevant* grouping almost unanimously using this label at some point in their responses, which would especially make sense for those in the *Acts 29* network who had always used the word 'missional' as a principal distinctive.<sup>24</sup> Two (2) respondents also identified with the *New Monastic* or *New Friar* labels, which as we noted in Chapter One are sub-streams of the larger *Emerging Missional* movement. Meanwhile, three (3) identified as *progressive*, all of whom were in the *Revisionist* stream. One (1) respondent in the *Reconstructionist* stream also identified as being concurrently *Post-Conservative*, *Post-Liberal*, and *Paleo-Orthodox*, while in the *Revisionist* stream one (1) person identified as *Post-Evangelical* and two (2) as *post-Christian*, with one noting that their community includes Muslims, Jews, Agnostics, and many “who identify as post (or former) Evangelical, post-catholic, and even post-Christian.”

Along with the above self-identifications, many respondents also added more traditional affiliations as a part of their mixture. Nine (9) persons identified as also being theologically

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<sup>23</sup>One *Reconstructionist* respondent, who leads a house church, rejected the categories, as did a respondent in the *Revisionist* grouping, though he embraced the 'emergent' label in the past.

<sup>24</sup>Seven out of eight (7/8) *Relevants* and three of nine (3/9) *Reconstructionists* identified as missional.

Reformed or Calvinist,<sup>25</sup> five (5) as Anglican,<sup>26</sup> four (4) as also being Evangelical, including those who included 'progressive-Evangelical;' four (4) identified as Charismatic or Pentecostal; three of whom are Anglican, and *Reconstructionists*; three (3) as having an Anabaptist influence, also all *Reconstructionists*; three (3) as having a Mennonite influence, one (1) as a Quaker and one (1) *Reconstructionist* as being shaped by Liberation Theology.

#### 4.4.1.1 *Relevant Backgrounds and Affiliations*

One fascinating trend that emerged among respondents in *Acts 29* is that, since Mark Driscoll's departure, a growing number of persons in *Acts 29* are now a part of *Missio Dei* or *Soma*<sup>27</sup> communities, an interconnected collection of missional communities within the *Acts 29* network who have transformed ecclesologically from the contemporary, western Evangelical worship forms that most *Relevants* followed, with a lead pastor, a building and a contemporary Sunday morning service, to a form with elder-led fellowships who meet in small groups in the neighborhoods where they live, work, and share weekly rhythms rooted in ancient Christian liturgical worship and practices,<sup>28</sup> while occasionally gathering as a larger community of

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<sup>25</sup>Seven out of eight (7/8) *Relevants* self-identified as Reformed. Two (2) *Reconstructionists* also mentioned Reformed theology as a key distinctive, but one used it in a broader Reformational sense that included Anglicanism as 'Reformed Catholicism,' and another mentioned it as a past part of his broader mix of streams. Reformed theology, including a specific focus on a Calvinist view of election, was previously a core commitment of *Acts 29* under Mark Driscoll and is still listed among the key distinctives on sites that link to his original formulations. For example, see: Crossing Louisville (n.d.), accessed Feb. 2018, [http://crossinglouisville.com/wp-content/uploads/city\\_stuff/membership/a29\\_doctrine.pdf](http://crossinglouisville.com/wp-content/uploads/city_stuff/membership/a29_doctrine.pdf). However, despite still retaining a strong Reformed theology as a core distinctive, the outward-facing messaging of the new *Acts 29* websites and statements, after Driscoll, now focuses primarily on living gospel-centered missional lives. See: Acts 29 Network, "Acts29.com," (n.d.), accessed June 2017, <http://www.acts29.com/>.

<sup>26</sup>All those who identified as Anglican were *Reconstructionists* and were either new members in the *Anglican Church in North America* or the *Anglican Mission in America*, both of which are new expressions of Anglicanism emerging from within the *Anglican Communion* and the *Episcopal Church* over issues of ordination, marriage, and ecclesiological authority, in which new expressions felt a realignment and reformation was necessary to protect orthodox Christian unity. For an explanation, from the ACNA, on why they felt a realignment was necessary, see: Anglicanchurch.net, "Our Genesis" (2009), accessed Nov. 2017, [http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Our\\_Genesis\\_revised\\_2.8\\_13\\_.pdf](http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Our_Genesis_revised_2.8_13_.pdf).

<sup>27</sup>*Missio Dei* and *Soma* share a partnership of missional communities. See: Missio Die, "Missio Dei Communities," (n.d.), accessed Sept. 2017, <http://missiodeicommunities.com/partnerships>.

<sup>28</sup>See: Jeff Vanderstilt, "Committing to Life on Mission Together" (Feb. 18, 2013), accessed Sept. 2017, <http://wearesoma.com/blog/committing-to-life-on-mission-together/>. *Soma* leaders are asked to sign a covenant committing to, "radically reorient their lives along the regular rhythms of missionary work," in the context where they and their family plant a missional community, while the 'missional' element includes their promise to, "devote themselves to one another and the mission of the group," in an intentional community with ancient rhythms and practices that are also outward-focused on weekly service to their neighbors in the local contexts in which they seek to incarnate the gospel.

believers.<sup>29</sup> One *Soma* respondent, Troy, described their ecclesiological focus as holding that “The Church is the missionary people of God sent into all of life to accomplish his purposes. We believe that a gospel community on mission (Missional Community) is the primary structure for making disciples.” Troy added that, in their communities, they are also now “focusing lately on bringing more liturgical practices into our gatherings that help shape our people’s hearts and imaginations around the gospel.” Another, Ellis, shared that in their retrieval of ancient “practices rooted in church history,” they have both included “liturgical worship and participation in the sacraments,” seeing the sacraments as central to ancient Christian worship. Additionally, another *Soma* respondent, Jon, also explained that the recovery of liturgical worship and sacred practices for their missional communities is also deeply aligned with missional values since it is “a culmination of the formation that is happening in our lives through shared rhythms of life that transpire on a daily basis.” It is interesting to wonder if the *Soma* model of church may also be attractive, in part, as an alternative to the charismatic-pastor-driven mega-church approach that characterized *Acts 29* under Driscoll, in which he was also not considered accountable.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the trend that we observed in the responses of *Soma* members of the *Relevant* stream, in their movement toward recovery of ancient Christian practices (liturgical worship, centrality of sacraments, and recital of creeds), forms (elder-led communities) and rhythms (focusing on life and mission together in local communities), also mirrors a similar movement that has been a distinctive of the *Reconstructionist* stream of the EC. Perhaps this shows a coming together of these two EC streams in their shared focus on recovery of ancient Christian practices, forms, and rhythms. We noted in our earlier chapters that a principal distinctive of the *Reconstructionist* stream was their attempt to recover the practices, forms, and rhythms of early Christian communities such as seen in *Acts*. Subsequently, we found this focus still present in the answers of respondents in the *Reconstructionist* stream as well; but were fascinated to see a similar trend toward the recovery of ancient forms, rhythms, and practices

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<sup>29</sup>See: *Missio Dei*, n.d.; *Soma*, n.d.

<sup>30</sup>See: Shellnutt and Lee 2014.

emerging in the *Relevant* stream where five (5) *Relevants* in total, including two (2) who were not a part of *Soma*, also mentioned the importance of recovery of liturgy or ancient rules of faith as being important, just as nine (9) persons in the *Reconstructionist* grouping also mentioned the importance of liturgy or ancient rules of faith as part of their distinctives.

#### 4.4.1.2 *Reconstructionist Backgrounds and Affiliations*

In another example of this overlapping trend among respondents in the first two EC streams, one person in the *Reconstructionist* stream who leads a small house-church community in Phoenix that is seeking to mirror the early church, Rachel, noted she has also specifically found the recovery of ancient liturgical practices to be a core sense of identity and rhythm for her small community. Then too, another leader in the *Reconstructionist* stream, Trevor, an Anglican lay-leader who helps lead an urban *New Friar* community, has also found recovery of ancient liturgical practices to be a vital source of deeper connection with God and others in his community, sharing that “liturgy is both memorial and anticipation, human action is deified” and adding that one of his greatest signs of hope for the church was the “rediscovery of the importance of liturgical worship.” Meanwhile, in addition to mentioning liturgy, three (3) *Relevants* and two (2) *Reconstructionists* also mentioned the vital importance of the sacraments at the center of their life and worship as well. Thus, according to the snapshot provided by our respondents, there appeared to perhaps be a movement toward an increased recovery of ancient Christian forms, rhythms, and practices within the first two EC streams.

At the same time, although many *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* respondents appeared to be similarly recovering ancient rhythms and practices, still, a point of differentiation that emerged between these first two streams was that some *Reconstructionists* have, instead of only focusing on decentralized missional forms of church<sup>31</sup> such as the small-groups and house churches seen amidst the *Soma* movement, also now moved toward recovery of expressions of church rooted in

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<sup>31</sup>For a discussion of the shared foci of missional EC voices, see: Robert J.A. Doornenball, *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on Missional Leadership and Its Challenges for Theological Education* (Eburon Academic Publisher, 2012), 43.

an ancient Christian polity as seen in the first four Ecumenical Councils of the 'Undivided Church,' in which an episcopate, global councils, and a strong diaconate were highly valued.<sup>32</sup> For instance, we were surprised to discover that five (5) of the respondents in the *Reconstructionist* stream, who had either been a part of the *Relevant* stream or house-church-style communities, had now joined the *Anglican Church in North America (ACNA)* or the *Anglican Mission in America (AMIA)*. In the responses of our samples, it also seemed that they had joined these expressions hoping to recover centeredness in the ancient church, and in orthodoxy, while still retaining a missional focus on service and social justice amidst current postmodern contexts, which for most respondents were urban.

Additionally, it is also worth pointing out that both Anglican expressions that respondents identified with, the ACNA and AMIA, are emerging expressions of Anglicanism that are currently viewed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Episcopal Church, as having departed from the Anglican Communion over debates about ordination of homosexual clergy, sexual practices, and same-sex marriage.<sup>33</sup> The ACNA, in particular, is newly formed in terms of governance, but it is using the opportunity provided by the Anglican realignment to retrieve even more ancient forms and practices and to practice a flexible convergentism of Catholic, Arminian, Reformed, and Charismatic practices and theologies,<sup>34</sup> which *Reconstructionist* Robert Webber termed the different streams of the 'one river' within the consensus of the ancient church.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the ACNA believes they are the more apostolically faithful expression of church in

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<sup>32</sup>See: Anglican Church in North America, *Constitution and Canons* (2017), accessed Dec. 2017, [http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Proposed\\_Amended\\_CC.pdf](http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Proposed_Amended_CC.pdf). The ACNA's constitutions and canons, as amended in 2017, states, "We confess the godly historic Episcopate as an inherent part of the apostolic faith and practice, and therefore as integral to the fullness and unity of the Body of Christ." They also confess the "historic faith of the undivided church as declared in the three Catholic Creeds: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian," as well as affirming the "seven Councils of the undivided Church," and the teaching of, "the first four Councils and the Christological clarifications of the fifth, sixth and seventh Councils, in so far as they are agreeable to the Holy Scriptures."

<sup>33</sup>See: Rev. Bill Atwood, "The Anglican Church in North America and the Anglican Communion," *American Anglican* (2014), accessed Feb. 2018, <https://americananglican.org/current-news/anglican-church-north-america-anglican-communion/>.

<sup>34</sup>See: Robin G. Jordan, "A View of the Emerging Anglican Church in North America," *Anglicans Ablaze* (2010), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://anglicansablaze.blogspot.com/2010/08/view-of-emerging-anglican-church-in.html>.

<sup>35</sup>See: Robert Webber and Ruth Lester, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 1985).

comparison to the Anglican Communion, whose governance is in Canterbury. (Ibid) This claim is based in the argument that they hold to consensual orthodox views on ordination, marriage, and sexual practices, as well as views of the importance of listening to the consensual voices of the universal church. They argue that the Archbishop of Canterbury has disdained accountability to the larger orthodox consensus within global Anglicanism by ignoring or countermanding the decisions of the Primates Meeting, Lambeth Council, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the continued expressions of Global Anglican Future Conference. (Ibid) Thus, the ACNA believes the realignment or reformation within Anglicanism is due to their faithfulness to orthodox consensus in contrast with the Archbishop of Canterbury and Episcopal Church whom they believe to have actually 'realigned' by departing from the orthodox consensus to engage in revisionism in service to current values. (Ibid)<sup>36</sup>

What is perhaps most fascinating here for the purpose of our study is that, as noted in Chapter Three, Vincent of Lérins argued that the strongest evidence that persons were attempting to entrench their own theological or doctrinal innovation, in place of the consentient belief of the Body of Christ through the ages, was that they would not be willing to submit their teachings or interpretations to the unity of the whole body through the ages as seen in the orthodox consensus. (Lérins, 72, 85-86) Thus, while Canterbury might argue that it is the ACNA, and AMIA, who are choosing schism, which Vincent also warned was a sign of heresy, the ACNA and AMIA have, conversely, argued that it is Canterbury and the Episcopal Church that are severing themselves

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<sup>36</sup>See: Atwood 2014. Atwood, serving as Bishop of the ACNA's international diocese, claimed the ACNA was labeled as outside of the Anglican Communion by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, due to their opposition to the current and previous archbishop's nullification of the decisions of the Primates meetings and the Lambeth Council of Bishops in rejection of the global consensus and in pursuit of a revisionist agenda on issues of sexual practice. He also claimed the Episcopal Church subsequently worked with Canterbury to influence global diocese to reject the ACNA as well, but the global communion of Anglicans continued to receive the ACNA in communion with them and, in fact, had further often even inveighed against the Episcopal Church over their own stance which was viewed as being outside of the consensus. For example, Atwood cited an instance where the leaders of the Anglican church in Malaysia invited the ACNA to participate in the consecration of a new bishop after barring the Episcopal Church, who were trying to gain access to demonstrate communion with the church in Malaysia. The leaders of the church in Malaysia reportedly said to the Episcopal leaders: "You cannot participate in the service...because of the actions you have taken to tear the fabric of the communion and you remain unrepentant. We are not in Communion with you."

from the whole body (Atwood 2014), not only within the global consensus of Anglicanism in the present age, but even more so from what Vincent termed the “consentient agreement of the universality and antiquity of the Catholic Church.” (Lérins, 86)

In reflecting upon the above, it is also fascinating that those respondents to this study who had been and still are a part of emerging conversations, but have now joined the new expressions of Anglicanism, such as found in the ACNA, are, in their movement toward recovery of ancient forms, rhythms and worship centered around the ecumenical orthodox consensus, finding continuity with many of the original goals of the *Reconstructionist* stream of the EC. As described in Chapter Two of this study, the *Reconstructionist* stream sought to reform not only Christian language or practices in order to inculturate the gospel in postmodern culture,<sup>37</sup> but additionally, under the influence of orthodox ecumenists such as Anglican *Reconstructionist* Robert Webber's 'ancient-future' vision,<sup>38</sup> to move toward an ecumenism centered in recovery of the 'ancient faith,' its worship, and mission in ways that also focused on authentic engagement with emerging contexts. In one of his last works, for instance, showing the ways in which Webber both supported what appears to be a Vincentian flexibility to listen to and encourage the growth of emerging expressions amidst current contexts, yet also maintaining the centrality of adherence to the ancient and consensual faith, Webber argued that amidst emergence and the challenges to the church found in a “resurgence of religious and political ideologies” and “Evangelical accommodation to civil religion, rationalism, privatism and pragmatism,” there must be a faithful return to “the priority of the divinely authorized canonical story of the Triune God” through recovery of “the faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church and its guardians in the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation and the Evangelical awakenings.” (Robert Webber and Phil Kenyon 2006)

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<sup>37</sup>Richardson 2013.

<sup>38</sup>See: Webber 2008, 109; Webber 2007. Webber gathered EC voices including Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, and Karen Ward to discuss what it meant to be 'emerging,' showing his flexibility in dialoguing with such voices, while also maintaining adherence to the orthodox consensus.

Additionally, in further examples of the natural synergy between early EC *Reconstructionist* conversations and a recent movement toward new expressions of Anglicanism that seek both ancient orthodox rootedness and flexibility in conversation with current contexts, we can observe the conversions to the ACNA of both Todd Hunter and Scot McKnight. Todd Hunter is a former leader in the Vineyard church movement who was also quoted often in Gibbs and Bolger's book *Emerging Churches* (2005) due to his role in discussions about the reformation of the church and his front-row seat to much of the EC conversation. Todd has now gone from being an important charismatic Emerging Missional leader to serving as a bishop in the ACNA where he leads a diocese that gathers a diverse set of missionally focused expressions.<sup>39</sup> Then too, Scot McKnight, who shares synergy with the *Reconstructionist* stream, has also now joined Hunter as a deacon in his ACNA diocese.<sup>40</sup> It was McKnight, we noted in Chapters Two and Three, who originally encouraged and helped to define elements of the EC movement. This was before later rebuking his friend Brian McLaren as having 'emerged' to merely revisit the liberal deconstructive approaches to Scripture of Marcus Borg (McKnight 2007a; McKnight 2011) as well as having departed from orthodoxy and the 'broader emerging movement,' which he argued was mostly still located within Evangelicalism and supported by orthodox voices. (McKnight 2008b) Thus, in the trend we uncovered amidst our *Reconstructionist* respondents, that saw several moving toward ACNA or AMIA expressions of Anglicanism, we subsequently realized that this current was also mirrored by the more prominent above-mentioned EC voices as well.

#### 4.4.1.3 Revisionist Backgrounds and Affiliations

In shifting our focus to the more progressive *Revisionist* stream, from our samples, we discovered that for their part many respondents in the third EC stream seemed to have diverged in quite different directions than the first two streams. In terms of affiliation, most persons in this

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<sup>39</sup>See: Frank Viola, "Interview with Todd Hunter," *Frankviola.org* (Feb. 5, 2010), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://frankviola.org/2010/02/05/interview-with-todd-hunter/>.

<sup>40</sup>See: The Diocese of Church for the Sake of Others, "Dr. Scot McKnight Ordained Anglican Deacon" (2014), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://www.c4so.org/dr-scot-mcknight-ordained-anglican-deacon/>.

stream tended to embrace categories or expressions of church that affirmed their individual identities or experiences or that focused on what they thought was the true 'way of Jesus,' as they felt he would live, act, and love today within the current culture, rather than only within the confines of Christian traditions that many believed had missed the 'true way of Christ.' In also describing what a Christ-centered praxis and community should focus on today, many respondents in this stream also echoed Brian McLaren's belief, as outlined in, *A New Kind of Christianity*, that Jesus' announcement of 'The Kingdom of God is at hand' means that in today's world "God's new benevolent society is already among us" and "the kingdom-oriented term 'Christ' means 'liberating king,' the one who will free God's people from oppression, confront and humble their oppressors, and then lead both into a better day." (McLaren 2011, 139)

Likewise, many respondents in this stream appeared to emphasize a belief that the true 'way of Jesus' would primarily focus on social justice, equality for diverse persons, identities, and practices, and greater freedom for current persons achieved by way of political or social evolution or activism. For example, one respondent in this stream, Sofia, who serves amidst an immigrant community in Phoenix, shared that her political and social contexts have caused her to feel a 'disconnect' from most traditional expressions of church: "I increasingly dislike the church and find myself disagreeing with most people within the American church. I feel hurt and angry by how their actions defy God's request for us to love each other but still speak and act using his name." Sofia also provided, as an example of what she feels is a disconnect between most churches and her actualities, "the increased trauma our community has been facing with our current political climate, increasing deportations and subsequently families being ripped apart...I cannot escape the fact that there are maybe the majority of churches in America that preach a Republican agenda from the pulpit." Consequentially, feeling as if historic forms of Christianity did not speak into her contexts, Sofia added, "Honestly I have been wanting to redefine my spiritual orientation to simply someone who loves God and wants to follow him in loving others."

In some agreement with Sofia, a worship leader in this stream, Hope, also shared that she has now entered a 'Post-Christian' community with persons from diverse worldviews in which their local

community and its worship are more important than adherence to historic forms or beliefs.

At the same time, a respondent in McLaren's *Open* network, Meredith, also found herself searching for a new Christian expression when most traditional Evangelical and orthodox churches and schools with whom she was in fellowship would not allow her to serve in leadership due to her sexual identity and practices. She shared that “I came out as gay, after wrestling with the Scriptures, our various Christian traditions, and the Bible.” Afterwards she was forced to leave her previous ministry and denomination, but eventually found a church in McLaren’s *Open* network that was both “progressive Evangelical” and “open and affirming to the LGBTQ community.” However, unlike Sofia, while Meredith did feel that she needed to leave her previous Christian affiliations behind to find a new expression that would affirm her views, identity, and praxis, she also felt that it was still important to not leave all rootedness in Christianity, but to instead maintain an identity that was “Christ-centered, rooted in the historic Christian Church, and committed to a Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God-in-Christ-in-the-Holy-Spirit.” She also believed the *Open* network was that rare community where both sets of beliefs, those of historic Christianity and those of current identities and praxis, could be held together within what she describes as “a loose network of progressive-Evangelical churches...who long for a more just and generous expression of the Christian faith.” Thus, while Meredith desired more rootedness in historical Christianity than Sofia or Hope, she also shared a desire for a new expression Christianity that could adapt to her identity and values, and further stressed that if doctrine and the contexts of persons' journeys were in conflict, she hoped doctrine could evolve just as persons do. In Meredith’s beliefs and trajectory, as part of the *Open* network, we can also see clear synergy with Brian McLaren's view that, instead of rejecting Christian tradition or orthodoxy completely, emerging Christians should instead look to see orthodoxy, tradition, and even creeds evolve to meet the needs and values of current contexts,<sup>41</sup> by centering their doctrine in relationship with Christ and the Spirit, which approach then also allows persons

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<sup>41</sup>See: McLaren 2006a, 28.

in the *Open* network be able to also accept historically unaccepted identities, relationships, and practices as now being thoroughly permissible for Christians.<sup>42</sup> However, it is important to note that the view that a more incarnational and contextual faith was necessarily tied to evolving views on issues of sexuality, though clearly vital to McLaren and the two respondents in his network, was not necessarily shared by other respondents in this stream.

In alignment with McLaren and Meredith, another pastor in the *Open* network, Rob, who defined himself as “post-Evangelical,” believed that the main role of his church was to “mature our followers into the likeness of Christ,” which he defined as not only caring for the “widow, the orphan and the immigrant in our midst” but as also being “the moral conscience of the Government.” Additionally, Rob also thought that being conformed to the likeness of Christ primarily meant, much as McLaren also articulated in, *A New Kind of Christianity*, seeking to heal “the injustices and inequities in our nation,” which Rob defined as injustices and inequities in race, gender, and sexuality. Rob also noted, as an example of ways his church is practicing reformation or renewal of the church, like others in McLaren’s *Open* network: “we recently moved to a place of full-inclusion for the LGBTQ community...anyone who identifies as LGBTQ can do anything in the context of our church...this is a departure from traditional Evangelical doctrine.” Thus, again, as with the first two respondents in this stream, Rob wished to center his community in Christ but also saw that centering as needing to be malleable to his community’s social, political, or sexual perspectives and practices. Just as this belief that doctrine should be Christian, but that its true ‘Christ-centered’ meaning may also be altered to meet the needs of current contexts, matched Brian McLaren’s beliefs, so too it also fits well with the views of fellow *Revisionist* Tony Jones, whom we likewise saw stating in Chapter Three that Christian doctrine and theology must be “both Christian and pragmatic/realistic” in service to pluralistic, postmodern contexts. (T. Jones 2011)

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<sup>42</sup>See: Brian D. McLaren, “Gay and Christian,” *Brianmclaren.net* (n.d.), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/gay-and-christian.html>.

Still another respondent in this stream, Evan, who was an important leader in early *Emergent-Village* conversations alongside McLaren and Jones, referenced the influence of postmodern deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida, whom McLaren also cites,<sup>43</sup> upon his identity and self-categorization, saying, “I would describe my Christian journey as a Derridian deconstruction...I would describe myself as one who seeks to follow in the Way of Jesus and who is actively searching for a truly post-Christendom Church.” Feeling like much of the Evangelical church was focusing on the wrong issues and questions, and that the EC conversation also became unhelpful, Evan has also now formed his own “network or emerging...parish expressions” that focus on local life together in what they view as the way of Jesus. In so doing, although Evan has now rejected much of the EC and the *Emerging* or *Emergent* labels as failing to focus enough on true 'life together' within local communities, he still appeared to share some synergy with McLaren in defending a Derridian deconstruction as necessarily needing to be applied to Christianity to subsequently retrieve and embody the core of the Christian faith. McLaren, for his part, defended a Derridian deconstruction of traditional Christian forms and doctrines as not being an “attempt to destroy, but to disassemble that human construction,” by which he means historic Christianity, so that then the “true essence can reveal itself.” (McLaren 2013)<sup>44</sup> McLaren further articulated the necessity for deconstruction being applied to the Christian religion when he argued, “We must deconstruct (unjust) laws so that justice may appear. You don’t deconstruct laws because you want injustice, but because you want a justice even more essential than this or that law promotes,” and McLaren added, suggesting that Jesus was also conducting a Derridian philosophical deconstruction of religion, “this is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Do not think I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill.’” (Ibid)

Overall, in terms of affiliation and identity among many respondents in the *Revisionist* stream, there seemed to be a similar desire to claim a 'Christ-centered' identity and praxis which they believed informed their concepts *of* and actions *toward* social justice, equality, and authentic

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<sup>43</sup>See: McLaren 2013; McLaren 2005b.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Christianity in concert with the values and experiences of their current contexts. Additionally, although most respondents within this stream did not include precise philosophical or theological language, many of their views also shared synergy with uses of postmodern deconstructionist philosophy or contextual theology<sup>45</sup> as typically ideated by leading voices in the *Revisionist* stream, including seeing their claim of 'Christ-centeredness' as subsequently engendering deconstruction of traditional Christian doctrines or practices in conversation with postmodern contexts where Christ was thought to be incarnate. However, there was a difference of opinion among several respondents in this stream over *to what extent* traditional Christian doctrines and voices of the historic church should be considered. While some were attempting to hold a tension between rootedness in the historic church and its doctrines versus their own contexts, values, theologies, philosophies, and praxis, others appeared willing to abandon orthodoxy completely in order to innovate a 'new kind of Christianity,' which Hope, who leads a pluralist worship community, described as being "post-Christian" and others as being centered in their evolving faith journey or that of their community.

#### 4.4.2 Views on Reformation and Renewal

The next set of questions we asked respondents were: *What are your current points of encouragement or frustration with Christianity, the church, or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why? In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about, or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?*

In St. Vincent's time, ca 431 A.D, Christological heresies, such as that of Nestorius, were often the greatest challenges to the church, as was the related refusal of heresiarchs to submit to the unity of the consensus of the body. (Lérins, 63, 86) In this section, we hoped to discover what

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<sup>45</sup>See: Mobsby 2007, 28-30. Mobsby argued many emerging communities have turned to contextual theology to both hear the voices and values and meet the needs of postmodern culture but he also argues that more traditionally Evangelical emerging expressions, whom we categorized as *Relevants* in this study, were often only, in their uses of contextual theology, attempting to 'translate' their traditional Christian messages and values into postmodern contexts, rather than culturally embedding themselves and listening fully to those contexts; as Mobsby suggested emerging expressions must do.

Christian forms, doctrines, or practices EC respondents felt most needed to be revised or defended, helping us to see what practices or doctrines they considered the 'core' of Christianity and which they felt were temporal or in need of reformation. We also hoped to discover in what ways they might be engaging in contextual updating, reformation, or safeguarding of doctrines. Further, we wished to discover in which ecclesiological, theological, and doctrinal directions they were moving amidst the continued divergence of EC. However, we tried to leave our questions as open-ended as possible so that respondents were not forced to address doctrine if they were more concerned with praxis, and vice-versa.

#### *4.4.2.1 Relevant Views on Reformation and Renewal*

Among *Relevant* respondents in the *Acts 29* network and related missional communities, one reoccurring point of frustration persons felt needed reform was the presence of tribalism, fracturing, and disunity within the church. For instance, Ben, who helps lead a missional church-plant for millennials in Phoenix, claimed his greatest frustrations were “disunity, fiefdom building, and hostility between denominations, including Catholic and Protestant.” He also noted theological fights over second-order doctrines, such as the rift between Calvinists and Arminians in many denominations, as causing frustration and leading to disunity, saying that such theological fights do “exactly what Satan would desire, divide and destroy.”

Another *Acts 29* pastor, Mike, said he also hates division in the church: “I struggle with the tribalism that seems to cause more division than unity.” Warren, who serves in an *Acts 29* church within a multi-cultural setting, also cited the “lack of unity and love” as his top frustration with the church, citing Desmond Tutu as having provided a better way forward in his statement that “Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another,” adding, “We believe that the gospel has been significantly weakened in our country because of the lack of unity and diversity. If your church is homogeneous in a diverse area, then the primary tie that is binding you together is not Jesus.”

Additionally, according to several more *Relevants*, more areas that need to be reformed in

the western Evangelical church are consumerism and a resistance to social justice on the part of many more traditional western churches. For example, *Acts 29* pastor, Mike, argued that “The enduring resistance to a lifestyle of social justice,” on the part of many Evangelicals, “because of fear toward association with liberal entities is problematic.”

This apparent shared concern over tribalism, lack of diversity, consumerism, and lack of care for social justice amidst respondents in this often more theologically conservative EC stream may be a bit surprising to some other EC streams and critics. For instance, some respondents in the *Revisionist* stream, whom we noted earlier, also seemed to think that most theologically orthodox expressions have focused solely on threats to doctrine while neglecting contextual practice. Further, as we saw in Chapter Two, Brian McLaren thought that more traditional hermeneutics and theologies, with their eschatological emphases, were to blame for lack of care for the poor and for situations of diversity amidst more theologically conservative Christians. (McLaren 2007) Then too, Chris Platt, a critic of *Acts 29* and the *Emerging-Missional* movement, has charged that all *Relevants* have really done in their updating of language and forms, and their missional emphasis, is to have changed “the packaging on an old message,” appearing to “put relationship ahead of doctrine,” while such a movement is actually just the “same old Evangelical doctrine...preaching largely the same old agenda;” which Platt claimed did not include much room for true diversity and change. (Platt 2012)<sup>46</sup> However, there did appear to be a clear thread of *Relevant* respondents who focused on evidencing concern for social justice just as much as they did for doctrine, which may show again how their *Emerging-Missional* focus on outward

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<sup>46</sup>Christ Platt, *Huffington Post*, accessed Sept. 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/Evangelical-20-the-decept\\_b\\_1299486.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/Evangelical-20-the-decept_b_1299486.html). A critic of such movements, Chris Platt, wrote of Driscoll and *Acts 29*, “I have to give Evangelicals due credit...they’re highly inventive and adaptive when it comes to how they reach people...But of course, underneath the veneer of something new lies the same old Evangelical doctrine...this is what bothers me more than my personal objections to most evangelicals’ theology. It seems...disingenuous simply to change the packaging on an old message...The missional church movement...seemed to be a different animal...seemed to put relationship ahead of doctrine and human beings ahead of church agendas...But if you want to be a member, you’d better be ready to align yourself with the 1,356-word doctrinal statement...which, again, could have been plucked straight from the docket of an agenda from the Southern Baptist Convention or the National Evangelical Association...I’m all for congregational and denominational change. But when it’s the same old white guys preaching largely the same old agenda, it smacks more of a desperate power grab than a genuine longing to better know and connect with the world around us.”

moving engagement with postmodern culture, which they believe must include social concern, has often set such Emerging expressions apart from more traditional western Evangelicals with whom they may share theological or doctrinal agreement, but have also often critiqued. For example, *Acts 29* pastor, Judah, blamed the consumerist, 'attractional,' or 'inward' focus of most Evangelicals as causing them to lose a “missional posture in the community in which they live.” While *Acts 29* pastor, Mike, also argued that the church must focus on missionally reaching out to neighbors and seeking justice if they are to be the true church.

Another *Relevant* leader in the *Soma* sub-stream, Ellis, who in some ways described the split that occurred in the EC, believed some of the fracturing and tribalism in the church has also been driven by a split between Christians who are trying to “be faithful to the Scriptures” but in so doing “ostracize the world and remove themselves from being a faithful witness,” and on the other hand, Christians who “in an attempt to be relevant to culture, forsake the commands of the Bible and therefore also remove their witness...One of the things that currently grieve me for the church is the division between these two approaches.” Likewise, he thought part of what is driving the split is that “politics and social issues seem to polarize the church between these areas, forcing many to feel they must choose a side,” which also caused “many who are not rooted well in Christ and his words to leave the church.”

Despite frustrations about praxis, many *Relevant* respondents also had hope that--as more Christians become 'rooted in Christ' and focus more on simply living out the gospel in imitation of the earliest Christian communities, and as persons also wrestle with the tension between Biblical faithfulness and incarnational mission and social justice--it may lead to, as Ellis has hopefully shared, a more holistic and “faithful response to being witnesses to this world through the power of the Spirit.” Thus, as seen in this quote, although such respondents seemed to share the frustrations of other EC streams over praxis, they distinctively saw hope in not only engaging in what they believed to be the essentials of service, reconciliation, and social justice amidst the culture, but also thought that such social engagement must be catalyzed out of centeredness *in* and faithfulness *to* the gospels. It was this focus on the centrality of the gospels as the launching

pad for all life and mission that also served as a distinctive of this EC stream. Further, in an example of how persons in the *Relevant* grouping were attempting to bring proclamation of the gospel together with praxis, James, who once shared ministry leadership with Mark Driscoll and is now doing marketplace ministry instead, added that Christians need to return to their roots and “Get back to being a faithful presence. Humbly seek and love the neighbourhood/city we are called to. Practice the sacraments. Encourage one another. As all possible, live in harmony with one another. Share the gospel in word and deed. All the other garbage can go down the toilet.”

Likewise, *Soma* leader, Troy, added:

I am encouraged to see more and more churches equipping the Body of Christ to see the centrality of mission to the nature of the church and embracing the reality that the church is to be a faithful presence in a contemporary world...not catering to the idols of materialism and consumerism plaguing our culture. We need churches that are convinced that the Bible is God’s true story of history, that Jesus is King, and that God’s people are his light to the nations.

This *Relevant* focus on a Christian community needing to be missionally centered on the gospels, in order to then move out into the culture in holistic and congruent ways, was also a core focus of the *Acts 29* network under Driscoll’s leadership. Thus, such a focus can also be seen in earlier books from the *Relevant* stream, including those by *Acts 29* authors as found in *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around the Gospel and Community* by *Acts 29* UK leaders Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. (2008) In their book on gospel centered missional communities-- which Mark Driscoll claimed, “accurately and insightfully identifies the local church as a gospel community on mission with Jesus” (Ibid), and in which Chester and Timmis themselves claimed to rely upon the influence of Lesslie Newbigin<sup>47</sup>--the authors argued that churches in their stream needed to incarnationally move outward into the community, but without losing the understanding that “The gospel word and the gospel community are closely connected. The word creates and nourishes community, while the community proclaims and embodies the word.” (Ibid, 55-56). Therefore, a *Relevant* vision for ministering to postmodern contexts through a more

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<sup>47</sup>Chester and Timmis 2008, 89. The authors cited as the influence for the vision of their gospel-centered missional community, Newbigin's statement that the “only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” See: Newbigin 1989, 227.

intentionally connected rhythm of life, worship and mission--which is not only out of an 'attractional' model of church and which is also always held accountable to the Gospel teachings about both sin, repentance, and salvation being indispensably required for holistic social justice--is an idea that was both present in the earliest days of the *Relevant* stream of the EC and that continued in responses of many Relevant respondents to this study. We, therefore, saw potential continuity between the ethos of the original *Acts 29* and present communities within the same network in the idea that living and proclaiming a gospel message of both salvation and social concern would unite truth and social justice in present contexts.<sup>48</sup>

However, what seemed somewhat new amidst many of the answers of respondents in this stream, in differentiation with the language about incarnational and gospel-centered missional communities being utilized during Driscoll's leadership of *Acts 29*, was the idea shared by some respondents in the *Relevant* grouping that a healthy balance between being rooted in the gospel and engaging-in-social justice also necessitated recovery of the life of the *early church*. This included its spirituality, liturgical worship, and creeds. This may allow for a deeper recovery of a Christian life rooted in the gospel story, which is also more attractive to postmodern persons in its rootedness in the same ancient rhythm of life as that of the apostolic authors and transmitters of the gospels and not only in a modern Christian form. For example, Jon, another leader in a *Soma* community in Phoenix, said he believed there was hope for the church in return to "the historical tenets of the Christian faith. Stepping away from culturally synchronistic practices and engaging in the modes of spirituality that are laid out in Scripture."

Therefore, amidst *Relevant* respondents, there appeared to be a shared emphasis on forming missional communities whose lives and rhythms were firmly rooted in the gospels with a desire to both engage in social action and in the proclamation of the gospel in holistically connected ways. Then too, there was an additional desire expressed among *Soma* leaders to recover ancient Christian forms, rhythms, practices, and sacramental and creedal centeredness. In

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<sup>48</sup>See: Mobsby 2007, 29-31.

this way, Christians would be more deeply rooted in the gospels, via participation in a more intentional and relationally connected *Acts*-style worshiping community, than could be accomplished in more traditional church practices and forms they believed to be held captive by the divisive ideologies and practices of the modern culture. Consequentially, according to Thomas Oden, seeing the worshiping ‘life together’ in Christian community as being inextricably linked to Christian confessions of belief, was also an essential ingredient of Vincent's *Consensual Orthodoxy* in which we have seen Vincent argue that Christians must not only focus on doctrine but be “united to each other by faith...equalled with each other by humility” (Lérins, 102) and, as Oden added, be entering “deeply into the worshiping community...singing the hymns...immersed in the written word...walking daily in the way...living life in Christ.” (Oden 2001, 119) Perhaps quite similarly, in the responses of *Soma* leaders seeking to recover ancient rhythms, practices and, creeds as foundational for their life together, we may also see further agreement with Vincent that theology and doctrine cannot be extracted from the worshiping life of the body, within which one also evidences 'Christ-centeredness' by then affirming only those doctrines held in common by that same worshiping Body of Christians across all cultures, places and times. (Lérins, 72) Then too, in their focus on recovery of ancient forms and rhythms, instead of the more contemporary ‘relevant’ church forms seen in Driscoll’s version of *Acts 29*, are *Soma* communities still within the *Relevant* stream or are they now *Reconstructionists*?

#### 4.4.2.2 *Reconstructionist Views on Reformation and Renewal*

In shifting to the answers of *Reconstructionists*, regarding key challenges to the church, several respondents here also shared *Relevant* concerns about fracturing and division. Still, in addition to sharing *Relevant* concerns about theological and denominational divisions, more *Reconstructionists* thought political ideologies were also a frustrating source of fracturing. A priest within this grouping, Gregg, reported, “I'm frustrated by the continued power of nationalism and partisan politics.” An Anglican lay-leader, Jens, added, “I’ve been discouraged by the way a significant portion of our country’s self-identified 'evangelicals' have capitulated to

a political movement that stands...largely in opposition to the Christian faith,” adding, “it seems to me we need a new theological word to describe those across denominations, parties, and races who seek to love God and love their neighbors in the way of Jesus.”

Fortunately, despite frustrations over divisions and fracturing in the church, many of our respondents in the *Reconstructionist* stream also reportedly believed they were part of a movement of church providing recovery of a more authentic and holistic Christian life. From our samples, it seems they were possibly finding that more holistic life in return to both ancient Christian rhythms and practices and to the core mission of the church, as seen in the proclamation of the gospel, social justice, and, in a note that would perhaps satisfy St. Vincent of Lérins through a revival of concern for orthodoxy and ecumenical unity as well. For example, Rachel, who helps to lead an *Acts*-style house church, said, “I believe there needs to be a breaking down of the concreted lines of denominationalism.” She suggested a hopeful solution was for the church to be rooted in the creeds and gospels again by returning to “a few basics...as outlined in the Nicene Creed...demonstrated through how we live out *Matthew 28:16-20*.” Meanwhile, Derrick, who has found a rich new life in an emerging Anabaptist expression seeking to recover early church practices, reported that while he is discouraged by the lack of a 'Biblical worldview' among many in the western church who claim to be Christian, he is simultaneously “encouraged by the explosive growth of orthodox Christianity all over the world,” believing that a return to orthodoxy is, as Thomas Oden would contend,<sup>49</sup> “an affirmation that God is on the move and doing great things for all people through his Church.” Thus, as seen in these responses, quite a few persons in this stream view a return to a shared foundational orthodox understanding of the gospels as also being vital to inculturating a holistic gospel-centered life. Also, while critics such as Chris Platt<sup>50</sup> might ask whether such movements of retrieval or reconstruction are simply repackaging the ‘same old’ theologies, rather than growing with the diversity of the times, Oden

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<sup>49</sup>See: Oden 2015. Oden said that in return to consensual unity around orthodoxy, “It’s the Holy Spirit guiding the church towards the unity of the Body of Christ.”

<sup>50</sup>See: Platt 2012.

has again defended such a movement of orthodox retrieval by charging that the current era is obsessed with change, while what Christians should be concerned with is growth, yet, “steady growth toward orthodoxy and consensual, ancient classic Christianity, with its proximate continuity, catholicity, and apostolicity,” instead of the fracturing and division of “faddism, novelty, heresy, anarchism, antinomianism, pretensions of discontinuity, revolutionary talk and nonhistorical idealism.” (Oden 1990, 1164-1669)

Some *Reconstructionists* also see hope for the church in new movements of orthodox ecumenism as well, which works to promote unity and reconciliation between Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christians that is centered in the creedal beliefs of orthodoxy; in synergy with the focus on orthodox ecumenism which Vincent inspired Thomas Oden and Thomas Guarino to work toward as well.<sup>51</sup> Just as Vincent also believed that unity within *consensual orthodoxy* was key and that fracturing and isolation were warning signs of potential error,<sup>52</sup> some of our *Reconstructionist* samples likewise thought there was hope for orthodox unity in the church in the future. Consequentially, Rick, a former *Acts 29* worship leader who has now moved toward more experimental forms of church modeled after the practices of the early church, as an Anglican priest in the *ACNA*, asserted he was encouraged by an increased emerging *Reconstructionist* Christian interest in “Paleo-orthodox, neo-orthodox expressions of the faith that hold to the core teachings of Christianity but transcend the old ‘liberal vs conservative’ divide,” as well as by an increased “return to the Fathers, ecumenism with Catholics and Orthodox, and by cross-denominational Christian mission and ecumenism.” This matched the similar enthusiasm of *ACNA* New Friar leader, Trevor, who, speaking from amidst a community rooted in the liturgical rhythms of the early church, said there was a clear global movement towards “reconciliation and unity in the Body of Christ,” in the hope of which he had also spent time engaging in Christian reconciliation work amidst Catholics and Protestants as a mission of his community. Such ideas around unity also again share synergy with Vincent’s *consensual orthodoxy* too, in which one

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<sup>51</sup>See: Guarino 2006, 35; Oden 2002, 186.

<sup>52</sup>See: Lérins, 72-75.

must not only be centered in life and worship together in the local or current actuality, but also in the universal 'worshiping community' of the greater Body of Christ. (Lérins, 72, 91)<sup>53</sup>

As with many whom we categorized as *Relevants*, several persons in the *Reconstructionist* stream also reported that they felt it was vital for the church to engage their neighbors via a form of social justice clearly rooted in what they saw as the holistic, Biblical mission of the early church, and not necessarily political ideologies, with the Anglican New Friar, Trevor, adding that, in addition to seeking ecumenical unity, he has felt led to "move closer to immigrants and refugees...recovering our biblical call to welcome, befriend, and care for the stranger." He also stressed 'that calling,' to engage in service amidst immigrants and refugees, "has recently become politicized and controversial, but one way of pledging allegiance to the Risen King is to undertake that calling quietly, consistently, without any sense of superiority over those who may not be doing likewise." Then too, Jens, an Anglican lay-leader who revealed an influence from Robert Webber, added that he has hope for the church in what he saw as a renewed focus on incarnational care for neighbors in his new ACNA expression, an expression he saw as holding both Christ-centered spiritual-and-theological formation and service-to-neighbors together, fostering "Parish movements that emphasize proximity, incarnational embedding in the neighbourhood, highly relational, less programmatic formation and catechesis...these all encourage me." Adding to these voices, Teresa, a pastor who works primarily in an early-church style community amid immigrants, shared that the unity of a community rooted in Christ could also lead to reconciliation of differences in local contexts, as seen in her community where they have "become a bridge from old to new, white Evangelical to Latino activist leaders, immigrants to *Fox News* listeners, community organizers to community developers, churchy people to people who want to be Jesus with skin on. It is a wonderful and always an awkward place to live."

Thus, for those termed *Reconstructionists*, as with samples in the *Relevants* stream, many have hope for the recovery of a church expression that combines what they see as Biblically

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<sup>53</sup>Also see: Oden, 165.

based, Christ-centered formation, proclamation, and social justice. At the same time, perhaps showing synergy with Paleo-Orthodox voices such as Thomas Oden and Robert Webber, we noticed more *Reconstructionist* respondents further extend that vision for a holistic church to one that also provides unity in the larger body via orthodox ecumenism or reconciliation.

#### 4.4.2.3 Revisionist Views on Reformation and Renewal

For their part, in the third EC stream, most respondents in our samples seemed to agree with the other EC streams about the problem of political fracturing in the church and the need for greater attention to social action. Still, they did not appear to evidence the same clear care for proclamation of the gospel, recovery of ancient forms, practices, or creeds,<sup>54</sup> or for a need to engage in orthodox ecumenism or Christian reconciliation, as seen in the work and responses of our samples in the other EC streams. Rather, in this third stream, evidencing the potential influence of postmodern deconstructionism, narrative theology, contextual theology, post-colonial, and post-imperial theology, among other theological influences that *Revisionists* have credited as being helpful for revising Christianity within current contexts,<sup>55</sup> some samples in this stream seemed to instead evidence more frustration with the beliefs, practices, categories, systems, or constructs of Christianity that they believed were irrelevant or restrictive to persons in current situations. Consequentially, some also shared a desire to pioneer a 'new kind of Christianity' that was more relevant or supporting of their own view of the 'authentic' way of Jesus or the needs and values of their current communities. For instance, in service to context

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<sup>54</sup>Among other data we uncovered was the fact that no respondents in the *Revisionist* stream mentioned sacraments, salvation, or ecumenism, which were terms that appeared often throughout the responses of the other two streams.

<sup>55</sup>See: Brian D. McLaren, "Postcolonial Theology," *Sojourners* (Sept. 10, 2010b), Accessed July 2017, <https://sojo.net/articles/post-colonial-theology>. In his reflection upon treatments of postcolonial theology, McLaren showed the influence of Derridian deconstructionism and contextual theology in arguing that by "distinguishing some theology with a modifier—feminist, black, Latin American, eco-, post-colonial" persons are "playing into the idea that these theologies are special, different" in ways that allow what he terms 'unmodified theology,' such as 'orthodox theology,' to retain "its privileged position as normative." Thus, he believes bringing awareness and deconstruction of theological constructs will allow a level playing field for marginalized theological perspectives. For another example of *Revisionist* uses of contextual theology, see: Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith (EmergentYS)* (Zondervan, 2005), 17-19.

theology, Hope, who leads a pluralistic post-Christian community, shared, “My biggest frustration is the holding on to systems and patterns of being that don’t have meaning or truth today.” Then too, in a sentiment that resonated with *Revisionist* theologian Andrew Perriman's self-described 'postmodern,' 'post-imperial' view of Christianity as a construct of empire, in the form of Christendom,<sup>56</sup> former *Emergent-Village* leader, Evan, shared that he struggled most with “Christianity as a religion” since “religion is inherently a colonizing force. In fact, religion was invited to aid in colonization...I find it frustrating that the religious right who claim to be defending Christianity are actually rendering faith mute in the public square.” Evan added that he was also frustrated by “the persistent adherence to the lie claiming Christianity is in the truth business, largely understood as 'right' belief.” Then too, Evan defended the deconstruction of traditional Christian doctrines and practices by insisting “Jesus did not claim he would protect church structures, institutions, politics, theologies, or even worship practices.” Still, Evan also found hope in his belief that “more and more people who are seeking to follow in the Way of Jesus are courageously leaving Christendom structures that have become oppressive, or power hungry, or are colluding with the state.” Thus, Evan seemed to link a healthy orthopraxis with a necessary setting aside of statements, forms, practices, or constructs of historical Christianity. This belief that the 'way of Jesus' likely diverged from the historical Christian church and its doctrines, creeds, politics, or theologies, and that the true way of Jesus was instead being discovered by new communities today, by carefully listening to and engaging within current perspectives and contexts, also appeared to be an important distinctive among the leading writers of the *Revisionist* stream, whom we noted in Chapter Two.<sup>57 58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>See: Andrew Perriman, “Narrative Premise of a Post Christendom Theology,” *Post* (May 13, 2010), accessed Oct. 2015, <http://www.postost.net/2010/05/narrative-premise-post-christendom-theology>. Perriman claimed a Post-Christendom, Postmodern, Post-imperial theology as a necessary paradigm via which to deconstruct Christendom and follow God in the unknowing of true faith, such as Abraham did.

<sup>57</sup>See: Mobsby 2007, 29-32. Mobsby argued that the EC needed to adopt a model of ‘contextual theology’ in which they could truly break free from the “Christendom mindset” and engage in a “synthetic model of contextual theology for a distinctly postmodern context” where they could then hear the key themes of the postmodern culture and place them in dialogue with the gospel and tradition via a truly “emerging contextual theology...akin to the values of a more post-Christendom mindset.”

<sup>58</sup>See: Pagitt 2005, 166. Early *Revisionist* and *Emergent-Village* leader, Pagitt, exemplified how many emerging communities in the *Revisionist* stream, such as his own, Solomon's Porch, would seek to avoid

Similarly, other persons in the *Revisionist* stream, who responded to our questionnaires, also expressed hope for a ‘new kind of Christianity’ that could embrace pluralistic perspectives or even different faiths. Hope, for instance, shared that in her community “Many of our people do not come to us as people of faith, but rather people who are interested in a faith community...that is not prejudiced, not judgemental, and not hierarchical. We also have many in our community who identify as post (or former) Evangelical, post-catholic, and even post-Christian.” A somewhat similar vision for Christian community was also shared by *Open* network pastor, Meredith, who shared that in her church community:

We are not inclined to defend doctrines...we talk a lot about renewed practices of contemplative prayer and renewed understandings of God and of humanity. Our vision for our church is that we might lead the way to a new 500-year reformation of the Church universal. We hope to play a role in the great emergence of a more just and generous expression of Christianity.<sup>59</sup>

In also noting what a more ‘just and generous’ Christianity should look like, Meredith added that, in her *Open* community, “We recently moved to a place of full-inclusion for the LGBTQ community...anyone who identifies as LGBTQ can do anything in the context of our church that anyone else can.” Again, this focus on sexual ‘inclusion’ as a distinctive was not shared by all persons in the *Revisionist* stream but was a distinctive noted by both respondents in the *Open* network, which is also a stated distinctive in the mission statement of the *Open* network.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Views on the Church, Epistemology, and Scripture

The next set of questions we asked were designed to dig deeper into *how, why* or *on what basis* EC streams felt they could know what was permissible or good for Christians today and what the authentic ‘way of Jesus’ or ‘true Christianity’ should look like in current contexts. Also, we wished to know, in debates over theology, hermeneutics, doctrines, and praxis, what were

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reinforcing past interpretations or truths of Christendom and would instead view teaching within their community as, “not primarily about my extracting truth from the Bible to apply to people's lives. In many ways, the sermon is...an act of poetry-of putting words around people's experiences to allow them to find deeper connection in their lives... So our sermons are not lessons that precisely define belief so much as they are stories that welcome our hopes and ideas and participation.” (Ibid)

<sup>59</sup>See: McLaren 2006a, 28. Here, McLaren popularized the term, ‘a generous orthodoxy.’ Meredith also used *Revisionist* theologian Phyllis Tickle’s language in notin a ‘great emergence.’ See: Tickle 2008.

<sup>60</sup> See: Convergence, n.d. The *Open* network is an initiative of *Convergence*.

their movements of reformation or revision based upon? In this section, we asked: *What can humans know about God? How can they know? How can they trust that what they know about God is true? What do you believe about the ‘authority of Scripture’? Can we know that our interpretation of Scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not? Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of Scripture should look like? If so, how?* We also asked: *How would you define the ‘church’?*

When questioned about how they viewed the church, nineteen (19) respondents mentioned it was in some way the 'Body of Christ' or 'Family of Christ' with different historical and local expressions. Seventeen out of nineteen (17/19) respondents who conceived of the church as a universal 'Body of Christ' with different expressions, were within the *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* streams. The greatest differences of opinion about what the church *is* appeared among respondents in the *Revisionist* stream where, as seen later in this chapter, many hoped to see the church evolve based upon the identities, experiences, and contexts of current persons. Views on the church also appeared closely related to how persons approached questions of epistemology, hermeneutics, and consensus.

#### *4.4.3.1 Relevant Views on the Church, Epistemology, and Scripture*

In asking what humans can or must know about God, and how, among *Relevant* respondents, there was a clear focus on Scripture as *the* source of knowledge about God and truth with one-hundred-percent of *Relevant* respondents mentioning Scripture as key and most seeming to believe Scripture was self-validating.<sup>61</sup> Their statements on Scripture included their commonly shared belief that, as one lay leader stated, “Scripture is the sole source of truth in the world,” and that we can know about God, and trust that that what we know is true, through “what has been revealed in Scripture...Scripture reveals about God to us.” Another pastor also added that while

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<sup>61</sup> This claim was perhaps consistent in *Relevant* responses due to the strongly Reformed nature of this stream and connection of this view to both the teachings of John Calvin and John Piper. See: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.2.; Piper 2016. Conversely, as we will see in Chapter Five, Dietrich Bonhoeffer thought such a Protestant approach to Scripture enabled persons to place the human ‘I’ over Scripture and, thus, above God’s revelation. Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 103-105.

“Those who are more liberal might claim that there are differences of interpretation in Scripture,” still, “Scripture interprets Scripture,” and thus, “heresy/misinterpretation are clearly defined.” In addition to the belief that Scripture is self-validating as a source of knowledge about God, three (3) also mentioned the salvation/atonement of Christ as the key revelation that could and must be known through Scripture. Then too, many also appeared to see the missional service of Christians as having the telos of reaching “the point where we can open the Bible with people” as noted by as *Acts 29* leaders Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. (Chester and Timmis 2008, 64)

In further asking *Relevants* how one might know that their knowledge about God or interpretation of Scripture was authoritative or correct, or whether they can or should find further support for their interpretation, four (4) respondents mentioned the necessity of the Holy Spirit in helping one to know God, know truth, and read Scripture correctly, since it is God's Spirit, as one respondent noted, who must open “hearts and minds to receive the words of Scripture.” In addition to the role of the Spirit, three (3) also mentioned nature/creation as a source of corroborating knowledge and two (2), in the minority, also added that, as St. Vincent would agree,<sup>62</sup> the historical ‘Christian Community’ was also necessary to correctly interpret Scripture together. Amid this minority view, theologically trained, multicultural-church pastor, Warren, who is rooted in the creeds, asserted, “We interpret the Bible rightly in community and through our connection to the historical Body of Christ,” with a second *Acts 29* pastor, Judah, arguing, “There is a certain level of tradition that every Christian yields to, that is the tradition of the Apostles and other Christians that have come before them,” yet he added, as did Vincent,<sup>63</sup> that tradition must be weighed “against Scripture.” However, it is interesting that, perhaps in alignment with Driscoll and John Piper’s approaches to scripture, as we saw in Chapter Two, most other respondents in this grouping did not seem to be concerned about externally evidencing that one’s own interpretation, or that of their local community, was in alignment with apostolicity or orthodoxy.

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<sup>62</sup>See: Lérins, 6, 86, 421. On the importance of the church’s consensually agreeing to Scripture’s meaning, Vincent states: “Whoever originated a heresy that did not first dissever himself from the consentient agreement of the universality and antiquity of the Catholic Church?” Lérins, 86.

<sup>63</sup> Lérins, 6.

Ben was, however, a bit of an exception in his apparent belief that interpretation needed to be accountable to more than one's own hermeneutics or those of only one's tradition, as seen in his stating "I hate the idea that an individual can sit down alone with their Bible and come up with an authoritative interpretation. Interpretation should be done in dialogue with the wider Body of Christ, across traditions, and across history...Fundamentalism and Biblicism can be as destructive as Liberalism." At the same time, only one (1) respondent in this stream mentioned the role of "personal senses" in hermeneutics, which was a more common response amidst samples in the *Revisionist* stream.

Interestingly, in the same *Relevant* stream, while not all agreed that Christians today could reach consensus on interpretations of Scripture, five out of eight (5/8) persons did believe agreement on core beliefs was possible; though only three (3) thought it was achievable. On this question, early EC leader, James, thought agreement was possible "If it falls in the topic of the core set of 'Beliefs' ...ala 'Apostles Creed' and 'Nicene Creed.' But there are too many things that aren't essential that Christians believe are essential." More hopefully, Jon, who is recovering ancient practices as part of his *Soma* community, believed "it is possible for Christians today to draw from Scripture and come to a consensus on...foundational tenets of our faith as well as the overarching narrative of Scripture." Thus, in these two sentiments, there is also similarity with Vincent's belief that consensus could be reached on core beliefs.<sup>64</sup>

#### 4.4.3.2 *Reconstructionist Views on the Church, Epistemology, and Scripture*

Among those in the *Reconstructionist* grouping, there was also a consensus that Scripture was prime with seven out of nine (7/9) *Reconstructionists* mentioning Scripture as the key source of knowledge about God and truth. Six (6) also noted the importance of God's Spirit revealing truth and guiding hermeneutics, in addition to three (3) mentioning the role of creation, nature, and natural law as providing support. Further, four (4) also mentioned the salvation/atonement of

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<sup>64</sup>See: Oden 2015. Oden said that in the Vincentian conception of orthodoxy, a core belief could not be accepted ecumenically within the universal church if it could only be found in the major writings of the early church councils, or fathers, but everywhere, from the Apostles to the present. Thus, in *consensual orthodoxy*, there does not need to be agreement on every point but only on core consensual beliefs.

Christ as a vital revelation that could and should be known about God via Scripture. However, unlike any *Relevants*, some *Reconstructionists* also took care to differentiate Jesus as 'the Word' from the Bible as the 'written Word' and also to note the significant role of the witness of the 'life of Christ' himself apart from the written word alone. For example, ACNA priest, Rick, noted that persons can know God through “Jesus the Word as revealed to us through the Word,” as Scripture and that Jesus speaking to persons through Scripture was “the summit and source and hermeneutic to the rest of the words of the Bible about God.” Likewise, New Friar leader, Trevor, noted that one must enter into the Biblical story in Christ himself, since, “We know God primarily through Jesus who becoming one of us and coming near reminds us that we are meant to flourish and function as human beings in the context of a love story... We have been brought into the life of the Trinity (John 17:21).” Similarly, Derrick, a new Anglican priest in an emerging missional church plant, noted that while one can come to know God and truth through “the revelation of his word written, the Bible” and “reason, logic, and historical evidence that can provide a credible case for the veracity of Scripture,” still, it is the “Resurrection of Jesus which in turn provides credibility for all the claims of the Apostles and the Church about him.” For some *Reconstructionists* then, the living Christ himself, his resurrection, the testimony to his life by the Apostles, and the supporting evidence they recorded and transmitted could also support and enliven the written word, rather than it being self-validating in written form alone.

Of additional interest was the fact that six (6) *Reconstructionists* also noted the role of the 'church through the ages,' and their testimony together in helping persons to know God, know truth and interpret Scripture, with most mentioning, as St. Vincent would appreciate, that such consensual testimony to faithful interpretations of Scripture is a work of the Spirit. As such, urban-community leader Teresa asserted persons can know God and know truth through the “2000 years of testimony...Scripture...the witness of the Spirit...people of wisdom” and “a growing body of evidence inside the life that has grown old in Christ.” Then too, emerging Anabaptist, Gregg, asserted that God's character is seen in:

Creation, Scripture, and most clearly in Jesus Christ. But of course this revelation is most

often perceived through experience...and usually... [in the] community of faith. The faithful witness and experience of the historical church is also a piece in this confidence.

Additionally, Anglican New Friar, Trevor, added that while “The first tellings of the gospel in Scripture themselves have richly varied quality,” and can thus be susceptible to what persons may want to “read back into the New Testament renderings,” one can still know what is true of God by grounding themselves in “what those first tellings portray of the character, actions and purposes of God.” Subsequently, in a perfect summary of the overarching approach to God, Scripture, and truth that many *Reconstructionists* evidenced, self-described Paleo-Orthodox theologian, Rick, who has been influenced by ‘Oden’s stuff,’ also stated that one can know God and truth through both the Spirit working in the individual and also through “the Spirit’s witness working through the Church throughout the ages...within the cloud of witnesses testifying to the authenticity of the accounts and the providential preservation of those accounts in Holy Scripture, as discerned collectively by the Spirit through the Church.” Thus, although the terms ‘test of orthodoxy’ and ‘*consensual orthodoxy*’ did not appear, it seemed that a Vincentian idea of apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* was alive in the *Reconstructionist* stream.<sup>65</sup>

In terms of their beliefs on whether it is possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of Scripture should look like. However, *Reconstructionists* seemed to have a similar response rate as *Relevants* with only five out of nine (5/9) in this stream believing it was possible. Among those who believed it was possible, most tended to believe it would only be “on the core doctrines,” as Rick noted, and then only after “lots of conversations.” Even then, Trevor lamented, there will still be “variation in how Scripture is interpreted but if we can agree on the essentials we will be okay.” Still, among those who hopefully believed consensus could be reached on core doctrines, there seemed to be evidence of deep reflection about how this might happen. For example, Derrick articulated a process of striving toward consensus, in which, “First we look to the plain, easiest reading of the

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<sup>65</sup>See: Lérins, 101-105. Vincent claimed Christ set in place the voices of the Apostles, and the orthodox consensus through the ages who joined them in affirming their core teachings, to not only guard the apostolic doctrine but to become unified in ‘one mind’ as the Body of Christ.

Scriptures...W[h]ere there is further question, we examine the witness of the early church leaders speaking in consensus. Where there is further question or exploration needed we look to theologians that build on those two key foundations.” Here again, though the exact Vincentian terminology is missing, there appears to be clear synergy with the Vincentian method.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.4.3.3 Revisionist Views on the Church, Epistemology, and Scripture

Among the last EC stream, *Revisionists*, all five (5) respondents in our samples in some way mentioned the importance of subjective experiences, feelings, or interpretations in knowing God and truth. Three (3) persons also mentioned Scripture as a source of knowledge about God and truth, two (2) thought Scripture was either simply 'myth' or was one 'story' or 'perspective, two (2) mentioned the importance of the Spirit in knowing God and truth and two (2) also mentioned tradition, while only one (1) thought it was possible to reach consensus. Also, in differentiation with the other streams, Scripture was only mentioned as the first source for knowing God or truth by one (1) respondent and, unlike the other streams, there was no mention of salvation or atonement as something that could or should be known.

Hope, who leads a pluralistic worship community, began her response to the questions about God and Scripture by saying that what one can know about God, “depends on what stories you are reading.” She believed Scripture was a guide but was only one story among many, which “went by the wayside” as an “end all authority...after Constantine,” just as she also thought the ‘Body of Christ’ was only one expression of a larger concept of the church that should be more inclusive of other religious expressions. She also added that Scripture and tradition were not entirely trustworthy as sources of truth for today because:

History has shown that large groups of people/faith groups were left out of deciding what ‘was true’ and should be included. This very action makes it suspect...However, that doesn’t mean that Scripture isn’t alive and still speaking to us. In fact, in our context we routinely recite: For the Word of God within us, for the Word of God Around us, thanks be to God after the reading. And we call Scripture: the story of God. For God is always

<sup>66</sup>Lérins, 76-77. Vincent said: “it has always been the custom of Catholics...to prove the true faith in...two ways; first by the authority of the Divine Canon, and next by the tradition of the Catholic Church...in the Church itself regard must be had to the consentient voice of the universality equally with that of antiquity.

present and changing us, therefore we think Scripture changes and is alive to us.

Thus, for Hope, as we saw Tony Jones similarly argue in Chapter Three,<sup>67</sup> orthodox hermeneutics and orthodoxy were seen to have marginalized diverse voices, which argument, conversely, we saw Thomas Oden claim ignored historical records which actually showed orthodoxy as more diverse, open, and less often in control of systems than were current western critics of orthodoxy.<sup>68</sup> Still, for Hope, although scripture was not authoritative and could also change, it did 'speak' as one voice in her community. Similarly, for Sofia, who shared that the Bible was simply like a 'Greek myth,' she still wanted to share a gospel story that, "demonstrates the beatitudes...God says people will know you are our disciples by your love for one another," and she was attempting to follow such an orthopraxis in her work amidst her urban immigrant community. However, in making scripture into a story that can simply be adapted to fit one's values and contexts, especially materialist acts of love, but which has no objective worth, both respondents would also appear heterodox according to the perspective of Vincent's concept of orthodoxy, especially in, as we have seen Vincent claim, departing from the unity of the body in its views of scripture. (Lérins, 76-77)

In comparison with the above views, *Open* network leader, Meredith, said her community considers Scripture and tradition as vital sources of knowledge about God and truth:

Most of what we think we know about God comes from 5 sources, the person of Jesus Christ, our experiences of God in our lives, the witness of Christian tradition over the last 2,000 years, the Bible, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our world and in our lives.

However, she stressed that she also wants her people to:

Learn to trust Christ, more than they trust what they think they know about Christ...And since most people's beliefs do change over time (as we grow and mature), we think of these changes as spiritual evolution. We're trying to help people be grounded in God, as

<sup>67</sup> T. Jones 2007, 14-17. As we saw in Chapter Three, Tony Jones' charged that the Vincentian claim of consensus was suspect because those *in* power certainly must have marginalized other groups whom he believed could not have been allowed to express their dissent with orthodoxy. Thus, orthodoxy only presented the voice of those in power who systematized their own innovation under the guise of orthodoxy. However, Thomas Oden answered that Vincent's *consensual orthodoxy* included *more* diverse voices than those of the modern or postmodern eras which speak from more limited and less diverse contextual perspectives than those of the orthodoxy; which consensus was also typically opposed by systems of power. Oden 2002, 52-53, 115-117.

<sup>68</sup> See above.

Trinity, rather than helping them to be grounded in doctrines.

Thus, although she is not saying that Scripture itself changes, and seems to have a higher view of Scripture than previous respondents in the sample of this stream, in synergy with McLaren's ideation of 'sola scriptura' as allowing 'tweaks' to Scriptures and creeds,<sup>69</sup> she appeared to see orthodox interpretations as changing, since persons' experiences and journeys may shape their interpretations over time. Meredith also claimed that 'knowing' God was more important than 'knowing about him,' by which she appeared to mean that traditional beliefs and orthodox doctrines were not as important as current experiences for her congregation, which they have articulated in affirming LGBTQ leadership in their church as being right for Christianity in the present context, in the view of their specific church and network. Likewise, she claimed they also need a new hermeneutic for reading Scripture that fit persons today, stating, "We also believe that a new hermeneutic, a new way of reading the Bible, is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. We are playing an active role in the work of a renewed hermeneutic." Concurrently, *Open* network pastor, Rob, who also leads a community that affirms LGBTQ clergy, believed that, while one could rely upon Scripture and tradition, they must also elevate the voice of one's current community to a place of mutually critical authority by inviting current voices "into our learnings and hear their thoughts and experiences," while also making sure to "always leave room for doubt. We do not need to be certain of everything to have a healthy and vibrant spiritual life."

At the same time, former *Emergent-Village* leader, Evan, did not necessarily share the same views as those in the *Open* network, but in claiming to be influenced by Derrida, while he stressed the importance of Scripture for epistemology, he likewise argued that claims of 'knowing' were problematic, since, in a contextual-theological perspective, as earlier evidenced by Ian Mobsby,<sup>70</sup> "What we know of God is our particular experience of God...our relationship with God...similar to what Apostle Paul bears witness to in his letter to the church in Rome...there is an irreducible mystery in knowing God." Thus, for Evan, truth claims were problematic if divorced

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<sup>69</sup>See Note 56.

<sup>70</sup>See: Mobsby 2007, 28.

from experience of God himself and life in present contexts. He added, “Part of the reason we need to gather with other followers in the Way of Jesus is to test our experience of the Divine in relationship with others, trusting that the Spirit will guide us toward Godself.” In his claim that truth about God must not be divorced from revelation of God, Evan would perhaps even find some synergy with Vincent’s approach, as we have presented it in our last chapter, as well as with key elements of Bonhoeffer’s theology, which we have explored in Chapter Five. However, conflict with *consensual orthodoxy* would likely also exist in Evan’s apparent claim that one can never advance to any knowing beyond the local and current contextual interpretation, versus Vincent’s idea of a consensual and universal knowing that incorporates the local and current into the universal in the Body of Christ. (Lérins, 91, 99, 102)

Thus, in this section, we saw that for many respondents in the *Revisionist* stream, one’s experiences, the voices of their community, and a healthy scepticism about what one could truly know to be true were essential elements that informed many persons’ approaches to Scripture, God, and truth. Also, while there were notable differences in their approaches to Scripture, even for those who had a more careful approach to Scripture, their belief that the meanings of Scriptures and doctrines could evolve in current contexts without needing to be congruent with the orthodox consensus, would evidence a heterodox approach according to Vincent’s method if, in their evolving views, they departed from the consensual interpretations of the meanings of Scripture as found in all places and times.

#### 4.4.4 Views on Innovation, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy, and Heresy

In our concluding questions, we asked: *To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines, or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of Scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates? Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true Gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?*

In response to the final questions about innovation and heresy, settling disagreements over interpretations of Scripture or doctrines, whether there is a center or set of boundaries to differentiate the true gospel from false, and also what roles apostolicity, *consensual orthodoxy*, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ might play in settling debates, we also found, as in earlier answers, that there was a thread of agreement among *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* samples, while persons in the *Revisionist* stream again provided a more diverse and divergent set of answers. For instance, all eight (8) *Relevants* and all nine (9) *Reconstructionists* appeared to believe heresy was a problem for the church today, while among *Revisionists*, Evan, was the only one (1) who agreed heresy was a problem, saying, "Of course heresy is a problem. Anytime false teachers mislead it's a problem." At the same time, one (1) person in the *Revisionist* stream said heresy was not a problem, one (1) chose not to answer, one (1) thought there was valid opposing research on most disagreements over historic doctrines and one (1) said it was a problem but, "not a problem about which we are deeply concerned."

There was an apparent consensus amidst *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* that both apostolicity and the Holy Spirit played vital roles in determining which interpretations of

scripture were trustworthy, when determining the boundaries for innovation or guarding against heresy, which opinion surprisingly included some who had not mentioned the importance of apostolicity for one's hermeneutics when earlier asked about approaches to Scripture. This perhaps revealed that apostolicity and orthodoxy were not normally considered for exegetical and hermeneutical practices by many respondents but were agreed upon as helpful fail-safes which might provide boundaries for orthodox innovation and prevent heresy.

#### *4.4.4.1 Relevant Views on Innovation, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy, and Heresy*

In terms of to what extent Christians are free to innovate or update forms, theology, doctrines or practices today, most respondents in the first two streams felt innovation or contextual 'updating' could be healthy for the church within certain boundaries. For instance, just as Vincent believed Christians could be innovative in making clear what had already been said,<sup>71</sup> *Acts 29* pastor, Warren, claimed, "We love innovative explanations of orthodox doctrine" in his community, but he warned that "departing from the historic creeds means you are no longer orthodox. We believe there should be boundaries...We would start with the historic creeds (Apostles, Nicene, etc.)." Another *Acts 29* pastor, Judah, added that contextual innovation was necessary "to reach lost people" in the current culture, thus, "we need to learn their language and culture." However, in terms of doctrine, he also seemed to echo Vincent in stressing, "We can explore..." updating "but with wisdom and caution and in community and we'll add submission to the HS and to others..." with God having provided a "safety net of orthodoxy which came from the Apostles, to us."<sup>72</sup> Then too, taking it a step further, Ben added that "if someone is not in agreement with the historic creeds they are likely not a Christian."

At the same time, a minority of respondents in this grouping appeared leery of innovation or contextualization that received influence from postmodern culture. For instance, *Relevant*

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<sup>71</sup>See: Lérins, 75. Vincent says doctrine can grow in terms of understanding, elucidation or contextual explanation, making clear what was before obscure, but one must never change apostolic meanings.

<sup>72</sup> It was interesting that he claimed orthodoxy came from the "Apostles to us," without noting the historical process of faith transmission. Some respondents appeared unaware of the history of orthodox faith transmission, which Oden made it his mission to outline. See: Oden 2002.

leader, Troy, struck a bit more contextually cautious tone in including “Postmodernism...and globalization” as threats to “sound doctrine,” warning Christians should “be extremely careful in thinking that we are free to ‘innovate’ what centuries of the church has shown to be faithful.” Still, he thought some freedom for updating forms or methods was needed as long it did not depart from the “core ‘markers’ or doctrines” in which one can lean on the Apostles and “church history to help us,” through the guidance of the Spirit. Likewise, *Acts 29* pastor, Mike, also asserted there was freedom for Christians to innovate, in terms of giving new language to doctrine,<sup>73</sup> but “any interpretation that fails to affirm what the Scripture says about itself is out of bounds right off the bat,” and he argued heresy has flourished because “postmodern culture takes a wide-birth, liberal view of truth” and even in “conservative dispositions of the Body of Christ, there is a profound cultural impact that seeps into the truth of Scripture.” In response to this slightly adversarial view of postmodern culture, evidenced by Troy and Mike, it is worth recalling that, in Chapter Three, we saw Ian Mobsby argue that conservative EC members were seeking to translate Christianity into a postmodern culture they were separated from instead of ‘embedding’ and contextually listening to the culture in incarnational ways. (Mobsby 2007, 28-30) The language used by Troy and Mike may likewise reveal a distinctive of this stream, despite using more contextual methods, by bringing a largely traditional Evangelical proclamation of the gospel into postmodern contexts.

At the same time, in agreement with the above noted perspectives in the *Relevant* samples, Mike believed Christians could agree on faithful interpretations of scripture by returning to the core essentials of the gospel, which he claimed, in agreement with Vincent, “have been amply expressed through the ages by the Church” with both the “Apostles’ original faith teaching” and “The Body of Christ” being “indispensable to delivering and knowing God’s truth. God works in and through His church in partnership and collaboration with the Holy Spirit.”

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<sup>73</sup>See: Lérins, 75. Vincent, quoting *Proverbs 22:28*, said that while doctrine could grow, Christians should not change those core teachings or interpretations of Scripture that had been held from the beginning, by the consensus of all Christians, everywhere, and always.

Consequentially, Mike's church discovers truth through "a foundation of biblical theology...that is, the story of redemption God tells via Scripture through Christ" then "add historical creeds that have proven scripturally faithful and time-tested<sup>74</sup>...Nicene, Apostles," while stressing this process must also be guided by the Spirit.<sup>75</sup> Here again, we saw a Vincentian thread in Mike's stressing that the Christian story told today must be congruent with that preached by the Apostles and that Christians must also be guided by the Spirit together, and not only individually.

At the same time, perhaps in even greater alignment with Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy*, *Soma* leader, Jon, shared that in his elder-led missional community:

We believe that there are differing levels of freedom in interpretation that are allowed by Scripture. It is helpful for me to think of Scripture as guardrails inside which we are free to explore our theology, doctrine, and church practices.

Thus, as part of a community that is incarnationally 'embedded' amidst postmodern culture, rather than seeking to separate itself from that culture, Jon's community had a slightly more open view toward contextualization. He added, in congruence with Vincent, how one could know they had remained within the 'guard rails' of faithful interpretation of scripture:

If there is a disagreement in the interpretation of Scripture the church should first seek out how the original church fathers interpreted the Scripture in question and how the early church lived in light of it...to see how the early church wrestled with their understanding (especially their differences in understanding) of Scripture, doctrine, and faith lived out. From there an appeal to trusted authorities, both contemporary and throughout history, should be sought out.<sup>76</sup>

In harmony, *Soma* leader, Ellis, claimed heresy was a problem because it steps outside the consensual 'guard rails,' in that it "preaches a different God than the One historically proclaimed through the Scriptures," while often justifying heterodox movements by arguing orthodoxy is an "outdated faith" and that persons must evolve to "a more 'enlightened' understanding of God in

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<sup>74</sup> As noted in Chapter Three, Oden pointed out that time was needed to reveal which interpretations were faithfully orthodoxy and which were only those of a current culture. Oden 2002, 47-49, 53-56.

<sup>75</sup>See: Oden 2002, 162. Oden stressed repeatedly that consensus around core orthodox creeds and doctrines, such as Vincent's method allows, could only be brought about via the work of the Spirit.

<sup>76</sup>See: Oden 2002, 171-172. Oden explained the application of Vincent's method to debates over interpretations of Scripture or doctrine as: "the universal prevails over the particular," then "the older apostolic witness prevails over the newer alleged general consent," and "conciliar actions and decisions prevail over faith-claims as yet untested by conciliar acts," while "where no conciliar rule avails, the most reliable consensual ancient authorities prevail over those less consensual over the generations."

order to apply to today's context." As an antidote to heretical challenges, in seeking to know which interpretations are faithful, Ellis said Christians should first turn to their elders or pastors and then to the voices of the Apostles who "learned directly from the one in whom our faith exists," thus, always checking an interpretation "in community with the saints and in prayer and communion with the Spirit."

#### 4.4.4.2 *Reconstructionist Views on Innovation, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy, and Heresy*

As with the *Relevant* leaders, most *Reconstructionists* likewise echoed the importance of the early creeds and voices of the Apostles as a baseline for settling disagreements over interpretations of Scripture. House church leader, Rachel, for instance, said that while there was always room for discussion, Christians have a problem if there is not, "as significant degree of agreement with the contents of the Nicene Creed," and that the voices of the Apostles and *consensual orthodoxy* are also 'essential.' Similarly, ACNA priest, Rick, in a further echoing of Vincent,<sup>77</sup> claimed Christians should have room to innovate but "not in regard to the core," since there is both a center and a set of boundaries in the "creedal witness of the Church" and in the consensus of apostolicity and orthodoxy, while without whose voices "we have mass mayhem" and are stepping outside the Body of Christ where, "as Cyprian said, to paraphrase: There is no salvation outside of the Church."

ACNA New Friar leader, Trevor, similarly argued that while there "will always be a variation in how Scripture is interpreted...our boundaries should include the historic Christian creeds" and "the Nicene Creed is a doctrinally sound barometer around which most followers of Christ can rally." Trevor added that "tradition and the writings of the Church Fathers are essential along with Scripture to knowing God and knowing truth," yet, like Vincent, he did not believe orthodoxy or apostolicity meant tradition alone but included the global "voices of Christian brothers and sisters from across all orthodox denominations" and required the working of the Spirit, without whom not only orthodoxy but even the gospel "is a dead letter."

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<sup>77</sup>See: Lérins, 75.

Emerging ACNA lay-leader, Paul, agreed that while “there are some things the Bible makes clear...there are plenty of questions the Bible leaves relatively unanswered,” allowing room for varying interpretations. However, as with other *Reconstructionists*, he added that there are boundaries. For instance, Paul said, “The creeds help us articulate the things that are clear, while giving us lots of room for improvisation.” Then too, Emerging Anglican priest, Derrick, provided a similar sentiment, yet with a Vincentian clarification on doctrinal growth,<sup>78</sup> in claiming that amidst varying interpretations and growth of doctrine, “Christians may not innovate” in terms of creating new doctrine “but they may build upon. There is such a thing as development of doctrine, but this is different than replacing or contradicting historic consensus,” and yet when Christians debate an interpretation of Scripture, he suggested they should then “go to their local church leaders first, then godly bishops,” then also be aware that there are further boundaries for doctrine provided in “The Bible...Catholic Creeds...consensus of the ecumenical councils,” and in the “teachings of the early church fathers, where they speak with one voice.” Further, in ways that also resonated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s suggested ‘marks’ of the true church, which we have explored in Chapter Five,<sup>79</sup> Derrick also suggested the marks of apostolicity included “a gospel preached that is consistent” with the consensus of the Fathers, councils, and creeds, “Sacraments administered” in alignment with consensus, and “godly bishops teaching” in congruence with “Apostolic Succession,” noting that ultimately it is God’s Spirit who provides these markers, working “in and through the Body of Christ for all of these things.”

Adding to the above *Reconstructionist* voices, emerging Neo-Anabaptist-pastor, Gregg, added that “improvisation...makes lots of sense...since we live in different times than when the revelation was first given.” However, Gregg also believed Christians need boundaries, which, as an Anabaptist, he wanted to say were simply provided by Scripture but admitted apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* played “a great role in guiding, supplementing knowledge, and

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<sup>78</sup>See: Lérins, 80. Vincent argued doctrine could grow, but only in continuity and congruence with the Apostolic doctrine first delivered and not becoming a new doctrine.

<sup>79</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 45-48; Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 130-132. Bonhoeffer claimed the preaching of the word, confession, and administration of the sacraments, in congruence with apostolicity, as ‘marks’ of the true church.

encouraging and cautioning our interpretive efforts,” which consentient voices are actually the Spirit working “through members of the body.”<sup>80</sup> Additionally, Mel, a church planter who has also been influenced by Anabaptist traditions, likewise believed that when there was debate about interpretations on essentials, persons should “Appeal to the historic creeds of the church such as the Nicene Creed,” while retaining “openness to other issues.” However, in some divergence from others in this stream, Mel added, while orthodoxy is 'important' for Anabaptists, “Anabaptists do not refer to any form of 'apostolicity'...this is foreign to them.” Thus, we perhaps saw an important distinction from Vincent, and others in this stream, in an Anabaptist desire to 'reconstruct' an early model of church without considering historic voices of Apostles or Fathers.

Concluding the thoughts shared in the *Reconstructionist* stream, Teresa, the leader of an immigrant church who is also a “student of liberation theology,” agreed that there can be innovation, such as she believes could be seen within 'liberation theology' itself. Still, she likewise thought that even in that movement there was an “adherence to orthodoxy” and that apostolicity and *consensual orthodoxy* matter “a great deal,” while apart from the Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit persons also cannot know God. Further, just as Vincent believed it was God's Spirit who prevented heresy from destroying the church, instead using it to strengthen the body, Teresa also believed the Spirit keeps the church from completely veering off into heresy.

#### 4.4.4.3 Revisionist Views on Innovation, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy, and Heresy

Lastly, among the *Revisionist* stream sample there appeared again to be a more divergent set of views. Sofia, who works to bring social justice to immigrant communities, and who earlier shared her view that the Bible was 'myth,' said she could not speak to an understanding of apostolicity or *consensual orthodoxy* but did not think “heresy is a problem as long as we are preaching a love for God and a love for others...the heresy we need to be dealing with is the fact that the church has chosen fear over love and its expression as an end result is hate for their

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<sup>80</sup>See: Oden 2002, 47. Oden says that in Vincent's consensual orthodoxy, the Spirit must form consensus and guide the church in its interpretation of doctrine, but the Spirit works via the human processes of “debate, inquiry, parliamentary deliberation, voting, and the apparatus of policy formation.”

brother.” Thus, in Sofia’s view, we saw a common *Revisionist* focus on love, and social justice, or an orthopraxis of materialist acts, over doctrine or orthodoxy.

In slight disagreement, *Open* pastor, Meredith, did believe heresy could be a problem, yet added it is “not a problem about which we are deeply concerned.” Instead, Meredith shared, “we are much more concerned with following the way of Jesus.” She added that theology and interpretations are not set, but can and should evolve, since just as humans are “evolving and becoming, so our connections to God are also evolving, which implies for us that our theological commitments will also evolve.” Amidst that evolution, and openness to changing interpretations, Meredith stressed that the “Church universal throughout history” is still very important to her community, along with Scripture, especially in how they “know God and how we know truth.” However, at the same time, they give equal weight to their own “historic personal faith in Christ,” and see the only center as being “Jesus Christ...the lens through which our shifting hermeneutic becomes clearer to us.” Thus, her community believes that their centeredness in Christ, as well as “the Body of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit,” allows them freedom to evolve in their hermeneutics and theology while still hearing other voices.

Also agreeing there is tremendous room for Christianity to evolve, including on issues such as sexual identity and practice, *Open* pastor, Rob, added “there is a lot of margin within Doctrine” and “there is great research on many sides of different doctrinal issues,” thus, making it difficult to be too rigid about doctrine. Then also, Rob thought it was challenging to define a center since there is “too much research by scholars from all perspectives to define a very definite, certain center.” However, Rob did appreciate the Apostles’ Creed as an example of something that could “provide good boundaries,” but not irreversible boundaries, since it “cannot be all we use to understand God’s character nor His Kingdom.”

Early EC leader, Evan, added postmodern deconstructionist language to some of the concepts articulated above. While Evan said he does believe heresy is a problem, having been influenced by Jacques Derrida, and also in agreement with Tony Jones who claimed to have been influenced by Foucault, Evan argued that apostolicity, *consensual orthodoxy*, and even the creeds

are not entirely helpful since, although, “Creeds...aid in understanding,” they are still only “culturally bound...interpretations,” and innovations, since:

Even if a person or a group could regurgitate exactly what they were taught and in the way they were taught it, they would already have altered the substance of the teaching because their context would have changed, and because within the teaching they received was a prior groups’ innovation that is now being passed on as though it is something other than interpretation.

Further, Evan claimed, Christians who are seeking boundaries or a 'center' for their epistemology, hermeneutics, or doctrine, are also not in congruence with authentic Christianity, since in his view, “centered & bounded metaphors end up reinforcing” a “Gnostic and individualist binary.” As a way forward, amidst disagreement, heresy, or error, Evan instead suggested persons should simply “invite the Holy Spirit to grow love for each other as the Spirit grows your interpretative grids” in order to then “seek to understand the perspective of the other,” with each differing perspective then, instead of trying to prove who is right or who has the truth, simply looking to be “faithfully present to their perspective, while also being faithfully present to the other group, to the Spirit of God, and to their contexts.” Thus, for Evan, one should not pursue a universal knowing, but should merely “discern the relative truth of their experience,” which he is hopeful can be achieved through “faithful presence to the people of God within context, to the authority of Scripture, and to Holy Spirit.”<sup>81</sup> However, in doing so, Evan also appears to have given up hope of thinking, speaking, or acting in ways evidenced to be in congruity and continuity with the same Body of Christ as that of the Apostles, perhaps making current revelation into what Bonhoeffer called a positivism of revelation.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, in consideration of the comments of respondents in this stream about both the growth of doctrine and the limits of knowing, it is

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<sup>81</sup>See: T. Jones 2007, 14. In such views, this respondent is also supported by Jones who shared a similar belief around the limits of contexts and perspectives and on a needed focus on dynamic life together in present contexts rather than on truth claims or doctrines, a view that was informed by both the deconstructionism of Derrida and Foucault, as well as postmodern contextual theology. This synergy also makes sense since Jones collaborated in the *Emergent-Village* with this respondent. Then too, Doug Pagitt, another leading voice in the *Revisionist/Emergent-Village* stream of the EC, likewise appropriated contextual theology to question whether Christians should seek to form a new 21<sup>st</sup>-century faith in dialogue with postmodern contexts. Pagitt 2005, 17-19.

<sup>82</sup> See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 140. As we have also noted in Chapter Five, Bonhoeffer was suspicious of a ‘positivism of revelation,’ in which one makes individual revelation a sufficient means of knowing Christ and truth.

also important to mention again that, for Vincent, the ‘test of orthodoxy,’ did not disallow current or individual perspectives, the growth of doctrine, newer declarations, nor deny the limits of individual or contextual knowing but it did require persons to subject their own current, contextual, or local knowing to the larger conversation and accountability in the diverse but unified chorus of the body. (Lérins 75)

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we noted an expected lack of identification with the 'Emerging' or 'Emergent' labels among current respondents, even though most were at some point a part of EC churches or networks, which also matched the trends in declining identification with these labels that we noted in Chapter Two. We also believe that an even greater divergence and metamorphosis has taken place in the second decade of the twenty-first century, among former EC streams, than happened in the first, in which we were surprised to discover a trend toward the recovery of ancient Christian rhythms, practices and creedal unity in the responses of not only *Reconstructionists*, which we somewhat expected to see, but also in a greater recovery of liturgy and forms of the early church among many *Relevants* in the *Acts 29* network. Also, there appears to now be two types of *Relevants*, with some still following a contemporary modern church model that seeks to proclaim the gospel in relevant ways, and others aligned with the elder-led *Soma* communities who are seeking to return to the forms, liturgical rhythms, and practices of the early church; and who, thus, in many ways more greatly overlap with *Reconstructionists*.

In this trend toward the recovery of early Christian rhythms, forms, and practices, we were surprised to also find consistent traces of St. Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* in the ways many *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* approached questions of disagreement or heresy by elaborating on the key roles that the apostles, early church, creeds, universal Body of Christ, and the Spirit all played in the process of discerning truth and settling disagreements over interpretations of Scripture. However, at the same time, many respondents in the *Relevant* stream still did not seem to engage very directly with the idea of 'apostolicity,' instead focusing more on

creeds, history, and tradition, rather than a living conversation with the apostles and church fathers themselves in the Body of Christ.

Subsequently, while one Anabaptist in the *Reconstructionist* stream also seemed not to consider apostolicity, likely due to the similar historical views of fathers and councils shared by traditions that emerged from the Protestant Reformation, we did see a bit more of a *consensual orthodox* sense of 'apostolicity' in the responses of the new and emerging expressions of Anglicanism among the *Reconstructionist* stream, none of whom were 'cradle' Anglicans, but had instead joined new movements of Anglicanism found in the *ACNA* and *AMIA* expressions. Among these respondents, more did mention the apostles, fathers, or bishops as essential elements in settling debates and discerning truth together.

We were also surprised that, despite the importance placed on orthodoxy and creeds, as well as on ecumenism, in the first two streams, that more *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* were not more hopeful that consensus could be reached on core issues. Some did believe it was possible and, in alignment with Vincent, cited the core beliefs outlined in the creeds as needing to be consensually held, but it was also clear some additionally believed significant divides existed, providing obstacles to consensus in Christianity as a whole. Still, it was also interesting to question whether they were aware of the similar views on what constituted the 'center' of Christianity, or what provided boundaries, among many others who were seeking reformation or recovery of a *consensual orthodoxy* in similar ways; and if they were aware, might they have shown more hope for unity and consensus?

It was also evident that although respondents did not use the precise language Vincent used to describe the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, still, amidst many respondents in the first two streams, the same basic concept was evidenced among the mosaic of answers. Thus, although precise Vincentian language was missing, since the same core Vincentian ideas did appear present in many responses, it may support Vincent's idea that it is the Holy Spirit who brings persons to consensus and forms his body in worshiping and doctrinal unity, even if the ancient orthodox methods of consensual discerning are not known. This idea, that the Spirit is working to form

consensus and unity in his body over time, resulting in eventual renewals of unity in the core apostolic faith, is an idea that Thomas Oden also picked up on in his rediscovery of Vincent and that served his own work toward orthodox ecumenism, as noted in Chapter Three. Oden further saw Vincent's work as a helpful guide for a movement of young Christians whom Oden called 'young fogeys,' and whom he believed were being Spirit-led to seek out ancient and consensual ways of knowing.<sup>83</sup> He believed such a renewal was happening in this era and we believe he would have been encouraged by a movement toward recovery of ancient rhythms, practices, and creedal unity among respondents in this study.

In also considering the responses of the *Revisionist* stream, we saw that for their part, sample respondents appeared to have diverged both from the other streams and sometimes from each other over key questions about epistemology, Scripture, hermeneutics, doctrine, apostolicity, and orthodoxy, as well as the self-identified beliefs of *Open* network leaders that openness to different views on sexuality was a core distinctive of a truly Christian orthopraxy. We also saw commonality among some respondents in the *Revisionist* stream in an often-shared focus on personal contexts and perspectives, and on a praxis that modeled what they thought to be the true 'way of Jesus,' as they interpreted his ethos. Out of centeredness in both the 'way of Jesus' and its intersection with current 'contexts,' such respondents then seemed to surmise that they could elevate the perspectives of their contexts to a mutually critical position with Scripture, the apostles, or creeds. Thus, in this movement, *Revisionists*, despite often showing a diversity of perspectives, appear to have often commonly moved toward a contextual or pluralistic post-Evangelical or post-Christian ethos. This posture also suggested synergy with *Revisionist* leaders such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, and Peter Rollins, as evidenced in their work noted in this study, while it contrasted most *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* respondents who saw innovation or updating of theology or doctrine as only being permissible if it did not alter the original meaning of Scripture, as seen in the core creedal claims of the historic Christian faith.

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<sup>83</sup>See: Oden 1995a, 13-14.

Still, for many persons in the *Revisionist* stream who believed in the evolution of doctrine, what should one then be accountable to if they wish to know they are particularly following the Christ of the original apostolic witnesses? One respondent answered that, since persons are bound in the relativism of contexts and cultures, one can truly only be faithful to their own perspective in relationship with God. However, for most in this stream it seemed that, beyond one's perspectives or contexts, the local community could also help an individual know if they were walking in the true 'way of Jesus,' with the evidence of knowing Christ, and truth, being a praxis of love, service, and social justice in current materialist contexts.

Summarily, considering the work and views of Vincent, seen in his answers in Chapter Three, he would likely be concerned that many *Revisionists* appeared willing to place their own interpretations, experiences, research, or current contexts either *over* or in a place of *equal authority* with Scripture as interpreted within *consensual orthodoxy*. He would also likely be alarmed that several thought doctrine and hermeneutics could evolve in ways that did not simply make plain what was said from the first but changed the apostolic meanings of Scripture as received through the consensus. In this, he would likely especially be concerned by any persons who suggest, as Nestorius did, that current interpretations of Scripture might be correct while all those who came before them were wrong. Vincent would also likely see the movement of many *Revisionists* away from the greater unity in the body and into smaller networks or 'new kinds of Christianity,' especially those centered around the affirmation of identities or ways of life not evidenced as having been supported within orthodox Christian hermeneutics or traditions, as warning signs of descent into heresy or error, just as he would also be concerned about any similar movement among *Relevants* or *Reconstructionists*; especially one who defined the Reformed expression alone as the universal Body of Christ. Based upon Vincent's work, he would also likely suggest that if one is not in alignment, surrender, and fellowship with the larger consensus of orthodoxy that provides continuity from the Apostles to the present, then there would be no basis to claim one is following the same Christ as testified to by the Apostles.

At the same time, Vincent would plausibly find encouragement in many of the answers of the *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* in this study and see their movement to recover beliefs, worship and practices rooted in the early church as their having been led by the Spirit to surrender to those who have come before them and have testified to the truth since the beginning of the church.<sup>84</sup> He would also, however, likely charge that they need to more readily practice submitting all hermeneutics and teachings to the larger chorus of the whole church in ‘all places and at all times,’ including to the voices of the Fathers, and not only issues in dispute. Furthermore, he would also likely believe it vital for many to be instructed further in both the ‘test of orthodoxy’ and the writings of the Fathers so as to practice humility and consensus and ensure that they do not depart from the whole. Also, in his concern for unity, Vincent would probably suggest, as Oden has, that a person’s *life* and *worship* must be brought into unity with the Body of Christ and not only their doctrine.<sup>85</sup> Then too, he would also likely see hope in the possibility that the Spirit is drawing persons into consensual unity after so many centuries, as hinted at in the movements of recovery in our questionnaires. We also think it certain he would suggest the method of *consensual orthodoxy* for Christians in emerging contexts who desire both flexible updating-and-inculturation, and not only a translation of past cultures into the present, while also seeking faithfulness to apostolicity and orthodoxy.

#### 4.6 Summary

In this chapter we brought St. Vincent of Lérins’ questions and answers around *consensual orthodoxy* into conversation with sample respondents in emerging expressions who have tried to reform the church, its forms, language, practices, and sometimes even its doctrines to inculturate the gospel in postmodern contexts. We did so to discover, amidst reformation, inculturation, contextualization, or innovation, how they know they are following the true Christ of the apostolic witnesses, especially when persons disagree about interpretations of Scripture and doctrine. Further, we wished to see in what directions they were moving since the fracturing of

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<sup>84</sup> Lérins, 110-112.

<sup>85</sup>Oden 2002, 165.

the EC and how they were now considering questions about the core beliefs and mission of the church.

We saw that while many *Relevants* appeared to be primarily still focused on bringing an Evangelical proclamation of the gospel into current postmodern contexts, they were also attempting to do so in more intentionally incarnational and missional ways that often sought rootedness in ancient rhythms and practices. We additionally saw that many *Reconstructionists* had also maintained their distinct focus on retrieving rhythms and practices of the early church, but that many have also now shifted toward retrieving more ancient forms of polity as well as seen in the new expressions of Anglicanism that former EC leaders and pastors have joined. Further, it was also interesting that both *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* evidenced concern for recovery of liturgical rhythms, practices, and the core creedal beliefs of the ancient church in recovery of a more historically rooted Christian ‘life together’ that in many ways shared synergy with the concept of *consensual orthodoxy* suggested by Vincent and supported by Thomas Oden and Thomas Guarino. Likewise, many respondents in the first two streams also shared hope for unity in the body. We believe this convergence of concern for ancient practices and creedal beliefs, and concern for unity, may provide hope for continual movement toward unified life, worship, and *consensual orthodoxy* in the larger Body of Christ along with flexible and humble listening amidst current postmodern contexts.

At the same time, we also saw that many respondents in the *Revisionist* stream seemed to have increasingly moved toward a contextual or pluralistic post-Evangelical or even post-Christian ethos, in alignment with voices such as Brian McLaren and Tony Jones, in which they believe interpretations and doctrine can evolve in sync with what they see as their evolution and that of the current age. Such a movement by the *Revisionist* stream also likely means that they have diverged from both the other two EC streams and from consensual unity in the body.

Moving forward, in our next chapter we have consequentially examined how, amidst their theological and doctrinal revision, some *Revisionist* theologians, such as Peter Rollins, have not only turned to deconstructionist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to

defend their movement away from the orthodox consensus as being supported philosophically, but have also turned to Dietrich Bonhoeffer to claim support for their movement as being truly Christian. In Bonhoeffer's questions about who God is 'for us' today and in his desire for a 'religionless Christianity,' such *Revisionists* believe they have found justification for their deconstruction of orthodoxy. Thus, in Chapter Five, I have examined and critiqued Rollins' movement, which attempts to justify deconstructions of orthodoxy as authentically Christian, via contrasting the views and approaches to Scripture, orthodoxy, creeds, doctrines, and accountability, as evidenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in order to explore whether Bonhoeffer has indeed enabled *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodox interpretations, creeds, doctrines, and practices or whether he instead provides nuances Rollins has missed. Within the same conversation, I have then also begun to consider whether Bonhoeffer potentially shares more synergy with Vincent's concept of a *consensual orthodoxy* centered in the living Body of Christ, in ways that might also, in dialogue, ground Vincent's concept of the 'body' and further provide an even more relationally grounded view of accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy for the work of emerging expressions today.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CRITIQUE OF PETER ROLLINS' MISUSE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER TO SUPPORT DECONSTRUCTIONS OF ORTHODOXY

#### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three of this study, we explored the ways in which St. Vincent of Lérins presented the method of *consensual orthodoxy*, in *The Commonitory* (1886) 2012), as the shared belief and testimony of a 'living chorus' in which Christian doctrine could develop over time, and in which the voices of diverse contexts could also be heard, yet while also maintaining that such growth must always be in congruence-and-continuity with the meaning of Scripture and doctrine as understood by the consensus of all Christians across all cultures, places, and times; as faithfully transmitted by the first apostolic witnesses through that same consensus of Christians found within the living Body of Christ. In Chapter Four, we then also explored the direct responses to an ethnographic questionnaire of persons who were currently leading or serving within Emerging Church (EC) expressions today, or in their postcedents. In reflecting upon those responses, we noted elements of Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* being evidenced today within the movements of both the *Relative* and *Reconstructionist* streams of the EC. Despite having moved in different directions in terms of their polity,<sup>1</sup> we noted synergy between these first two EC streams, and also with Vincent, in their concern *for*, adherence *to*, or unity *within* the core creedal beliefs of the apostolic church. Then too, we also saw synergy in the shared movements of many to recover both the liturgical worshiping life and social concern of the early church as well, through a unified life of worship and praxis which, as Vincent also believed, many saw as inseparable from the gospel and core creedal beliefs of the Christian faith. Still, in

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<sup>1</sup>As seen in Chapter Four, there appears to now be two types of *Relevants*. While some still follow a traditional church model that seeks to inculcate the gospel in relevant ways, there is also the model of the *Soma* communities who are seeking to return to liturgical rhythms and practices of the early church. Also, we saw that there were three types of *Reconstructionists* in our survey: house church/missional communities, Anabaptists, and those returning to an episcopal convergentist expression as seen in the Anglican Church in N. America (ACNA). Also, at least two types of *Revisionists* were present: 1) those who hold to the importance of Scripture and creeds but are willing to revise their meaning in service to current contexts or experiences and 2) those who have become admittedly post-Christian/pluralistic.

that same ethnographic chapter we also noted that many respondents in the third EC stream, *Revisionists*, persons sampled there appeared to be less concerned with maintaining congruence-and-continuity with Christian tradition or the consensual beliefs and practices of 'all Christians, in all places, and at all times.' Instead, we saw many persons arguing, in ways that were also consistent with the ideas of Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, and other leading voices of the *Revisionist* stream, as seen in the last three chapters, that an 'authentic Christianity' incarnationally rooted in Christ could justify revisions to the original consensual meanings of Scripture, doctrine, and creeds, in service to the evolving pluralistic identities, needs and values of postmodern persons and contexts. While orthodoxy was either not considered by respondents in this third EC stream, or was seen as being open to revision, they instead appeared to consider evidencing an orthopraxy that they believed was rooted in relationship with Christ, and that focused on values such as love, social justice, and equality, as understood by pluralistic, postmodern contexts, as the key evidence of following the true way of Jesus, or of being accountable to Christ. In such a movement, it thus appears the *Revisionist* stream of the EC has not only diverged further from the other streams of the EC than it had in the last decade, as noted in Chapter Two, but has also now moved further from consensual understandings of Christian orthodoxy as well.

Subsequently, since, in Chapter Four, we saw evidence of current respondents in the more theologically progressive *Revisionist* stream of the EC having continued to diverge from both the *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* streams of the EC in this present decade, and also from *consensual orthodoxy*, in this chapter, therefore, in alignment with our objectives of providing a snapshot of issues that divided the EC, their considerations of apostolicity and orthodoxy, and their theological approaches or justifications for revisions of orthodoxy, we have now sought to identify an additional, current *Revisionist* theological voice who may have both helped to influence more recent *Revisionists'* evolving views on apostolicity, orthodoxy, and accountability, and whose writing also helped us to better understand some of the language, theology, and philosophy undergirding the continuing development of this steam. Thus, while we previously

observed some other *Revisionist* justifications for revisions of orthodoxy in earlier chapters, especially as seen in the work of Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Andrew Perriman, we will now specifically consider the current *Revisionist* theological movement of ‘Radical Theology,’<sup>2</sup> in order to understand the further evolution of attempts to provide a robust philosophical-and-theological justification for *Revisionist* movements to set aside orthodoxy in favor of an orthopraxy grounded in materialist acts of what they ideate as love and social justice.

The approach of ‘Radical Theology’ is primarily ideated by *Revisionist* Irish philosopher and theologian Peter Rollins. Rollins has served as a catalyst for the current thinking and language of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, especially in his noted influence on fellow *Revisionist* voices such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Ian Mobsby, and Richard Beck as well as upon the language and paradigms of current *Revisionist* communities such as the *Convergence/Open* network, the successor to the *Emergent-Village*; most significantly, via Rollins' argument that Christian orthodoxy is ideologically bound in human systems and that setting aside the false objective claims of such systems, through the death of both false ideas about God as well as a further death of God's felt presence, will free persons to live the resurrection in human community where God can only be experienced subjectively.<sup>3</sup> Thus again, in exploring the core concepts of Rollins' theological movement, we hope to better understand the more robust philosophical and theological justifications for *Revisionist* movements and the meaning of some of the language they have developed in the last decade, as seen even in the statements of respondents in our last chapter who were part of the *Open/Convergence* network.

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<sup>2</sup>See: Moody 2016, 253-265.

<sup>3</sup>See: Peter Rollins, “The Objective, Subjective and Evental Dimensions of Theology” (Aug 3, 2016), accessed Feb. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6T17Eq2gLU>. Rollins even rejects theologies he is sympathetic with, such as Open Theism and Process Theology, since they make objective claims. However, he says, “If I had to be an orthodox theologian, I would probably be a process theologian.” Also see: Peter Rollins, “Retroactive Justification” (Mar. 17, 2011), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://vimeo.com/21173208>; Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards A New Foundation Of Dialectical Materialism* (Verson, 2014). Both sources reveal that Rollins’ usage of ‘objective,’ ‘subjective,’ and ‘evental dimensions,’ meaning the real, symbolic, and imaginary, are likely by way of Žižek’s reading of Jacques Lacan.

We will additionally explore Rollins' claim that much of his movement to deconstruct orthodox Christianity is particularly supported by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which claim might appear to give *Revisionist* deconstructions a cover of theological legitimacy due to the popular regard in which Bonhoeffer is held by many Christians. While we will see that Bonhoeffer's own challenges to orthodoxy and his related questions about the canon of Scripture and claims of the creeds do seem to provide some inspiration for Rollins' movement, we will conversely argue that Rollins has also largely misappropriated Bonhoeffer based upon a selective reading that does not fully consider his Christology, Soteriology, or Ecclesiology. Consequentially, we will also subsequently engage with researcher K.S. Moody's argument that Rollins' movement, which has significantly impacted current *Revisionist* thought, is more consistent with the work of Slovenian Marxist-Hegelian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Thus, in briefly exploring Žižek's potential influence, through Rollins, upon the more radical divergence of *Emerging-Revisionists* from the other streams of the EC, and from orthodoxy, we will also then consider how Bonhoeffer not only does not support Rollins' Marxist-Hegelian 'a/theism,' but instead critiques such a movement in ways that may actually show greater synergy with St. Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy*. Further, Bonhoeffer may do so in ways that might also allow us, in our last chapter of this study, to also conceptualize and evaluate the applicability of the *consensual orthodox* method for emerging expressions who wish to inculturate the gospel in ways that are both contextually flexible and also faithful to apostolicity and orthodoxy.

## **5.2 Rollins' Influence on the Revisionist Stream of the EC**

Peter Rollins is an Irish philosopher and theologian who has served as a vital voice for the theological development of the *Emergent-Revisionist* stream of the Emerging Church (EC) movement, especially in its development since the decline of the larger EC movement in the previous decade, along with the collapse of the *Emergent-Village* organization<sup>4</sup> which served as the center of the *Emergent/Revisionist* stream of the EC, as described in Chapter Two. Rollins'

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<sup>4</sup>See: Brandon O'Brien, "Emergent Village Fires Leaders," *Christianity Today* (Jan. 6, 2013), accessed Aug. 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/january/6.13.html>.

own first significant impact upon EC conversations came, via his outlining of the theological foundations of the *Revisionist* stream of the Emerging Church in *How (Not) to Speak of God: Philosophical & Theological Underpinnings of the Emerging Church Movement*. (2006) In reference to the significance of Rollins' work for the evolution of the more progressive *Revisionist* stream of the EC, Brian McLaren, in the introduction to that same book, claimed Rollins “Represents what is to me one of the first and most hopeful expressions to date of Christian theology being done in a postmodern context,” as McLaren declared that Rollins challenged *Emergents/Revisionists* to:

Embrace opposite ends of the common modern polarities, and...shows the creative and constructive power of what is commonly called *deconstruction*...I share Peter’s enthusiasm for what he calls ‘the emergent conversation.’ Here he makes one of the most important contributions to date to that conversation. (McLaren 2006d, Introduction)

Additionally, *Revisionist* theologian and former co-leader of the *Emergent-Village* with McLaren, Tony Jones, gushed that Rollins' work, in *How (Not) to Speak of God*, was a groundbreaking “negative theology for the emerging conversation that is poignant, beautiful, and profound,” with Jones also claiming it was so essential for understanding the *Emergent* or *Revisionist* stream of the EC that he would “no longer respond to any critics of Emergent who have not read *How (Not) to Speak of God*.” (T. Jones 2006) Then too, fellow emergent theologian Ian Mobsby praised Rollins' influence on the emerging belief that one must move past God as an 'object' of knowledge to instead experience God as “radically subjective.” (Mobsby 2007, 28-30) In this view, Rollins and Mobsby were seemingly joined by key voices in the other more orthodox streams of the EC movement as well, such as *Reconstructionist* Robert Webber who argued, “The concept of God as an object, an essence who, so to speak, ‘sits out there’ is...not a biblical understanding of God...God is the God who acts...creates...becomes incarnate in Jesus, dies for us, is resurrected for us...intercedes for us.” (Webber 2005) However, as we have discussed in this chapter, for Rollins, and those influenced by his theological agenda, viewing all knowledge and experience of God as subjective meant to not only encounter God relationally, and place experience of God before knowledge about God, but to further claim that nothing objective

could be known of God, even creedally, but that God could instead only be encountered in a dynamic, pluralistic life in the secular world, beyond all ideology, in which an orthopraxy of love for fellow humans, regardless of one's beliefs, was what saved.<sup>5</sup> For instance, emergent-progressive philosopher Richard Beck claimed Rollins' work "shaped the emerging church conversation and still articulates what many progressive Christians believe," especially in Rollins' pragmatic understanding of truth as a "soteriological event" in which "those who exhibit a genuine love *know* God, regardless of their religious system," and, thus, as Beck agreed, "Loving (orthopraxy) saves us. Belief (orthodoxy) doesn't." (Beck 2014) As seen in Beck's evaluation, perhaps Rollins' greatest influence on the *Revisionist* stream was in his having provided a theological foundation for their often shared belief that what was more important than orthodox belief, such as in the physical resurrection of Christ, was to instead engage in an orthopraxy that lived a 'life of resurrection,' through materialist acts between humans, or, as Rollins said, "to believe in the Crucifixion and Resurrection means nothing less than enacting them." (Rollins 2011b, 180)

Therefore, especially in light of McLaren and Jones' praise for Rollins' work here as having successfully framed their movement's theological foundations, as the most notable leaders of the *Revisionist* or *emergent* stream of the EC, subsequently, by examining the key distinctives of Rollins' evolving theological agenda, we could also begin to understand important influences on the further evolution of the *Revisionist* stream as a whole, in this present decade. Such an examination has also allowed us to identify crucial theological paradigms that helped us understand their continued divergence from the rest of the EC and from consensual interpretations of Scriptures, creeds, and orthodoxy; while they also maintained that they were pursuing an 'authentic Christianity' or an even more authentic 'orthodoxy' in the 'way of Jesus.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Rollins also said, "the truth of Christianity is life, not description." Therefore, he also praised 'heretical orthodoxy' in which "someone who does not understand God yet who changes the world in love." Becky Garrison, *Rising From the Ashes* (Seabury Books, 2007), 48-49.

<sup>6</sup>See: McLaren 2006a, 28. Here, McLaren claimed he was following a more 'authentic orthodoxy' than the rigid 'orthodoxy-as-tradition' of most Evangelicals in that his 'generous orthodoxy' was based in ideation of 'sola scriptura' wherein "the Holy Spirit may use Scripture to tweak our creedal understandings." He applied his method primarily to issues of sexuality in alignment with current

In further considering Rollins' influence, K.S. Moody, a researcher in Philosophy at Lancaster University, UK, who has focused her studies on the continued movements of what she has termed the more 'radical' stream of the EC, also thought that the more recent turn of what we have referred to in this study as the *Revisionist* stream of the EC has largely been catalysed by Peter Rollins of late, along with contributions from Kester Brewin, the founder of *Vaux*, London.<sup>7</sup> (Moody 2014) Moody was joined in her assessment of Rollins' impact on the more 'radical' or *Revisionist* stream of the EC by sociologists Gladys Ganiel, Queens University, Belfast, and Gerardo Marti, Davidson College, who also saw the recent movements of *Revisionists* as primarily centering around practices of deconstruction, with Rollins serving as a crucial catalyst for the movement. (Ganiel and Marti 2014, 26-45) Moody also claimed that Rollins and Brewin, in their influence on the evolution of the *Revisionist* stream, were themselves a part of 'Radical Theology,' which was in turn influenced by 'Death of God Theology' and 'a/theism'<sup>8</sup> in a convergence of deconstruction and materialism as seen in the work of a/theistic deconstructionists John D. Caputo and Slavoj Žižek, whom Rollins often credited in *Insurrection*. (Rollins 2011b, 38, 44, 46, 86) Moody further argued that Caputo and Žižek were both influenced by Jacques Derrida<sup>9</sup> and who read the New Testament epistles of Paul through an 'a/theistic' lens.<sup>10</sup> (Moody

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postmodern values." Also see Chapter Four of this study in which respondents in our samples from the *Revisionist* stream also often referred to the idea that they were following the 'true way of Jesus' that allowed them to revise Scripture, creeds, or doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> Brewin was also a key voice in the *Emergent-Village*, which, as with *Vox*, is now gone but has given birth to *Revisionist* postcedents such as Rollins and Brewin's 'radical theology' and McLaren's *Convergence/Open* network. Also see: Kester Brewin, *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That Is Always Organic/Networked/Decentralized/Bottom-Up/Communal/Flexible/Always Evolving* (*emersion: Emergent Village resources for communities of faith*) (Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>See: Moody 2016, 253-265.

<sup>9</sup>See: Colby Dickinson, "Slavoj Žižek on Jacques Derrida, or On Derrida's Search for a Middle Ground Between Marx and Benjamin, and His Finding Žižek Instead," *Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works* (Loyola University Chicago, 2015). Dickinson examined Žižek's reading of Derrida. Also see: McLaren 2013. McLaren noted Derrida's influence on his deconstructions.

<sup>10</sup>For a summary of Caputo's readings of Derrida and understanding of a/theism as a deconstructionist form of atheism that still allows faith, see: Gary Gutting, "Deconstructing God," *The New York Times* (March 9, 2014), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/deconstructing-god/>. Caputo explained he was following Derrida who adhered to a type of deconstructionist atheism which Caputo defined as a move beyond the equally 'creedal beliefs' of theism, agnosticism, and atheism, as atheism might be used by the 'new atheists' such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Gutting countered: "After all the deconstructive talk, the law of noncontradiction still holds: Derrida is either an atheist or he isn't." Caputo rebutted: "Derrida's atheism," and his own, "is not trying to knock down one position ("theism") with the opposing position ("atheism"). He does not participate in these wars."

2014) Moody also credited Rollins as the inspiration for the rising influence of a/theism within the 'radical' or *Revisionist* stream of the EC. (Ibid)

Rollins has himself explained a/theism as an experiential loss of God that moves beyond both theism and atheism, such as the atheism of Richard Dawkins which Rollins' argued does not go far enough in its abandonment of God but is instead only a "comfortable theoretical rejection of the divine." (Rollins 2011b, 20-21) Conversely, Rollins argued that his movement of a/theism instead embraced a deeply felt loss of God by Christ on the cross which he claimed has "more in common with the Atheism we see expressed in Friedrich Nietzsche, whose blood-curdling proclamation of God's death...was deeply felt." (Ibid) Rollins also professed that such a 'felt loss of God' as Nietzsche expressed was also that which Christ experienced on the cross where Rollins said he lost everything and "God became an Atheist," so that "what we witness here is a form of atheism: not intellectual...Christ directly addresses God as he dies...but a felt loss of God." (Ibid, 20) Rollins further summarized his movement as aiming then to "blur the lines between theism and atheism" by seeking to reject the 'Good News' of Christianity which he argued was "actually very bad news," in what he believed were its false promises of safety, security, and certainty about life, salvation, and God. (Rollins 2017) Instead, Rollins asserted persons should embrace a mature doubt that 'unravels' all constructs, religion, and knowing to 'revel' in the 'horror' of uncertainty and the 'unraveling' of everything they were certain of, even God. (Ibid) Consequentially, Rollins declared that his movement of a/theistic 'Radical Theology' showed persons how to burn down systems of belief to, after an experiential 'death of God,' a term Rollins embraced,<sup>11</sup> and the deconstruction of all orthodox Christian beliefs, practices, and all 'knowing,' to instead create spaces for simply 'being' in the world. (Rollins 2011b, 36)<sup>12</sup>

Moody, in her examination of Rollins' impact on the *Revisionist* stream, additionally asserted that more 'mainstream' iterations of the EC movement in North America, whom we have

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<sup>11</sup>See: Peter Rollins, *God is Dead* (May 2017), accessed Jan. 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_O\\_SFVMvGqw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_O_SFVMvGqw).

<sup>12</sup>See: Caputo 2007, 130. Caputo shared Rollins' approach in wanting to gather people from theism, atheism, and a plurality of perspectives who would enter 'spaces for being,' to simply 'experience' truth over false claims of knowing truth.

identified as typically being those in the *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* streams, would "not likely understand the positions of Rollins...on, crucifixion or resurrection," in which Rollins thought Christ had truly lost God on the cross<sup>13</sup> and that the resurrection must only be embodied rather than believed as an event,<sup>14</sup> nor would other EC streams, Moody argued, "state their disbelief in a personal God or divine salvation as Brewin does." (Moody 2014) However, for Rollins' part, in attempting to argue that his movement of *a/theistic* deconstruction is authentically Christian, though not orthodoxy, Rollins also claims theological support from Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>15</sup> whose search for what it means to know or 'have' Christ' today, in actuality and not only in statements of belief, and also in his call for the church to become the church 'for others' (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 487), may appear at first to have some resonance for EC movements of emergence. However, did Bonhoeffer truly support Rollins' agenda for an a/theistic orthopraxy that stands against historic orthodoxy?

### 5.3 Rollins' Revisionist use of Bonhoeffer

In Rollins' crediting Bonhoeffer as having inspired his theological movement, (Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv) he appeared to have possibly answered theologian Ray S. Anderson's call to the EC movement, in *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (2006, 43-46), to turn to Bonhoeffer in support of the EC's work to emerge beyond an ideological Christendom and instead live an incarnational faith in a postmodern world.<sup>16</sup> In his book on emerging theology, Anderson specifically asked the EC movement to look to Bonhoeffer's practices of placing the

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<sup>13</sup>See: Rollins 2011b, 20-21.

<sup>14</sup>See: Peter Rollins, "I Deny the Resurrection," Poets, Prophets & Preacher's Conference (2009), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://vimeo.com/19258866>. In keeping with Žižek, and Rob Bell's, postmodern use of videos to communicate with a popular audience, Rollins often uses blogs, live events, and videos to reach his audience. Here, in his video on the resurrection, he attempted a paradoxical answer on the resurrection that, in alignment with his Marxist-Hegelian attacks on ideology, focused on a praxis of love and social justice that affirms the resurrection of Christ being more important than ideological belief, saying, "Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ...I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor" and "lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system."

<sup>15</sup>See: Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv.

<sup>16</sup>Also see: Ray S. Anderson, "Ten Theses on Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Martyr," *Faith and Theology* (June 29, 2007), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://www.faith-theology.com/2007/06/ten-theses-on-dietrich-bonhoeffer.html>. Anderson claimed Bonhoeffer believed "Jesus Christ abolished the distinction between religion and the world." We explored Bonhoeffer's meaning in this chapter.

'way of Christ' before creedal beliefs, suggesting that Bonhoeffer claimed, "The who question precedes the how and what questions when it comes to Christology" and, thus, "Emerging Churches should continue to cite the creed, but their life depends upon a personal knowledge of Christ, not just having an orthodox Christology...the creeds confess *that* one believes and *what* one believes." (Ibid)<sup>17</sup> Even more, Anderson asserted that Bonhoeffer's belief that "Christ exists as community"<sup>18</sup> was "more of an emergent church theology than a Christological formula!" (Ibid) Consequentially, Brian McLaren, who wrote the forward to Anderson's book, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Anderson 2006), referenced Bonhoeffer in a *Revisionist* movement to rebuke 'Christendom,' by which McLaren meant Christianity as a western structure within which he believed many conservative, fundamentalist, or Evangelical Christians had been too closely tied to an "American empire and domination," just as he thought Roman Christians were co-opted by Constantine in opposition to the original message of Christ. (McLaren 2006e) Thus, McLaren attempted to use Bonhoeffer's sermon, on *2 Corinthians 12:9*, where Bonhoeffer said, "'Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak,'" to imply that Bonhoeffer's words here suggested Christians should support liberation theology, as McLaren believed it had been ideated in Latin American contexts, as a more purely Christian alternative to the false ideological system of 'Christendom,' that he believed most conservative, orthodox, and Evangelical Christians to be captive to.<sup>19</sup> (Ibid) Still, when questioned about how Bonhoeffer's more nuanced, paradoxical, and

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<sup>17</sup>See Richard Beck, "Progressive Christianity Option for Pragmatism over Postmodernism," *Experimental Theology* (May 22, 2014), accessed Feb. 2018, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com/2014/05/progressive-christianity-opting-for.html>. Beck attempted to qualify that 'orthodoxy' was equally important to 'orthopraxy' for Rollins as well, but Rollins likely meant "believing in Jesus (orthodoxy) is to live like Jesus (orthopraxy)." However, as seen in *Insurrection*, and also in this chapter, Rollins' a/theism attempted to deconstruct consensual understandings of orthodoxy and even one's ability to know that God is present, redefining orthodoxy as only that which is lived and ideating an orthopraxy that is materialist, pluralistic, and that stands against orthodox belief. Also See: Rollins 2011b, 20-21, 36.

<sup>18</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998). Also cited in Anderson 2006, 45-46.

<sup>19</sup>McLaren does not define how he is precisely ideating 'liberation theology' nor provide references to Bonhoeffer's work to show in what ways Bonhoeffer explicitly supported his definitions. It is interesting that he also appeared to wish to pit liberation theology against orthodoxy, which dichotomy, our respondent, Teresa, disagreed with, as seen in Chapter Four, in which she believed traditional liberation theology was faithfully orthodox. See also: Julio de Santa Ana, "The Influence of Bonhoeffer on the Theology of Liberation," *The Ecumenical Review* Volume 28, Issue 2 (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, April

potentially radical theological statements, such as about a 'religionless Christianity' in a 'world come of age,'<sup>20</sup> might be understood or put into practice by the EC, McLaren deferred to Peter Rollins as the theologian in the *Revisionist* stream who was 'especially thoughtful' about Bonhoeffer's theology. (McLaren 2009b) It was also Rollins, amidst the *Revisionist* stream, who most intentionally engaged with Bonhoeffer, perhaps in response to Anderson's call.

In examining Rollins' a/theistic agenda for the *Revisionists*, as briefly noted above, we can see that in, *Insurrection*, where Rollins lays out his vision for an emergent theology for a postmodern age, that while leaning on Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida, Rollins claims to have been primarily inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*<sup>21</sup> (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997), for his own movement to deconstruct Christian orthodoxy, which Rollins believes, along with all Christian religion and belief, is holding persons back from discovering authentic faith-in-being in the current world. (Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv) Rollins claims, for instance, that it is Bonhoeffer who shows persons such as him today how to "overturn the church as it presently stands," in all of its forms, including "orthodox," in that Bonhoeffer shows Christians how to set aside the "impotent God" of religion, belief in whom only provides Christians with a "psychological crutch," to instead embrace a God of "religionless Christianity." (Ibid, xiv) Rollins then announced that the goal of his work, in *Insurrection*, was to complete Bonhoeffer's work and show what Bonhoeffer's vision for a "faith beyond religion might look like." (Ibid) In doing so, Rollins subsequently attempted to apply Bonhoeffer's 'God of the gaps'

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1976). In this essay, liberation theologian, de Santa Ana, argued that no one in liberation theology "could claim...the so-called 'Latin American Theology of Liberation' is highly dependent on the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." He also claimed that while Gustavo Gutierrez did use a quote from Bonhoeffer's book, *Creation and Fall*, to form his own definition for the 'theological nature of freedom,' (Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación (A Theology of Liberation)* (Lima CEP, 1971), 58), there was not much more evidence of Bonhoeffer's influence in that work, nor in the broader work of other Latin American Catholic liberation theologians. However, de Santa Ana does believe Bonhoeffer perhaps influenced Protestant liberation theologians such as Richard Shaull. Also see: Beatriz Melano, "The Influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Lehman and Richard Shaull in Latin America," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 22:1 (2001), 64-84.

<sup>20</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 8, 367. Bonhoeffer, in fact, said: "The church stands not at the point where human powers fail, at the boundaries, but in the center of the village. That's the way it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense, we don't read the New Testament nearly enough in light of the Old. I am thinking a great deal about what this religionless Christianity looks like, what form it takes."

<sup>21</sup>Herein abbreviated as *LPP*.

theology, from *LPP*--in which Bonhoeffer said it was wrong to “use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 310-312)--to suggest that humans simply want someone watching over them and would have invented God even if he didn’t exist, since humans need a “psychological crutch.” (Rollins 2011b, 7) Rollins proceeded to argue that Christians have thus often used this reality, of the need for a 'crutch,' to place psychological pressure on persons to manipulate them into believing in God. (Ibid, 9) They have done so, Rollins argued, via his reading of Bonhoeffer,<sup>22</sup> by trying to make people believe that there was no enjoyment of life apart from Christ or suggesting that people would suffer in hell if they didn’t accept Christ. (Ibid) Rollins proclaimed, however, that such attempts to make persons accept God, through psychological manipulation, ultimately fail when persons mature enough to see the manipulation for what it is: an attempt to falsely prop up the need for God in the world instead of embracing the actuality of the world. (Ibid, 10)

Likewise, Rollins continued appropriating Bonhoeffer’s questions from *LPP* within *Insurrection* by suggesting past Christians thought that they needed God to be a powerful, external force who gave their lives purpose because they didn’t understand how the world worked. (Rollins 2011b, 14-15) Thus, God was merely a God of human creation who made the cosmos work but did not impact persons’ actual lives. Rollins accordingly saw Christianity as a construct of an antiquated ‘human religion’ that once moved people into psychologically manipulative belief or fear, to then falsely present God as the solution to how the world operated, and to humanity’s problems. (Ibid, 16-17) Rollins’ antidote to the false dilemmas and constructs of past Christian thought was to encourage Christians to “unplug from the God of religion,” who can solve human problems, and alternatively enter a mode of ‘unknowing’ where God’s presence, love, and help are viewed as absent. (Ibid, 17) Just as Rollins’ asserted that Christ lost God on the

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<sup>22</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 324-329. Bonhoeffer said that in the modern world 'come of age,' it was “becoming evident that everything gets along without 'God'...as in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground.” In this, Bonhoeffer seemed to have meant that attempting to make modern persons believe that God was needed to answer questions about “laws by which the world lives and deals with itself in science, social and political matters, art, ethics, and religion” was a false movement on the part of religion.

cross and was forsaken, so Rollins also argued current persons must likewise abandon false certainty about God to enter the frightening darkness, unknowing, and forsakenness of the cross. (Ibid, 21) By entering such a mode of psychological and experiential ‘forsakenness’ and ‘doubt,’ Rollins contended persons could at last escape false beliefs about God, the world, sin, and the need for an atonement, as transmitted through orthodoxy, and discover a “breaking apart of the various mythologies we use to construct and make sense of our world.” (Ibid, 23)

Rollins continued to contend, in *Insurrection*, that a “properly Christological reflection should lead us to see the felt experience of God’s absence as the *fundamental way of entering into the presence of God.*” (Ibid, 24) Rollins presumed that, on the cross, Christ not only lost all certainty that there was a God who was ‘out there’ and who “ensures life makes sense” (Ibid, 27) but, further, “Jesus as Christ is cut off from his own essence on the cross” and Christ is also still hanging on the cross in weakness. (Ibid, 28) Christians, he declared, are thus required to undergo the same psychological experiential crucifixion as Christ, which will “involve the same troubling, terrifying process” that Christ went through in ‘losing God.’ (Ibid, 29, 35) One’s participation in the cross both cuts one off from Christianity and its orthodox concepts of God and forces persons to participate in the death of God on a psychological, experiential, and emotional level in terms of both one’s experience of God and certainty about him. (Ibid, 47) Subsequently, at the cross where all “meaning is ripped away,” Rollins reveals that Christians will at last find that there are no answers or meaning provided in exchange for the death of meaning, but only “doubt, unknowing and loss.” (Ibid, 23) Such loss of meaning may not satisfy, but it is the necessary death that allows an individual to see that there is no God “out there,” instead, God is only a “presence that is made manifest in our very midst,” only in the material and secular, not in “turning away from the world but in fully embracing it through the act of love.” (Ibid, 120)

Rollins’ main thesis is, therefore, that, ironically, *first*, persons can know with certainty that Christ lost God on the cross in a way that showed orthodox Christian religion, doctrines, and creeds to have been meaningless and insufficient and that, *second*, in one’s entering into the crucifixion with Christ persons must also must experience the same loss of God’s presence, and

certainty about God that he presumes Christ experienced, in order to then “rupture...the way those beliefs function as a crutch to prevent the individual from actively participating in the difficult challenge of embracing the world” (Ibid, 72) to at last, in the present world, be freed from false systems of belief and then proceed to experience the telos of love in human community where God is found only in the materialist acts or 'being' in that human community. (Ibid, 119-121) In embracing the material present as all that can truly be had, humans can also now create a “space where people are invited to suspend their interpretations of the world” and “dream new dreams, reimagining the kingdom of God in a way that is not constrained by the presently existing system.” (Rollins 2011b, 26) *Third*, consequentially, Rollins suggested a new liturgical structure to bring people into what he termed the “transforming trauma of Christ’s death,” by entering the loss of God. (Ibid, 73) Accordingly, in his *Ikon* ‘collective,’ he shared that they participate in new liturgical practices such as creating a mural that reads, “God if you exist, come among us,” which they proceed to paint black until the word ‘God’ has vanished, thus embracing the loss of a God who does not answer and residing in only-human community that remains in the death of God’s presence. (Ibid) Then too, Rollins also annually invites his *Ikon* collective to practice 'Atheism-for-lent,' saying:

Thankfully there have always been individuals who’ve grasped the profoundly theological dimension of atheism...Tillich...Bonhoeffer...Žižek...Atheism for Lent provides a space for you to delve...into the true theological expanse that is atheism...as a profane practice of theological purification, we will uncover its priestly power of exorcism. An exorcism powerful enough to cast out the religious dogmatism and festering fundamentalism.” (Rollins 2018)

Consequentially, Rollins also critiqued an orthodox focus on eschatological salvation, calling for persons to instead enjoy the pleasures of the present world, living fully in the material without certainty of the transcendent or eternal. (Ibid, 72) He additionally lamented that persons who have stepped away from the Christian religion to embrace questions and doubts about whether God can solve their problems, as Rollins suggested they should if they are mature, unfortunately often turn back to the church and religion as a ‘safety blanket,’ returning to a ‘false myth’ that says that God is out there and everything is going to be all right. (Ibid, 72) Likewise,

citing Bonhoeffer's *LPP* again as his influence in, *Church in the Present Tense*,<sup>23</sup> Rollins argued that, instead of returning to the orthodox Christian religion and its forms and practices, emerging human 'collectives' should instead embrace the 'basic goodness' of humanity and the secular world. To do so, he interpreted Bonhoeffer's call in *LPP* for the church to be the church 'for others'<sup>24</sup> to mean that true faith is found in abandoning Christian religion to embrace the secular world in all of its worldly fullness: "For that is faith." (Rollins 2011b, 36)

In this movement, Rollins was again in synergy with others in the *Revisionist* stream in their deconstruction of orthodox beliefs, including eschatological understandings of sin and atonement, to instead focus solely on present concerns. Brian McLaren, for instance, had also deemed a deconstruction of Christian belief and orthodox readings of Scripture necessary in order to "disassemble that human construction" so that the "true essence can reveal itself," which he thought was primarily a concern for human situations. (McLaren 2013) Subsequently, McLaren has claimed that the true essence of the gospel is not about belief in eschatological salvation in which God and humanity must be reconciled, nor especially about penal substitution, but instead about journeys of self-discovery that lead persons to focus only on the needs of present contexts: "We've got so much of the old narrative so deeply...influencing the way we read the Bible...one of the questions I could raise...is...what is the problem with sin?" (McLaren 2007)<sup>25</sup> Focusing on beliefs about sin and atonement, McLaren argued, "minimizes the concern about injustice between human beings," and an orthodox focus on eschatological sin that was also to blame for "apartheid, colonialism, segregation...carelessness toward the poor, disregard for...homosexuals," and "people with AIDS." (Ibid) Likewise, as we saw in Chapter Two, in their 2005 study of EC leaders, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005, 54), Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger also found that many *Emergents* similarly thought that the original

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<sup>23</sup>See: Rollins 2011a.

<sup>24</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 486.

<sup>25</sup>As noted in Chapter Two, McLaren argued Jesus' warnings of judgment were not about sin, but the destruction of Israel by Rome due to a rejection of Jesus' message about human peace-making, which he argued was also Jesus' concern now. Conversely, Scot McKnight countered that such a reading ignored the context and content of Paul's work. McKnight and Modica 2013.

narrative understanding of the ‘good news’ of the gospel was not the physical death of Jesus for individual sins, but his “new way of life” to be lived materially in the present world. *Revisionist* leader Karen Ward also added that secular postmodern cultural views of Jesus’ teachings should be followed above orthodox Christian views which she felt misrepresented the truer meaning being uncovered by current secular persons. (Ibid, 48) For *Revisionists* then, materialist acts of love and justice amidst current contexts were the 'essence' and telos of the faith and, in a contention Rollins' has given greater theological support, such a praxis of materialist human love and justice could only be carried out after deconstructing orthodox beliefs which were seen as inhibiting authentic orthopraxy.

It was perhaps in this concept, above all, that orthodoxy must be set aside in order to enact true love and justice in the world, where Rollins, McLaren, and *Revisionists* appeared to have most clearly diverged from orthodoxy; and from other EC voices who shared concern for orthopraxy that impacted current situations, but alternatively saw orthopraxy as congruent with orthodoxy as transmitted through the orthodox consensus, in alignment with the ecumenical creeds. We, for instance, saw in our responses in Chapter Four, that many EC *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* were also focused on an orthopraxy that leads to what they ideated as love, social justice, and reconciliation in current contexts, especially among immigrants, refugees, and the poor. However, instead of feeling it necessary to abandon or set-aside orthodox beliefs or eschatological understandings of Christ’s salvific work in order to love the other person in the world, such love and justice was, for many *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* respondents, instead seen as flowing out of the gospel, in congruence with the core creedal teachings about sin, confession, the atonement, and resurrection held within the consentient orthodoxy. In an example of how other EC streams, in contrast with Rollins and McLarens, see orthodox belief and eschatological salvation as inherently linked to an orthopraxy of love in present contexts, we can also turn again to EC *Reconstructionist* theologian Scot McKnight, who was originally supportive

of McLaren's work,<sup>26</sup> but later saw him as simply repeating the liberal deconstructive approaches to Scripture of Marcus Borg in ways that, as Thomas Oden might also agree, were too narrow and actually lacked the “generosity of genuine orthodoxy.”<sup>27</sup> McKnight, who has reminded fellow EC thinkers that the “central creedal statements” of orthodoxy “are at the core of that faith,”<sup>28</sup> also demonstrated the balanced focus on orthopraxy more typically evidenced in the other two EC streams in claiming that, while the resurrection must be believed as the actual physical resurrection of Christ, it also “creates new life here and now for the community of faith as well as in the *there* and *then* for that same community.” (McKnight 2007, 70-71) McKnight claimed the atonement likewise extended into the present and was lived in present community where “Atonement...is praxis,” not “just something done to us and for us, *it is something we participate in—in this world, in the here and now...about Christus Victor...who liberates his people to be God’s people on earth.*” (Ibid, 30-31, 71)

As further discussed below, Bonhoeffer, in congruence with McKnight and with many *Reconstructionist* and some *Relevant* respondents in our study, in fact, provides critiques of Rollins and McLaren’s *Revisionist* movement, including in his stating that confession of individual sin before both Christ and the other Christian was both the primary evidence of having met the incarnate Christ and was required to be able to love and act in the world in meaningful ways, which worthwhile acts could only be done *in* Christ after passing through the humiliating death of one’s self, via confession, and then after being reconciled with Christ. Then too, Bonhoeffer would also, despite critiquing orthodox systems, maintain that the creedal beliefs and rites of Christianity must be followed in ‘obedient thinking’ and faithful submission if one was truly following the Christ of the Apostles. Therefore, in examining Bonhoeffer’s thinking, we will

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<sup>26</sup>See: Scot McKnight, “McLaren Emerging,” *Christianity Today*, (Sept. 26, 2008b), accessed Aug. 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/38.59.html>.

<sup>27</sup>See: McKnight 2011. McKnight said of McLaren's, *A New Kind of Christianity*, “Unfortunately, this book lacks the 'generosity' of genuine orthodoxy and, frankly, I find little space in it for orthodoxy itself...a robust orthodoxy means that orthodoxy itself is the lens through which we see theology. One thing about this book is clear: Orthodoxy is not central...Alas, *A New Kind of Christianity*” is a “rehash of ideas that grew into fruition with Adolf von Harnack and now find iterations in folks like Harvey Cox and Marcus Borg. For me, Brian’s new kind of Christianity is quite old. And the problem is that it’s not old enough.”

<sup>28</sup>McKnight 2006b.

see an example of an approach to orthodoxy that allows room for questioning, debate, and doubts, and yet, unlike *Revisionists* such as Rollins, also provided evidences of incarnational centeredness in Christ that were congruent with those of the consensus of the body of Christ through the centuries, rather than only being current, materialist, or subjective. However, we have first considered Bonhoeffer's critiques of orthodoxy and whether he did provide any support for *Revisionist* movements of deconstruction.

#### **5.4 Bonhoeffer's Possible Support for Revisionists**

At first glance, Bonhoeffer's theology has appeared to provide tangential support for Rollins, at least in an initially shared concern over human attempts to confine God within the boundaries of human religion and doctrines. In his work, *Act and Being*, in which Bonhoeffer presented his clearest public critiques of the institutional church, orthodoxy as a system, and Protestant trans-subjective uses of canonized Scripture and doctrines, Bonhoeffer warned that the potential danger of doctrines and systematics was that "When God is bound within a doctrine...then God is to be found in that doctrine, understandable and subject to classification within the human 'system.'" (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 103-104) Bonhoeffer believed that humans could likewise attempt to bind even a revelation of God, once given, within the boundaries of human doctrine as well, giving themselves control over references to past revelation rather than remaining open to a continuous revelation of God from 'without' that would break apart false constructs. Bonhoeffer claimed: "It follows that wherever revelation is understood only as doctrine one comes short of the Christian idea of revelation, because God is died down by an ontological conception of that kind." (Ibid, 104) Also, crediting the influence of Karl Barth<sup>29</sup> upon his thinking about how a true act of revelation from God could never be fully captured in human language, concepts, or systematic theologies, Bonhoeffer said: "God's being is only act and therefore...the act cannot be grasped in conceptual form or become part of systematic thought." (Ibid, 83-84) Throughout *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer continued to lament

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<sup>29</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 104. Bonhoeffer quotes Barth's *Christian Dogmatics* often, showing Barth's influence upon his thinking at this early point. See: Barth 1927, 295.

that Christians have often misused doctrines and systematics to place themselves over Scripture, and thus over God, rather than humbly encountering the actual, living Word-of-God in-Christ as given. Against such practices, rooted in what he saw as the sinful human will-to-power, Bonhoeffer charged that “The freedom of God’s Word cannot be captured in unequivocal theological statements. It breaks them apart.” (Ibid, 59) Bonhoeffer additionally believed that the Catholic idea of an institutional church, Protestant ideas of orthodoxy, and even the idea of verbal inspiration of Scripture could all be used by humans to attempt to bind God and revelation:

Defining revelation transsubjectively seems to consist in conceiving it as an institution of God. The Catholic church and the notion of Protestant orthodoxy that the Bible is verbally inspired are representative of this approach...God ‘is’ bound immediately and is at the disposal of human beings. (Ibid, 104-105)<sup>30</sup>

He added that Christians had often created an ‘objectification of God’ in both “the Catholic canonization of history-that is, the concept of the church” and also in “the Protestant idea of verbal inspiration,” since both could make God an object that was “there for the finding” by the human being who, placing themselves over God through their control of the institutional church or their own reading of the text, were thus empowered to then make claims about God or truth without actually meeting or surrendering to the living God. (Ibid, 92) The fallacy of all attempts to define truth, through a ‘canonized’ church structure, a system-of-orthodoxy, or even by appeals to canonized ‘Scripture alone,’ he asserted, was that in their naturally sinful state “Human beings take all that exists into the transcendental ‘I’” (Ibid, 105) and, thus, such things may be fashioned into human constructs that do not make room for authentic revelation from God. (Ibid, 106) Likewise, he thought past revelations of God, as recorded in history, also could not be used alone to support statements about God, as an idea of orthodoxy as only tradition/system might do, since “The movement of faith...cannot be pointed to in a here-and-there open for exhibit.” (Ibid, 128)

Hence, based on his above claims, it may seem that Bonhoeffer had indeed directly influenced Rollins in terms of his call for Christians to deconstruct Christian creeds, doctrines,

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<sup>30</sup>See: Warnock 2006a. As noted in Chapter Three, Driscoll’s *Relevant* approach to orthodoxy may have evidenced the approach Bonhoeffer critiqued here as seen in Driscoll’s viewing of orthodox doctrines as unchangeable and universally applicable, while then charging that the statement in the *Apostles’ Creed* that Jesus went into hell was heretical. Driscoll 2008b.

systematics, and readings of Scripture that came between the individual and a mature faith found in doubt, unknowing, and deconstruction, especially when Bonhoeffer's words, above, are compared to Rollins' respective quote, in *Insurrection*, about the need for Christians to engage in the "Breaking apart of the various mythologies we use to construct and make sense of our world" (Rollins 2011b, 23) as well as to Rollins' belief that Christians must embody the resurrection rather than making the event an object of belief. (Rollins 2011c) However, while Bonhoeffer did critique the institutional church, doctrines, orthodoxy-as-a-system, and even the scientific plausibility of some claims of Scripture and the creeds,<sup>31</sup> did Bonhoeffer's work truly support Rollins' a/theistic deconstructionist movement which claimed that Christ was only incarnate in subjective experiences amidst materialist communities and acts, and could also only be met there after deconstructing all Christian beliefs and practices?

### **5.5 Bonhoeffer's Critiques of Rollins' Revisionist Movement**

To this point, Bonhoeffer has appeared to critique only those approaches to church, Scripture, doctrine, and creeds that viewed revelation as 'frozen' or bound up in an institution or system in which persons were enabled to maintain human control over revelation apart from encounter with God's being, which Bonhoeffer believed could not be found in reference to past acts of God as much as *in act* within the present where Christ gives himself to persons in the Body of Christ.<sup>32</sup> However, Bonhoeffer also charged that psychological and religious experiences, and we might add any human deconstruction of religion, knowing, or practices, also could not escape the 'I' of self because the core problem was not the existence of religious constructs, beliefs, or practices in-and-of themselves, but was instead the sinful human nature which seeks to control all things, including both God's revelation and its own deconstruction. Bonhoeffer proclaimed the central problem was that "The I finds itself in every instance under the shelter of this existing thing," which was not only tradition or "the sanctuary of the verbally inspired

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<sup>31</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 185-187. Bonhoeffer appeared to question the scientific plausibility of some of the 'how' claims of Scripture, such as the virgin birth.

<sup>32</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 92, 111.

Bible,” but also even “the factuality of religious experience” in which one believed their experience had authentically placed them in reality before God. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 108)

Therefore, Bonhoeffer would also likely view Rollins' basic movement, in which Rollins's attempted to justify divergence from apostolicity and orthodoxy as being authentically centered in Christ who was found only subjectively in materialist communities and acts in the world, of being in danger of placing the 'I' of self over authentic revelation of God and of creating human constructs or movements in which, based upon reference to post-deconstructive acts, Rollins thought he could now claim to 'have' the incarnate Christ.<sup>33</sup> For instance, in Rollins' claim that one must deconstruct all Christian belief or enter into an experiential 'death of God,' in the ways that he outlines, before one can obtain mature faith in which God then exists as 'act' *as* Rollins' defined it and *in* the 'suspended space' that he suggested, Bonhoeffer would likely have seen such a movement also being in danger of making its psychological and religious experiences sources of 'knowing' about the incarnate Christ<sup>34</sup> which allow the self to remain supreme.

On these points, UK Vineyard pastor, Jason Clark, who was an early leader and author in the EC conversation alongside McLaren, McKnight, and Rollins, etc., and who claimed to shared many of Rollins' goals, would later become concerned over the existentialism, postmodern deconstructionism, and isolation of his fellow more progressive EC members, and would subsequently question whether Rollins had diverged from Bonhoeffer's actual agenda, which included room for the historic faith, by turning all events, even the resurrection, into existential experiences. (Clark 2006b)<sup>35</sup> Then too, progressive Emergent philosopher Richard Beck, who also

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<sup>33</sup>See: Smith 2006, 27, 48. Smith similarly claimed that *Emergent/Revisionist* deconstructionists were themselves guilty of imposing universal worldview claims and thus actually not as postmodern as the orthodox Christian faith, which he defined as the “Christian faith as rooted in the Scriptures and attested in the historic creeds and confessions” and which affirms the limits of knowing.

<sup>34</sup>See: Bonhoeffer 1997, 140. Although Bonhoeffer was influenced by Barth early on, he later heavily critiqued Barth as having promoted a ‘positivism of revelation,’ which to Bonhoeffer seemed to mean that he had negated the need for the church, whereas Bonhoeffer believed Christ allowed himself to be ‘had’ in his body, while Barth allowed individual revelation to be a sufficient means of knowing Christ.

<sup>35</sup>Clark asked whether, in *Insurrection*, Rollins' method allowed concepts such as the resurrection to only retain meaning “as descriptions of the existential ‘events’ of Christian experience? I think Pete leads us into an understanding of God, and...Christian faith that Bonhoeffer would not have recognized, as ‘religionless Christianity.’” Jason Clark, “Peter Rollins's Insurrection,” *The Other Journal* (Oct. 31, 2011), accessed Feb. 2018, <https://theotherjournal.com/2011/10/31/book-symposium-peter-rollinss-insurrection-2/>.

supported Rollins' overall work,<sup>36</sup> likewise asked if Rollins' movement in *Insurrection* both misread Bonhoeffer and failed to show why one must undergo a 'death of God,' as Rollins' proscribed, to then have 'love.' (Beck 2012) Beck specifically recognized that Rollins was attempting to follow Bonhoeffer's understanding, in *LPP*, of 'religionless Christianity,' and the 'world come of age,' including Bonhoeffer's claim that "God' is being pushed more and more out of life."<sup>37</sup> (Ibid) However, Beck professed that Rollins had misread Bonhoeffer, claiming that for Bonhoeffer what was being 'pushed out of the world' was not God as the 'other,' but a false, human-religious view of God and that, additionally, Bonhoeffer was actually claiming that where God could be authentically found was on the cross, where false *ideas* of God die, not God's experienced presence.<sup>38</sup> (Beck 2010) Consequentially, Beck then stated that Rollins was also wrongly using Bonhoeffer to suggest that persons had to choose between "God as other-worldly object of love," versus "God as the act of love itself." (Beck 2012) Beck asked, "Why can't God be both? ...Why can't, say, a transcendent worship experience...be the route to loving-kindness? ...Rollins doesn't explicate the necessary connection between undergoing 'utter desolation' and love." (Ibid) Beck's critique of Rollins' use of Bonhoeffer appeared correct in the way in which he argued Rollins was trying to force a non-sequitur in which God could only be had in the way in which Rollins proscribed, via an a/theistic death, and in which Rollins' movement became the only way one could authentically live in orthopraxy.

However, it also appeared that what Beck missed was Bonhoeffer's belief that death *was* necessary before one could love God or the other in the world. For Bonhoeffer though, it was not an experiential 'death of God' that was required, nor only death to false ideas of God, which for Bonhoeffer would still not be enough to be enabled to love, but rather the death of one's 'self-centered' life, via confession of sin to Christ who gave himself *for* us and *to* us to reorient our hearts and only then give us to the other in love.

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<sup>36</sup>See: Beck 2014.

<sup>37</sup>Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 324-329.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 479.

### 5.5.1 Bonhoeffer on Confession of Sin as a key Evidence of Revelation

Where Bonhoeffer primarily created a problem for many *Revisionists* was that he not only declared that revelation, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy should be centered in the incarnate Christ, but that, for Bonhoeffer, the primary evidence of centering in Christ was not found through deconstruction, psychological experience, nor in embracing other humans or the secular world in love or social action first, but instead, in an encounter with the living Christ that required death; death that was evidenced first by *confession of individual sin* and, second, by surrender to the Word and sacraments *as-once-given* by the Apostles, without 'tweaking.'<sup>39</sup> <sup>40</sup> Thus again, while Bonhoeffer shared agreement with Rollins' believe that one must die before they could advance to love, the way that one died to both their self and to false constructs, for Bonhoeffer, was that they must first allow Christ to deconstruct *them*, rather than attempting to deconstruct Christ; by surrendering one's self-centered life to Christ through confessing individual sins to God, and before others.<sup>41</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the act of confession before others in Christ, in the fact that it brought humiliation and death of self, especially showed that one was responding to the Christ of Scripture who himself was humiliated as he bore our sins in weakness, and who also then bids us to come and die with him, surrendering one's "old-self" in its pride and self-justification:

In confessing actual sins the old self dies a painful, humiliating death before the eyes of another Christian...And it is nothing else but our community with Jesus Christ that leads us to the disgraceful dying cross of Jesus Christ that shatters all pride. We cannot find the cross of Jesus if we are afraid of going to the place where Jesus can be found, to the public death of a sinner. (Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 111)

Thus, the death to have died was to one's sin nature. If persons would not surrender to Christ, via confession of sin, they were then still trying to be "as God," who alone has no sin.

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<sup>39</sup>McLaren 2006a, 28. McLaren claimed creeds could be 'tweaked.'

<sup>40</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 110-119; Bonhoeffer (1931) 1997, 129; Bethge 2000, 56; Bonhoeffer, (1931) 2009, 329; Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Centre* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 74.

<sup>41</sup>See: Lawrence 2006. Lawrence argued that many scholars have misunderstood Bonhoeffer's vision of how Christians might exist 'for others' in the larger secular world, wrongly believing he was only speaking about how the church should respond to 'situations of injustice,' because they misunderstood his soteriology. Lawrence suggested that, via Luther, Bonhoeffer thought that the core problem for humanity was the 'heart turned inward on itself,' or the self-centeredness of humanity, and that confession of sin to God, and before other Christians, was the primary way by which humans surrendered self-centeredness.

(Ibid, 112) Yet, in confession persons could truly die to themselves and their false constructs, allowing their inner-most self to be deconstructed by God and to then find new life in Christ:

In confession occurs the breakthrough of the Cross. The root of all sin is pride...I have a right to my self, my hatred and my desires, my life and my death...it is precisely in his wickedness that man wants to be as God. Confession in the presence of a brother...In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother - which means, before God - we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation. The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we share in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life. (Ibid, 111-112)

In his theology of death-of-self with Christ, through confession of sin, Bonhoeffer, therefore, did not allow persons to start with a philosophical, psychological, or experiential deconstruction and to then jump to the construction of new theologies, liturgies, or an embracing of the secular world. Rather, he maintained that one must first pass through death whereby God could reorient their hearts in the self-denying act of confession of sin. Additionally, to those who believed that the required death could simply be a psychological 'unknowing' or death to creeds, doctrines, systems, or modes of knowing, Bonhoeffer stressed that it was only individual sin alone that actually destroyed a person and it was only through repentance of sin and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ that new life could begin. He declared:

The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is...man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this...The Christian brother knows when I come to him: here is a sinner like myself...The psychiatrist views me as if there were no God. The brother views me as I am before the judging and merciful God in the Cross of Jesus Christ. (Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 115)

Therefore, awareness of the damage that sin does, and confession of sin to Christ, and before other believers, was again the key evidence that a person had actually surrendered to the living God. Bonhoeffer also added that, in coming to terms with the deadliness of sin, persons must also give up all attachments to the secular world and cling to Christ in the moment of dying, rather than, as Rollins would have them do, give up attachments to Christ to embrace the world:

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross...meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. (Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 99)

Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, neither the individual nor the human community, in their fallen state, could truly know whether they had been freed from false constructs or knowing. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 92) Yet, after dying to self, via confession of sin, and being resurrected as part of the Body of Christ, only then, together as the Body of Christ, *with* and *in* Christ, could persons authentically claim to have God, to have revelation, and to have been brought into truth and faith. Bonhoeffer asserted, "the Church is the Christ of the present, 'Christ existing as community'...Christ is the corporate person of the Christian communion." (Ibid, 111) Thus, he grounded revelation in a Christian community that had been supernaturally formed into the Body of Christ within the present community of flesh, yet, again, with a primary evidence of that transformation being confession of sin. Additionally, in some synergy with Vincent's concept of doctrine belonging to the living body,<sup>42</sup> for Bonhoeffer everything one says about God, humans, or truth, could only be of any worth if done from within relationship with Christ as members of his body: "Because theology turns revelation into something that exists, it may be practiced only where the living person of Christ is itself present and can destroy this existing thing or acknowledge it." (Ibid, 131) Thus, for Bonhoeffer one could speak theologically, but only from within the Body of Christ where the human 'I' could be surrendered, with the evidences that one had surrendered the 'I' being not only confession of sin, but also surrender to the Scriptures, creeds, and sacred rites of the historic faith in 'obedient thinking' and practice. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 130-132)

Additionally, Bonhoeffer has also provided another critique of Rollins' *Revisionist* stream in that--while Bonhoeffer did state that "The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us...who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually...Before God, and with God, we live without God" (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 479), which may seem to match what Rollins' said about forsakenness and unknowing---for Bonhoeffer Christ had actually been pushed into darkness *by* the world and

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<sup>42</sup>See: Lérins, 8, 72, 86.

Christ himself had also *chosen* to enter into that forsakenness in order to be our savior. (Ibid) Bonhoeffer was not, therefore, asking persons to give up all Christian concepts of God, but to instead see that God had chosen to save humans in a way of humility and weakness that confronted the worldly will-to-power of the human 'I,' and instead flipped it upside down, asking humans to surrender their power, control, and very selves in surrender, not to darkness and unknowing, but to Christ himself who “wins power and space in the world by his weakness.” (Ibid, 188) Humans were asked, then, not to give up Christ, but to fix their eyes even more fully upon Christ who, in his faithful surrender on the cross, on our behalf, could now unite persons with God, bridging the gap of separation between God and humans rather than simply joining humans in their unknowing. Bonhoeffer attested further, in *LPP*, that “God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us.” (Ibid, 479) For Bonhoeffer, therefore, it was in Christ’s very act of dying on the cross amidst the darkness, which Christ had himself chosen to enter out of faithfulness, that he became the savior who could save persons, rather than simply being lost alongside them. In contrast, Rollins’ theology appeared to be in danger of placing the emphasis on a human ‘unknowing’ or ‘unmaking’ that was accomplished too much in human psychology and experience instead of in divine fellowship in the supernaturally transformed Body of Christ. He seemed to also place the human too much at the center of revelation and salvation, through an act of psychological death, rather than the death of confession before Christ, who is the center of revelation and salvation.

Second, the best praxis for humans, in Bonhoeffer’s view, was not to focus on their forsakenness or unknowing, which would allow humans to remain in control of both their own deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of systems and concepts, but to instead look upon Christ in faith. If humans looked to Christ, they would then see that in Christ’s death on the cross the Father had not abandoned Christ, nor humanity, but God was reconciling all things to himself, destroying all separation, and offering salvation. Humans were no longer lost or separated because they were with Christ. Bonhoeffer proclaimed that:

In the body of Jesus Christ God is united with humanity, all of humanity is accepted by God, and the world is reconciled with God. In the body of Jesus Christ God took upon himself the sin of the whole world and bore it. There is no part of the world, be it never so forlorn and never so godless, which is not accepted by God and reconciled with God in Jesus Christ. Whoever looks on the body of Jesus Christ in faith can no longer speak of the world as if it were lost, as if it were separated from Christ. (Bonhoeffer (1949) 2005, 53)

Bonhoeffer repeated this refrain in *LPP*, saying again that, in his dying, Christ did not leave persons to feel abandoned, but instead comforted in the reality that he had now made all things new. The act of dying amidst the darkness was for Christ an act of new creation.

Bonhoeffer asked, “What is the meaning of ‘I make all things new’? It means that nothing is lost; all things are taken up into Christ and preserved, but also transformed... a splendid and deeply comforting thought.” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 65) Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the death of Christ was not the terror Rollins’ proclaimed it as but was instead ‘deeply comforting’ in Christ’s retrieval and transformation of all who were feared lost.

Third, in another differentiation with Rollins--although Rollins would have Christians begin the journey toward ‘mature faith’ by abandoning historic and consensual Christian concepts of God, and undergo a psychological experiential ‘death of God,’ to immediately after focus on embracing the secular world in ‘its goodness’--for Bonhoeffer persons could not be of any worth to their neighbors in the world or even authentically deconstruct false constructs unless they were first deconstructed by Christ who breaks into human existence from without. He declared, “Faith is never directed towards itself but always towards Christ, toward that which comes from the outside.” (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 94) For Bonhoeffer, it was only as persons surrendered themselves to Christ as both the object and the subject of their faith, instead of to an ‘unknowing’ that may only be an experience within one’s self, and are met by Christ, that persons were then *made* able to let go of false constructs and to advance to love their neighbors in the world, not in the flesh or human knowing, but in Christ himself. To try to deconstruct false constructs or embrace the world, as Rollins suggested, without being first transformed by Christ who breaks into one’s sinful existence from without, would be to perpetuate sinful human ‘self-assertion’ by placing the ‘I’ of self over God, revelation, and the other:

Through the person of Christ other human beings, too, are moved out of the world of things to which they, as still something-existing, continue to belong-and into the social sphere of persons. Only through Christ does my neighbor meet me as one who claims me in an absolute way from a position outside my existence... Without Christ, even my neighbor is for me no more than a possibility of self-assertion. (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 127)

For Bonhoeffer then, it was Christ alone who could, in acts or revelation, place persons in reality and faith, and who could make them of any worth to the other in the world. He argued that humans could not ever “place themselves into the existential situation from which they could speak of God, for they are not able to place themselves into the truth” (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 92), and faith also was only ever “a God-given reality.” (Ibid, 126)

Subsequently, again, for Bonhoeffer, the primary evidence of having been placed in a ‘God-given reality,’ was not death to Scripture, religion, doctrines, or constructs, or an orthopraxy of love, but surrender to Christ through death-to-self primarily evidenced by confession of one’s sins. On the other side of that death, Christians who were given new life together in Christ could *then* serve and participate in love, justice, and reconciliation in the world, but not so that merely human love could be made the telos, but rather to show the world “What a life with Christ is,” and invite them into that shared life in Christ in which alone true love might be had, just as also Christ had only allowed himself to be had in that same body. (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 487)

Hence, for *Revisionist* EC voices such as Rollins and McLaren--who wished to claim that their revisions of orthodox interpretations of Scriptures and creeds could be justified by their discerning in the Spirit or a grounding in the incarnate Christ, which was only evidenced by materialist acts that matched the subjective values of current persons and cultures--Bonhoeffer would claim the evidence of ‘being in’ Christ was to surrender to Christ, through the *death to self* in confession of sin. Without this death-to-self, in confession, one also could not show that they had continuity with or accountability to the Christ transmitted by the apostles, the same Christ who called persons to come and die to both themselves, their old nature, and the world. (Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 99) However, many in the other two EC streams, the *Relevants* and *Reconstructionist*, have found more synergy with Bonhoeffer on this point, than have

*Revisionists*, in agreeing on the centrality of confession of sin for grounding one's self in Christ. For instance, in another example of the differentiation between the *Revisionists* and other EC streams, Dave Gibbons,<sup>43</sup> who leads an Emerging Multi-Ethnic community of artists and creatives in Santa Anna, California, and has shared points of connection with *Reconstructionists* in how he has sought an earlier form of church, has, despite the freedom and creativity of his community which works and worships amidst the postmodern culture, agreed with Bonhoeffer on the centrality of repentance for individual sin as necessarily proceeding maturity. Gibbons asserted, "Biblically, the act of confession is when we come to agree with God about our issues: our sins and all the ways in which we've missed the mark...confession becomes part of the normal rhythm of those who follow Jesus. When we are honest...it's like a pressure valve is opened, releasing denial...it is the step that starts the healing" and "growth." (Gibbons 2011, 71-74)

Additionally, another difference between Rollins and Bonhoeffer, which also showed a vital difference between EC streams, was that Rollins charged his readers to stop teaching the ethics of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount since he believed teaching the ethics of Jesus made people sin even more. (Rollins 2017) However, Bonhoeffer said Jesus meant for Christians to actually live Christ's ethics in their new nature: "Either we follow the call or we are crushed beneath it. There is no question of a second chance." (Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 116-117) Bonhoeffer could call Christians to live out such ethics as an imperative from Jesus since, after the breaking-in-of-Christ into their lives and the subsequent death that occurred in confession, they were now freed from the old self to instead, only in their new nature, be made able to do good and to be *of* good for the other. (Ibid) Scot McKnight showed yet another *Reconstructionist* EC agreement with Bonhoeffer in his similar claim that when Christians meet God, "truth will be told and reconciliation will occur. First, we will go face-to-face with God...and we will know God for how he is. The truth will be so clear to us that we will want to confess our sins. We will want to turn from our sins and we will want to...embrace God's grace and forgiveness and

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<sup>43</sup>See: Richardson 2013, 132. Richardson located Gibbons in the *Multi-Ethnic* stream of the Emerging Missional movement.

reconciliation,” and would then be made able to “also go face-to-face with others.” (McKnight 2014) Thus again, unlike those *Revisionists* who thought Christ was only followed subjectively in materialist communities and acts in the world, in Bonhoeffer and McKnight’s views there were concretely Christian beliefs and acts that persons must embrace, in meeting Christ, after which encounter, and death to self via confession of sin, one could then love both Christ and their neighbor out of a new heart, life, and love in Christ.

### 5.5.2 Bonhoeffer’s Further Evidence of Accountability

In apparent contradiction with orthodoxy, Bonhoeffer had critiqued the authors of Scripture as having been limited in their ability to scientifically explain the ‘how’ claims of Scripture and creeds such as the virgin birth and even the resurrection. (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 285) As such, he also critiqued Karl Barth’s assertion that persons must accept all claims of Scripture as facts, saying, “Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion...but he put in its place a positivist doctrine of revelation which says, in effect, ‘Like it or lump it’: virgin birth, Trinity, or anything else; each is an equally significant and necessary part of the whole, which must simply be swallowed as a whole or not at all.” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 185-187) Still, while Bonhoeffer thought that some claims of Scripture, and the creeds, might be flawed in terms of the scientific language used, as a matter of faith and spiritual formation in the Body of Christ, however, he argued that the Scriptures must not be at all revised or abandoned since they were sacred agents by which God provided revelation: “The full content, including the ‘mythological’ concepts, must be kept...this mythology (resurrection etc.) is the thing itself.” (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 329)<sup>44</sup> Bonhoeffer’s brother-in-law and biographer, Eberhard Bethge, also claimed that although Bonhoeffer viewed the canon of Scripture as something that was indeed open to higher criticism in regard to its historical and scientific claims, Scriptures still had

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<sup>44</sup>Bonhoeffer’s questioning of the scientific claims of Scripture can also be observed in his partial sympathy for Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologizing of Scriptures. However, he thought Bultmann was wrong to remove Scriptures he could not explain, such as miracles, since Scripture was, for Bonhoeffer, an agent of faith. Also, in the act of choosing what could be kept or removed, one was not surrendering to revelation as given but was placing one’s self over revelation. Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 372, 440.

to be taken wholly as “agents of revelation, not just specimens of writing, but sacred canon” (Bethge 2000, 56) for, as Bonhoeffer himself also added, “It is through the Bible with all its flaws, that the risen one encounters us.” (Bonhoeffer 1978, 74) Likewise, against the temptation to revise Scripture, through the lens of the current secular culture,<sup>45</sup> rather than regarding it as a sacred agent of revelation, Bonhoeffer warned that the Church must stand by Scripture as received from the first apostolic witnesses over-and-above a need to be relevant in the current age, since: “Where the question of relevance becomes the theme of theology, we can be certain that the cause has already been betrayed and sold out.” (Bonhoeffer 1965, 308-310)

So then, Bonhoeffer saw Scripture much as he also saw the church. Both may be flawed in terms of the limitations of the human members and authors, yet both were sacred agents of revelation whereby Christ had chosen to reveal himself to humanity, via the “sacred canon” and the “miracle of his presence in the Church,” where “he bears witness to himself as there in history, here and now.” (Bonhoeffer 1978, 72) It was also in the living body where Christians would realize that the Christ who revealed himself in the ‘now,’ in the ‘miracle of his presence’ in the church of the present, was the Christ who was also “none other than that which the Scriptures deliver to us and which comes to us by no other way than by the Word of the Scripture.” (Ibid, 73) Thus again, in Bonhoeffer’s thinking, Christ had given both the church, conceived of as Christ existing for Christians as the Body of Christ and Scripture as sacred agents *within* which Christ was revealed. Consequently, if one projected too much of a deconstructive lens onto Scripture, they were then no longer allowing Scripture to speak to them as sacred revelation, placing themselves beneath it in humility, but were instead lowering Scripture to a mutually critical place of authority with extra-biblical narratives. In so doing, the sacred was now profaned. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer also revealed here the ways in which one might allow a flexible approach to both Scripture and orthodoxy, and still remain within the orthodox consensus through faithful

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<sup>45</sup>See: Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2-3. Hitler, in fact, did what Bonhoeffer warned against, creating a Nazi bible that removed references to miracles, Christ’s divinity, and Judaism.

surrender to the 'deposit of faith,' as transmitted by the apostles, through the consensual body, in which Vincent of Lérins also claimed surrender to Christ in the body that transmitted sacred teachings and practices was more important than understanding.<sup>46</sup> Yet, again, in contrast with the *Revisionist* movement, one's approach to and interpretations of Scripture must be surrendered to the life and beliefs of that body as transmitted, not as revised in current contexts.

Likewise, Pauline scholar John Frederick, a *Reconstructionist* EC voice, who also believed in Vincent's *consensual orthodoxy*, showed synergy with Bonhoeffer and Vincent in claiming, in *Worship in the Way of the Cross: Leading Worship for the Sake of Others* (2017, 142-143), that the vital importance of Christians following sacred Christian beliefs, rhythms, and practices, even if they do not understand or agree with doctrines, is that Christians are called to join with Christ, via a cruciform life together in the body that only comes in alignment with the 'way of God' as understood by the corporate Body of Christ and not only current contexts: "The underlying ethos of Paul's understanding of transformative, 'cruciformational' worship is that through walking in the way of God and worshiping with the people of God we are renewed in the image of God...This results in a spiritual transformation of the community in the way of the cross." (Ibid, 142-143) Frederick also argued that, for Paul, "Knowledge of God" also "is not doctrinal knowledge" but "knowledge of who God is in Christ," yet that knowledge was only "made present in the ecclesial community by our communal walking in accordance with his will and Word." (Ibid, 143)

Additionally, against *Revisionist* attempts to claim Bonhoeffer, Edwin H. Robertson, in the preface to his translation of Bonhoeffer's *Christ the Center*, argued the lens through which to understand all of Bonhoeffer's theology, ecclesiology, and approaches to Scripture was through his lectures in *Christ the Center*.<sup>47</sup> Within *Christ the Center*, which contains Bonhoeffer's lectures defending an apostolic Christology against a revisionist Aryan-Christology being popularized in Germany in the early 1930's, Bonhoeffer made it clear that even as persons seek to discover who

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<sup>46</sup>Lérins, 86.

<sup>47</sup>Edwin H. Robertson in Bonhoeffer 1978, translator's preface, 8-9.

Christ is *for* them, in their actuality, in terms of how he reveals himself and exists for them in the church, this does not mean that persons are then allowed actually to decide *who* Christ is, since they must always align with the Christ of “biblical fact” or it is not actually Christ whom they are describing. (Bonhoeffer 1978, 85) Bonhoeffer also cautioned that all heresies had made the mistake of presenting a Christ who stood in “direct opposition to the biblical fact.” (Ibid) As an example of such a practice in his day, he also branded 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal German theologians as simply being modern incarnations of the “Docetists” heresy. Like the Docetists, Bonhoeffer charged that liberal German theology had likewise projected their human image, and what they believed a human being should be, onto Jesus Christ, turning Christ into an idol in their cultural image instead of surrendering to the actual Christ who, in his revelation to persons today, will never contradict the Christ of Scriptures revealed to the apostles. (Ibid) Although, in Bonhoeffer’s view, the apostolic witnesses may have been limited in their understanding of the scientific *how* claims of Scriptures, their testimony on *who* Christ *is* was revelation. (Ibid) Further, if persons attempted to project personal or cultural desires onto the Christ of Scriptures, Bonhoeffer warned that they were then in danger of creating a “Jesus cult,” in which they simply made Christ a figure of their own making, a lesser God than revealed Scripture, (Ibid) and thus, an idol they had fashioned in the form of their image, rather than the true ‘Logos’ of Christ that persons must surrender their lesser logos to by dying to themselves, via confession. (Ibid, 29)

For Bonhoeffer then, even in his greatest innovations, unlike Rollins' movement, he seemed to refuse to depart from the ‘appointed witnesses’ of Scripture on their testimony of *who* Jesus is and *how* persons are called to follow him. Even more, Bonhoeffer also believed in key marks that identified those who were responding to the true Christ of Scripture and entering life together in the community of faith. For Bonhoeffer, those marks were *confession of sin*, as well as the *preaching of the word* and the *sacraments*.<sup>48</sup> Thus, for instance, the rite of holy matrimony, in

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<sup>48</sup>See: Beck 2014. Richard Beck also argued that Rollins failed to address the importance Bonhoeffer placed on “religious rituals directed toward God as ‘object,’” that Bonhoeffer argued were to be kept in private only due to a ‘world come of age’ not understanding them and also, in contrast with Rollins’ movement, the “religious, transcendent dimension isn’t collapsed in a ‘death of god’ move.”

Bonhoeffer's view, was not only a symbol of two persons' love for one another but a sacred act where they were joined together in God. In a sermon Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, for the occasion of the marriage of Eberhard Bethge to Bonhoeffer's niece, he said, for instance:

Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man...It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love. (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 43)

Consequentially, just as love between two persons was to be lived out and contained within the rite of marriage, so too all Christian life and work, thinking and preaching was to be carried out from within the community of faith held together in the body, in submission to the rites that the Apostles had provided to order the Christian life.<sup>49</sup> Even theology, Bonhoeffer said, must be done *only by, within and for* the Body of Christ, rather than in current pluralistic contexts where *Revisionists* believed it could exist, and only in obedient thinking to the Word, since outside of the community of faith and without placing one's self under the Word:

Even the reference to the living person of Christ remains a reference in thought, and, as such, systematic. Any genuine reference...is not made possible by a theoretical method, but by holding fast in humility to the word that has been heard...In the obedience of thinking, the scholarly discipline of theology does differ fundamentally from the profane...Only the community of faith knows that the word which is addressed to it, and which theology has for its subject matter, is always uttered anew beyond theology...The community of faith may be assured of the faithfulness of God, who stands by the word God has given to it, so that theology, if it locates itself earnestly within the community of faith, can never go wholly astray. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 130-132)

For Bonhoeffer then, when persons practiced an 'obedience of thinking' by humbly placing themselves under the word, sacraments, and rites, within the Body of Christ, they were thus participating in the death and surrender of Christ who surrendered to the will and plan of his Father rather than to his own. In such unique surrender, Christians were also then enabled to become the church for others *in* Christ, not in the flesh of human effort, but rather only in the flesh-made-new in Christ by his grace and were empowered by his Spirit even to forgive sin. (Ibid) Also, within the new life of the body there was no 'unknowing' or need to abandon one's self to the darkness of doubt, as Rollins suggested a mature person should, but rather, for

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<sup>49</sup>See: Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005. Bonhoeffer here famously described his communal life at Finkenwalde and laid out how daily life in the Body of Christ should be ordered.

Bonhoeffer, Scripture made all things clear. (Ibid, 129) Thus, in attempting to use Bonhoeffer to support an a/theistic deconstruction that bypassed Bonhoeffer's focus on confession, 'obedience of thinking,' and a life in the Body of Christ that must be placed under the Word, sacraments and rites of the apostolic faith, we believe Rollins misread Bonhoeffer and likely did so through a reading shaped by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek.

### 5.5.3 Bonhoeffer is not a 'Death of God' Theologian

In consideration of Rollins' belief--that Bonhoeffer supported not only the death of ideology but also an experiential 'death' of God that allowed one to advance to acts of love in the world without confession of sin or obedience to the core beliefs and sacred rites of the Christian faith--it is vital to point out that the attempt to claim Bonhoeffer in support of an a/theistic 'death of God' theology is a movement that has been made before, by older Marxist 'death of God' theologians, and has been roundly rebuked by those who knew Bonhoeffer personally. In *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'Letters and Papers from Prison': A Biography* (2011, 94), Martin E. Marty claimed that Communist theologian Hanfried Müller was the first to suggest Bonhoeffer opposed the Christendom of the west and was moving in a Marxist direction.<sup>50</sup> Martin traced how Müller's reading of Bonhoeffer was then enlarged upon by 'death of God' theologians, but how Müller was "shunned and even repudiated by those who had known Bonhoeffer's work from before his imprisonment and related that to the writing in his letters;" reading *LPP* through the lens of his previous theology rather than in isolation. (Ibid, 97, 100-101) For example, Bonhoeffer's friend, contextual ethicist Paul Lehmann, who influenced Protestant liberation theology and thought God placed himself incarnationally amidst current contexts in order to make 'truly human life' possible for everyone,<sup>51</sup> argued:

The so-called 'Death of God' theologians are perhaps the most conspicuous of Bonhoeffer's misrepresentation. They have seized upon the Letters and Papers from

<sup>50</sup>See: Hanfried Müller, *Van der Kirche zur Welt* (Koehler & Amelang VOB, 1961).

<sup>51</sup>See: Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 25, 47, 82 as cited in Angel de Santiago-Vendrell, *Contextual Theology and Revolutionary Transformation in Latin America: The Missiology of M. Richard Shaull* (Pickwick, 2010) 123-124. De Santiago-Vendrell also noted Lehmann's influence on Shaull's move into Liberation Theology via an understanding of God's location amidst present contexts, showing the difference between 'death of God' and liberation theology.

Prison... 'the world come of age', 'religionless Christianity', 'true worldliness'...these same phrases have been appropriated as a kind of quintessential, 'new essence of Christianity' which claims Bonhoeffer for the tradition of Nietzsche and celebrates him as a forerunner of a theology without God. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that both cultic and atheistic celebrations of Bonhoeffer are grievous distortions of his thought and spirit. When the prison papers are read and reflected upon, with due regard for Bonhoeffer's exegetical and theological writings, there is no informed and responsible way claiming Bonhoeffer for a theology without God. (Lehmann 1966, 365)

Thus, Lehmann believed anyone who claimed Bonhoeffer for 'death of God' theology was misreading his work through a Marxist lens that did not consider Bonhoeffer's entire corpus. For Rollins, such a lens that made Bonhoeffer into a Marxist materialist was provided by Žižek.

### 5.6 Žižek's Influence on Rollins' Revisionist Movement

In addition to the critique of Rollins' reading of Bonhoeffer by a mostly sympathetic voice, in Richard Beck, another mostly supportive voice, K.S. Moody (2012, 182-198), has made the case that although Rollins has been influenced by Bonhoeffer, as well as by Derrida, that Rollins' movement beyond negative-theology, toward an a/theism that argued, "doubt extends from 'who or what God is' to 'doubt about *if* God is,'"<sup>52</sup> has been more significantly shaped by Marxist-Hegelian a/theist Slavoj Žižek. (Ibid, 183, 189) Moody insisted that Žižek has both informed Rollins' understanding of a/theism and also his vision for what a truly authentic Christian community should look like, which Moody stated actually matched the vision for an atheistic/materialist *communist collective* advocated for by Žižek. (Ibid, 185) For example, Žižek had declared that "Christianity is alive only in materialist (atheist) practices which negate it...the Pauline community of believers, for example, is to be found today in radical political groups, not in churches." (Žižek 2009, 287)<sup>53</sup> Moody suggested that, through Žižek's Marxist-Hegelian reading of Paul's epistles, the reason the Pauline Christian community of the New Testament could not exist in current Christian forms, but only in "revolutionary political party or the psychoanalytic society," was that Žižek thought the "organizational forms that historical Christianity took" were mistaken forms, and thus the "Spirit" was today emergent only elsewhere,

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<sup>52</sup>Peter Rollins, "Interview by K.S. Moody" (August 27, 2007) as cited in Moody 2012, 189.

<sup>53</sup>As also cited in Moody 2012, 185.

outside the boundaries of the specifically Christian community.” (Ibid, 185-190) Subsequently, Moody also suggested that Rollins and his *Ikon* ‘collective’ were effectively following Žižek’s template for forming communist collectives, via a “laying down of identities, of becoming nothing, just as Christ made himself nothing,” as was evidenced, for instance, in Rollins’ “Retroactive Justification”<sup>54</sup> wherein he claimed to be forming “a Christo-communist collective, an ‘insurrectionary’ force,” which Rollins argued was embodying the resurrection through subjective materialist praxis, as we will also see Žižek conceive of it. (Moody 2012, 196) Summarily, Rollins’ agenda was, according to Moody, one of a Hegelian-Marxist a/theistic deconstruction of the ‘mistaken forms’ and constructs of western Christianity and its ideologies, ala Žižek, in which Rollins’ included orthodoxy, to instead form human collectives that ‘live the Resurrection,’ via a subjective materialist praxis of love.

In concurrence with Moody’s point, we could even see Žižek’s impact on Rollins’ thinking in *Insurrection*. Despite Rollins’ initial claim, in *Insurrection*, that Bonhoeffer was the primary inspiration for his movement of deconstruction and that his goal in that work was to flesh-out Bonhoeffer’s vision for a ‘religionless Christianity,’ (Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv) Rollins subsequently turned to Žižek in that same work<sup>55</sup> to support and articulate the vision he claimed was catalyzed by Bonhoeffer. For instance, Rollins cited Žižek’s statement that, “On the cross Christ shows us what this hatred of one’s Father looks like” (Žižek 2010, 115), to support his point that, on the cross, Christ had lost God and even all relational identity in the Father. (Rollins 2011b, 38) Then too, we could also see ways in which Žižek’s language likely formed the basis for a *Revisionist* deconstruction of both an eschatological atonement and all orthodox belief, in exchange for human ‘spaces of being,’ evidenced in both Rollins’ language and also even in the language of Brian McLaren’s *Open/Convergence* communities, as seen in the responses of our Open network respondents in Chapter Four, by examining Žižek’s film, *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*. (2012) There, Žižek proclaimed that ‘true Christianity’ was not found via confession of

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<sup>54</sup>Rollins 2011c.

<sup>55</sup>See: Rollins 2011b, 38, 44, 46, 86.

sin or the atonement of Christ, but could only be found outside of the 'false' western systems of Christianity via an a/theistic 'death of God' movement where Christ, rather than atoning for sin, primarily showed persons how to die to both religion and, even more, to God himself in order to live more fully human lives together in the spaces created after deconstruction. (Ibid) With scenes from Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, playing in the background, Žižek argued in the *Pervert's Guide* that "What dies on the cross is precisely this guarantee of the 'Big Other'...The message of Christianity here is" not that the "death of Christ is any kind of redemption" where "Christ suffers to pay for our sins," but instead it is the "disintegration of the God which guarantees meaning of our lives...and that's the meaning of...Father why have you forsaken. Just before Christ's death we get what we call in psychoanalytic terms subjective destitution,"<sup>56</sup> which Žižek argues means that Jesus was actually showing humans, in his death and abandonment on the cross, that "we cannot know what God wants from us because there is no God," but in exchange for the 'death of God' Christ then said, according to Žižek:

My death itself is good news. It means you are alone, left to your freedom, being in the Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, which is just a community of believers. It's wrong to think that the second coming will be Christ as a figure will return somehow. Christ is already here when believers form an emancipatory collective. This is why I claim the only way really to be an Atheist is to go through Christianity. Christianity is much more atheist than the usual atheism, which can claim there is no God...but...retains a certain trust into the Big Other. This Big Other can be called natural necessity, evolution, or whatever. We humans are nonetheless reduced to a position within the harmonious whole of evolution...but the difficult thing to accept is again that there is no Big Other, no point of reference which guarantees meaning. (Ibid)

Accordingly, understanding Žižek's movement also illuminates the Marxist-Hegelian a/theistic 'death of God' ethos behind Rollins' movement to deconstruct Christian forms, practices and orthodox beliefs, as well as to understand why Rollins also apparently critiqued fellow EC

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<sup>56</sup>See: Žižek 1996, 31-45. In his essay on the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, which impacted Žižek, Žižek provided Lacan's definitions of 'subjectivization' versus 'subjective destitution,' a concept which Žižek employed here and that also informed Rollins' movement: "Subjectivization"...consists in the purely formal gesture of symbolic conversion, by means of which the subject integrates into his symbolic universe...provides with meaning...the meaningless contingency of his destiny. In clear contrast... 'subjective destitution' involves the opposite gesture: at the end of the psychoanalytic cure" one "has to suspend the urge to symbolize...interpret, to search for a 'deeper meaning;' he has to accept that the traumatic encounters...of his life were utterly contingent and indifferent, that they bear no 'deeper message.'" Thus, Žižek here claimed that Christ, in dying, had likewise arrived at the end of the search for deeper meaning and found none.

streams, such as the *Reconstructionists* and *Relevants* who were seeking ecumenical unity, reformation, or renewal via a retrieval of ancient rhythms, practices, forms, or creedal beliefs, with Rollins arguing that “instead of the naive attempt to return to the early church,” persons should instead seek to live in, “suspended space,” which he said was, “about returning to the event that gave birth to the early church,” which through Žižek's work we could better understand as meaning to share experimentally in the 'death of God,' in order to be then freed to form a/theistic-communist 'emancipatory collectives' where human communities were seen as *being* the Spirit. (Rollins 2011a, 26) Then too, while Žižek's claim that politically insurrectionary or 'emancipatory' human communities *are* the Spirit might have seemed a bridge-too-far for Rollins to cross and remain in conversation with any semblance of Christian orthodoxy, it was consequentially interesting to reflect on Rollins' belief that Jesus' incarnation was primarily about confronting both religion and the “power and authority of Rome,” as well as Rollins' argument that, “the Virgin birth can be read as a protest narrative, a political narrative, a narrative that makes a this-worldly claim,” which Rollins said meant Jesus was incarnate specifically with “those who suffer...are oppressed,” or “been brought low by the power and authorities,” and subsequently also then gave specific marginalized persons a “privileged voice in his kingdom.” (Ibid, 35) While such a claim might, so far, appear to have also mirrored the thinking of liberation theology, Rollins then showed the further influence of Žižek<sup>57</sup> by continuing to argue that “a

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<sup>57</sup>In relation to how Rollins' appropriation of Žižek may have informed his approach to the identity and situation of those persons he believed were marginalized, as universal voice of liberation, see: Lynch, 2010, 3-10. Lynch argued that Žižek provided a way for liberation theology to move beyond identity politics, which Žižek rejected. Lynch asserted that since the waning of Latin American Liberation Theology, after 1979, most liberation theologies have focused on “specific...queer, feminist, and indigenous liberation theologies,” rather than on “political economy.” Lynch first noted a critique of Žižek by Liberation Theologian Moldonado-Torres who thought Žižek's attacks on identity politics came from Žižek's readings of St. Paul's “universalization of male and Christian bodies,” which Moldonado-Torres argued was also linked to a “Eurocentrism...that... matches identity politics with the search for the universal” and, thus, “leads to the incorrect elevation of a particular to the level of the universal, resulting in a similar inability to enter into dialogue with other traditions” and then to “exclusionary rhetoric” by Eurocentric philosophers such as Žižek. Maldonado-Torres further argued that such an approach would allow Žižek, for instance, to dismiss Liberation Theology, by claiming that “Liberation theology's achievements... appear quite limited and problematic when looked at from the perspective of women and peoples of color in the Americas” and, thus, the “Žižekian response to this statement, must be ‘No. If women and people of color are ignored within liberation theology, then it is not only from their perspective that liberation theology is failing. It is failing without qualification.’” On the other hand, Lynch presented the view of a second Liberation Theologian who actually liked Žižek, Manuel J. Mejido, who declared, “Liberation theology is facing an

person who is gay” was now not only “one voice among others,” but instead, in the space beyond ‘constructs’ of empire and religion, “this voice represents a *privileged place*, the place where God speaks...it is an avatar of God’s voice...the site where we encounter the call of God...that calls for liberation of all those who are excluded.” (Ibid, 36)<sup>58</sup> Rollins' approach to forming 'emancipated' human communities and new 'suspended spaces' in which specific human voices now spoke as “particular manifestations of a universal struggle for liberation,”<sup>59</sup> as inspired by Žižek's Marxist-Hegelian movement, also now allowed current persons’ subjective experiences and perspectives to be privileged over all historical and consensual voices, even those of Scripture and creeds.

However, just as Žižek has been critiqued by more traditional Latin American liberation theologians such as Moldonado-Torres, as noted above, Rollins has likewise come under fire from some other mostly sympathetic listeners in the progressive *Revisionist* stream of the EC conversation who, in their concern for particular voices and contexts, also sometimes view Rollins’ Marxist-Hegelian a/theism as too 'Eurocentric' and too narrowly focused on a metanarrative that is guilty of both universalizing persons’ struggles and marginalizing many of the same voices they claim to elevate, including non-western voices. Jordan Mattox, for example, in “Unradical Theology” (2012), responded to a talk on 'Radical Theology' and a/theism by Peter Rollins and Kester Brewin at Fuller Seminary, in 2012, by arguing that while he was sympathetic

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impasse resulting from both internal and external tensions” and suggested “appropriating Žižek’s reworking of Lacan” was the way forward between ‘traditional’ liberation theology and ‘identity’ liberation theology since, via Mejido's perspective, Lynch argued that Žižek’s view of the relationship between the universal and the particular allowed for the particular to be heard while also then allowing that the “Truth of these [particular] struggles is not found in their particularity. Rather, they are particular manifestations of a universal struggle for liberation.” Also see: MJ Mejido, “Beyond the Postmodern Condition, or the Turn toward Psycho Analysis,” in Petrella 2005; as well as, MJ Mejido, “Theology, Crisis and Knowledge-Constitutive Interests, or Towards a Social Theoretical Interpretation of Theological Knowledge,” *Social Compass* 51 (2004), 381-401; and, N. Moldonado-Torres, “Liberation Theology and the Search for the Lost Paradigm,” in Petrella 2005.

<sup>58</sup>While such a sentiment might at first appear to empower a particular identity, Latin American liberation theologian Maldonado-Torres critiqued Žižek' for attacking identity politics and promoting a method that “leads to the incorrect elevation of a particular to the level of the universal, resulting in a similar inability to enter into dialogue with other traditions,” and thus marginalizing the particular. (N. Moldonado-Torres 2005, as cited in Lynch 2010); Also see: Nelson Maldandao-Torres, “The Time of History, the Times of Gods, and the Damnés de la terre,” *Words and Knowledge Otherwise* (Spring, 2006) 1-12.

<sup>59</sup>See: Lynch 2010.

to their agenda, he was not certain how their approach served non-western contexts in need of liberation, who may require faith in the 'Big Other' that Rollins denies:

I am not sure that this call to doubt everything has any relevance to subjugated communities in the peripheral areas of empire, where doubt is more normative than belief. Places where death and decay are visible, global capitalism ravages the land and resources of the commons, disease threatens lives every day...The mythology of Christianity becomes the only hope to liberate one's self of constant doubt. Are we to fault someone living in this context for desiring a benevolent Big Other to redeem them? And if this spiritual energizing and this horizon of hope aids them in movements toward liberation and freedom, then why support a temporary ideology of hope and new creation...Rollins also claims that his radical theology has the power to revolutionize Christianity by bringing an end to religion and allowing for rebirth, following some Nietzschean-esque metanarrative of a historical march toward liberation. Aside from the fact that this categorical critique of religion is heavily influenced by the faulty enlightenment ideas in its reduction of religion to institutions and power relations, this contrived understanding of their movement's significance falls victim to the same historical trap that the movements against capitalism fall victim: they are absorbed into the larger movement and become tools to perpetuate the system. (Ibid)<sup>60</sup>

Such a concern, on the part of Mattox, about whether the contexts of non-western persons were being considered by Rollins' method, was somewhat ironic considering the importance of contextual theology for *Revisionists*. For instance, as noted in Chapter Four, Ian Mobsby (2007, 28-30), who quoted Rollins' influence in that work, especially upon his belief that Western Christianity had been too focused on orthodox doctrine and must move to instead experience God as, "radically subjective,"<sup>61</sup> argued that while the more progressive EC iterations developed a uniquely emergent contextual theology that truly embedded in postmodern contexts, conversely, more traditionally orthodox, Evangelical, or Reformed emerging expressions had not truly engaged with a 'postmodern social context' nor authentically shared their values, but only used contextual theology to 'translate' their traditional messages and values into postmodern contexts. (Ibid) Still, Rollins,' in his Marxist-Hegelian a/theistic approach, also appeared, to Mattox, to not be listening to all such contexts either, but to be translating a universal meta-narrative as well.

Additional voices in the *Revisionist* stream of the EC have likewise shown the ways that persons whose contextual theologies or liberation theologies believe particular identities must not

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<sup>60</sup>Such a critique would also likely be appreciated by Oden who argued that modern voices, who have critiqued the myriad voices of *consensual orthodoxy*, were, in fact, guilty of refusing to listen to the greater diversity of those consensual voices; and see the narrow limits of their own contexts. Oden 2002, 112-117.

<sup>61</sup>See: Mobsby 2012, 13, 34, 104.

be universalized, such as we have above noted Moldonado-Torres (2005) alleged Žižek was guilty of, have also questioned whether Rollins and those who have shared synergy with him, such as Tony Jones, have realized the irony of their speaking universally into diverse contexts from a place of privilege.<sup>62</sup> For instance, Sarah Moon claimed that in the progressive EC circles in which she had participated, and in her personal interactions with Rollins and Jones, she had felt, “silenced, as a woman,” along with other marginalized voices who shared the same experience. (Moon 2013) Moon stated, “I once critiqued author Peter Rollins for his stance on...‘identity politics,’” wherein she alleged Rollins claimed, “‘rigorous thinking’...as defined by white men, of course...is more important than inclusion.” (Ibid) She further reported he “could not converse with me because I’d talked about sexism [in] my critique,” which precluded “reasonable debate.” (Ibid) She then argued that the problem with many progressive EC leaders, such as Rollins and Jones, speaking to diverse contexts was that they were not really listening to the persons in those contexts, but were instead speaking down to them:

So many...privileged people...who claim to be progressive Christians act like they want a world where everyone has a 'seat at the table.' But...they tell oppressed groups what they can and cannot say...what words they can use to define their oppressions. They even dictate whether or not the experiences and thoughts of oppressed groups are valid... When oppressed groups bring up the fact that they do not feel comfortable in Privileged Dude’s favorite spaces, or...are underrepresented...Privileged Dude refuses to see oppression as part of the problem... [and] brings up his academic training and feigns blindness to race...sex...orientation... You just don’t understand the Marxist sociopolitical ideology that informs his critique of theories. (Ibid)

Despite such critiques from those *Revisionist* voices who saw Rollins' Žižekian movement as guilty of marginalizing particular voices in exchange for a universal metanarrative, and also despite critiques from additional EC thinkers whom we have noted, such as Beck and Clark, who thought an experiential ‘death of God’ was an entirely unnecessary step toward an authentic faith, Rollins' theological agenda and language have nonetheless had a continued influence upon many of the leading theologians of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Ian Mobsby, especially in their revised understandings of orthodoxy,

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<sup>62</sup>See: Note 57 for an example of liberation theologian Moldonado-Torres' similar critique of Žižek's 'Eurocentric' approach and Thomas Lynch's contention that post-1979 liberation theology, with its focus on identity, was at odds with Žižek's approach, and by extension Rollins' as well.

the atonement, and deconstructions of Christian forms, creeds, and practices. However, Rollins' impact could also be seen in the ways in which not only Rollins' *Ikon* collectives, but the greater stream of *Revisionist* ecclesiology has also now appeared to also echo Rollins' Žižekian view for 'insurrectionary' communist/materialist collectives<sup>63</sup> that exist in 'suspended spaces' beyond Christian religion, and that bring together pluralistic views united by a praxis of love, as demonstrated primarily by way of socio-political activism. For instance, McLaren, in describing his new *Convergence/Open* networks, some of whose members we dialogued with in Chapter Four, has articulated the vision for his community as one of creating new spaces beyond the forms and beliefs of traditional Christianity where, as the combined statements of McLaren and his communities declare, they are gathering, "a diverse collective of leaders, learners, activists and artists seeking a just and generous expression of faith for a more just and generous world," via, "new, more expansive spaces for belonging," where those who are advocating for, "equality for all people, advocates for the rights of immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ people," may work to, "heal and protect our planet...Convergence is about you and the goodness you are doing in the world."<sup>64</sup> In his recent book, casting vision for movement of his current networks and partners, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* (2016), McLaren also claimed, again echoing both Rollins' and Žižek, that such new movements of emergence, as seen in his networks, were due to moving beyond the boundaries of traditional and orthodox understandings of Christianity, which McLaren believed to be synonymous with categories of power, toward what he saw as a doctrinally and theologically unbounded human praxis of love as: "Growing numbers of us are acknowledging with grief that many forms of supremacy—Christian, white, male, heterosexual...are deeply embedded not just in Christian history but also in Christian theology," and thus even words like, "clean, remnant, sacrifice, lord, and even God...must be identified and purged." (Ibid, 90) After deconstructing orthodox doctrine, language, and practices, Christians could then embrace a new

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<sup>63</sup> See: Moody 2012, 196, for Rollins' use of such language in casting his own vision.

<sup>64</sup> See: *Convergence*, n.d.; McLaren 2017.

iteration of Christianity that, McLaren argued, rather than being defined by “a list of unchanging beliefs,” was defined instead by a “dynamic pursuit of love...by a way of life centered in love, as embodied by Jesus” (Ibid, 48) which, in some synergy with Žižek, meant organizing new communities that, rather than focusing on the “prescribed conceptual beliefs” of ‘Traditional Christianity,’ instead focused primarily on living out the “loving way of life embodied by Jesus,” in which persons would “commune and be filled with *the nonviolent, liberating spirit of God* embodied by Jesus.” (Ibid, 228) Such embodiment was evidenced in humans “working for the common good;’ that included healing the environment, promoting peace, and engaging in social justice to bring about a better future for the planet. (Ibid)

We also saw similar language and self-identification to that of McLaren’s amidst several respondents in Chapter Four. For instance, we saw Hope, who led a pluralistic worship community, which she described as “post-Evangelical, post-catholic, and even post-Christian,” announce that her community did not attract ‘people of faith’ who were focused on religious belief as much as people who were interested in a ‘faith community,’ placing the emphasis on the human community itself, which was then distinguished principally by its being “not prejudiced, not judgemental, and not hierarchical.” Then too, we saw Meredith, who pastored a church in McLaren’s *Open* network, also share that, while her community was resourced by the creeds, they did not feel the need to “defend doctrines” as much as to focus on “renewed understandings of God and of humanity,” in which also, by focusing more on the evolving stories and journeys of humans--which also included allowing creedal beliefs to be changed--she hoped they could be part of a “great emergence of a more just and generous expression of Christianity.”<sup>65</sup> Then too, we saw our respondent, Sofia, declare the Bible was just a ‘myth,’ like the ‘Greek myths,’ and simply one story among many. However, despite her view that the Bible was just a mythological story, whose accounts provided only one perspective, she still wanted to claim the ‘gospel story’ itself in support of materialist acts of love by asserting that “God says people will know you are our

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<sup>65</sup>McLaren popularized the term ‘a generous orthodoxy’ in *A Generous Orthodoxy*. McLaren 2006a.

disciples by your love for one another.” At the same time, in envisioning a new kind of Christianity that focused exclusively on acts of love in present actualities as the telos, without concern for beliefs, she said, “I have been wanting to redefine my spiritual orientation to simply someone who loves God and wants to follow him in loving others.” Furthermore, our respondent, Evan, who formerly collaborated in McLaren’s *Emergent-Village*, noted that “an encouraging sign to me is that more and more people who are seeking to follow in the Way of Jesus are courageously leaving Christendom structures that have become oppressive, or power hungry, or are colluding with the state...more followers in the Way of Christ are recovering Jesus’ radical practices of hospitably to the outcast, stranger, and powerless; while reconnecting holiness/purity with life lived resonant with Jesus’ life as seen in Scripture more than any one tradition social mores.” Thus, in the vision statements of the *Open* network and in the answers of respondents whom we engaged with in Chapter Four--as briefly exemplified above--we have seen a *Revisionist* movement that, despite claiming to be ‘authentically Christian,’ and also still sharing some vital practises of Christianity, such as a focus on social concern, appears to have collectively diverged from holding the unifying and identifying beliefs and sacred rites of the historic Christian faith as essential to the faith, which Bonhoeffer, like Vincent, affirmed as essential Christ-given ways that Christians participated in the body of Christ. Conversely, such *Revisionists* have argued, through the work of philosophical and theological voices such as Rollins, that, against all consensual knowing and experience of the body of Christ through the centuries, they are indeed centered in Christ who is only subjectively encountered in materialist communities and acts of love in the world, in alignment with postmodern values.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Therefore, as evidenced in both *Revisionist* praise *for* and deferment *to* Rollins’ work and in the language used to define key *Revisionist* communities, such as *Ikon* and the *Open/Convergence* networks, we believe Rollins, in channeling Žižek, has had a significant impact on the thinking and language of the *Revisionist* stream of the EC. He has provided a

theological catalyst and supporting voice for their movement beyond not only traditional forms or human ideology but also the core creedal Christian beliefs and practices that both Bonhoeffer and key voices in other EC streams identify as the evidence of having encountered the actual Christ of the apostolic witnesses.<sup>66</sup> As we have also seen, though not all *Revisionists* agree with Rollins' need for a 'death of God' to then advance to love in the world, many leading *Revisionist* voices and respondents, including those in our questionnaire, do see apostolicity and orthodoxy as, at the very least, secondary in a movement toward the formation of communities who seek to embody God in subjective human actions of love and justice, as such concepts are defined by current pluralistic voices, contexts, or experiences; and Rollins provides a continuing example of a serious philosopher who provides an agenda for doing so. In, at the very least, emphasizing a subjective materialist orthopraxy as allowing deconstructions of the orthodox creeds, sacraments, and rites of Christianity, *Revisionist* leaders such as Rollins and McLaren are also likely following a Marxist-Hegelian a/theistic movement and, in fact, forming communist-materialist-collectives that do not participate in the 'obedient thinking' nor worshiping and confessing life of the body that both Bonhoeffer, Vincent, and many EC *Reconstructionist* and *Relevant* respondents believed provided both essential grounding in Christ and evidence of alignment with the Christ of Scriptures, rather than an idol of culture. In so doing, such *Revisionists* appear to have not only diverged from the other two streams of the EC movement, but to have departed from accountability to apostolicity as well by severing unity and harmony with the historic faith, as transmitted via the consensus of orthodoxy, and with the global ecumenical body of Christ today, to instead practice accountability only to themselves within materialist spaces of being.

## 5.8 Summary

In this chapter we have examined the ways in which *Revisionists* such as Peter Rollins have tried to provide support for the continued divergence of their EC stream from both the other two EC streams, and from apostolicity and orthodoxy, as, in fact, (or rather in *act-as-fact*) being

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<sup>66</sup>See: McKnight 2006.

authentically centered in Christ who is found only subjectively in materialist communities and acts in the world. We also examined whether Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own questioning of the danger of transforming the canon of Scripture, the creeds, and orthodoxy into human institutions or systems has inspired some of the deconstructions carried out by the *Revisionist* stream of the EC, as seen in the work of Peter Rollins. In doing so, we saw that for Bonhoeffer, like Rollins, true revelation could not be had in systems of thought that allowed humans to place the 'I' of self over God. Still, unlike Rollins, who has primarily been influenced by Žižek, Bonhoeffer grounded true revelation and accountability in the living community of faith, in which, "Christ is the corporate person of the Christian communion;" where Christ himself is the focus of faith rather than one's unknowing; where Christ also exists for human beings in the form of the church and; where Christ has also provided the only place *whereby* persons can truly claim to have truth and to have another human, within the living revelation of Christ himself as found in his body. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 111) Within this living Body, Christ also grants Christians continuity, allowing them to know that they have not only had a temporary existential experience of Christ that is open to interpretation but have tangibly met and experienced the living Christ together within the living body. (Bonhoeffer 1998, 127) However, for Bonhoeffer, the evidence that persons belong to Christ, and are, in fact, thinking, speaking, and acting from within his body, is that they confess individual sin before Christ and others, that they faithfully preach the Word, and faithfully administer the sacraments and rites as transmitted by the Apostles. These inherited acts of preaching, confession, sacraments, rites, and 'obedience of thinking' cannot be bypassed because they are sacred agents of revelation of Christ who is present with Christians as they participate in the body in unity and congruence with the faith transmitted from the first witnesses.

In our next chapter, Chapter Six, we have explored whether Bonhoeffer, in fact, provides a bridge to Vincent of Lérins' concept of *consensual orthodoxy*, especially in the idea of obedience to both faithful thinking and faithful acts in the Body of Christ, in which also interpretation and doctrine cannot be separated or extracted from the life of that worshiping Body across the ages. Our primary purpose in doing so has been to further conceptualize and evaluate

the applicability of Vincent's *consensual orthodox* method, in conversation with Bonhoeffer and Thomas Oden, for emerging expressions who wish to inculturate the gospel in ways that are contextually flexible, to allow the growth of doctrine, and to allow humble listening to diverse contexts, yet while remaining faithful to apostolicity and orthodoxy as affirmed by the voices of all Christians, in all places, and at all times.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ORTHODOXY AS UNIFIED FAITH, OBEDIENCE, WORSHIP, AND WITNESS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this study, we have considered *if, how, or to what extent* emerging Christian expressions might seek to reform, innovate, or revise Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines to reform the church and inculturate the gospel amidst current postmodern contexts and yet do so in ways that are in faithful continuity-and-congruity with apostolicity and orthodoxy. We have also sought to discover *if or to what extent* such voices have considered accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy and, if not, to what they are then accountable.

While, in our ethnographic dialogue with Emerging Church (EC) respondents, in Chapter Four, we discovered that many respondents in the *Relevant* and *Reconstructionist* streams of the EC believed that adherence to the core creedal beliefs of orthodoxy was vital for the faithful inculturation of the gospel in postmodern contexts, we conversely saw that many more respondents in the *Revisionist* stream thought that orthodoxy could be revised when in conflict with the evolving beliefs, values, and experiences of current persons and cultures. In this sentiment, such respondents agreed with the leading voices of their stream such as Brian McLaren and Tony Jones who, as seen in previous chapters, tried to argue that orthodoxy could be 'tweaked' or done away with as one followed the incarnate Christ and the guidance of the Spirit. (McLaren 2006a, 28)<sup>1</sup> However, in such claims, *Revisionists* appeared to be heterodox according to the 'test of orthodoxy' of St. Vincent of Lérins, as seen in Chapter Three, in which one had to surrender to the consentient orthodox understandings of Scripture and doctrine or else they were departing into heresy; not only by contesting interpretations of orthodoxy, but by

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<sup>1</sup>Also See: T. Jones 2011.

separating themselves from unity in the body as evidenced in the consensual interpretation of all Christians, everywhere, and always.<sup>2</sup>

Consequentially, in our last chapter we examined a critical EC *Revisionist* voice, Peter Rollins, who, with Brian McLaren and some more doctrinally progressive respondents noted in Chapter Four, sought to show how a *Revisionist* deconstruction of orthodoxy was authentically Christian.<sup>3</sup> To justify a deconstruction of orthodoxy as authentically Christian, such *Revisionists* argued that Christ, and truth, were incarnate only in the dynamic movements of current materialist actualities and thus true orthodoxy meant to follow Christ in orthopraxy, by which they meant embracing the experiences, values, and journeys of diverse postmodern voices.<sup>4</sup> However, in conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom Rollins attempted to claim in support of his deconstruction of all orthodoxy and sacred practices as an authentically Christian movement, we instead saw that Bonhoeffer, although critical of abuses of *orthodoxy-as-a-human-system*, also warned of the danger of making the Christ of the apostolic witnesses into a ‘Christ of culture’ or into that in which the human ‘I’ created an ‘idol of Christ’ based upon cultural values or existential or psychological experiences.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Bonhoeffer believed that the true Christ is incarnate specifically within the living Body of Christ from within which theology, preaching and even social action cannot be extracted and in which Christians must also surrender to the core creedal beliefs and practices of Christianity, including confession of individual sin before both Christ and other Christians; and in the same ways that the apostolic witnesses have transmitted them. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 130-132) In Bonhoeffer’s call for ‘obedience’ in sacred thinking and practices, (ibid)<sup>6</sup> he thus also provided a criterion that evidenced encounter with the true Christ and which also showed potential synergy with Vincent of Lérins’ concept of *consensual orthodoxy*; in which truth is grounded in the worshiping life in the Body of Christ but within

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<sup>2</sup> See: Lérins (1886) 2012, 76-77.

<sup>3</sup> Rollins 2011b, xiv-xv, 20-26, 36, 180. Also see: McLaren 2006a, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Rollins 2011b, 119-121.

<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 108; Bonhoeffer 1978, 85; Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Here Bonhoeffer argues for the importance of ‘obedience of thinking’ in “holding fast in humility to the word that has been heard.”

which life evidences emerge of having encountered the same Christ as that of the apostolic witnesses, including an alignment of confession, worship, and doctrine.<sup>7</sup>

In these points, there are other EC voices and dialogue partners whom we have seen glimpses of throughout this study, such as Jason Clark, James K.A. Smith, Scot McKnight, Robert Webber, and Doug Gay, who appear to have shared the greatest synergy with the approaches to orthodoxy of Bonhoeffer, Vincent, and respondents in the more orthodox *Reconstructionist* stream of the EC.<sup>8</sup> While these more orthodox or *Reconstructionist* EC voices have, like *Revisionists*, emphasized grounding truth in the incarnate Christ, conversely, we have seen that they also believed that such grounding must be done in specific ways that evidence belonging to the same Christ witnessed by the apostles. At the same time, such orthodox EC voices have also seen surrender to orthodoxy as being an act of faith and worship that is part of the larger unified life in the Body of Christ, rather than as a system of 'frozen' truth claims, as some *Relevant* EC voices such as Mark Driscoll appear to have viewed orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup> As such, there appears to be a 'third,' dynamic yet faithful EC approach to orthodoxy within these voices that we also observed traces of in Chapter Four, among some *Relevant* respondents, such as *Soma* leaders, and in many more *Reconstructionist* respondents as well, in which orthodoxy was not to be deconstructed, nor was it only about truth claims but it was connected to a unity of life, worship, and witness together in Christ. In this view, such orthodox and *Reconstructionist* EC voices also appeared to share surprising synergy with Vincent and Bonhoeffer. Therefore, in this chapter, we have further brought Bonhoeffer, Vincent, and Thomas Oden into dialogue with this 'third' set of orthodox EC voices and conversation partners in order to additionally consider how emerging expressions seeking to innovatively reform the church or inculturate the gospel in postmodern contexts might do so in ways that listen to diverse contexts and yet also remain in faithful continuity-and-congruity with apostolicity and orthodoxy. In so doing, we have heard

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<sup>7</sup>Lérins, 72-86.

<sup>8</sup>Stetzer 2006. Stetzer categorized the *Reconstructionist* stream as focusing on reforming a culturally irrelevant modern church via a return to the more missional and incarnational apostolic life, worship, or forms of the early church.

<sup>9</sup>Warnock 2006a.

some of the ways that missionally incarnational, yet orthodox, EC voices and dialogue partners have pushed back on both the concept of orthodoxy as a system of truth claims and, also, on revisions/deconstructions of orthodoxy. We have additionally considered how Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy*, in dialogue with Bonhoeffer, Oden, and orthodox EC voices, might guide a faithful yet flexible approach to reformation, contextualization, and inculturation amidst postmodern contexts.

## 6.2 Orthodoxy as Unified Faith, Obedience, and Worship

In answer to our research questions of *if, how, or to what extent* emerging expressions have considered apostolicity or orthodoxy and, if not, *to what* are they then accountable, in this study we have thus far seen two EC approaches to orthodoxy that we have argued both Vincent of Lérins and Dietrich Bonhoeffer would critique. We have seen, for instance, that some *Relevant* EC voices, such as Mark Driscoll, seemed to view orthodoxy as a set of frozen beliefs to be translated into current contexts through updated language, yet in ways that, for Driscoll, still appeared to allow him to revise creedal interpretations of the orthodox consensus in favor of his own. (Warnock 2006a) Vincent warned that such revisions of the consensual interpretations disregarded the apostolic deposit of faith<sup>10</sup> and Bonhoeffer also critiqued such movements as having approached revelation trans-subjectively in making orthodoxy into an *orthodoxy-as-a-human-system* in which God's revelation is “bound immediately and is at the disposal of human beings,” allowing them to reduce revelation to an objective set of views and often alter it by way of their own reason or systematics. (Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009), 104-105) On the other hand, *Revisionist* EC voices, such as McLaren and Rollins, have argued that orthodoxy is entirely subjective<sup>11</sup> and open to revision<sup>12</sup> if grounded in the incarnate Christ, which in practice has meant that for *Revisionists* the evidence of having encountered Christ is found through alignment with the evolving beliefs, values, and experiences of postmodern persons and contexts.<sup>13</sup> Such *EC*

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<sup>10</sup>Lérins, 75, 91.

<sup>11</sup>Rollins 2016; Mobsby 2012, 28-30.

<sup>12</sup>McLaren 2006a, 28.

<sup>13</sup>See: McLaren 2006b; McLaren 2006c.

voices have, in these first two approaches to orthodoxy, thus, evidenced heterodox approaches in their departure from the consensual interpretations and doctrines of the universal ecumenical body, according to Vincent's 'test of orthodoxy,'<sup>14</sup> and have also, in claiming that the incarnate Christ whom they have met in dynamic community has allowed them to revise both orthodoxy and sacred Christian practices in synergy with the beliefs and practices of the current culture, also run afoul of Bonhoeffer's warnings against transforming Christ into an 'idol of culture.'<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, as we have explored in this chapter, other EC voices and dialogue partners, such as Jason Clark, James K.A. Smith, Scot McKnight, Robert Webber and Doug Gay, conversely show a 'third' Emerging approach to considering accountability to apostolicity and orthodoxy. This third approach, unlike Rollins' movement, does indeed have synergy with Bonhoeffer's approach, which Ray Anderson had earlier recommended EC voices adopt,<sup>16</sup> where knowing Christ is more important than knowing about Christ and, yet, where one must also practice obedience to the core apostolic beliefs and practices of Christianity as a matter of faith if one is indeed meeting the same Christ of apostolic witness. Further, some such Bonhoefferesque EC voices have also shown synergy with Vincent of Lérins who, like Bonhoeffer, centers orthodoxy in the Body of Christ and yet in which body consensual unity of life, worship and doctrine becomes a crucial evidence of alignment with Christ. (Lérins, 80-82)

We can begin to see such a flexible, yet careful, 'third' EC orthodox, or *Reconstructionist*, approach to apostolicity and orthodoxy in EC leader Jason Clark's critiques of the *Revisionist* deconstructionists with whom he had been a vital collaborator in the early days of the movement.<sup>17</sup> As the *Revisionist* stream of the EC became progressively heterodox in their revisions of consensual understandings of orthodoxy, sola scriptura, and orthopraxy<sup>18</sup> in the last

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<sup>14</sup>Lérins, 76-77. Vincent's test holds that only that doctrine should be accepted that is congruent with the interpretation held by the consensus of all Christians, in all places, and all times.

<sup>15</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson (USA: Harper & Row, 1965), 308-310; Bonhoeffer 1978, 72, 85; Bonhoeffer (1949) 2005, 53.

<sup>16</sup>Anderson 2006, 43-46.

<sup>17</sup>See: Clark 2006a, 191-204; Clark 2010a; Clark 2010b.

<sup>18</sup>See: McLaren 2006a, 28; Also see: Garrison 2007, 48-49. Here, Rollins claimed an orthopraxis of materialist human love, regardless of belief, was what saves. Also see: Challies 2014. Challies deemed McLaren heterodox for his denial of atonement for sin and Christ as the only savior.

decade, so, just as formerly sympathetic voices such as Scot McKnight<sup>19</sup> had critiqued the increasingly revisionist movement of EC leaders like McLaren as having departed the greater diversity and openness of orthodoxy for a narrower expression, after 2005, so Clark expressed alarm about a *Revisionist* divergence from core Christian beliefs and unity, as seen in Rollins' a/theistic movement. (Clark 2006b) Thus, Clark has served as a helpful source in showing concern for a flexible, yet careful understanding of orthodoxy among EC voices who have remained orthodox. Further, he has also exemplified ways in which such orthodox EC thinkers thought *Revisionists* had severed their rootedness in the core unifying beliefs of historical and emerging Christians in favor of narrower postmodern expressions. In his critiques, Clark felt the EC movement had been helpful in providing:

Freedom...to think theologically...integration of my faith into a postmodern world...to do church differently...rediscover...liturgy, confession, litany...the ancient in our faith...Ministry to the poor and social justice are not optional...they are part of mission...Being able to walk the talk...have fears, doubts, questions...to use the mediums and places of our culture to communicate, without seeing them as godless. (Ibid)

Still, Clark also saw that those who became too focused on the deconstruction of historic beliefs and practices of Christianity were left with narrower, isolated communities that had erred in:

Writing off all of church since the beginning of Christendom...church is wrong and modern...follow us into new radical ways but then offer nothing, devalue traditional churches, be full of bitterness...create new private God spaces full of existential angst...pride ourselves on being postmodern...have a theology and ecclesiology that is thoughtless, non-biblical (if I use that word they think I'm a foundationalist Evangelical)<sup>20</sup> drawing no lessons from church history...church history was mostly a mistake...with the result that a handful of people hang out in private spaces just as self-indulgent as the ones they left, yet they are more valid...being postmodern and authentic...and Jesus...would love our middle class blog discussion night, cigars, beer and...hate most things about church...cover it all with the spiritualised veneer...of saying...I want to be organic, spirit led, postmodern...as if the rest of church for the last 2,000 years...wasn't valid. (Ibid)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See: McKnight 2011.

<sup>20</sup>Gerald McDermott notes that some post-conservatives have attempted to label those in Oden's Paleo-orthodoxy, including Robert Webber, as 'foundationalists.' Paleo-Orthodoxy looks to Vincent's *consensual orthodoxy* as its primary method. However, McDermott points out the "suggestion that...Paleo-orthodox are foundationalist is dubious...none of the Paleo-orthodox would affirm the possibility of intellectual certainty based on self-evident truths or sensory experience," nor "say doctrine alone is the essence of faith, but all would insist that experience should never be privileged over doctrine." Gerald McDermott, "Evangelicals Divided: The Battle Between Meliorists and Traditionists to Define Evangelicalism," *First Things* (Apr. 2011), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/04/evangelicals-divided>.

<sup>21</sup>As seen in Chapter Three, Vincent was also concerned that those in danger of heresy or error would seek

By 2011, in showing care for the core historic beliefs of the Christian faith, Clark further critiqued his former EC colleague Peter Rollins' a/theistic deconstructionism, claiming he now realized they had had different paradigms. For instance, in critiquing Rollins' movement in *Insurrection*, which we also critiqued in our last chapter, Clark lamented, "Pete explicitly wants to remove the notion...that loving Christ directly is possible...God is to be indirectly loved, as we participate in love generally." (Clark 2011) Clark declared that Rollins' approach, "also seems to elevate the love of love itself, as the telos to any ordering in our relationship with God...If God is not the object of my love<sup>22</sup>...what is the purpose in Christianity at all?" (Ibid) Clark was also alarmed that Rollins had misappropriated Bonhoeffer to present "an understanding of God, and...of Christian faith that Bonhoeffer would not have recognized," where, despite deep questioning, Clark argued Bonhoeffer practiced a "confessional faith...with a deeply theological content, and...hope in a real historical resurrection," while Rollins, conversely, "not only empties theological terms, those used by Bonhoeffer," depriving "the wider Church and ourselves of their content," but "presents them as universal processes and experiences." (Ibid) Clark concludes, "Pete's writing...has replaced one theologia gloriae<sup>23</sup> with another; of human reason and existential experience that takes the place of experiencing the Cross...in the real time and space of a worship service." (Ibid) Thus, Clark shared elements of our critique of Rollins, in Chapter Five, especially in his missing the importance Bonhoeffer placed on surrender to the core beliefs

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to isolate themselves from the larger consensual Body of Christ so that they did not have to submit their beliefs to the whole body, for fear of rejection, and would so seek out only those smaller groups in which they could find affirmation for their doctrines. Lérins, 91-99. Still, as we have also seen, *Revisionist* voices such as Andrew Perriman have argued that local accountability is all one needs. Perriman 2005a.

<sup>22</sup> See: Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 281. Bonhoeffer did say, "Christ is no longer the object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean?" He continued to declare that Jesus is Lord of the world because he will not be confined to only religious spaces, but then added that even "The world is growing too small for the Christian community." Thus, he thought that Christ should not be reduced to an object of religion but was not saying that all speaking about God was subjective. He instead grounded speaking about God in the Body of Christ. He also believed in eschatological salvation and second coming in which Christ will conquer all, not allowing humans to place themselves over Christ in the religious, secular, objective, or subjective. (Ibid, 303)

<sup>23</sup> See: Martin Luther, "Lectures on Hebrews: 1517-1518," *Library of Christian Classics vol. 16, Luther: Early Theological Works*, ed. and trans. James Atkinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 233-234. Also see: James G. Kiecker, "Theologia Crucis et Theologia Gloriam: The Development of Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 92.3 (1995), 179-88. Luther argued the church of his day relied on human works or 'glory' rather than upon the salvific work of Christ which alone brought reconciliation with God. Kiecker argues that Luther first used the phrase, 'theology of glory' in his lecture on *Hebrews 12*.

and practices of Christianity as the Christ-given means of responding in faith to the self-revelation of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

As another example of a 'third' EC position between only viewing orthodoxy as a system of frozen ideas to be translated into current contexts (i.e., Driscoll), or as being open to complete revision (i.e., McLaren, Jones and Rollins), Clark has also claimed that EC movements of contextualization and deconstruction can be helpful for reformation and inculturation and that EC streams should be flexible in reaching out to “others not like us.” (Ibid) Still, he warns that EC voices should also realize the potential traps of a non-reflexive deconstruction that reduces everything to the subjective--as Rollins and some *Revisionists* have sought to do--and in which Christians are both then left with no uniquely Christian truths to proclaim and are also less likely to act toward others in the world in ways match the historic mission of Christianity. (Ibid) On this point, Clark argued, “whilst Christians confess the particular of following the historical Jesus within changing historical contexts” in ways that are contextually flexible and yet faithful to the particular Christ of history, Emerging Christians should be leery that in “post-modern...neo-Nietzschean...deconstructive hermeneutics,” such as evidenced by McLaren and Rollins, “there is little to no possibility that anyone can make any truth claims as a person, institution and organisation,” and there also appeared to be little desire to “take action, as agents of the Kingdom for the mission of Jesus,” which Clark implies is about both social action and eschatological salvation. (Ibid) Likewise, Clark asserted, after deconstruction, rather than taking, “responsibility to act to others...moving from abstraction to the concrete,” such deconstructionists seemed content to merely continue in open-ended discussion and critique. (Ibid) Then too, such deconstructionism seemed to “have no room for conflict and debate between claims,” which Thomas Oden has comparatively argued is why *consensual orthodoxy* and its broad historical debates are much more flexible and inclusive than are such secular methods.<sup>25</sup> (Ibid) Clark concluded the reason such EC deconstructionists rarely allowed themselves to be critiqued by

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<sup>24</sup>Bonhoeffer (1949) 2005, 53; Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 130-132, 329.

<sup>25</sup>Oden 2002,108-117.

external voices or advance to concrete missional acts is that they did not recognize that “the power of sin is not just in the systems that are deconstructed but in the people who try to deconstruct!”<sup>26</sup> (Clark 2007) In this last statement, Clark echoed Bonhoeffer's warning that the sinful human 'I' will take all things, even religion, and experiences into itself if not surrendered to Christ via death-to-self in the confession of sin.

On the other hand, in Clark's arguing for the 'confessional faith' of Bonhoeffer, including Bonhoeffer's belief in a 'real historical resurrection'<sup>27</sup>--which Clark also believed in and saw as being in alignment with the creedal confession and worship of the larger church in history--and also in Clark's call for the church to speak and act in 'concretely' historic Christian ways within current contexts, (ibid) we saw a vital thread uniting Bonhoeffer and Clark with more orthodox and *Reconstructionist* EC voices and dialogue partners such as James K.A. Smith, Scot McKnight, Robert Webber, and Doug Gay. Although supportive of movements of reformation and postmodern inculturation, as seen in Clark's work, such voices and dialogue partners also maintained that there was a shared historic 'confessional faith' at the core of Christianity and that removing creedal beliefs would rob the Christian faith of the shared believing and worshiping life together that unites and forms the body in Christ. Therefore, in this third Emerging approach to orthodoxy, which may be justly termed *Reconstructionist*, as with Bonhoeffer, submission to the core creedal beliefs and practices of apostolic Christianity was not done to objectively prove the

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<sup>26</sup>Clark was likely not only speaking to Rollins here, but also to McLaren who claimed a deconstruction of orthodoxy was essential to “disassemble that human construction,” so that the “true essence can reveal itself,” which he believes is primarily a concern for human situations. McLaren 2013.

<sup>27</sup>Bonhoeffer 1978, 73-74.

truths of Scripture or creeds to those outside of the Body of Christ, but rather as an act of faithful obedience, worship, belonging, and formation for those who are unified with Christ in his body.

There also appeared to be a connection between such orthodox and EC voices and Vincent via the intersection of *Reconstructionists* with Thomas Oden's Paleo-Orthodoxy, a theological school based in Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* that sought to root the Christian faith in the early ecumenical creeds and consensual writings of the church fathers. (Oden 1995a, 130) For instance, Robert Webber, who provided an early *Reconstructionist* voice amidst the larger EC movement,<sup>28</sup> was also Paleo-Orthodox, as is British Methodist, Geoffrey Wainright,<sup>29</sup> who has influenced *Reconstructionist* Doug Gay's approach to orthodox updating, as noted below.

### **6.3 EC Orthodox Congruence with Bonhoeffer and Vincent**

To first note the congruity between *Reconstructionist* EC voices and Bonhoeffer, it is important to briefly restate Bonhoeffer's critiques of approaches to orthodoxy as well as his approach. At the heart of Bonhoeffer's critiques of *orthodoxy-as-a-system*, was his point that Christians should not try to place God in a system of facts where they could claim to 'have God' and so make themselves secure in their methods, systems, or knowledge in which the sinful human 'I' reduced even God-given acts such as grace to a "doctrine, a principle, a system." (Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 45-46) Rather, Christ remained free in 'act' amidst the world, unbounded by human systems.<sup>30</sup> So, Christians must also seek to live in Christ<sup>31</sup> within the same profane world where Christ died for their salvation,<sup>32</sup> rather than in religious systems, since, "in the body of Jesus Christ God took upon himself the sin of the whole world...There is no part of

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<sup>28</sup>See: Webber 2007.

<sup>29</sup>See: Webber (2002); Wainright (2002). Both Webber and Wainright contributed chapters in honor of Thomas Oden in Tanner and Hall (2002).

<sup>30</sup>Bonhoeffer, (1931) 2009, 92, 111; Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 61.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 1998, 127.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, (1944) 1997, 486.

the world...so forlorn...so godless, which is not accepted by God and reconciled with God in Jesus Christ.” (Bonhoeffer (1949) 2005, 204)

Concurrently, while Bonhoeffer believed that Christ wished to break down the barriers of “false religious obligations and inhibitions” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 61), calling Christians to live incarnationally amidst the world, he maintained that Christ had also placed barriers between the sacred life-in-Christ and the secular life-in-the-flesh found in the world: “Christ *does* set up a barrier between man and his natural life” and, yet, “this barrier is...the gospel, the person of Jesus Christ.” (Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 106) He added that Christ “stands between us and God...and all other men and things.” (Bonhoeffer (1937) 2003, 95-98) Then too, the way by which one passed through-and-into Christ was by the death of self in confession of sin.<sup>33</sup> To offer participation in the body without confession was to offer 'cheap grace,' which was:

The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin...proclaimed as a general truth...An intellectual assent...held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins...no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of...the Incarnation of the Word of God...the grace we bestow on ourselves...without requiring repentance...Communion without confession. (Ibid, 45-48)

Thus, while Bonhoeffer centered all belief (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) in the incarnate Body of Christ existing as the church,<sup>34</sup> confession of sin and obedience to the creedal beliefs and sacred practices of the apostolic faith were how one surrendered to Christ in faith.<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer claimed, “faith is only real...only becomes faith in the act of obedience.” (Ibid, 69) As such, the core creedal apostolic beliefs and practices could not be revised or removed since they were the Christ-given ways by which one participated in the life in Christ.

Concurrently, in some synergy with Bonhoeffer’s view of the importance of maintaining the historic beliefs and practices at the heart of the living body, *Reconstructionist* Robert Webber pointed out that Vincent of Lérins also believed that since “the church was not a merely human organization of people who believe, but the Body of Christ inseparably united with the Holy Spirit,” the consensual doctrines of that body must not be removed because it is “the Holy Spirit

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<sup>33</sup>Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 110-119.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 1998, 127.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, (1931) 2009, 130-132; Bonhoeffer 1978, 74.

who is truly within the church brings consensus.” (Webber 1999, 193) At the same time, Vincent also did not allow creedal beliefs to be bound in an institution, as Bonhoeffer also warned against,<sup>36</sup> but rather only in the living Body of Christ as evidenced in the consentient voice of the universal body across the ages. (Lérins, 101-102)

Likewise, Emerging orthodox voices, such as Clark, also demonstrate that in holding to orthodoxy, they are not then appealing to a concept of orthodoxy as a *human system* in which truth may be controlled, objectified or extracted apart from a dynamic incarnational life in Christ.<sup>37</sup> Instead, like Vincent and Bonhoeffer, such orthodox EC voices have believed that Christians are primarily called into the dynamic worshiping life in the body, yet within which alignment with orthodoxy is an act of faith and of orienting one’s life and worship around the beliefs and acts that identify, unify, and form that body in the eternal Christ.

We can again see both a Vincentian and Bonhoefferesque approach to orthodoxy in the work of Robert Webber, a crucial influence on the EC.<sup>38</sup> While McLaren and Rollins had, among *Revisionists*, argued that the Christian journey must be a journey of self-discovery in which one follows the incarnate Christ out of Christian religion to enculturate the gospel via the mutually-critical pluralistic voices of a secular culture,<sup>39</sup> Webber, in congruity with Vincent and Bonhoeffer, said that for the ancient church the journey of faith, while also leading one into the secular world, meant to enter a world that was “hostile to the church and its values” and in which a believer had to be united with the incarnate Christ through specific sacred confessions and practices whereby “God’s saving presence is made a reality through physical signs.” (Webber 2001, 41-42) This then meant that, for the church as “the eschatological people who are under the reign of God, the people who confess ‘Jesus is Lord,’” they took with them into a hostile culture that was against Christ an “evangelism with teeth, not an ‘easy believism’ or a ‘cheap grace’; and it

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<sup>36</sup>Bonhoeffer critiqued the idea posited by “Protestant orthodoxy that the Bible is verbally inspired,” as having empowered Protestants to wrongly conceive of orthodoxy as an “institution” in which “God ‘is’ bound immediately and is at the disposal of human beings.” Bonhoeffer (1931) 2009, 104-105.

<sup>37</sup> See: T. Jones 2007, 18-24. Jones argued that orthodoxy must be dynamic and evolving if grounded in dynamic community, still, unlike Vincent and Bonhoeffer, he saw that community as pluralistic.

<sup>38</sup>See: Webber 2007.

<sup>39</sup>See: McLaren 2007; Rollins 2011b, 119-121.

was a spiritual journey of discipleship, spiritual formation, and entrance into a new community.” (Ibid) Further, to belong to that new community required persons to, again, specifically surrender to “the priority of the divinely authorized canonical story of the Triune God,” via, “the faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church.” (Webber and Kenyon 2006, 1)

Then too, also in synergy with Vincent, Bonhoeffer, Clark, and Webber, orthodox EC voice Doug Gay, a lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Glasgow, and a notable voice in the EC movement in the UK, has also argued that Christians must both take the gospel into the world in contextual ways and also maintain the core of the faith undiluted. In deference to the importance we have previously seen placed on contextualization by EC voices such as Ian Mobsby and Tony Jones, in Chapter Three,<sup>40</sup> Gay agreed that Emerging Christians must be aware of their contextual biases since, even amidst inculturation, there will always be an “ethnocentric tendency to falsely privilege one mode of inculturation over others” due to the “failure to understand the status of ‘our’ inculturate practice and inability to accompany our practice with theological reflection.” (Gay 2011, 64)

However, Gay thought that the solution was not, as we have seen *Revisionists* argue in previous chapters, to say that Christians are simply then trapped in contexts or that orthodox doctrines and creeds are also contextually bound. Contrarily, Gay believed that while Christians should 'unbundle' cultural beliefs and practices that have been layered over the core creedal beliefs and practices of the Christian faith, they must still, amidst inculturation, center Christian theology in the orthodox canon of the apostolic faith, which he quoted Paleo-Orthodox theologian Geoffrey Wainwright as claiming as “the apostolic faith, which defines historic Christianity and includes a confession of the unique and universal significance of Jesus Christ” and which, from that center, “allows a *cultural pluralism*...as part of an ecclesial catholicity in time and space that allows grace to transform rather than destroy culture.” (Wainwright 1997, 264) Hence, in accordance with Wainwright, Gay thought that Christians should be culturally contextual and yet

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<sup>40</sup>Mobsby 2007, 28; Jones 2007, 18-24.

should not revise the apostolic canon, nor simply translate culturally bound practices into another culture and assume it is the gospel itself, but, as Bonhoeffer has also argued, openly and flexibly bring the unique sacred core of the faith into the world. (Gay 2011, 66) Further, in his reliance upon Wainwright's work, Gay also demonstrated a shared distinctive of the 'third' EC approach to orthodoxy in which, as Vincent and Oden would appreciate, culturally diverse yet orthodox ecumenism is a key outcome of shared orthodox belief and worship in the body. Then too, Gay and Wainwright were also in sync with Robert Webber's suggestion, in *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Webber 2008, 75-76, 109), that orthodox Christians may hear the voices of pluralistic contexts, but must then humbly admit that to be Christian is to choose, by faith, to center one's beliefs and practices only in the "story of the canon of Scriptures that narrates our faith," which narrative will even impact how Christians think, speak, are formed, and worship.

Additionally, philosopher James K.A. Smith, a key dialogue partner with the EC, also evidenced connections with Bonhoeffer, Webber, and Gay's approaches to orthodoxy, as well as with Clark and Scot McKnight's critiques of deconstructionists as not being as open and diverse as orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> For instance, just as Clark has argued that EC deconstructionists such as Rollins had, rather than surrendering to the 'confessional' cruciform faith at the core of historical Christianity, instead emphasized a 'theologia gloriae' of philosophy and existential experiences, (Clark 2011) so too Smith asserted that those same EC voices who had attempted to merge the thinking of deconstructionist philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard with Christianity, to then claim a postmodern approach to the faith so as to justify their deconstructions of Christian doctrine, had not read Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard correctly and were, thus, neither in alignment with Christianity nor actually postmodern enough. (Smith 2006, 33-38, 74-75, 99, 116) Unlike Evangelical critics of the EC then, such as Kevin DeYoung and D.A. Carson, who, as seen in earlier chapters, believed a primary problem with the EC was the influence of

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<sup>41</sup>See: McKnight 2011.

postmodernism,<sup>42</sup> Smith was not afraid of having the church learn from postmodern examinations of the limits of knowledge since the church was birthed in a premodern era rather than a modern one. However, Smith has charged the problem was that those *Emergents* who have appealed to postmodernism, have often done so to try to correlate their faith to non-Christian contexts and philosophies, even as seen in their critiquing of orthodoxy through external lenses, such as we have previously seen McLaren do with Derrida, Rollins with Žižek and Tony Jones with Foucault. (Ibid, 48) As such, EC *Revisionists* were attempting to examine Christianity through external worldviews and, in this, were actually still too *modern*, Smith claimed, and thus also not as humble as the orthodox Christian faith, which Smith defines as the “Christian faith as rooted in the Scriptures and attested in the historic creeds and confessions,” which affirms the limits of human knowing; (Ibid, 27) as Oden argued, in Chapter Three, *consensual orthodoxy* does in its call for humility.<sup>43</sup>

As such, Smith has sought to show that orthodoxy actually has greater epistemological humility than do those who have tried to deconstruct the core beliefs of Christianity through the lenses of current philosophies, such as *Revisionist* Tony Jones’s did in, as seen in Chapter Three, for instance, attempting to use Foucault to claim that all orthodox beliefs, including even the “orthodox articulation of Christology,” were merely human ‘constructions’ formed by systems of power. (T. Jones 2007, 16) Smith has argued that, unlike such attempts to label orthodoxy as a construct, which actually reveal a need to rationally analyze the faith by way of external philosophies, conversely, the greater epistemological humility of the orthodox Christianity of the ancient creeds and confessions could be seen in the fact that they were consistent with their story and identity needing to be paradoxically ‘confessed’ by faith rather than proven via objective truth claims or philosophies. (Ibid, 116, 123-126) In this idea, Smith was also supported by Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer declared that “Absolute certainty about an historical fact is in itself never attainable. It remains a paradox” and, yet, in the person of Christ the historical fact, such as the resurrection,

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<sup>42</sup>See: DeYoung and Kluck 2008; Carson 2005b.

<sup>43</sup>Oden 2002, 30, 162.

now becomes “present” as what for humans was once only reference now becomes “absolute” through the “witness of the risen one to himself.” (Bonhoeffer 1978, 72) Then too, Smith also stated that the accounts of Scripture can, for those who are in Christ, now be seen as interpretations of objective events, such as Christ’s death on the cross, however, in sync with both Bonhoeffer and a more authentically postmodern admission of the limits of human knowing, Smith claimed that “One must (subjectively) accept this revelatory interpretation, which requires faith—and such faith requires the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit” to see that the event which Christ has made clear, through objective revelation given in himself, must be accepted in faith. (Ibid, 48) So then, Smith believed too that ancient Christians admitted the necessity of faith and the working of the Spirit to ‘believe’ that the canon of faith which has been transmitted to the present was also true, (Ibid, 119) rather than treating revelation as a system of facts to which humans had access at any time. (Ibid, 56)

Consequentially, again much like Bonhoeffer, Smith further argued that Christians must then surrender to the same creeds and practices transmitted by the apostles to faithfully center their worship in the unified body, rather than pursuing the ‘individualism’ of modernity. (Ibid) In this focus on surrender to unity, Smith also showed synergy with Vincent who warned that the heart of heresy was a refusal to surrender to the unity of the body, as well as in the belief that unity in the body would necessarily lead to a shared affirmation of the creedal beliefs of the whole. (Lérins, 76-77) This sentiment was also echoed often by some *Relevant* and many *Reconstructionist* respondents to our ethnographic questionnaire, as reported in Chapter Four, who felt that the greatest challenge to the church today was disunity and that Christian unity--which brought together the diverse expressions of the faith as one--should be pursued with the core beliefs of orthodoxy serving as a unifying element around which to gather diverse persons and expressions. For instance, San Francisco-based minister, Warren, argued that “the gospel has been significantly weakened in our country because of the lack of unity and diversity,” noting that Christians needed to become unified with the diverse global voices of the one faith, doing so in shared rootedness in the creedal beliefs. Then also, Rachel, a *Reconstructionist* respondent who

leads an *Acts*-style house church, asserted, “I believe there needs to be a breaking down of the concreted lines of denominationalism” by together recovering unity centered in the clear ‘basics’ of the faith “as outlined in the Nicene Creed” and “demonstrated through how we live out Matthew 28:16-20.” Likewise, we saw Derrick, as part of an emerging Anabaptist expression, share that he was most encouraged by “the explosive growth of orthodox Christianity all over the world,” believing a global return to orthodoxy was evidence that God was gathering his church. In agreement, Trevor, an Anglican New-Friar, also thought there was a new wave of “reconciliation and unity in the Body of Christ,” which he also saw as being centered in the shared ancient creedal beliefs of the faith, adding that, “as Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,” Christians could only have community “through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ, where we belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ” and in the ways Christ ordained.

At the same time, while Bonhoeffer and Smith both placed surrender to the incarnate Christ, and unified life together in the body at the center of the Christian faith, above statements of belief, still, they saw adherence to the confession, worship, and creedal beliefs essential to unity since they were how Christians were called to practice surrender and formation together faithfully. Consequentially, James K.A. Smith also argued that *where* and *how* one worshipped further demonstrated *what* a person truly believed, *who* they believed in, and *how* they were formed. (Smith 2016, 3) Likewise, just as Bonhoeffer thought the core sin was having one's heart focused on one's self and their desires, and that the antidote was to reorient one's heart toward Christ through confession of sin and surrender to arcane practices,<sup>44</sup> so Smith also argued that the 'center of gravity' for humans is found in *who* or *what* they worship in their 'heart' (Ibid, 9) and so to be a Christian meant to not only align one's intellectual beliefs with orthodoxy (Ibid, 3), but to reorient one's self in Christ within the shared worshiping rhythms of the body where God will “renew our loves, reorient our desires, and retrain our appetites,” so that *who-and-what* people love, and who they *are*, is formed in Christ. (Ibid, 65)

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<sup>44</sup>Bonhoeffer (1939) 2005, 111-112.

Further, for Smith, like Vincent, such formational and unifying worship cannot be separated from the historic beliefs and practices of the church since, although the early church at first innovated in their worship practices as the disciples and their successors “sought to discern the rhythms and practices that would constitute the community of Christ,” Smith claimed that such innovation was 'faithful,' 'careful,' and in specific response to “Jesus’ commands...giving us Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, for example.” (Ibid, 79-80) Then, over the subsequent centuries, the “Body of Christ continued to discern the scripts that should characterize a worshipping community centered on the ascended Christ,” so that what now exists in the body may be allowed to grow, as Vincent has even allowed.<sup>45</sup> However, it should not be deconstructed since “the repertoire of historic Christian worship represents the accumulated wisdom of the Body of Christ led by the Spirit into truth, as Jesus promised (John 16:13)” and it is to that same shared body that Christians belong. (Ibid) Even more, Smith asserted that the 'accumulated wisdom' and worship of that unified Body of Christ through the centuries brought about not only “doctrinal correctness” but, more vitally, “a promise that the same Spirit would lead the Body of Christ to discern a way of life that is faithful” and “this liturgical heritage” was:

An expression our catholic faith--the common, orthodox heritage of the church that is shared across an array of Christian traditions...like the Nicene Creed. When our worship has a common form, it reinforces our oneness and unity, which is especially important for the church’s witness in our post-Christian age. (Ibid)

Then too, Smith claimed that the core practices of ancient Christian worship were also the “gifts of the tradition handed down to us for our (re)formation,” providing guidance for how Christians might seek growth and reformation today, yet, as Vincent and Oden have also argued, in ways that were accountable to that same body, formed by the Spirit. (Ibid, 86)

So then, along with Clark, Webber and Gay, Smith provided another example of a third Emerging approach to orthodoxy that we also saw traces of in the ethnographic responses, in Chapter Four, amidst *Relevants* and, even more so, amidst *Reconstructionists* who were seeking

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<sup>45</sup>See: Guarino 2006, 70, footnote 17. Guarino claimed Vincent’s method was rejected as too progressive at Vatican II due to his belief doctrine could grow. Also see: Ratzinger 1966, 20–21.

rootedness and formation in the ancient creeds, liturgies, and practices of the church, which again showed tremendous synergy with both Vincent and Bonhoeffer. Smith, for example, evidenced this similar approach in, like Bonhoeffer,<sup>46</sup> grounding orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the incarnate Christ where one must then have their heart and desires reoriented via the shared creedal beliefs and sacred practices/worship which, in surrendering to in faith, shows that one has surrendered to the same God as that encountered by the apostolic witnesses. (Ibid) Such surrender and humble alignment with the universal body even provided an antidote to the danger Bonhoeffer noted of placing one's self over revelation through making orthodoxy a system of objective truth claims,<sup>47</sup> as Smith believed both postmodern *Emergents* and many modern Evangelical Christians were doing in attempting to understand or explain Christianity via external methods or worldviews. In also noting both the faithful and careful development of doctrine and worship practices that took place in church history, by the guidance of the Spirit, (Ibid, 79-80, 86) Smith also showed points of connection with Vincent's belief that doctrine could grow, but must clearly be seen to be in congruence *with* and centered *in* the sequential growth of the Body of Christ from the time of the apostles to the present,<sup>48</sup> or else one is not only innovating new doctrine but is ejecting from unity in Christ; which Vincent warned persons were doing if they rejected the consensual orthodox life and doctrine formed in the Body of Christ across the centuries. (Lérins, 80)

This approach to orthodoxy, as evidenced by Smith, in which orthodoxy is seen as the shared faith, obedience and worship of the body in response to revelation, has also been noted by Kevin DeYoung as bypassing the two typical positions in 'objective versus subjective' approaches to truth, which we earlier saw *Relevants* and *Revisionists* respectively taking, to instead turn inward to know reality in formational belief and worship in the body. (DeYoung 2013) However, DeYoung, as a Neo-Reformed Evangelical critic of both the EC and Postmodernism, whom we saw critique the EC's engagement with postmodernism in our second chapter, has also critiqued

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<sup>46</sup>Bonhoeffer 1998, 127.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid, (1931) 2009, 108.

<sup>48</sup>Lérins, 80.

Smith's approach here as having, like Emerging voices, wrongly departed from the importance DeYoung believes Scripture has placed on objectively 'knowing truth' through Scripture and creation. (Ibid) DeYoung has instead agreed with David F. Wells' views, as seen in *God in the Whirlwind*,<sup>49</sup> that Christians should focus on knowing and defending truth objectively, especially against the wider culture. (Ibid) Smith, conversely, has critiqued Wells, with whom DeYoung is in agreement, for seeking, in his writing, to escape what he sees as a 'corrupted' culture, especially postmodernity, to return to what DeYoung refers to as an objective, "set of views we have lost;" but that, in Smith's view, may be seen as viewing orthodoxy as a system of beliefs or even fleeing the world for Christendom. (Smith 2013) However, like Bonhoeffer and Clark,<sup>50</sup> Smith has again argued that such a modern approach to truth, in which Christians believe they must prove truth objectively, has repeated the same error as deconstructionists in denying the reality of sin's influence upon persons' reason and interpretations and, at best, only proved, "thin realities of theism." (Ibid) Instead, Smith argued that the role of the Body of Christ as a 'witness' to the truth is "not demonstration but rather proclamation" which begins with revelation and with *being* the church, rather than with reason. (Smith 2006, 28)

Therefore, Smith has made a helpful case for how this 'third' approach to orthodoxy, in which submission to creedal beliefs is seen as an act of faithful obedience, worship, belonging, and formation in the Body of Christ, still supports belief in objective truth, but prioritizes experience of truth in revelation in the body first; in which body confession, life, and worship together in Christ proclaims Christ to the world more effectively than the correlationist apologetics of many Evangelicals. (Ibid) However, while Smith does not seem to indicate that doctrine may then later be contextualized in such a way that current contexts may approach it rationally, Vincent, on the other hand, appeared to emphasize that orthodox doctrine, as the shared witness of the Body of Christ, could also, after being accepted in faith, also be spoken of

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<sup>49</sup>Wells 2014.

<sup>50</sup>Jason Clark, "The Will to Action: Deconstruction and Reconstruction in Church," *Jasonclark.church.blog* (July 5, 2007), accessed Mar. 2018, <https://jasonclark.church/blogs/2007/07/the-will-to-action-deconstruction-and-reconstruction-in-church>. Clark claimed deconstructionists also failed to see their sinful control over their deconstruction.

objectively and not only experienced.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, we have considered how Vincent also allowed the consensual witness to revelation be spoken of, refined, defended, and proclaimed.

#### **6.4 Orthodoxy as Faith, Obedience, Worship, and also Witness**

As we have seen in Chapter Three, in the concept of *consensual orthodoxy* Vincent agreed with Bonhoeffer, and orthodox EC voices noted above, that the creedal beliefs of the Christian faith must be surrendered to first by faith and centered in the formational worshiping life in Christ.<sup>52</sup> Vincent also did not indicate that orthodox doctrine could be extracted from the Body of Christ and either handled trans-subjectively or used to correlate the faith externally. Likewise, Vincent also did not indicate that Christians were left to view orthodox doctrines only as a paradoxical ‘confession’ of faith or as a ‘depth grammar’ that guided worship and practices, ala Hans Frie and George Lindbeck,<sup>53</sup> but in which one could never rationally know or describe that which the orthodox consensus claimed was true. Rather, in Vincent's concept of *consensual orthodoxy*, doctrine formed in the worshiping body was a shared witness to revelation by those unified by the Spirit and “united to each other by faith...equalled with each other by humility,” which allowed consensual doctrines of that body to also be understood, refined, defended, and proclaimed as a shared testimony of the sacred people of Christ in the world. (Lérins, 102)

For instance, it is again interesting to note, as in Chapter Three, that in *The Commonitory* Vincent quotes *I Tim. 6:20*, where Paul says, “O Timothy, guard the deposit, shunning profane novelties of words,” to argue that the task of *consensual orthodoxy*, in service to apostolicity, was to humbly surrender to and safeguard the apostolic ‘deposit’ of teachings and interpretations that had been handed down from the apostles through the body, teaching only “the same truths which thou hast learnt,” even if they were at first “imperfectly apprehended;” with Vincent indicating that Timothy did not necessarily comprehend all that was transmitted, yet still received, guarded,

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<sup>51</sup>Lérins, 53, 85, 86.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>See: Hans Frie, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (Yale University Press, 1980); George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

and transmitted it faithfully. (Lérins, 53, 78, 86) However, Vincent also thought that even if one adhered to consensual teachings as an act of faith and obedience first, Christians should then seek to understand apostolic doctrine, as well as receive, guard, and proclaim it. (Ibid)

In seeking to understand doctrine, Vincent was not then attempting to correlate the faith to current contexts or to place human knowing over doctrine, but to instead make sure that what was being believed in and transmitted was only 'heavenly doctrine,' with those who taught it being witnesses and not originators.<sup>54</sup> (Lérins, 11) *Consensual orthodoxy* then, as the consensual witness of the Body of Christ to revelation in Christ, also provided an antidote to the sinful nature of human reason and systems in that revelatory knowledge about Christ could only be transmitted in the worshiping life and unity of the universal ecumenical body in which consensual knowing could not be hijacked, since, as Oden claimed, “If one tries to impersonate consensus without entering deeply into the worshiping community, without singing the hymns, without begin immersed in the written word, without walking daily in the way, without living life in Christ, his for her voice will quickly betray itself with evidence of dissonance.” (Oden 2002, 119)

In agreeing with Vincent on the ability of that consensual body to not only view doctrine as ritual, practice, or a 'depth grammar,' but as testimony that could be known and proclaimed as true externally as well, Oden additionally argued that the Spirit does not only work to form the person and the body inwardly but also works “externally in bearing the objective testimony of Scripture and preaching” so that truth revealed in the Spirit may also be preached externally as objectively true, although it can only be received and understood through the Spirit’s inward work to open person’s hearts to receive the truth in faith. (Oden 1991, 91) Likewise, *Reconstructionist* Scot McKnight, in noting recovery of orthodox ecumenism, has also argued that the core content of the orthodox faith, that must be maintained to remain Christian, can also be described and explained and not only performed:

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<sup>54</sup>Oden notes that the martyrs who gave their lives to transmit the orthodox teachings only wished to “witness to faith, whatever the cost,” showing that the orthodox doctrine had been transmitted as a body of witness and not mere human innovation. (Oden 2002, 52)

Orthodoxy believes that there is an identifiable content to the Christian faith and that it can be articulated. No one has ever explained the creeds as expressing all of that faith, but it has always been a conviction that the central creedal statements are at the core of that faith. Denial of which jeopardizes Christian faith...So, what I see going on for many of us is to identify the core of the faith with what the Church has always believed. Further, it enables us to hold hands with the Great Traditions: Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism and Protestantism...without denying differences but affirming where we all can agree. (McKnight 2006b)

Thus, for McKnight, orthodoxy was the creedal 'core of the faith' that unifies the Body of Christ ecumenically, and that should also be identified and discussed. Discussing doctrine also serves unity in the body since being able to speak about doctrine further allows Christians to identify which distinctives must be ecumenically held to remain in the same faith, and united around, and which are not only *not* a part of the body but are actually detrimental to the faith. (Ibid)

Vincent agreed that, by discussing and identifying core doctrines, not only did Christians come into greater unity of heart and mind, but heresy was also identified, helping persons remain in the 'unity of communion' in the body. (Lérins, 102-105) Since unity in the body was a Christ-given directive for Christians (*John 17*), identifying heresy was primarily about helping persons to remain in humble unity in Christ rather than departing in pride in their individual beliefs. (Lérins, 28-29, 80-83, 101-102) Thus, in this method, Vincent has also provided both agreement and a solution to Bonhoeffer's concern about the human 'I' placing itself over revelation, or even above orthodoxy, since, as Oden has noted, (Oden 2002, 175) Vincent understood that even believers were tempted by the "insatiable lust for error," in which human nature was "possessed by a permanent desire to change religion to add something and to take something away," and so he then showed that all human thought must always be surrendered to the consentient belief seen in the witness of all Christians, in all places and times. (Lérins, 305-307) Further, Oden points out that, in identifying the orthodox beliefs held by the consensus, Christians were also shown the boundaries within which they were free "to move confidently" in "freedom of inquiry and action." (Oden 2002, 30) Further, since, as McKnight has pointed out, the creedal beliefs were only those core creedal beliefs agreed to by the whole consensus, there is then, in fact, a vast field of thought and expression within which one is free to think and move within *consensual*

*orthodoxy*. (McKnight 2006) This is also why, again, as we have pointed out in previous chapters, Vincent's method further allowed for the development of later statements by the church, as seen from the Reformation to the current era, and was even turned to by the Reformers to guide their work.<sup>55</sup> As one of our study respondents, Ben, noted, "The Reformers did their theology in conversation with the historic church. They knew the writings of the Fathers. They had a ton of appreciation and deference for tradition" and likewise appreciated the boundaries they provided for their reforming work, knowing that, as Ben added, "If someone is not in agreement with the historic creeds they are likely not a Christian."

Consequentially, why Vincent's emphasis on being able to identify, articulate, and defend orthodox doctrine is also potentially helpful for the work of Emerging expressions is that, in demonstrating the clear consensual boundaries for the growth or contextualization of doctrine, it has then provided greater flexibility for contextualizing doctrine amidst current contexts than can be found in conceiving of *orthodoxy as-a-system* of 'frozen' objective beliefs, or in seeing it as only an element of a sacred life accepted in paradoxical faith; both of which may inhibit the ability and desire to contextually speak about and inculturate doctrine in missional ways.<sup>56</sup> Since, in *consensual orthodoxy*, creedal beliefs can be seen as a shared testimony to God's person and story, or an 'ecumenical chorus' singing about what has been revealed as true in Christ, (Oden 2002, 119) and is also then true within the world, this approach then allows current communities to be brought into conversation with the shared testimony or song of the church through the ages. They are also able to ask questions and seek contextual understanding of that story or song. Further, in this method, Christians may also have freedom, amidst inculturation, to use new language, methods or even to seek to clarify better what has been said by the body, yet while clarifying, updating, or elucidating only in congruence-and-continuity with the original meaning

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<sup>55</sup> See: Guarino 2014, 103-117.

<sup>56</sup>This also appeared to be a vital distinction between Vincent and Bonhoeffer. For instance, as we have seen in our last chapter, while Bonhoeffer sought to unbundle Christianity from religious institutions and systems, he appeared to then re-bundle creedal claims, such as the Virgin Birth, as agents of revelation whereby, in removing them from being objectively discussed, he may have, in fact, shown that he too greatly valued the voices of the modern world to whom he could not rationally correlate such creedal claims. Bonhoeffer (1944) 1997, 285.

of those beliefs, as transmitted and confirmed by the consensus in the same body across all cultures, places, and times.<sup>57</sup> Then too, Oden added that in this approach, in which one may trust that what has been affirmed by the universal consensus in Christ is true, also “frees critical reasoning from the templates of narrow modern ideological advocacy,” since truth could now be approached in conversation together across a vast ‘mosaic’ of universal ecumenical testimony and thought rather than only through narrower modern means. (Oden 2002, 116-117)

We have thus come to view Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy*, as applied via the methodological steps that both Vincent and Oden have provided, as noted in Chapter Three,<sup>58</sup> as having tremendous potential for providing accountability to apostolicity for Emerging expressions who are seeking to center orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the incarnate Christ amidst current contexts, while also being able to speak about, refine and contextualize the Christian narrative, but also wish to remain in humble and faithful unity, continuity and congruity with the creedal beliefs of the whole church from the Apostles to the present. However, as Thomas Guarino has also noted,<sup>59</sup> the *consensual orthodox* method, in which one may see doctrine grow, but must surrender their personal beliefs and contexts to the consensus of the whole church both past and present, requires time, reflection, patience, listening, humility and surrender of one's beliefs in the greater unity of the Body of Christ. Thus, it is likely more comfortable for persons to either 'freeze' doctrine or practice revision than it is to both hear and surrender to the unity of the consensus in the body through a process that requires consulting not only church fathers but the larger ecumenical, catholic Body of Christian writings. However, if one accepts Bonhoeffer's argument for surrendering to the core beliefs and practices of the historic faith as the antidote to placing the 'I' of one's self over Christ, we believe that adopting Vincent's method suggests a tangible way to do so: seeing orthodoxy as grounded in the incarnate Christ, while then showing

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid, 28-29, 80-83.

<sup>58</sup>Oden says any assertion about doctrine must pass three tests: that it is the “same faith that the church confesses the world over,” it is the “same faith confessed by the apostles,” and that it has survived “testing by cross-cultural generations of general lay consent through a trustworthy process of conciliar agreement.” Oden 2002, 162.

<sup>59</sup>Guarino 2014, 103-117.

how one may also proceed to innovatively and contextually reform, worship, speak, and inculcate the gospel in current contexts in ways that are apostolically faithful.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have identified ways in which Bonhoeffer, Vincent, Oden, and orthodox EC voices shared a similar belief that one who centers their doctrine and practice in the incarnate Christ--as in previous chapters we have seen *Revisionists* such as McLaren, Jones, and Rollins arguing they are themselves doing--should, in contradiction with such *Revisionists*, remain faithful to the core creedal beliefs and sacred practices of orthodoxy. Faithful surrender to the core beliefs of orthodoxy is vital for Bonhoeffer, Vincent, and orthodox EC voices, as noted in this chapter, in that it demonstrates faithful surrender to and unity in the incarnate Christ. In such orthodox EC agreement with Bonhoeffer and Vincent, especially on the importance of centeredness in the creedal beliefs of the church, not only on the part of key EC voices such as Clark, Gay, and McKnight, but also amidst EC respondents whom we questioned in Chapter Four, we also saw a 'third' EC approach to orthodoxy. However, amidst what we have referred to as a 'third' approach to orthodoxy, while Vincent's method appears to have influenced Webber, and perhaps Wainright, it still does not appear to have gained wider consideration with EC thinkers to this point, in either its synergy with Bonhoeffer or its applicability for guiding faithful contextualization or inculturation amidst emerging contexts. Still, in the observed convergence of orthodox and *Reconstructionist* EC voices with concern for incarnational and faithful centeredness in orthodoxy, we wonder if Thomas Oden was correct in identifying a new work of the Spirit to call Christians back to ancient consensual beliefs, practices, and knowing in recent years through a 'rebirth of orthodoxy.'<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, in considering the applicability of Vincent's concept of orthodoxy for Emerging expressions, we believe EC expressions would, in further listening to Vincent, benefit from seeing that doctrine does not only have to be systematized, revised, or only paradoxically

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<sup>60</sup>Oden 2002, 10-11.

accepted in faith, but can be seen as a shared witness to Christ formed within the worshiping body through the centuries, by the work of the Spirit, which also shows how one may faithfully speak about Christ's revelation in truth and worship amidst the world; while also refuting those beliefs which depart from the shared revelation and unity of the whole.<sup>61</sup> Then too, not only faithfully submitting to, but understanding the core doctrines of *consensual orthodoxy*, is vital in showing what may or may not be further said or elucidated for missional work in postmodern contexts, while remaining within the shared belief, worship, and witness of Christ's body.

## 6.6 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen some of the ways that missionally incarnational, yet orthodox and *Reconstructionist* EC voices and dialogue partners have, like Vincent and Bonhoeffer, agreed that Christians are called to surrender their lives to Christ through obedience *to* and *within* the dynamic and worshiping life in the Body of Christ as transmitted via orthodoxy. Further, within the incarnate Body of Christ, alignment with orthodoxy was first an act of faith and of orienting one's life and worship around the core beliefs, acts and rhythms that identified, unified, and formed the body. Additionally, in referring again to Vincent's method of *consensual orthodoxy* we have briefly noted how his method might also help missionally incarnational, yet faithful orthodox EC voices to see how doctrine may be discussed, elucidated, and contextualized in missional situations, while also defending it against heresies that depart from consensual unity

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<sup>61</sup>Lérins, 76-77-, 101-102.

in the body; ensuring that what is taught is authentically Christian and has developed in congruence and continuity with the original apostolic faith.

## DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Introduction

In this study, we have considered *if, how, or to what extent* emerging Christian expressions might seek to reform, innovate, or revise Christian forms, language, practices, or doctrines to inculturate the gospel amidst postmodern contexts and yet do so in ways that are in faithful continuity-and-congruence with apostolicity and orthodoxy. We have also examined to what EC expressions and precedents are accountable and, if not orthodoxy, then what they consider the center of the Christian faith that may not be revised.

In our first two chapters, via a review of the primary literature, blogs, interviews, and talks of the Emerging Church (EC), we examined the rise and fracturing of the EC movement, the debates that led to fracturing, and some of the key arguments presented by leading EC voices to justify their opposing views and approaches to orthodoxy. We learned that the fracturing of the three streams of the EC, *Relevants*, *Reconstructionists*, and *Revisionists*, as categorized by Ed Stetzer, was primarily due to politically charged debates over doctrines and practices relating to issues such as sexuality, war, the unique salvific atonement of Christ, and the need to confess individual sin, especially as one attempted to contextualize the gospel in pluralistic, postmodern contexts. Amidst such fracturing we were surprised to discover that many of the EC voices who debated such issues, such as Mark Driscoll, Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Peter Rollins, despite stark hermeneutical and doctrinal disagreements, similarly believed that they could defend or revise consensual orthodox understandings of Scripture or doctrine based on their own beliefs, values, and experiences, or theological, psychological, or philosophical systems. For instance, EC *Revisionist* Brian McLaren, in his books, blogs, and interviews, justified revisions of orthodoxy and his redefining of 'sola scriptura' by claiming to ground belief and praxis in the incarnate Christ, which then allowed him to 'tweak' creedal teachings if it seemed 'good' to him and 'to the Spirit.' Further, McLaren's ministry partner, Tony Jones, would argue that Christians needed to be realists when it came to doctrine, in conversation with the dynamic and evolving realities of

current contexts. Then too, Mark Driscoll, in the *Relevant* stream, argued, in his books and sermons, that orthodoxy should be ‘frozen’ as an objective set of truths, but then also revised consensual interpretations. As such, the leading EC voices whom we examined did not evidence concern for apostolicity or *consensual orthodoxy*. Subsequently, there appeared to be nothing to hold the EC streams from further divergence from both each other and from historic orthodoxy since, as Thomas Oden noted, they did not evidence an ‘immune system’ to resist heresy.

Subsequently, in Chapter Three, we explored Thomas Oden’s suggestion that St. Vincent of Lérins’ method of *consensual orthodoxy* might provide a flexible yet faithful method showing Emerging expressions to what extent doctrine may be updated or contextualized without departing from apostolicity. In studying Vincent’s *Commonitory*, we discovered that *consensual orthodoxy* suggests that orthodoxy is a shared testimony of the Body of Christ about how to faithfully interpret and elucidate the apostolic canon of teaching. Thus, the potential suitability of Vincent’s method for the reforming and missional work of Emerging streams is found in the fact that Vincent grounded orthodoxy in the living Body of Christ, rather than in an institution or system of truth claims, as both Bonhoeffer and EC Revisionists such as Tony Jones and Peter Rollins warned against. Moreover, Vincent also allowed doctrine to grow within the body in terms of elucidation and contextualization, much as a human body must also grow and mature and, yet, while both remaining the same body and developing an immune system to resist external bodies that might harm the body and its members. Further, in synergy with McLaren and Rollins’ focus on grounding truth in the incarnate Christ, Vincent claimed that orthodox teaching, as transmitted from the apostles, must be accepted in faith first, before understanding. However, conversely, Vincent also then cited surrender to the unity of the consensual doctrine of the universal ecumenical Body of Christ as evidencing belonging to the same body as that of the apostles. Therefore, the approaches to orthodoxy of both Driscoll and McLaren, among other EC voices we explored, would be heterodox, according to Vincent’s method, since they departed from the consensual creedal beliefs, by which surrender to one evidences unity in the same body. Thus, while allowing doctrine to grow, Vincent provided an ‘immune system’ to guard against

heresy by arguing that doctrinal growth must always be in clear continuity and congruence with the consensus of all Christians, in all places, and at all times, being seen to have clearly developed from the teaching transmitted by the Apostles and not changing the meaning.

Conversely, in *Revisionist* critiques of *consensual orthodoxy*, we saw that they argued that contextual theology and postmodern deconstructionism, which they privileged, showed the impossibility of the consensus that Vincent claimed was possible. However, we saw Oden argue, primarily in *Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, that such critics have not understood how orthodoxy is more diverse, flexible, and the result of a consensus more often suppressed by power, than that which he classified as the mostly western, white, and narrower paradigm of revisionist critics.

Next, since Vincent learned his method of *consensual orthodoxy* from both the apostolic tradition, the consensus of church fathers, and the consensus of those whom he interviewed in his day, and also believed that the orthodox consensus was formed by the Spirit, in Chapter Four, we sought to enter into direct conversation with current theologians, pastors, and lay leaders who *were* or *are* in one of the three key EC streams, postcedents, or partners, in order to discover *how* or *to what extent* they had further diverged, to what extent they considered apostolicity and orthodoxy amidst their reformation, contextualization, innovation, or even revision, and to what they were accountable. We also hoped to discover whether there was evidence of Spirit formed consensus on core creedal beliefs, as Vincent and Oden discussed, though we were not hopeful of finding it. We then observed that many *Relevants* and *Reconstructionists* showed synergy in not only considering orthodoxy but in seeking to recover ancient liturgical rhythms and practices that were rooted not only in the ancient creeds but in the worship and praxis of the early church; seeing both orthodoxy and orthopraxy as needing to be centered not only in Scriptures and creeds, but in a life of liturgical worship together, from which word and deed could not be separated. In these points, these streams shared commonality with Oden's belief, drawn from his reading of Vincent presented in *Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, that doctrine should be centered in the unifying, worshiping life of the Body of Christ. Also surprising was the discovery that many former EC voices in these two streams had also joined Emerging Anglican expressions in a journey toward

an ancient-future expression of the church like that envisioned by EC dialogue partner Robert Webber, in works such as *Ancient-Future Faith*.

Conversely, in that same ethnographic chapter, Chapter Four, respondents in the *Revisionist* stream, though not always claiming to abandon orthodoxy, often tried to redefine orthodoxy in contradiction with the historic orthodox consensus and in synergy with leading *Revisionist* voices such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Peter Rollins. For instance, some respondents in the *Revisionist* stream argued revisions of orthodoxy were authentically Christian if grounded in the incarnational Christ or 'way of Jesus,' as they understood it, allowing the faith to evolve in sync with their own evolving beliefs, values, experiences, or contexts, and sometimes those of the wider culture, including non-Christian voices. Considering such *Revisionist* deconstructions of orthodoxy, in service to current cultural values, we then questioned *how* or *to what extent* a stream that no longer adhered to historic and consensual understandings of orthodoxy may claim to be centered in historic Christianity and not a new faith. Interestingly, some *Revisionist* respondents expressed that they were a part of a new, evolving faith.

Consequentially, in Chapter Five, we next examined a key *Revisionist* voice, in Peter Rollins, who, in works such as *Insurrection*, has attempted to use Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work in *Letters and Papers from Prison* to argue that a *Revisionist* deconstruction of orthodoxy, as observed in the voices of key *Revisionist* sources and questionnaire respondents, is both necessary to enter into a living and contextual faith and is actually more 'authentically Christian' than adhering to historic orthodoxy. As such, we saw that in order to justify the deconstruction of orthodoxy and an embracing of heterodoxy as being authentically Christian, Rollins argued that truth is found in Christ alone, but that Christ is then incarnate only amidst subjective materialist actualities and that, thus, truth is found in abandoning all religious knowing, even certainty of God's existence, to find Christ in materialist acts of love in the larger postmodern culture.

However, in reading most of Bonhoeffer's corpus of works together, as Paul Lehmann and Eberhard Bethge suggested, including *Act and Being*, *Christ the Center*, *Life Together*, *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rather than seeing support for Rollins' claim

that Bonhoeffer supports his deconstruction of orthodoxy, we instead saw that Bonhoeffer, although critical of abuses of *orthodoxy-as-a-human-system*, saw individual human pride and sin as that which must be chiefly deconstructed, by Christ acting toward humans in revelation and not in humans own psychological experiences or deconstructions. Bonhoeffer also warned of the danger of making the Christ of the apostolic witnesses into a 'Christ of culture' or into that in which the human 'I' creates an 'idol of Christ' based upon existential or psychological experiences, especially if it allows the individual to avoid the death-of-self through confession of sin. Bonhoeffer also believed that, while Christ has specifically made himself incarnate within the living Body of Christ, Christians then, if they are in the same body, must also, by faith, surrender to the core creedal beliefs and practices of Christianity, as received, since they are agents of revelation. In Bonhoeffer's call for 'obedience' in sacred thinking and practices, he also provided criterion evidencing encounter with Christ. Such criterion also resonated with Vincent of Lérins' concept of *consensual orthodoxy* in which truth is also grounded in the living Body of Christ, but within which body certain evidences emerge of having encountered the same Christ as that of the apostolic witnesses, including an alignment of confession, worship, and doctrine.

Likewise, we discovered that otherwise sympathetic EC voices, such as Richard Beck, also disagreed with Rollins' reading of Bonhoeffer and it was even argued, specifically by Karen Moody (Moody 2012), that Rollins and fellow EC deconstructionists were more accurately following the Marxist-Hegelian a/theism of Slavoj Žižek. As such, after examining Žižek's views on Christ, truth, and community, we became aware that language we had previously encountered in both Rollins' *Ikon* collectives and Brian McLaren's new *Open/Convergence* networks, which included respondents to our study, shared tremendous similarity to Žižek language, as filtered through Rollins, including their goal of creating pluralistic 'spaces for being' in the greater culture. Thus, McLaren's new *Open/Convergence* communities, like Rollins' communities, likely had more in common with Žižek's vision for communist collectives than they did with the vision for Christian community presented by Bonhoeffer and the Apostle Paul. We also found that in the *Revisionists'* Marxist-Hegelian a/theistic deconstructionist turns, even former EC ministry

partners, such as Scot McKnight and Jason Clark, saw McLaren and Rollins as moving too far beyond the unifying center of the Christian faith.

At the same time, in the work of flexible yet orthodox EC voices, such as McKnight and Clark, who also appeared to view orthodoxy as being grounded in the incarnate Christ, rather than as a system or set of objective truth claims, we also began to wonder if there was a ‘third’ EC approach to considering apostolicity and orthodoxy amidst reformation, contextualization, and inculturation, against deconstruction of orthodoxy or orthodoxy-as-a-system. Thus, in Chapter Six we then brought key EC voices and conversation partners such as Jason Clark, Scot McKnight, Doug Gay, and James K.A. Smith, who have contributed significantly to EC conversations while also remaining orthodox, into further conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Vincent of Lérins. In doing so, we considered how Emerging voices who ground correct belief and practice in the incarnate Body of Christ, yet do not believe that orthodoxy should be deconstructed, may share synergy with Vincent and Bonhoeffer and, together, suggest the best approach for a flexible yet faithful approach to reformation, contextualization, and inculturation amidst current contexts by showing what things must be kept to remain authentically Christian. We found that many of these orthodox EC voices and partners, like Vincent and Bonhoeffer, agreed that within the Body of Christ, alignment with orthodoxy was seen as an act of faith, obedience, worship, and of orienting one’s life and telos around Christ through surrender to and participation in the core beliefs, acts, and rhythms that identify, unify, and transform the Body of Christ together. However, while some of these voices, such as Smith, in *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, like Bonhoeffer, primarily emphasized submission to orthodoxy as an act of faith and formation, we conversely saw that Vincent, while in agreement with the above points, additionally saw *consensual orthodoxy* as a witness. While Vincent does not claim that orthodoxy may be objectively proven or correlated to those outside the body, he does appear to believe that the shared witness of the body to truth, in Christ, provides a living testimony that allows the church to not only surrender to orthodoxy in paradoxical faith, but to speak about, refine, and contextualize doctrine amidst current contexts, and in ways that listen to diverse voices rather

than only translating the gospel into them. However, such growth of doctrine must again, for Vincent, always remain in faithful continuity-and-congruence with apostolicity and orthodoxy.

## 7.2 Final Conclusions

In this study we have concluded that although the Emerging Church appears to have vanished as a cohesive movement, members of the three EC streams have continued to metamorphose into new forms either within original EC networks, such as found in the missional *SOMA* communities within the *Acts 29* network, in new networks, such as the *Open/Convergence* networks, or via converging with other streams, as evidenced by former EC voices who have joined expressions such as the *Anglican Church in North America*. Despite changing networks and forms, many of the same people who made up the three streams of the EC have continued along similar theological, doctrinal and ecclesiological trajectories as evidenced in the final days of the EC movement. We were able to thus chart some of the threads of continued evolution and convergence of former EC streams and note their approaches to orthodoxy.

Within the new *Open/Convergence* networks, we discovered that key talking points of many respondents appeared to match the evolving opinions of EC *Revisionist* leaders such as McLaren, Jones, and Rollins. As such, the trajectory of theological and doctrinal divergence from both orthodoxy and other EC streams, as evidenced by *Revisionists*, amidst the fracturing of the EC at the end of the last decade, had progressed from questioning orthodoxy, as seen in McLaren's early works such as *A Generous Orthodoxy*, to in some cases a complete Žižekian deconstruction of orthodoxy and creation of new post-Christian, materialistic, or pluralistic 'spaces for being,' as advocated for in McLaren and Rollins' recent work; in which politically progressive voices could emerge from historical Christianity and converge primarily around evolving values, identities, and political causes in ways that had synergy with Žižek's Marxism. Thus also, in revising beliefs on topics such as the salvific atonement, the need for confession of sin, the physical resurrection of Christ, or even God's existence, we believe that the *Revisionist* stream has now become largely heterodox according to Vincent's method, in which divergence

from unity in worship and doctrine with the consentient body evidences division and heterodoxy. Thus, the *Revisionist* stream has likely emerged out of the historic Christian faith to, after deconstruction, become more Marxist, Derridian, and Žižekian than historically Christian.

On the other hand, in the responses of many *Relevants*, *Reconstructionists*, and postcedents, in synergy with Thomas Oden and Robert Webber, we observed a convergence of movements to recover a shared rhythm of belief, confession, worship, and witness, both in word and social action, that is rooted in the creedal beliefs and sacred practices of the ancient church in unity with the universal ecumenical body. Such recovery also matched the earlier trajectories of those EC voices who, especially amidst *Reconstructionists*, were seeking rootedness in the early church. Thus, while we expected to see Bonhoeffer and Vincent primarily critique EC approaches to orthodoxy, such as noted in the approaches of Driscoll, McLaren, and Rollins, we instead found--in the answers of many of our respondents and in orthodox EC voices and dialogue partners such as Scot McKnight, Jason Clark, James K.A. Smith, Doug Gay and John Frederick--that many in these first two EC streams actually showed synergy with both Vincent and Bonhoeffer's approaches to orthodoxy. Additionally, we also discovered that a potential thread that tied together orthodox EC voices was Thomas Oden's Paleo-orthodoxy, a theological school that Webber and Geoffrey Wainright were also a part of, and that drew its approach to orthodox from Vincent of Lérins. Consequentially, we believe that there is a 'third' Emerging/Missional view of orthodoxy, shared by many of these voices, that combines key elements of both Bonhoeffer and Vincent's approaches, with Vincent perhaps having tangentially influenced orthodox EC voices through the work of Webber, and perhaps also, Oden, Wainright, and Gay.

In this 'third' view of orthodoxy, in contrast with a revision/deconstruction of orthodoxy or viewing orthodoxy trans-subjectively, such Emerging orthodox voices also, like Bonhoeffer, most often saw correct belief and action as needing to be centered in participation, by faith, in a creedal, liturgical, and incarnational sacred life together in Christ amidst the world. In such an approach, the core orthodox doctrines and sacred practices may also not be altered since they serve as the Christ-given ways to cruciformly orient one's life and desires around Christ. In this

focus on orthodoxy as faith, belief, confession, and worship, many such orthodox EC voices, and dialogue partners also appear to have more authentically followed a Bonhoefferesque approach to orthodoxy, as Ray Anderson had hoped, than have *Revisionists*. Likewise, in emphasizing the vital importance of creedal beliefs as an identifying and unifying core of the universal Body of Christ that may not be revised, and that supports orthodox ecumenism, there also appeared to be synergy with both Vincent and Oden.

Additionally, though most orthodox EC respondents did not demonstrate an awareness of Vincent's method, nor awareness that others shared their views on the center of the faith, the convergence of so many persons simultaneously attempting to center their faith and worship in the core creedal beliefs and ancient practices of the ancient church, in ways that appeared to have synergy with Vincent's method, may, in fact, support Vincent and Oden's belief that it is the Spirit who forms the Body of Christ in unity through the centuries. Then too, we believe we have begun to show how *consensual orthodoxy* may also provide a method for such Emerging voices to see how, amidst reformation, contextualization, and inculturation, doctrine may be described, refined, elucidated, and freshly presented, while also ensuring that what is described or inculturated is authentically Christian, in congruence and continuity with the original apostolic faith as received, transmitted, and confirmed by the consensus of all Christians, in all places, and at all times.

Summarily, we hope that our research will prove helpful in both having shown a glimmer of evidence for a common emerging movement toward consensual orthodox ecumenism among many orthodox EC voices and postcedents, as well as having also shown such Emerging voices the importance of both Bonhoeffer and Vincent as dialogue partners for those who wish to reform the church and inculturate the gospel in the larger world, while remaining as the distinct people of God in ways that are apostolically faithful. In also suggesting that such Emerging voices learn Vincent's method, in conversation with Bonhoeffer, we hope that we may further help Emerging and Missional Christians to see how much freedom is allowed for flexible contextualization of doctrine, that is centered in the incarnate Christ, and, yet, to what extent the consentient witness of the Body of Christ also then provides boundaries for what may be said, so that such teaching

does not depart from the apostolic meaning as understood and transmitted by the consensus that, by the Spirit, lives and has unity in the Body of Christ.

### 7.3 Challenges

In this study, a primary challenge was that the categorization of EC streams has been hard to fix because of the changing nature of the movement and the rejection of categories by some postmodern voices, including Tony Jones and Peter Rollins. Further, the EC has also all but vanished as a movement, along with many primary sources which were more often websites and blogs than academic sources. Then too, many academic sources that did attempt to categorize or define the movement were secondary sources written by external critics and often with little first-hand understanding of the movement. Additionally, since the movement has metamorphosed, it was at first challenging to categorize streams, find current primary sources, and track their progression, especially after the fracturing of the movement in the last decade. However, the questionnaire and conversations we engaged in with respondents helped us to track the current progression of EC streams and postcedents, many of whom still hold the same core convictions amidst new forms. Further, a challenge to our ethnographic work was that some *Revisionists* were suspicious of entering a conversation with persons focused on ‘orthodoxy.’ This caused a bit of a delay in our ethnographic work as we had to engage potential respondents multiple times.

Another limitation was the challenge of placing Vincent, Bonhoeffer, and Oden’s robust theological work into dialogue with postmodern practitioners and popular theologians who mostly conducted their theology through talks, conferences, blogs, videos, and some popular books. The disparity between the robust theological work of our historical dialogue partners, and the far less developed popular content of Emerging sources that we were forced to rely upon was sometimes a painful contrast. Still, it was one that we could not avoid in our task of placing EC voices and postcedents into conversation with such helpful past theologians.

Additionally, many EC respondents found our questionnaire to be too robust, open-ended, and time consuming, which delayed our ability to conclude our ethnographic work for some time,

while we awaited their responses. We were made aware that the daunting nature of the questionnaire was because many respondents were practitioners who were busy with ministry, or had never considered our questions before, or who were not academically trained and thus found some of the concepts to be new. However, while making respondents more aware of Vincent's method or Bonhoeffer's approach to orthodoxy, thus limiting the scope of the questionnaire and increasing direct interaction of respondents with our conversation partners, may have saved time and made the responses more robust, we were limited by having proposed to follow Vincent's lead. Since Vincent claimed he learned his method from his respondents who had, by the guidance of the Spirit, naturally followed the same method since the time of the Apostles, we also wanted to see if there was evidence of a similar method existent in the responses of our respondents today without biasing our respondents by describing the method to them.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

Many of our orthodox EC respondents, despite sharing similar answers on what constitutes the core of the Christian faith, were uncertain whether Christians could ever agree on a center to the faith. So then, while they shared tremendous synergy, they did not appear to be aware of such synergy. Thus, in future research, it would be interesting to explore why, or to what extent, such Emerging/Missional voices are not aware of how similar many of their views are with both each other and with Vincent and Bonhoeffer, on what constitutes the 'center' of Christianity and provides boundaries. Further, I would also recommend a deeper study that traces who such Emerging voices are reading, and that may have influenced their beliefs around the believing, acting, and worshiping center of the faith to see *if* or *to what extent* common sources

may have shaped their views. I suspect, for instance, that Bonhoeffer has had a pronounced impact even upon those who may be unaware of his more theological works.

Also, we believe that more research would be recommended to observe additional causes, outcomes, and points of synergy or conflict in the observed Emerging movement to recover ancient rhythms, practices, and creedal unity among the respondents in this study. It would additionally be beneficial to place such a movement into more intentional conversation with Vincent and Bonhoeffer in which respondents may directly engage their work which, as described above, we were limited in doing in this study due to our goal of observing the already existing approaches to orthodoxy of Emerging expressions in the same way Vincent had also done with respondents in his day.

## **7.5 Final Comments**

While in this study we have seen that *Revisionists* attempted to revise historical and consensual understandings of orthodoxy, conversely, for the surprising number of EC voices who instead tried to preserve centeredness in early ecumenical orthodoxy, we saw that there is tremendous synergy with Bonhoeffer and Vincent. Thus, in also exploring Vincent's method in the future, in conversation with Bonhoeffer, we believe that such innovative, contextual, and yet Emerging orthodox voices will find a holistic approach to orthodoxy and orthopraxy in which persons ground all beliefs and acts in the incarnate Christ amidst the world. However, in so doing, while believing that the incarnate Christ is the center of all reality and acts, they will also then find that the boundaries within which doctrine may be elucidated, described, and contextualized--without diverging from the apostolic faith by changing the apostolic meaning--are boundaries provided by the worshiping Body of Christ across time and space. In this method then, the evidence that one belongs to the body is to submit to Christ via confession of sin and surrender to the core creedal beliefs and sacred practices transmitted by the early undivided church, which submission then evidences that persons belong to the living and worshiping unity of the same

universal ecumenical Body of Christ as that of the apostles, rather than departing from the unity of the body and originating a new faith.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

Title of the Study:  
Faithful Reformation: The Importance of Apostolicity and Orthodox Consensus for  
Emerging Christian Expressions.

Researcher:  
Jonathan Sharpe  
Doctoral Student at the University of Pretoria

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(Additional questions may be added after conducting participant observations and reviewing documents provided by persons, churches or communities being interviewed)

- **Where are you from?**
- **How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?**
- **How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?**
- **How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: *Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative* or something else? Are such categories helpful?**
- **How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?**
- **What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?**
- **In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?**

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- **What can humans know about God?**
- **How can they know?**

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

**Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy**

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?
- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?
- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?
  - Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true Gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?
  - To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?
  - To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

## BEN'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **Where are you from?**

Originally born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. I have lived in Phoenix AZ since -----.

### **How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?**

As is the case for most committed believers I know, it is a series of twists and turns of God's revelation of His deepest spiritual truths. Sincere and committed Christian family upbringing, commitment to Christ at an early age, backslidden and falling away and a beautiful and gracious submission to the relentless pursuit of Jesus again about 22 years ago.

### **How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?**

I serve as an elder in our current church which is pastored by my daughter and son in law. I consider myself a marketplace missionary, which is a graciously and magnanimously delivered place in the business world (35+ years of business involvement) by the Grace of God. In my immediately prior church experience I served for 12+ years in eldership at a more established church (Church of God ----- This was a blessed gift of God as He brought me through years of service and excellent teaching which followed the essential tenets of Christian theology and observing and being tutored by leadership.

### **How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing Movement, New Monastic, New Friar, PaleoOrthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?**

Church of God (-----). Our present church is Missional in ministry philosophy having been planted in a 'full bloom' gentrification in a central Phoenix neighborhood (--- area) which has drawn in the participation of younger families. It is a simple philosophy of equipping the saints for service and preaching the Gospel in a clear and concise manner (as the Holy Spirit would direct) so that those in the millennial generation (in particular) will hear the unfettered and clear message of the Good News. Labels are interesting for the academics and helpful to some degree to the laity and clerics but not particularly beneficial.

### **How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?**

The "church universal" is the entire body of Christ in the world to which we are united in Christ to serve those as God would lead and proclaim the truth of the Gospel, where He has so ordained we should reside from season to season. The expression of the 'universal' body of Christ is the local presence of the God's people which we euphemistically call "church". We are united by the essentials of the Christian faith and those that are sincere and committed believers (in my view) understand and accept that we are part of a larger brother/sisterhood in Christ. The church in its various forms and manifestations (the reformed Protestant church — to be clear) is similar if not the same in its overarching purpose and calling, but the expression or "walking out" of that mission is different per each church body in its local formation.

**What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?**

1. The tendency of the North American Church (in particular) to treat each of the expressions of the body of Christ (local churches so to speak) as if they are competition as opposed to a part of the whole of Christ's church. There is disunity, fiefdom building, power plays and outright hostility at times, between denominations, local churches that are within reach of one another in a neighborhood and between the Catholic and Protestant presence in community.

2. Division within the protestant realm as to certain doctrinal differences. The "reformed theological disposition" which is largely labeled Calvinism and the more Arminian dispositions. This issues within the Protestant church is highly divisive and creates very militant oppositions that are part of the disunity of the church as a whole. My issue is with those on both sides that take this to a point of drawing a line in the sand and making judgements as to the salvation of one side or the other. I am disposed to the reformed or Calvinistic theology but my brothers and sisters in this camp often raise this to a war with the other side in such a militant and virtually hateful manner that it does exactly what Satan would desire, divide and destroy.

**In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?**

Internal discussion with leadership; denominational or 'movement' conversations regionally and nationally within the Church of God. There are initiatives often pursued on a more 'collective' basis that give rise to the opportunity to discuss and debate and bring into place the opportunity to graciously and purposely discuss such issues. It is more informal then formal. I do applaud the larger movement of ecumenicalism (to an extent) to bring peace between the Roman Catholic and the catholic/protestant churches. There is great merit in finding common ground amongst the Eastern Orthodox, Western Orthodox and protestant church to unite as the Body of Christ in our common ground of knowing and understanding the person of Jesus and that he is the only hope for the world.

**What and how can we know about God or know God?**

**What can humans know about God?**

Limited to the finite nature of humankind and our limited ability to understand in part, but not in whole the deepest truths of God's revelation. Scripture is the sole source of truth in the world and as such, we come to know God, His character, his triune nature and the mysterious and beautiful collaboration of the Godhead through this revelation. Fellowship of the saints, teaching and learning the truth of scripture and Holy Spirit revealed understanding is how we might know God as intimately as our finiteness and limited capacity of our heart, soul and mind can allow.

**How can they know?**

The revelation of God's truth, His character and personhood are by, through and solely through Him (the Godhead). It is clear (from my experience) that God chooses in accordance with His own good and perfect will to work through His people, His church and His word in countless and often indescribable ways.

**How can they trust that what they know about God is true?**

Faith (trust in God) is authored by Him through Christ. There is a process or elements of one's spiritual journey that traverse the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of our being. Each such journey is unique (similar in many respects, but marginally or significantly different depending upon the individual). Ultimately God

chooses as to whom He enlightens to His truth to verify His existence. If one truly believes that we "Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, than we know by His Word that it is a supernatural/metaphysical substantiation and confirmation that He alones orchestrates.

### **Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy**

#### **What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?**

Infallible, source of all truth that is unchanging and eternal. It is the Word of God in every sense, which makes it the ultimate and sole authority over all other matters, expressions and particularly false truths espoused by man whether based on a gross misunderstanding of scripture or any other "religious" expression.

#### **Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?**

I believe this is affirmed by and through the establishment of our faith. Trust in God and his immutable truths (as largely contained in scripture) have general broad acceptance in mainstream (bible-based) evangelical Christendom. The application of such truths (in some sense, perhaps, interpretation) to our own lives can be highly specific, affirming, encouraging and convicting. As to the "differences" that are attributed to biblical interpretation (by those that are more liberal vs conservative — so called) that espouse quite different interpretations of the truth/scripture may not be 'easily' resolved or agreed, but if you believe (as we should) that scripture interprets scripture then heresy/misinterpretation are clearly defined. As to the non-essentials of our faith, we make room for grace to abide. I believe that as we journey through our walk with Christ we are in a constant state of reinterpreting certain truths. It's authoritative nature (at least in my experience) as it relates to the essentials of our faith, is knowable.

#### **Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?**

Possible, but not highly probable. Consensus may be reached in some quarters, but I believe the entrenchment of tradition, church history, reliance on dogma, ritual and sacraments (as ordained in pan by God, but often abused and misused by mankind) will stand strongly in opposition to a full consensus. There are certain essentials of the faith that are largely accepted by western (RC) and eastern orthodox traditions and evangelical and other protestant dispositions. The divide over certain issues (essentials of salvation, socio-cultural influences regarding sexual orientation, gender etc.) will be difficult impediments to overcome. I appreciate and realize there are efforts being made on a grand scale to try to bring Christendom to a place of a more stable unity. This efforts should be continued and, by the Grace of God, I expect we will see some consensus. In short, as a member of the Body of Christ, I must speak the truth in love, which is to say, be biblically and theologically literate sufficiently to be able to give account for the hope that resides within me. In essence, for me, this is to consistently and unwaveringly proclaiming the Gospel. As individuals, my hope is that if we can make this investment for the Kingdom, God will bring unity by His merciful Good and perfect will.

#### **To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?**

I believe I have addressed this, in part, in prior responses, however, freedom of expression (in many parts of the world) has few boundaries. This attitude, I think, prevails too much so when it comes to proper biblical interpretation. Heresy tends to abound in some quarters because the post/post modern culture takes a wide-berth, liberal view of truth. Even in the so-called conservative dispositions of the body of Christ, there

is a profound cultural impact that seeps into the truth of Scripture. The essentials of the Gospel and accurate biblical theology have been amply expressed through the ages by the Church and many of the Lord's saints. The boundaries need to be established within the context of these essentials.

**What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?**

Difficult question as the structure of the 'organized' church demands a protocol within such denominational or dispositional confines. There will always be debates about the non-essentials of the faith and often the mistaken application of preferences being "principles". That being said, it is extraordinarily difficult to establish some form of overarching authority that would be respected and accepted by all elements of the protestant community. Those that are likeminded on particularly divisive issues, will naturally gravitate to one another. Sides then tend to divide (in a more global sense) on the issues as opposed to orthodox as to evangelical as to Catholic etc. There are strong scholarly voices in the various protestant communities yet even within those communities there is seldom strong consensus.

**Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true Gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?**

The 5 solas are a foundational place of foothold for such conversation:

1. Sola scriptura: "Scripture alone"
2. Sola fide: "faith alone"
3. Sola gratia: "grace alone"
4. Solo Christo: "Christ alone"
5. Soli Deo gloria: "to the glory of God alone"

These are (certainly to me) the foundational truths of Christianity that have to be central to the truth claims of Jesus. Perhaps too general in some such debate, they are strong and vivid markers for discerning truth from fiction in the believing world. They are critical and essential because they eliminate much of the heresy of truth claimants who stand (often) to add to these 5 "Solas" tradition, practice, ritual or some other 'revelation' to define the immutable "truth" of God in and through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**○ To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?**

Being a layperson, this is way beyond my scholarly aptitude (to say the least). As God's Word is clearly His (as inspired by and through the Holy Spirit) and as such He is the source of the authorship of the "original faith" I would say that the Apostles original faith teaching is indispensable in that this teaching is a large part of the underpinning of knowing God and His truth. God's Word has stood the test of millennia of challenges and although the debate continues presently as to the canon content, it stands resolute and remains Holy Scripture.

**○ To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?**

Once again, I believe that the Body of Christ is indispensable to delivering and knowing God's truth. God works in and through His church in partnership and collaboration with the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual awakening, edification and

application.

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## DERRICK'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

Phoenix, Arizona

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was raised by Southern Baptist missionaries overseas and ordained a Baptist minister is ----- . I have always thought of myself as a committed Christian. During my college years, I became more and more interested in contemplative spirituality and historic practices of the church, including its practice of celebrating Holy Eucharist as the central act of worship. My journey is one of discovering the deep riches of the historic church and mystery of God in contemplation.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

My journey above led me through Reformed and Lutheran circles to Anglicanism, where I have found a spiritual home and vocation as a priest. When the rector of our church retired, I had already been ordained and was in a position to move into the role, by the grace of God and according to his call.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I suppose I would say we are Reformed and Catholic. Our local church is also missional and charismatic. I think there is a place for such labels, although they can quickly become overused and watered down, and there is also a danger of them being abused for the sake of "tribalism."

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

The church may be found anywhere the pure gospel and preached and the sacraments rightly administered. Books have been written to unpack this, of course, but I would have three brief comments:

- 1) The church is first the worshiping community of God, made up of individuals that have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and brought into his people through Baptism.
- 2) When this people gathers for worship, they do so locally and so form "local churches" that are nevertheless part of the greater global, historic, universal (catholic) church.
- 3) This people may create various institutional structures comprised of policies, procedures, etc, but strictly speaking these institutions are not themselves the church, which is made up of people. Organized is not always necessarily the same thing as institutionalized and being organized is an inherent part of being a functional "Body.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I am encouraged by the explosive growth of orthodox Christianity all over the world. It is

an affirmation that God is on the move and doing great things for all people through his Church. I am most discouraged by the lack of biblical worldview in the West among those claiming to be Christians, the lack of biblical literacy, and the completely bankruptcy of connection with historic church through the ages. What must be defended in this day and age in the West the very idea there is a biblical worldview, this worldview is centered around the person and work of Jesus, and it will always and naturally come into conflict with every other worldview at some point.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I only preach gospel sermons. By that I mean I try to place each passage of Scripture in its context with the whole gospel narrative. I emphasize Jesus as Lord over all things. I talk about Jesus as a real King, not just an abstract “Lord of my heart” (although he certainly is that!). I do my best to encourage thorough Bible reading and spiritual disciplines that place God in the highest place in our lives.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

That he exists, that he loves his creation, that he entered into in the person of Jesus, that he will make all things new.

- How can they know?

First they can know God exists through natural law, philosophy, and so on. Second they come to know his agenda the revelation of his word written, the Bible.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?
  - 1) First through a process of reason, logic, and historical evidence that can provide a credible case for the veracity of Scripture and in particular, the Resurrection of Jesus which in turn provides credibility for all the claims of the Apostles and the Church about him.
  - 2) Second, by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit that is further confirmed over time in the life the church and personal transformation.

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

We can have good reason for thinking we do, but we must always remain humble, knowing that we are each fallible individuals.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

Yes. First we look to the plain, easiest reading of the Scriptures. Where there is question, we look to other Scriptures. Where there is further question, we examine the witness of the early church leaders speaking in consensus. Where there is further question or exploration

needed we look to theologians that build on those two key foundations.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

Christian may not innovate, but they may build upon. There is such a thing a development of doctrine, but this is different than replacing or contradicting historic consensus. Heresy is absolutely a problem and leads to theology that runs contrary to who God is and human flourishing.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Depending on the level of debate, Christians should go to their local church leaders first, then godly bishops.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

The effective boundaries for doctrine are:

- 1) The Bible, (OT & NT)
- 2) The Catholic Creeds
- 3) The consensus of the ecumenical councils
- 4) The teachings of the early church fathers, where they speak with one voice

Additional markers include a gospel preached that is consistent with the above, the Sacraments administered in a way that is consistent with the above, and godly bishops teaching in consistency with the above in Apostolic Succession.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

This is essential.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth

The Holy Spirit works in and through the Body of Christ for all of these things. He worked in the church to give us the Bible, the creeds, etc. The Holy Spirit guides his church into the truth through a variety of means.

## ELLIS' RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?  
Phoenix, AZ

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?  
I grew up in a large and broken family with divorced parents. At a very young age I knew in my spirit that Jesus was the answer to my family's dysfunction, as well as the brokenness I saw in my friends. As I grew and found people in a local church to disciple me, I started to see the Bible come together as one grand narrative, the true story of God and His world.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?  
My wife's cousin planted the church nearly ten years ago. I was trained up and commissioned as an elder almost seven years ago. A few years ago he resigned and I began co-pastoring the church with another elder of ours.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?  
We are a non-denominational Christian church who is part of the Soma Communities family of churches. The heartbeat of our church is both the weekly gathering (Sunday mornings) and our missional communities, which strive to live life together in community, centered on the gospel, engaged in servant-hood mission throughout the week. You can certainly place us in the 'Missional' church movement. Also, our leadership teaches from a reformed, Neo-Calvinist perspective of theology. However, much of our body is made up of both reformed and Arminian believers.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?  
The Church is the body of Christ, God's people called to Himself and sent on His mission to be signposts of His Kingdom. The Church is global and historical. We are saved into a large family. However, we do see even in Scripture a distinction in the church based on geography, as Paul addresses his letters "To the church at (Ephesus, Corinth, etc.)..." Revelation also makes this distinction in speaking to specific areas of the church. This is not a separation or segregation within the church, simply a distinction of time and place for the people of the church who are being addressed. Each of us is called to take part in a local expression of the larger body of Christ.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?  
The church and every follower of Christ, throughout time and locale, must always hold the tension of being faithful to the Scriptures while being fitting to their particular context. Often the church is tempted to forsake one of those for the other. In an attempt to be faithful to the Scriptures, some expressions of the church ostracize the world and remove themselves from being a faithful witness. Other parts of the body, in an attempt to be relevant to culture, forsake the commands of the Bible and therefore also remove their witness. One of the things that currently grieve me for the church is the division between

these two approaches. Politics and social issues seem to polarize the church between these areas, forcing many to feel they must choose a side rather than caring for our culture while being faithful to Christ. This tension also leads many who are not rooted well in Christ and his words to leave the church, which is disheartening. However, I believe the encouragement is that it also causes those who are well rooted in Christ to wrestle through this tension and ask difficult questions, which I am hopeful will lead to a more faithful response to being witnesses to this world through the power of the Spirit.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)? One of the practices rooted in church history that our local congregation holds to is a liturgical worship and participation in the sacraments. It is important to us that we are reading Scripture as a community, responding to the call found in the word, and reminding ourselves of Christ's work through baptism and communion. We are also careful to consistently point one another back to the Grand Narrative of Scripture, rather than taking verses out of context or seeing them as individual life lessons and stories. As we see the story of the Bible played out through Creation, Rebellion, Promise (Israel), Redemption (Christ), Mission (the Church now), and Restoration, we can better understand the context in which we find ourselves in the world now. Every culture and individual has a story, which finds its place underneath and within the larger story of the gospel. Our role as elders and pastors is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4:11), or to equip them to help others see their place in this Story.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?  
This is a loaded question ☺  
In short, we can know what Scripture reveals about God to us. We cannot fabricate any other details or thoughts about Him through our own logic, emotion, or preference. Scripture reveals to us that God is triune as seen in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can know that all things, visible and invisible, have been made through God and for God. We can know that rebellion against this God who commands the universe comes at a cost, which is death for leaving the One who gives life. Every single person and culture has engaged in this rebellion and is therefore under the penalty of death. We can also know, however, that out of God's great love with which He loves His world, He has pursued His creation and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, offers reconciliation to all who place their faith and trust in him.
- How can they know?  
This is made known to us clearly through the Scriptures. It is made more clearly known as the Spirit of God opens up hearts and minds to receive the words of Scripture. It is also made known to us through creation (Romans 1:20).
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?  
God's people have always had reason to trust God by looking to His promises. The first man and woman could trust God because He provided everything they needed in the garden. However, they still chose not to trust Him. They could then trust that God would rescue them from their own sin as He promised because He covered their shame and nakedness through sacrificing one of His own creatures to clothe them. Later in the Story, we see that Abraham had reason to trust God because He continually saved him from his enemies and provided for he and his family. Abraham could trust God's promise of a great nation through his descendants as his wife became pregnant at an age that seemed impossible to conceive children. Still, Abraham struggled to trust God

at all times and even tried to bring about God's promise of children through his own plans and power.

Israel could trust God as He saved them from slavery to Egypt and brought them into the land He promised them. This was one of the main things the people of Israel would continue to look back on for generations to know they could trust God. However, Israel also continually struggled with their trust in God and kept turning to other false narratives and gods of the culture they found themselves in.

The early church could trust in God as they saw the Promised Messiah come in Jesus, who was born to a virgin mother, lived perfectly under the Law, performed many miracles, and served the world even to the point of willingly going to a torturous death on a cross. They could trust God because Jesus then rose from the grave in the power of the Spirit, conquering sin, death, and Satan. Thomas could trust Jesus had truly risen as he saw and felt the scars in his hands. Still, every one of the apostles struggled with trusting in God at different times, such as when Peter had to be rebuked by Paul for not living in step with the gospel and when Paul admitted he continually did the things he knew he should not do.

The church can still trust in God today as we see that Jesus came through with his promise of sending the Spirit who raised him to life to empower his new body, the Church. The Spirit living in us, revealing the truth of the Word to us, is how we can trust God. Still, we all continue to struggle with this trust, just as our ancestors throughout history always have. Though we can trust in God and have faith in Him through the power of His Spirit, functionally we lose sight at times and turn our trust to created things of this world. That is the scandalous beauty of this gospel. The work of Jesus is enough to cover our failings, and the power of the Spirit can truly transform us into people who trust in God more and more to the glory of the Father. That is why we must always pray, "Lord we believe; help our unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?  
"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?  
Though the Scriptures are infallible, it is difficult, and very possibly arrogant, to claim that our individual interpretation of Scripture is infallible and does not every need correction. There are certainly truths of Scripture that are inarguable, such as Jesus being the way, truth, and life, and the only way to the Father. However, there are also parts of Scripture that are admittedly more difficult to understand fully. This becomes increasingly more difficult when verses of Scripture are divorced from the whole story and taken out of context. When we look at the Bible as one complete story, centered on Jesus, it becomes easier to have more confidence in the interpretation of Scripture.
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?  
I believe it certainly is possible through the power of the Spirit and grace of God. There will definitely be a day when all followers of Christ will come to agreement as Jesus will return and consummate his kingdom, making himself fully known. However, in this era where his kingdom has not fully yet come and the stain of sin and brokenness of rebellion still remains, it is highly doubtful that the church will come to a complete unity. Until that day comes, we must continue to proclaim Christ who is the Word we profess to believe,

“that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? The boundary is who God is and what He has done, specifically through the person of Christ in the power of the Spirit. Creating a theology of who God is and what He has done outside of what is revealed in Scripture is dangerous and heretical. Heresy is certainly a problem because by definition it preaches a different God than the One historically proclaimed through the Scriptures. It is not enough to simply say one believes in God, or even in Jesus. We must ask the question, “Which Jesus?” The answer to that question must match what Jesus himself answers in Scripture. Any other issue of interpretation of Scripture must then find its place within that Story of who Jesus is. Does it matter whether the earth was created in a literal six days or over a longer period of time? Only to the extent that your answer contends with who God is and what He has done through Jesus. If our answers to that question differ, but both have done work to show how our answer is rooted in the Scriptures and both point to the God of the Bible being the one who created it, then we can be in agreement.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Christian brothers and sisters are to first pray for a bond in the Spirit and unity in Christ, to the glory of the Father. Then, they can turn to the Scripture together to answer the questions. This should be done in context of the entire story of Scripture, not through isolating that particular text. If a disagreement on interpretation of Scripture persists, the believers may then turn to their elder and/or pastor to ask for clarification and teaching. These are men who have been entrusted to teach the body. If a disagreement persists, multiple elders/pastors may be brought into the conversation to determine the official stance of that local congregation.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

Scripture is, of course, where we turn to first. Seeing the entirety of Scripture and the narrative it tells of who God is and what He has done through Jesus is how we center that interpretation of Scripture. I firmly believe that most heretical ideologies come from taking particular verses out of the context of that grand narrative.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

This must play a vital role. To claim that we may move on from an outdated faith or must ‘graduate’ to a more ‘enlightened’ understanding of God in order to apply to today’s context is very dangerous and heretical. The Apostles saw Jesus. They learned directly from the one in whom our faith exists. They were the first to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This must not be taken lightly. The truths Jesus shared with them are just as true today as they ever were, and will always be.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Interpretation of Scripture ought to always be checked in community with the saints and

in prayer and communion with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is who reveals the truths of Scripture to us, yet often many of us can confuse our own emotions and logic to be the voice of the Spirit. That is why we must read Scripture in community with the body of Christ, to have brothers and sisters either confirm or challenge our interpretation of Scripture.

## EVAN'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Where are you from?

I am a Canadian citizen, born and raised within an Anabaptism (Mennonite) culture in Southern Manitoba. Most of my childhood was spent in a small city (-----) which is an agriculture support economy. My Mennonite Father and Mother both has Evangelical conversions in the late 1950s, and they were the first members of their respective families to leave their Mennonite colonies for the city. They raised us kids (I have an ----- and - ----) as Evangelical in beliefs and Mennonite in culture. The aspects of evangelical belief they stressed were an emphasis on personal assurance of salvation, individual piety, doctrinal fidelity, mission as personal evangelism).

I have lived briefly in Northern England, Regina SK, Calgary AB, Billings MT, and Chicago IL.

But Seattle's ---- has been home since ----. Today self-identify as a resident of Washington State. The ----- neighborhood of ----- is my home. I am a permanent resident alien in the USA.

1 How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I would describe my Christian journey as a Derridian deconstruction. It seems I am forever interrogating my faith, beliefs, practices, etc. so as to get closer to the already and always reality often hiding underneath, behind, or within said belief or practice.

I think I could say that my journey has been away from Christian certainty as an individual possession, and toward faith in the Jesus Way with others. Even looking at the last sentence it feels far too either/or then my lived experience. So let me try it again, I was raised to believe that Evangelical Christianity was True, what I think I'm discovering is that Jesus is Truth, but He is also the Way, and the Life. As such my "Christian journey" is a form of complexification of the nature of the Good News.

I resonate deeply with Colin Gunton when he used to say that we are always searching for the least inadequate words to describe God, and our experience of the Divine. As you may sensed from my earlier response, I was raised in a religious cultural context which stressed the clarity of catophatic certainly as the primary symbol of faith and maturity. I don't believe that as much anymore. I'm coming to believe that truth claims may be better understood as my best attempts to describe what I've known in my being more like a thesis than a dogma.

In Romans 8 Paul confesses that the Spirit of God testifies within our hearts that we are God's Children. This makes sense to me. I have tacit knowledge of God. The Holy Spirit of God speaks to me. Part of my journey to become more honest myself and others regarding my experience of God, to become more aware of the multiplicity of ways my believes, practices and perspectives have been and are being culturally shaped, and to open myself to the real God who reveals Godself through scripture, throughout history, in the world today and ultimately in Jesus of Nazareth.

I am increasingly aware of the tension that I am struggling to hold between the tradition that holds the faith and the live and the existential experience of the living Christ.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

My lineage goes back to Menno Simon's Catholic parish. I had profound experience of the Divine as a teen, at which time I sensed what I have come to describe as a "Call" from God to help others lean into life, and lead communities which render fullness of life as seen in Christ more plausible. Became active with church youth leadership, was taken under my senior pastor's wing – even traveling with him to attend an early ----- Leadership Conference.

After high school I enrolled in Bible College to prepare myself to serve. Though I was so convinced of my calling that within my first month at (then) -----Bible College I arranged for meeting with its President to present an alternative path (outside of Seminary) as a means to my ordination. Needless to say he graciously encouraged me to get to class. After earning my degree, was married, and move to ----- where I'd arranged to have an additional internship under a leader my pastor had recommended that I learn from. After a year there I took a call my first pastoral role.

Was hired as an Associate/Youth Pastor at ----- Church in ----- . Served there for about two years. Was ordained by the ----- . While serving, my wife and I sensed a God inviting us to prepare for missionary service.

We moved to ----- to participate at ----- Church and found a seminary near the church so I could learn from both places. Attended ----- School and was mentored by ----- . While studying we arranged to teach ESL with a church in Latvia (shortly after it gained independence from the USSR. While Latvia was divided between Russians and Latvians, this church had services drawing from both cultures and languages... this was profound to me. We returned with a clarified sense of call, to become foreign missionaries, but to function like missionaries in America.

Believing that the kind of missionary/contextual/church discovery work we sensed ourselves being called to would require the rest of our lives, I wrote letters to just a couple of places in Canada and the USA where we could see ourselves living for good. The ----- District Superintendent of the PNW welcomed us to come to the Seattle-area though he made it clear that there would be no pay check from the District office – though truth be told they ended helping pay for part of our move out west. They specifically requested that we focus our energies along the -----, ----- suburbs.

I planted a network of emerging, parish expressions and gave leadership to that/those communities for 11 years. The last 3-4 years of my pastoral leadership I also began my teaching at ----- of Theology & Psychology. While teaching I developed friendship with area pastor -----, and former student of mine ----- and together we started the ----- Conference, ----- Certificate program and -----Collective.
- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

The faith community I participate with identifies as Mennonite and is culturally incestuous and struggles to know why it exists. I would describe myself as one who seeks to follow in the Way of Jesus and who is actively searching for a truly post-Christendom Church.

Church labels are perennially challenging, at various points I've found meaning in:  
 Evangelical,  
 Missional,

Emerging,  
Incarnational,  
Emergent,  
Simple Church/house  
New Monastic, and  
Post-Evangelical

Today I wouldn't use any of those terms. And have the biggest theological problems with "Missional" and "Incarnational," and sociological problems with Evangelical/Post-Evangelical.

The term "New Parish" carries the most meaning and hope.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

The church is the new relational identity given to followers in the Way of Jesus within a particular place/time who gather to: 1 remember & discover (who God is/they are); 2 listen & discern (collectively listen for the Spirit's invitation to faithful presence within their place); 3 and rehearse & embody (practicing together through story, ritual, practices, & expressions so as to become the Good News their place needs) God's Shalomic imagination as they fit together as a body in the everyday stuff of life within their respective parish.

I don't like to make a separation between institutional church and local or organic church as such actions often belie and underlying gnostic dualism; often its presented as though the institution is bad, while the local/organic is good, similar to the human body both bodily structure and soul intrinsically one in life... separated, one is a corpse, the other ghostly-vapour.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

Firstly, we follow in the Way of the Kenotic God, we have no need to defend ourselves or our faith, rather, we bear witness in life and word to the reality of our experience of the holistic saving life of Christ. And because God is God, and we are not God, all our thinking, and articulating, all of our practices, and postures need renewing and reforming, in fact there are many Church practices that require repentance.

Frustrations:

I struggle with Christianity as a religion. Religion is inherently a colonizing force. In fact religion was invited to aid in colonization. Religion makes faith the states servant, and followers in the Way of Jesus don't bow to the state. I find it frustrating that the religious right who claim to be defending Christianity are actually rending faith mute in the public square.

I find it frustrating that so many followers in the Way of Christ have improvised Shamolic imaginations, largely because of the corrosive power of the Christendom structures which has largely shaped our hermeneutic of the church, and faith.

The persistent adherence to the lie claiming Christianity is in the truth business, largely understood as "right" belief.

Encouragements:

Jesus claimed that he would build his church... Jesus did not claim he would protect church structures, institutions, polities, theologies, or even worship practices.

An encouraging sign to me is that more and more people who are seeking to follow in the Way of Jesus are courageously leaving Christendom structures that have become oppressive, or power hungry, or are colluding with the state. I find it encouraging that more and more followers in the Way of Christ are recovering Jesus' radical practices of hospitably to the outcast, stranger, and powerless; while reconnecting holiness/purity with life lived resonant with Jesus' life as seen in Scripture more than any one tradition social mores.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I don't understand this question.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

Short answer: Whatever God makes known. The Johannine community in John's gospel quote Jesus as saying something like, "whoever has seen him, has seen God." As such careful attentiveness to the pictures of Jesus painted by the gospel writers give us the clearest vision of what God may look like. Both the Hebrew bible and the New Testament as a whole underscore what we see of God in Jesus. Further, as Creator we can look at creation and discover all manner of hints and about what God may be like. Please note that I have not talked about "knowing" per se. I think it is fair to say that what we know of God is our particular experience of God - our relationship with God - similar to what Apostle Paul bears witness to in his letter to the church in Rome, he says that; "God's Spirit testifies to my spirit that I am God's child." There is an irreducible mystery in knowing God – its why we call it "faith". Part of the reason we need to gather with other followers in the Way of Jesus is to test our experience of the Divine in relationship with others, trusting that the Spirit will guide us toward Godself.

- How can they know?

I think I addressed in in my above response. My epistemological lenses have been largely formed by Jesus, Paul, St Augustine, Polanyi, Gademer, Merleau-Ponty, and Easter Meek.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

Discernment with the Spirit, in community of the saints, testing their experience of the Divine in relationship to what they and the community see in Jesus the Christ. This is an ongoing act of humble submission to God in community, which invites freeing God from the false gods of our limited imaginations, as such this kind of knowing (as is all knowing) is better understood as faith. As I have lived with this over the years am finding that if I will seek to be faithfully present to my experience of God, and bear witness from what I have known, I have enough to stay in the journey. Generally the more I have sought to defend or define, beyond my experience of God the less truthful my portrayal of God, and the idolatrous my heart becomes – and I become addicted to my definition of God.

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I hold high the authority of scripture.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

No.

All interpretation is culturally formed and riddled with bias and blindspots, no human or communal interpretation is authoritative in the same way that Scripture itself is authoritative. And in fact, this is part of the reason why we value the authority of Scripture so highly, because all interpretation, translation, and even proclamation particular, and fallible. Scripture is the ongoing test of all Scriptural interpretation. That said a community or church can and do choose to act as though certain interpretations are true but that is a social act.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

Depends a lot on what you mean by “consensus”, to what depth of interpretation, and which definition(s) of “authority” are operative. That said, given the glorious diversity that is Christ’s Church I would say that conscience is not possible and may not even be advisable.

Part of the gift that is God’s creation of differing cultures and different church traditions is that each brings a particular interpretive gift to the table that is Christianity. Every tribe and tongue is valued by God, and finds its fullness in Christ, difference is gift.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

All followers in the Way of Christ are shaped by those who have come before them, and everyone one of those people, groups, traditions, and cultures who came before them are finite and are not God, there from their theologies and practices will invite innovation, (reforming is the term used most often). As such even if a person or a group could regurgitate exactly what they were taught and in the way they were taught it, they would already have altered the substance of the teaching because their context would have changed, and because within the teaching they received was a prior groups’ innovation that is now being passed on as though it is something other than interpretation.

Of course heresy is a problem. Anytime false teachers mislead it’s a problem. That said heresy and innovation are not the same thing. And one should be careful not to link them too closely.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

First of all, they should be grateful to God for the gift of others and their perspectives. Prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to grow love for each other as the Spirit grows your

interpretative grids. They would be wise to foster curiosity and genuinely seek to understand the perspective of the other, and why that perspective matters. They may wish to allow this opportunity to invite reflection as to their own perspective and what contributed to its formation. They would be wise wonder how their disagreement can be seen as part of their respective discipleship process.

There is no earthly authoritative body who has definitive power in these kinds of disagreements. Rather, differing traditions discerning with the Holy Spirit over time yields wisdom.

There is no rush. Each group is responsible to be faithfully presence to their perspective, while also being faithfully present to the other group, to the Spirit of God, and to their contexts.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

The centered/bounded set metaphor is a modern failure. Both centered & Bounded metaphors end up reinforcing the same Gnostic and individualist binary. Greater complexification is needed. I might suggest a “networked set” which might be conceived to hold bounded and centered in dynamic relationship with diverse others.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

“Original Faith” is an interesting interpretative claim.

Creeds are often wonderful gifts that greatly aid in understanding. Many creeds are tangible example of differing perspectives, traditions, and cultures coming together to discern a way forward with the Spirit around a particular issue, question, or disagreement. However all creeds are culturally bound, power is always at play, contexts change. At the end of the day creeds are still interpretations, and cannot be held with the same authority as scripture. How the creeds are created might be more instructive (for good and ill) in today’s context than the substance of the creeds.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

From my culturally formed perspective I’m coming to believe that the only way for a follower in the Jesus Way to discern the relative truth of a their experience of the Divine is through faithful presence to the people of God within context, to the authority of scripture, and to Holy Spirit.

I find the wording of this question odd, as it seems to want to collapse truth or God into rational objective modernist claims. The only way to know truth or to know God is in relationship... by necessity that includes the Spirit and the church. Any other way of “knowing” is a false.

## GREGG'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- What are your current points of encouragement and Where are you from?

Born and raised in Wyoming, college and early marriage in small-town Kansas, moved to Phoenix in -----. Living in ----- for the past 2 years.

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I grew up in an evangelical pastor's family. Came to understand a basic message of Jesus' death for my sins and believed, prayed and was baptized very young.

In my teen years, some mission work among migrant workers in Mexico brought me to a new intentionality in pursuing a relationship with God, and I began thinking about vocational ministry.

I was educated at a Evangelical Friends (Quaker) bible college, and then ----Seminary – both settings spurred me to deeper faith, through relationships and studies. In this time I especially began to appreciate the Scriptures, and I started “finding myself” theologically/convictionally...

My marriage of 9+ years has been a central piece of my journey sharing faith and struggles with my wife, including the pain of a fast-ending first “senior” pastorate – and the joy and struggle where we are planted today.

Currently learning more about intentional spiritual disciplines and limits.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

To make a long story short – we walked in the door and became part of the church family when they were looking for a pastor – and it was a fairly organic shift to me serving as pastor.

The backstory includes our own theological convictions developing so that we knew an Anabaptist church was an appropriate fit.

A painful rejection and ended tenure at a previous church because of expressing those convictions is also part of the story.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

Words like missional, Anabaptist/mennonite or neo-anabaptist, or evangelical would all be fair descriptions...

But I don't personally find such categories helpful in the long run. They provide a bit of context for the informed, but they can also prevent a dialogue and a more honest evaluation of differing convictions, and in general I think they remain confusing to the uninformed.

- How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

My most common way to define church is “family of disciples.” This comes from the

titles used for the early Christians in the book of Acts, a simple counting up shows that “disciples” and sibling language (adelphoi) is used most often. Of course the familial language carries through the rest of the NT. Both words “family” and “disciples” mutually define the concept of church as people adopted through Jesus, and people following in the way of Jesus.

I think I would differentiate some between the terms in the last question. The local church is but a local expression of the body of Christ – and the institutional church may or may not always reflect what the church is to be. Hard to draw hard and fast lines here without specific examples in mind.

- /or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I’m encouraged by what appears to be a greater attention being given to Jesus and the gospels.

I’m frustrated by the continued power of nationalism and partisan politics.

I think interpretive practices and discussions of Scripture’s authority in the life of the church is an ongoing are for conversation, and for renewal and reform I think most American ecclesiology is quite thin, and discipleship is quite individualistic – so more renewal in the shared discipleship – and the cultivating of communities of disciples.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

We are moving towards a simpler weekly approach to gathering in homes, in addition to our Sunday gatherings, that I hope will bring some of this renewal.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

A ton – or none at all. Hard to give a short answer...his character revealed in Christ – his words and deeds in history – his presence ,power, and love, etc...

- How can they know?

By perceiving and responding to what God reveals. The old three categories still ring true – God revealed in creation, scripture, and most clearly in Jesus Christ. But of course this revelation is most often perceived through experience, often over time, and usually in relationship/community with others.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

The key word there is trust – it’s still required. So I’d hesitate to list some sort of “proof” - though good historical reasoning can be put forth for the reliability of the gospel of Jesus, and that can really help.

But there is also the emotional angle – the ways the good news of Jesus coheres with the heart as the Holy Spirit works, or the explanation of the human experience angle – and the larger worldview – large story of scripture and story of reality – finding coherence in people’s own experience.

More and more – I know people feel like they “know” by watching others find hope,

meaning, and freedom in Jesus – or by experiencing something different in the community of faith.

The faithful witness and experience of the historical church is also a piece in this confidence.

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I believe Scripture is inspired by God, and should guide the faith and life of the people of God.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I think we can often be very confident – simply by paying good attention to texts and listening to them in their contexts (both literary and historical). I’m also in favor of a Christ-centered hermeneutic that seeks to understand the bible as a unified story that moves towards the good news of Jesus, who explicitly reveals God to us. Still, I know that doesn’t rule out all varying interpretations...

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

Maybe – I’m hopeful for a “yes”! But I really don’t know. We might begin by considering Jesus’ own use of scripture...and we can go from there...

(Although I know there will be varying interpretations on that matter as well).

It probably will involve lots of conversations – lots of suspending of some of our systematics...and consensus still might be hard to find.

Honestly, apart from a shared understanding of what Scripture IS and how God speaks or doesn’t speak through it – this consensus will be really difficult.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

Innovation doesn’t sound like the best idea – since Christianity is a revealed faith. Improvisation on the other hand makes lots of sense – since we live in different times than when the revelation was first given. But faithful improvisation isn’t the same as innovation. Hopefully I’m not misunderstanding the question.

As for boundaries – I’m in favor of the ancient “rule of faith” (gospel, Trinity, God’s revelation in Scripture) although that wording probably won’t communicate as clearly today.

Yes, heresy is a problem.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

History and tradition can certainly supplement, but I think the real arbiter is the

text itself. What should Christians do? Keep reading prayerfully together – and honestly identify when we hold convictions that we don't see as clearly (or at all) in the text.

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

The "rule of faith" conversation again – which begins with gospel story of Jesus - the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, crucified for sin, risen, ascended, and returning. But I think this also includes the way Jesus believed the OT, and the way of life he taught. So this invites boundaries of how we think about the bible, ethics, and more...

I know it creates as many problems as solutions, but part of me simply wants the Scriptures be the 'set of boundaries'. ☺

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I don't know if they play a DIRECT role in knowing God and truth – although they play a great role in guiding, supplementing knowledge, and encouraging and cautioning our interpretive efforts.

They can give us pause when faithful improvisation turns into unfaithful innovation.

They can point us to the truths God has revealed.

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

To a huge extent – no knowledge is possible apart from the working of the Spirit...and the spirit works through members of the body...

## HOPE'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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• Where are you from? Fort Worth, Texas

• How would you briefly describe your Christian journey? I was a former professional actress and ballerina and after a tragic death of my brother, I chose to leave my acting life. I decided to focus on seminary and why the arts were woefully represented in most church and worship settings. I am an ordained minister and have my MDIV in Worship & Spirituality and my DWS (Doctorate of Worship Studies). I teach frequently in seminary settings, but mostly find my work outside the church is writing liturgies for congregations and helping congregational life in worship.

• How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role? See above.

• How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

For my role as the Worship Architect of ----- (a postmodern, post-church expression of gathering, mission and fellowship of mostly artists) we are actually post-Christian. We have lots of “former” every-flavor of denominations and church expressions, but we also have some Jewish people, a Muslim, and several proclaimed Agnostic folk alongside of us.

For my role as the Senior Minister of -----, we are denominationally bound, but are a combined church of over 40 years as Christian Church, DOC and Presbyterian Church USA. We identify mostly as traditional, but also progressive.

• How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

Church is a gathering of folk. The end. I think it is getting harder and hard to delineate further than that. I think Church has a spiritual component to it, but with more and more churches using alternative forms of biblical stories, new found texts, alongside prophetic literature that wasn't included in the Bible, I'm trying to simply what “church” is. I think in this time it is probably easier to say what CHURCH IS NOT (i.e., a government sponsored organization) than what it is; as that seems to be mostly specific to context. Since there are a variety of religious expression in the world that we can point to “as church”, to assume “church” is always a body of Christ expression seems limiting.

• What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

My biggest frustration is the holding on to systems and patterns of being that don't have meaning or truth today. Therefore we harbor resentment that our churches aren't full; but I want to ask WHERE ARE WE? Are we out like Jesus, feeding, welcoming and sharing? Most people just wait. And advertise. That seems so disparate to the gospel and how Jesus lived in the world. I think we need to defend the actions of the gospel, and then translate to what that means today. (i.e., would Jesus blast and engage on social media? would Jesus hang scripture flags at football games? etc.)

• In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)? What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God? I guess it depends on what stories you are reading. We can believe that God is creative. And judgmental. And enduring. And love. See this is why it's messy. Personally, I believe story of God shows us that God is a God of relationship. And relationships have highs and lows and relationships require work.

- How can they know? see above.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

Well in this era I think people throw around the phrase "You don't know my truth" way too much and then bring that same emotion to faith. People who have abusive relationships with a father, prolly don't want to have a relationship with a Father God; but are they astute enough or in communities where language matters and so other aspects of God are shared? I would hope so, but most of the time I find that not to be true.

- Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?

I believe that scripture is a guide. I also think something can't have authority unless it is recognized as authority; therefore since all people can't agree that our scripture have authority, it doesn't. It has power and meaning, sure. But does it have the end all authority? Nope. I think that went by the wayside after Constantine.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I don't think we can. As the years emerge and more and more "digs" happen, we have light shed on communities and how they operated, what scripture meant to them (and which scripture.) Also, history has shown that large groups of people/faith groups were left out of deciding what "was true" and should be included. This very action makes it suspect, does it not? However, that doesn't mean that scripture isn't alive and still speaking to us. In fact, in my context we routinely recite: FOR THE WORD OF GOD WITHIN US, FOR THE WORD OF GOD AROUND US, THANKS BE TO GOD after the reading. And we call scripture: the story of God. For God is always present and changing us, therefore I think scripture changes and is alive to us.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how? see above as I think I covered this.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

- o Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

- o To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

- o To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

## JAMES'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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(Additional questions may be added after conducting participant observations and reviewing documents provided by persons, churches or communities being interviewed)

- Where are you from?

Seattle, WA

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

Grew up hearing about Jesus, involved as a child in church and church activities. Became a follower of Jesus at 20. Two steps forward, 3 steps back since then. But God through the ups and downs, Jesus has become real, central and the sustainer of my life.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

Had a calling to the city of Seattle years ago. Our previous church that we helped start became overcome with issues. We left to start something new in Seattle

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I don't like to identify with any specific movement or expression. I would imagine some of these words, titles...I would identify with pieces/threads of them. I am orthodox in belief (I believe the Scriptures are the Word of God, I believe Jesus is the God/Man and is the way of Salvation) and a mutt in everything else. Sort of like what Stan Hauerwas said, "Jesus is Lord and everything else is bullshit."

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

There is a lot I could write/say about this.

The short answer is yes. The Church is the people. The followers of Jesus. Big difference between that and the institutional church.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

We need to get back to being a faithful presence. Humbly seek and love the neighborhood/city we are called to. Practice the sacraments. Encourage one another. As all possible, live in harmony with one another. Share the gospel in word and deed.

All the other garbage can go down the toilet.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I honestly don't know. We are trying to simply practice the way of Jesus. Acts 2:42-47.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?
- How can they know?
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?

I believe in it.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?  
Great question. I think there are certain core "Beliefs" that define Christianity.....these are authoritative.....though there is MUCH outside of this in Scripture that would be difficult to know the "true" interpretation....hence why we have so many denominations, etc
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?  
Wow that would be a dream. If it falls in the topic of the core set of "Beliefs", then yes.....ala "Apostles Creed" and "Nicene Creed." But there are too many things that aren't essential that Christians believe are essential.
- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?  
Sure, if its' on the foundation of the core set of beliefs (God, gospel, Jesus)
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?  
- There are simply too many tribes in Christianity for this to happen. Each tribe has their chosen voice of "authority" that others don't recognize as authority. Even someone like Billy Graham who probably had the broadest support of Christians from all denominations would not have gotten support from a "tribe" I used to be in.
  - Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?  
- 1 John and specifically I John 3 lays this out. Galatians also does.
  - To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

## JENS' RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Born and raised in Connecticut

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

Raised in a Christian family engaged in full-time camping ministry. Very conservative (a notch or two above fundamentalist) and fiercely non-denominational, with a strong conviction that the mainline churches, along with Catholics and Orthodox, were not really saved.

At ----- College, as a result of NT and theology courses with Fr. Dr. Robert Webber, I had a second "conversion" and was baptized and confirmed as an Episcopalian. Since the recent theological discord in the Episcopal Church, I now identify as Anglican.

In the early 80s, I experienced aspects of the charismatic renewal that was moving through the mainline and Catholic Church. My experience was low key and a matter more of private worship and contemplation, not wild and wooly. I guess I'd say I'm a multi-stream Evang-Episco-Pentecostalist.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I'm in lay leadership in music, liturgy (reader, chalice, thurifer), and prayer ministry. Just a natural evolution from being in the pews to take a role as a "lead worshipper" (I don't like the concept of a "worship leader.")

I am also the President of a Christian 501c3 that is the continuation of my parents' camping ministry. Our purpose is to engage and equip emerging leaders with the principles and practices of serving leadership from a faith-based perspective. These growing leaders are not limited to explicitly Christian church or parachurch ministry. Rather, we want to be reaching leaders in all spheres of life

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

Something else --Ancient-Future: rooted in the Great Tradition while being missionally engaged with emerging culture. I pursue a very strong commitment to Christian Unity across theological and sociological lines.

No, the categories don't really help. Aspects of all of these fit into what I'm dream of, while also raising up barriers to what I dream of.

- How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

I would differentiate:

The local church is the body of Christ gathered for worship and scattered for witness within a geographical / demographical / ethnographical sector. I prefer proximity because I’m a big fan of an Incarnational view of the Church, but new ways to reach out can connect us from different places and at different times.

The institutional church serves local churches to ensure “the faith once delivered” – the kerygma, the apostolic DNA – is authentically lived and passed on at the local levels. It is the source of catechesis. It is a construct within the Body of Christ that takes on the various delineations of gifts and ministries and roles in the NT. For, those are bishops, priests and deacons, as well the 5-fold framework in Ephesians: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The Body of Christ is the community / the collective of the Church across all time and space. It shares features of the Trinity in that we are in Christ and Christ is in us; Christ is in God and God is in Christ; and Christ and God are distinct in person but one in nature with the Holy Spirit who “proceeds” ... (here I’ll dodge the filio que controversy ☺ ) I have a high Trinitarian view of the Body in which we recapitulate the perichoresis of the Triune Godhead. I’ve also mentioned a high Christological view of the Church.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

Parish movements that emphasize proximity, incarnational embedding in the neighborhood, highly relational, less programmatic formation and catechesis – these all encourage me. Mega churches, with their shopping mall feel and their “program for every need” across many campuses for your convenience make me sad.

All the things in Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman’s books, in Kenda Creasy Dean’s “Almost Christian” and in everything by Christian Smith that bring out the bigotry, hypocrisy, and hyper-partisanship of evangelicals turns my stomach.

Catholic Social Doctrine and Orthodox environmental theology give me hope. Reformation thinking, a la Kuyper, helps me breakdown false dichotomies and fully engage with all spheres of human culture making. Add Andy Crouch to that mix.

Literalist bibliolatry drives me crazy. Theologians like NT Wright bless me.

We’ve lost the culture war on sexuality and gender. It’s time to stop fighting the wedding-cake fights couched as “religious liberty.” We need to shift the ground to what celibate, covenantal spiritual friendship can be so that we can be oriented to love in many forms while holding the biblical and church witness to the place of sexual intimacy within monogamous marriage between one man and one woman.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?  
See above. Conversations around great books and boots on the ground ministry that are highly relational, incarnational, and face to face.

I've got to stop here – too much other work. SORRY!

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?
- How can they know?
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?
- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?
- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?
  - Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?
  - To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?
  - To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

## JON'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

Manassas, VA USA

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was raised in a liberal Presbyterian church that my mom was very involved in. I was a somewhat rebellious child and I remember from a young age pushing back against the structure of church. As I grew older I felt that there was a great disparity between the Biblical message and the message that was given at the church in both word and deed. It was not until I was forced to face the consequences of my sin at the age of 21 that I decided that I needed help from the church. By God's grace, the church that I began to attend taught the Bible faithfully and for the first time in my life the gospel message made sense to me. I placed my faith in Christ shortly after my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday and I have been walking with Him ever since. Christ called me from within a megachurch environment (one where I felt safe to slip in and slip out) but He quickly convicted me of the need to have the accountability that is found in a much smaller church family. My wife and I began attending a small SBC church plant and followed that church when we merged with a larger Baptist church. After serving there for several years we felt called to move back into the church plant arena. We have since helped launch a few church plants but have recently found ourselves called to a more mature, albeit still small, church family.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I was serving as an Elder of a small church plant which had brought me on to help move them into a Missional model. However, it became evident to all who were involved that our culture was, at the core, incompatible with a Missional model. During this same time I was in conversations with some leaders from another Missional church in my area and I approached them about joining their gathering. With the blessing of my church at the time, my family began attending both churches. As it became more obvious that we aligned well with the Missional church, I stepped down from the former church to begin the Elder process with the latter.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I think that these categories can be helpful in understanding the cultural values of a congregation. My church would fall under both the Missional and Neo-Calvinist categories.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

I believe that the concept of church can fit well in all of those categories, and probably more as well. I view church as worshipers of Christ which I guess could be stated as the body of Christ. Yet, this will take on radically different forms given the context and its

needs. There are many churches (although I don't know the statistics I would assume that the majority of church attenders fall in this category) that are aligned in institutional forms bound together by doctrine and practices. However, these and others that are not part of larger institutions typically have a very real presence in a local geographic space. This is I believe a good and necessary thing. Yet, there are others that are blazing new ground in an apostolic sense. While they often receive support from both local churches as well as institutions, there is a very real sense in which they are not defined by these organizations. Thus, I have come back full circle to worshipers of Christ being the tie that binds.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

This is a very complex question! I have been extremely encouraged by the movements that I have seen returning to the historical tenets of the Christian faith. Stepping away from culturally synchronistic practices and engaging in the modes of spirituality that are laid out in scripture. I have also been encouraged by the force that is driving this, a falling out of post-modern relativism and a resurgence of belief in absolute truth. I see God equipping a generation to push back on the idolatry of the past and step into a transformative community of true worshippers. That being said, I believe that a reformation of church practices and a defense of sound scriptural teaching is essential. In many ways the western church has bought into the cultural idol of consumerism thereby catering to the desires of the congregants rather than promoting devotion and service to God. Until the church is willing to be a prophetic voice, often at the expense of its material safety and wellbeing, it will continue to be both spiritually and culturally irrelevant.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

In our current church gathering we have returned to a liturgical form of worship while continuing the contemporary western style of music and scriptural teaching. However, this practice is only a culmination of the formation that is happening in our lives through shared rhythms of life that transpire on a daily basis. I believe that in this way we are upholding the authority of scripture, encouraging accountability, moving away from individualism and towards lives lived for the kingdom.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

Humans can know that God exists and that all other things exist through His design. Humans can know His divine attributes and His will. To be honest All of God's characteristics, deeds, and desires could be listed but I'm not sure that is what the aim of this question is. Please let me know if you would like an expansion on this answer.

- How can they know?

God has fully revealed Himself (to the degree that humans are able to comprehend) through creation, through scripture, and most profoundly through His son Jesus Christ.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

First one must honestly seek truth, allow themselves to be open to where ever the evidence leads, and then weigh out what can be known about God. I believe that if one earnestly undertakes this endeavor it will be found that trusting in God is the most intuitive and sensible conclusion. The barrier to trusting in God is not lack of evidence, it is hardness of heart.

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I believe that scripture is the recorded word of the living God and has the authority of a direct extension of God’s revelation to His church.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I believe that there is a very real sense in which our human fallibility can give the possibility of a misinterpretation of scripture. The mere fact that so many disputes exist among earnest and learned Biblical scholars on the finer points of doctrine reveals that this is so. However, I find that this does not detract from the ability to draw out from scripture an authoritative interpretation of the essential tenets of our faith. Nor does it prevent us from fully grasping the overarching narrative of scripture and allowing it to be authoritative in our lives.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

As I stated above I believe that it is possible for Christians today to draw from scripture and come to a consensus on both the foundational tenets of our faith as well as the overarching narrative of scripture.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

Heresy is absolutely a problem, the scripture that we hold to be authoritative both tells us of its existence and warns us to guard ourselves against it. That being said, I believe that there are differing levels of freedom in interpretation that are allowed by scripture. It is helpful for me to think of scripture as guardrails inside which we are free to explore our theology, doctrine, and church practices. In some areas the guardrails give us more space to move in our understanding of scripture, and in others the guardrails are so close together as to only allow us one path to walk.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

I believe that if there is a disagreement in the interpretation of scripture the church should first seek out how the original church fathers interpreted the scripture in question and how the early church lived in light of it. From there an appeal to trusted authorities, both contemporary and throughout history, should be sought out. If an impasse is reached I

feel that to the extent to which issue can be left unresolved it should be met with grace and love on both sides.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

This really depends on the issue at hand but as I have stated all along I believe that all of the major tenets of the Christian faith can be found readily in scripture. There is not one sole place to point to but rather the entirety of scripture details the true gospel and those that are false or heretical will be shown by their incompatibility with the Bible’s metanarrative.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I believe that I already touched on this question with my previous answer but to expand on it I believe that their original faith can be used as a baseline for the understanding of scripture. To see how the early church wrestled with their understanding (especially their differences in understanding) of scripture, doctrine, and faith lived out, gives us a model for how to enter into those same conversations and scenarios today.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

If I understand the Body of Christ to mean the collective of those called by Christ and whom have submitted to His Lordship, then I would say that it would be to a great extent. We are called to submit to one another, bear witness to each other, and above all else guide each other to the ultimate truth found in God which is revealed through creation, scripture, and His son Jesus the Christ. Furthermore, it is understood that those who enter into the new covenant receive an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Scripture details that He is to guide us in our discernment of truth by opening our eyes to God’s continued work in creation, illuminating our understanding of scripture, and bringing to our remembrance the teachings of Jesus.

## JUDAH'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

I grew up in southern California. Moved from Anaheim to ----- during High School. Then back to North OC Fullerton area during college years.

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

Went to church with family. Believed. Grew a lot while driving myself to church in high school. Experienced deep community in college. Grew in theology during this time. Went to seminary as a 20 something. Got in vocational ministry in early 20s.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I planted a church on ----- ----- . The gathering phase was Oct. 2015. Merged our church with a dying/struggling church in -----.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, PaleoOrthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I'm a part of 2 networks. One is the Pacific Church Network and Acts 29. I'm a Calvinist and identify more with Reformed Theology and yes Missional.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

As one body with a local expressions.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

The large amount of church planting is encouraging. I think the most frustrating thing is traditions that turn churches inward and loss its missional posture in the community in which they live. Most defended: I think we have to continue to fight for peoples hearts and point them toward the Worship of God, the Community of his people, and the mission of God and his people.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

-we keep pointing people to worship, community, and mission.

What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

What He has revealed in scripture and nature

- How can they know?

From the Holy Spirit, from people, from personal senses

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

The Scriptures, The Holy Spirit and Christian community. The other aspect is a trust in Eldership. There is a certain level of tradition that every Christian yields to, that is the tradition of the Apostles and other Christians that have come before them. But they/we must weight it against Scripture.

Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I believe it’s authoritative...it is our final authority...It’s infallible and sufficient.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

Yes, by consulting the Scriptures themselves, and the community of faith, current and historical.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

No. Because we are sinners/saints who are still have the battle of the old nature. That’s why we have denoms. There wont have total consensus in this life.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

To the extent that when someone is learning they are learning in the care or under the discipleship of others in community. There is a lot of freedom in practice....lots. In fact we need to be innovative to reach lost people. We need to learn their language and culture.

As for doctrine, this is where we can explore but with wisdom and caution and in community and I’ll add submission to the HS and to others.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

The local governing church because God has ordained their authority of oversight.

- o Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

This is usually painful and difficult for many people. Mainly, because as they work out theology and philosophy of ministry they are discovering who they are and how to use their gifts.

That aside a great start is systematic theology and biblical theology studies. This put training wheels and even a safety net under the person as they develop.

- o To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed

down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I see it as a net of safety, while attempting something very dangerous right. With no net the fall is hell. The cults of our day, which no one cares about anymore like JW or Mormonism, ignore the safety net of orthodoxy which came from the Apostles, to us.

o To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

In every way. The HS must be listened to. We must pause and seek him on our faces, pleading for His help as we seek to understand the Scriptures. And the body local and abroad are helpful in chalking out the field that is where we are theologically. I know that Chalk tightens up as we get closer to every church.

## MEL'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from? Currently live in Phoenix, Arizona, USA. Born in British Columbia, Canada. Lived in USA since 1980.
- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey? I was born in a Mennonite family. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior at age 11. Baptized at age 14 by immersion. Practiced spiritual disciplines of daily Bible reading, prayer, public worship and service from teenage years. Studied Bible formally at ----- College, ---- College, ----- School Of Theology and ----- Seminary. Ordained in 1980.
- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role? I was founding pastor of ----- Church in 2004.
- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

My theology is rooted in Anabaptist theology. I have added Catholic spirituality to my practice such as meditation and Bible study (Lectio Divina).

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

The church is the called-out people of God. I do not differentiate between local church or universal church or "body of Christ." The church is where "two or three are gathered."

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

Christianity has a bad name in the USA. I generally refuse to use the word, Christian, to define my spirituality. I call myself a "follower of Jesus." I posted a comment on Facebook some months ago: "I am not a Christian." There is a knowledge of God but no godliness. We need to work on transformation. We need spiritual renewal. The divorce rate of Christians is higher than non-Christians.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)? There is nothing wrong with the doctrines of the Christian faith; there is much wrong with the application of the faith to daily life. We need to preach the practice of loving God, loving the brother/sister in the faith and loving those who do not know God loves them. In my context, I practice building living relationships with atheists, agnostics and Muslims. Several years ago, my wife and I hosted a Thanksgiving dinner that was shared by persons who were atheists, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. There was a homeless man as well.

What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

Nature is a witness to God. God has revealed himself through this written Word, The Bible. They will also learn about God from the lifestyles of those who say they know God.

- How can they know?

They will also learn about God from the lifestyles of those who say they know God. They will learn about God as the Holy Spirit instructs them through the Bible.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

The witness of the community (Anabaptist theology – community hermeneutic).

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’? The Bible is the Word of God. While the Bible is the Word of God, it only has authority if the person who believes it subjects themselves to the Word.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

Yes. The witness of the community (Anabaptist theology – community hermeneutic). Subject my interpretation of the Bible to the scrutiny of the believing community.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how? Yes, it is possible but not probable. There is too much individualism in the church today.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

A lot of Christians think that they are free to believe what they believe. How else does one explain the recent attempt to excuse the alleged pedophile behavior of a candidate for the US Senate by comparing his behavior to that of Joseph and Mary? The same Christians took offense at the decision of Keurig to withdraw their advertising from Shawn Hannity’s program because Hannity defended the candidate’s alleged behavior and are seen in media destroying their Keurig machines.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

The Anabaptist/Mennonite community is not a confessional community. Their seminaries do not have courses in systematic theology; they have courses in Biblical Theology. I know of only two Anabaptist/Mennonite Biblical scholars who attempted to create an “Anabaptist Theology.”

To answer the question, Christians should seek understanding through prayerful discussion about their disagreements. Appeal to the historic creeds of the church such as the Nicene Creed should also be made.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

Anabaptists hold to a strong incarnational view of the Christian faith, that is, the follower of Christ is Christ in the world. “The only Bible people read is you” is a common statement among Anabaptists. Anabaptists hold to an orthodox view of Jesus as God-man. They also believe in the orthodox view of the Trinity. They believe in faith in Jesus’ death as the means of salvation. (They hold various views of atonement – no consistent view although the forensic position is most common. They believe that salvation is by faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). They believe every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit at salvation. They also believe that faith is demonstrated by active obedience to the teachings of Jesus.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I would say for Anabaptists that orthodoxy is important. Anabaptists often say they focus on essentials and leave openness to other issues. Anabaptists do not refer to any form of “apostolicity: - this foreign to them. They are more concerned to be Biblical than to be historically orthodox as the way this question is framed. God is known through the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

The Holy Spirit plays a significant role church. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth who reveals the knowledge of God, convicts of sin and fills the believer to live the life of Christ in the world.

The church is a body of believers who are each uniquely equipped by the Spirit to minister to each other and to the world. The church is the “priesthood of believers” where each believer reveals the nature and character of God in the world.

## MEREDITH'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from? I'm originally from a small, rural coal mining town southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey? I grew up Roman Catholic, where I found personal faith in Christ, and learned to love the Bible and the church. As I grew in my faith, I was befriended by people from a wide variety of Christian traditions including Baptists, PCUSA Presbyterians, Charismatic Christians, Evangelical Presbyterians (EPC), Christian and Missionary Alliance people, the United Church of Christ, and two evangelistic Para-church organizations: Campus Crusade for Christ (they recently changed their name to "CREW") and Youth for Christ.
- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?  
It is a very long story. I'm happy to say more, if needed. Briefly, in 2005 I came out as gay, after wrestling with the Scriptures, my various Christian traditions, and the Bible for more than 25 years. By 2007, I resigned from 23 years of service in ----- and begun the ordination process in the ----- . In 2009, I discovered a new church, a 10 month-old church plant that was evangelical and open and affirming to the LGBTQ community. In 2010, I completed and earned my Doctor of Ministry degree at ----- . After getting to know the pastors of ----- Church and the community, I joined the staff as one of three Co-Pastors in 2010.
- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?  
The categories are limiting to be sure, but our church identifies as "progressive evangelical." We add to that label, Christ-centered, rooted in the historic Christian Church, and committed to a Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God-in-Christ-in-the-Holy-Spirit. We are part of a loose network of progressive-evangelical churches in the States and around the world who long for a more just and generous expression of the Christian faith. The network is called OPEN.
- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?  
We think of the local church as a part of the (institutional) Church: Church with a capital "C." We don't often use the language of Institutional Church. We prefer "universal" or catholic Church. We believe that each individual follower of Christ is also a member of the Body of Christ.
- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why? My fellow colleagues and I (We are 3 Co-pastors: ----, the Founding Pastor of the church, and ----), are very encouraged about what's happening in our local setting and in the national setting of our small OPEN circle. The sheer number of people interested in discovering a more inclusive faith-community that is still distinctly Christian, grounded in the Bible, and open to the work of the Holy Spirit is encouraging to us. Many of our people do not come to us as people of faith, but rather people who are interested in a faith community to

raise their children or to explore for themselves that is not prejudiced, not judgmental, and not hierarchical. We also have many in our community who identify as post (or former) evangelical, post-catholic, and even post-Christian. We also believe that a new hermeneutic, a new way of reading the Bible, is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are playing an active role in the work of a renewed hermeneutic.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)? We are not inclined to defend doctrines. But we talk a lot about renewed practices of contemplative prayer and renewed understandings of God and of humanity. Our vision for our church is that we might lead the way to a new 500-year reformation of the Church universal. We hope to play a role in the great emergence of a more just and generous expression of Christianity.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God? A lot, but less than we once thought. Most of what we think we know about God comes from 5 sources, the person of Jesus Christ, our experiences of God in our lives, the witness of Christian tradition over the last 2,000 years, the Bible, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our world and in our lives.
- How can they know? We strive to hold loosely to what we are certain of when it comes to God. We want to be confident, but not arrogant; persuasive, but humble; clear, but open to being wrong.
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true? We want our people to learn to trust Christ, more than they trust what they think they know about Christ. That's a fine line, very fine. And since most people's beliefs do change over time (as we grow and mature), we think of these changes as spiritual evolution. We're trying to help people be grounded in God, as Trinity, rather than helping them to be grounded in doctrines. I know – a very fine line.

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'? We believe the Scriptures are inspired by God's Holy Spirit, written by human hands, and very informative for our understanding of the human story and the story of God.
- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not? We believe it's super important for us to dig deep as we interpret the Scriptures – think critically, make good use of the primary original languages, do thorough exegesis, be prayerful in our study and in our application. And we are not convinced that our interpretation or anyone else's is THE authoritative interpretation.
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how? I don't think it likely - in this life -that all people who identify as Christian will agree on what faithful interpretation/authority of the Bible should look like. Nonetheless, we are deeply committed to unity in the Body of Christ.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?  
 Heresy can be a problem, but not a problem about which we are deeply concerned. We are much more concerned with following the way of Jesus, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. Theology is important at ----- Church because it informs how we experience God and how we give away our lives for the sake of a world in need. Given the limited amount of energy allotted to any given church or any given person, we are invested in equipping, empowering, and inspiring people to follow closely on the heels of Jesus as they learn to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with Christ. We think of the development of theology similarly to how we think of human development. People are evolving and becoming, so our connections to God are also evolving, which implies for us that our theological commitments will also evolve. You stated the question in a helpful way – we are innovating – which is to say we are becoming more and more of what God longs for us to become, including how we understand God.
  
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates? We need to listen more. We need to talk to each other more. We need also to believe the best in each other and pray together more often.
  - Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why? Our truest center is Jesus Christ. The lens through which our shifting hermeneutic becomes more clear to us and for us is always the person of Jesus Christ.
  
  - To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? For us at Highlands Church, the Church universal through out history and our historic personal faith in Christ is crucial to our current understanding and practices of faith. It plays a key role. We stand on huge shoulders. The other key roles of experience, spontaneous movements of the Holy Spirit, and an in depth study of the scriptures and of humanity are also very important to how we know God and how we know truth.
  
  - To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? We would rank participation in the Body of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit quite high on our list of key roles in knowing God and truth.

## MIKE'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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• Where are you from? Born in Ontario, Canada — raised in Suburban Houston, Texas — living and pastoring on----- ----- in -----.

• How would you briefly describe your Christian journey? Born into a Catholic family. First understood the gospel at a youth event when I was 16 thanks to the invite I received from a friend at a local ----- Church. Fell in love with the bible playing basketball at ----- College ( -----) in -----. Learned to walk in the Holy Spirit at a Pentecostal college (-----), felt called to plant a church while attending Mars Hill Church in Seattle, planted a sister church in -----. My convictions and my church reflect this diversity from underneath the Christian umbrella.

• How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?  
We planted our church in -----. It's an honor to serve as Lead Pastor. I champion vision, serve as the primary preacher, raise up and send leaders to plant churches of their own, care for our staff, and do my best to exemplify a life on mission.

• How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, PaleoOrthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

We are a non-denominational church. Of the above list, I believe “missional” fits. I personally avoid terminology that tends to feed theological tribalism. We have a fierce gospel-centrality and a diversity of convictions on the non-essentials.

• How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’? lower-case c church = a body of believers in a local context capital-C church = believers past/present/future church in general = a people, not a building or institution

• What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why? As mentioned above, I struggle with the tribalism that seems to cause more division than unity. The enduring resistance to a lifestyle of social justice because of fear toward association with liberal entities is problematic.

• In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?  
What and how can we know about God or know God?

• What can humans know about God? What has been revealed in scripture. His eternal nature, his infinite power, his intimate desire for relationship, his desire for righteousness, his provision for sin, his plans for humanity and creation...(what he is doing in the world.) ...all that is necessary for a life of faithfulness, fruitfulness, and purpose.

• How can they know? scripture.

• How can they trust that what they know about God is true? initially — the witness of scripture.. enduringly — the confirmation of transformed lives marked by joyful self-sacrifice for the betterment of others.

Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’? I’m all in.
- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?
- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

I’m tempted to say “no,” which is quite pessimistic. Interpretation that is theological (that is, affirming of it’s divine nature up front), prayerful, humble, committed to obedience and application, and Christocentric serves us best in the effort to interpret (and live) well together.

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To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? Freedom exists within the above parameters of scriptural affirmation. Any interpretation that fails to affirm what the scripture says about itself is out of bounds right off the bat. Any interpretation that changes the overarching narrative from “a story about what God is doing throughout history through the person and work of Jesus to execute his intentions to love creation and humanity” to any other narrative has missed the mark. Heresy problem? Absolutely. I live next door to the pastors and churches that are doing these very things. Authority of any kind, accountability of any kind are under attack.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Care for the sheep, identify the wolves. Voices that have proven themselves faithful to the scriptures and the gospel seen within, who do not sway with the culture.

o Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

At ----- we use a foundation of biblical theology (that is, the story of redemption God tells via scripture through Christ beginning to end), then add historical creeds that have proven scripturally faithful and time-tested (Nicene, Apostles, etc). We have found the Lausanne Covenant incredibly helpful and encouraging as well.

o To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? see above. They tend to encourage and strengthen believers, while appearing outdated to those affirming the most recent and prevalent theological trajectories in our context.

o To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? The utmost extent. If we are not a Spirit-filled body delighting in and defending the truth, we are already lost.

## PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

I was born and raised in Guatemala as a dual citizen. My family moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania when I was 15, and I lived there off and on until I was 28. Around that time, I got married and moved to the Phoenix area, where I've lived for six years.

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

For better or worse, I'm a spiritual mutt: baptized Lutheran as an infant, confirmed Methodist as a teenager, I'm now part of an Anglican church – but I've always more or less identified with aspects of the evangelical movement (as a theological concept, not a political one). My parents were missionaries, so I grew up in the church and was immersed in the faith at home. As a teenager, that faith slowly but surely became more and more my own, not just something I'd inherited. During college, I joined a nondenominational megachurch that emphasized “taking the Bible seriously” and considering its global implications. Ultimately, I found that church's dispensational theology to be untenable, which led me on a long, winding exploration (mostly through books, but also through friendships) of Mennonite, Catholic, and Dutch Reformed thought, particularly in reference to theologies of justice and mission. So, obviously, I became Anglican.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I'm a layperson. I have been involved in a variety of ministry capacities within churches and Christian organizations, but I'm not in any formal “ministry” role right now. My wife and I are members of ----- Anglican, where we ended up after a nondenominational (but “Anglicanish”) church plant we were part of dissolved in 2013. By day, I run a small ---- -- business through which I serve a variety of nonprofits and startups. A couple of those clients are small nonprofits working among vulnerable communities in Mexico and Central America – it's that work that especially makes me come alive.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

Our pastor once exegeted the words in the name of our church, ----- by saying that first and foremost, our identity is in Christ. Next, as his followers, we're part of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church made up of all believers across space and time. Finally, Anglicanism is one reliable way to follow Christ and be part of his Church. I like that. I love the liturgy and sacramentality of Anglicanism, not to mention its historical rootedness and global connectedness; my first Sunday in this church felt like a homecoming. Beneath the surface, though, I'm basically a Kuyperian with an appreciation for Catholic social teaching and an indebtedness to Anabaptist peace and justice movements. As for those labels in the question, I've read a lot of books from authors representing many of those movements over the years, and have learned from – and been challenged by – certain aspects of them. But I haven't found any of them to be crucial labels for me to personally adopt at this point.

- How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

I suppose I think first of all about “the Church” (with a capital C) – the people of

God who constitute the “body of Christ” through space and time. I trust that God knows who constitutes the church in that sense, so I don’t need to spend a lot of time worrying about who’s in and who’s out. I think the “institution(s)” of the church matter very much, both at a denominational and local level, and that there’s wisdom in some sense of church structure. I appreciate Abraham Kuyper’s distinction between church as organism and church as institute – both are essential, but we shouldn’t get so bogged down in internal church politics and ecclesiological empire-building pursuits that we miss what God is doing through the Spirit, moving in ways we cannot predict, organize, or understand.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I’ve been discouraged by the way a significant portion of our country’s self-identified “evangelicals” have capitulated to a political movement that stands, in my estimation, largely in opposition to the Christian faith and its teachings. The exit polls from November 2016 showing 81% of white evangelicals supported President Trump – with large numbers continuing to praise him uncritically in the year or so since, despite everything – have been dismaying to me. It seems we have crossed into new territory, where deceit, vulgarity, and outright racism have become the norm – and far too many “evangelicals” have enthusiastically marched in step with the idolatrous parade. (I say this as a political independent who is unable to align with either party.) It seems to me we need a new theological word to describe those across denominations, parties, and races who seek to love God and love their neighbors in the way of Jesus.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

One thing I’ve prioritized is to take small steps in my own life to move closer to immigrants and refugees – recovering our biblical call to welcome, befriend, and care for the stranger. That calling has recently become politicized and controversial, but one way of pledging allegiance to the Risen King is to undertake that calling quietly, consistently, without any sense of superiority over those who may not be doing likewise. We’re to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God – and it’s all too easy to simply say those words. But I’m more and more convinced that while there will come a time to talk about that, first of all we need to actually undertake those actions as a matter of daily practice without fanfare.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?  
We can know enough. There will be a lot of unanswered questions. But we can know enough.
- How can they know?  
Through the Bible, in the sacraments, in prayer, in suffering, in learning from others – all mysterious, all by the power of the Spirit.
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?  
I’m enough of a Calvinist to believe that God enables us to trust him. I don’t know how that works, exactly, but I believe it.

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I believe Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and trustworthy for life and practice.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I'm far less confident in my own interpretation than I am in the interpretation(s) of Christians throughout time and space whose lives show the fruit of the Spirit. The newer and more isolated the theological concept, the more skeptical I am, because I think we tend to overestimate our own theological intuition and ingenuity.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

I don't have much hope of consensus until the New Jerusalem. Even then, though, I wonder if God delights in our imagination and will bless a certain degree of theologizing – and disagreement! – even in the eschaton. On the other hand, we will no longer see through a glass darkly, so maybe all our burning questions will be answered. I don't know!

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

Yes, heresy is a problem. Regardless of theological particulars, there's a big difference between "Reformed and always reforming" and "move fast and break things."

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

I think we should be honest about where we stand in relation to Christians from other traditions of yesterday and today. I see this as particularly (although not exclusively) problematic in nondenominational churches of various kinds. If we're not honest about the movements and traditions that have shaped us (and the movements and traditions we've reacted against or separated from), how can we be honest with ourselves and others about where we stand in relation to historic Christian teaching? Some churches like to say they "take the Bible seriously." And they very well may. But if they aren't forthcoming about the particular theological lens through which they approach it, members will be led to believe this is what those who take the Bible seriously believe – even if that interpretation happens to be a novelty.

All that to say, I think the content of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds are fairly basic rubrics for "big tent Christianity" as it has been understood since the earliest days. Those creeds leave a lot unsaid, and I think that's okay. Specific churches and denominations can and do articulate stances on "secondary issues," and in becoming members, individuals and families voluntarily sign on to those specifics as well. But the idea of the creeds is to recognize what the "essentials" are. So if someone disagrees over the timing and form of baptism, for instance, we can dialogue as fellow believers with differing interpretations on an important matter. But if someone denies the divinity of Christ or the mystery of the Trinity, we should treat them as unbelievers – that is, we should love them and seek to win them over, albeit without coercion.

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

I sort of answered this in the response above. One other thing that comes to mind

is I Corinthians 4:1, in which Paul says, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.” In that verse, I understand him to be saying, in part, that there are some things the Bible makes clear, but there are plenty of questions the Bible leaves relatively unanswered. I think of Jesus, who primarily taught using parables rather than proclamations and who tended to respond to questions not with definitive, airtight answers but with more questions. So, being “stewards of the mysteries of God,” it seems to me, is one crucial characteristic of those constituting the “true church” – not conveniently tidying up things the Bible leaves messy, but also not needlessly muddying the things the Bible makes clear. I think the creeds help us articulate the things that are clear, while giving us lots of room for improvisation.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Not sure I have a well-formulated answer to that beyond what I’ve already said.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I don’t have a profound theological conviction about this, but anecdotally, I have experienced the reality that God uses his people and his Spirit to shape and teach us.

## RACHEL'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **Where are you from?**

Willcox, AZ

### **How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?**

I was "bribed" into Christianity. The pastor and his wife came to visit on Monday night visitation and found me in the midst of hysterics.

They said, "You need Jesus. He'll fix all of this." In the my 39 years of relationship with Jesus I've doubted, hated, didn't believe, and eventually came to a settled place of believing in God's love and goodness and that neither was dependent on him answering my prayers or stopping suffering.

### **How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?**

I was an integral part of leadership in a local church and my passion was helping churches understand how essential it is that they properly screen employees and volunteers, develop and implement child protection policies, training for leadership, teachers, and parents, and abide by the law which states that all people in the State of AZ are mandated reporters. Their stance was that their mission was evangelism not dealing with social issues; yet when an issue did arise they wanted my help. I left my home of 20 years, finally began to settle into a small church which turned into a home church after they made transitions from what is normally understood as church to their home.

**How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: *Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing Movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative* or something else? Are such categories helpful?**

I no longer find these labels or categories helpful when describing my relationship with God. There are times we take turns putting together liturgy and study of God's word where each of us participate. We always eat, pray, and share our hearts with each other who know how to listen and don't find the need to provide answers or solve the things that are breaking our heart. Maybe it's a bit more like the 1st Century Church than anything else.

**How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?**

Each of these terms evoke a different internal reaction. The body of Christ as I see it is people who share a common belief framed within the Nicene Creed. My response will be oversimplified but the church exists where-ever two or three gathered together for the purpose of wrestling with, praising, seeking, and engaging each other, the text, (Scripture) each other and the world - or culture.

**What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?**

I believe there needs to be a breaking down of the concrete lines of denominationalism and of those to return to a few basics as I said earlier as outlined in the Nicene Creed and then (a) Matthew 25:35-40 (b) Matthew 22:37 (c) John 8:7, (d) I Cor

13: 4-8, demonstrated through how we live out (e) Matthew 28: 16-20.

**In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?**

This is part of what our community is trying to figure out.

What and how can we know about God or know God?

**What can humans know about God?**

This is simplified but I would say..through His creation...wherever there is love, the hungry are fed, the sick are cared for, the homeless given a safe place to rest their bodies God will be experienced.

**How can they know?**

I believe this is different for each individual and their story that led them to the knowledge they needed something other than themselves and needed to believe that they are loved unconditionally.

**How can they trust that what they know about God is true?**

Know in a dogmatic manner is not possible. But the guidelines I mentioned above answers these questions...also, faith isn't about what we see but what is within us from before we were birthed, that holds onto hope when there seems no reason to do so. There is something within the Image of God that helps us have with a knowing that can't always be put into words.

Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

**What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?**

See below

**Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation?**

**Why or why not?**

Oh boy this is a difficult one. I took a seminary course several years ago. One of the instructors is a well-known Bible translator. He told us that a particular publisher ask him to write a literal translation of a specific book of the bible within his specialization as a translator.

After doing so, the publishers sent it back to him letting him know it was too literal and couldn't be included in the Bible as it was translated. When I realized that a publishing company has input into how the Word of God is presented I wrestled for a long time trying to figure out what I believed about the Bible which I had so dearly loved. I don't know that I have completely reconciled all that was disrupted by this knowledge.

I do believe that those that translate scripture do their very best to not change the meaning of what God wanted us to learn and know about Him through the Word yet I'm stunned to have learned that not even their work is always honored.

**Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?**

I often think that we are more concerned with being right than we are with spending time with one another being willing to learn, question, wonder, explore scripture to come to a consensus on what a faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture.

**To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?**

I don't know that my thoughts on this make any sense but again, the basics I mentioned feel like good guidelines for understanding if we honoring the most important parts of what God wants us to take away from reading His stories and words.

**What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?**

Not insist that they are right as long as there is a significant degree of agreement with the contents of the Nicene Creed and leave room to acknowledge there is much we cannot know until we see our God face to face.

**Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true Gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?**

In the most basic areas I've listed these in another questions.

**To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?**

I haven't thought through this for several years.

**To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?**

I think they are essential.

## RICK'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

Boston, Massachusetts [living now in ----- Australia]

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, experienced an evangelical conversion experience in my early 20s. After that I became involved in the Acts 29 Church Planting Network, attending -----, and working as a Worship Leader in an emerging, Reformed church plant in ----- After attending seminary at -----, I became an Anglican and eventually was ordained to the priesthood. I now teach theology FT in higher ed.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I most recently planted a church with colleagues and friends in Phoenix called ----- It was a response to being unsatisfied with serving in other established Anglican churches that were too immersed in a weird Christian subculture, and exhibiting too much of a cultural capitulation to right-wing theologies and cultural elements, such as an unmoving, infallible commitment to Calvinistic theology and a love for rifles.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

My current membership will be in the ----- Church which is basically a mainline denomination in Australia. I've recently arrived, so we'll see how that goes. In terms of ----- church I would identify with missional and emerging. I resonate with 'emergents' but wouldn't want to use either that or 'emerging' to describe myself as I see them as already sort of out-dated. I am a product of the middle road between emerging and emergent movements. I am also more on the post-conservative side of things, but I'm somewhere on the spectrum between post-liberal and post-conservative. I'm also comfortable with being called postmodern, because it is simply a fact that we live beyond modernism, and I embrace a non-foundational theory of epistemology. I resonate with paleo-orthodox, but barely anyone knows what I mean by that.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

Yes. The church is the mystical body of Christ that is alive by the Spirit on earth and in heaven as a communion of saints, linked together by the resurrection life of Christ. The local church is a participant and manifestation of this larger body.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

Encouraged by paleo-orthodox, neo-orthodox expressions of the faith that hold to the core teachings of Christianity but transcend the old 'liberal vs conservative' divide. Encouraged by a return to the Fathers, ecumenism with Catholics and

Orthodox, and by cross-denominational Christian mission and ecumenism. Encouraged by changes to theological education and denominationalism that reflect and serve the mission, rather than operating as clunky immovable old balls and chains.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I have had the opportunity to distinguish recently between catholicity in the major core teachings of Christianity, using Oden's stuff, and distinguishing this from 'ecumenism' and 'inter-faith dialogue.' The seminary I work for was asking us to reflect on that and I noticed many local clergy, usually more on the liberal side of things conflated all of those things. And so 'catholicity' was transformed to refer to accepting diverse and deviant theologies that departed from the faith once delivered. I think that our ecumenism, if it is to be worth anything, must derive from our catholicity, and our catholicity must be a reference to the core teachings, held at every time in every place by all. In other words, helping our denominations distinguish between theological conversation that derives from this core, and the core itself, will help us avoid mere reception theology where we cease to think after Nicea, and just pass on ideas, and on the other hand, it will help us to avoid placing contemporary theological and ethical arguments within the core. Doing theology is very important, but Calvinism or Arminianism or Liberalism or Progressivism or Dispensationalism are not the core, these are explications of the core. We can disagree on explications, and still have unity, but we cannot disregard the core, or to impute modern ideas to the core.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

Jesus the Word as revealed to us through the Word as both the summit and source and hermeneutic to the rest of the words of the Bible about God.

- How can they know?  
Through the Spirit's witness working through the Church throughout the ages.
- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

Through the internal witness of the Spirit individual, the encounter with God in worship, and the witness of the Spirit speaking through the Church within the cloud of witnesses testifying to the authenticity of the accounts and the providential preservation of those accounts in Holy Scripture, as discerned collectively by the Spirit through the Church.

#### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?

That the authority of Scripture exists because the CHURCH is the foundation and pillar of the truth, as 1 Timothy notes. The church is not authoritative because of the Bible, the Bible is authoritative because of the Church, and the Spirit working through the Church.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?  
Not on all things, but on core teachings of the faith the Spirit has guided the Church through the ages. On other issues we ought to exegete and disagree and seek to speak as the church across denominational lines, and to make decisions in a conciliar manner

submitting ourselves to the work of the Spirit through consensus in the Church, rather than through political posturing.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

Yes—but only on the core doctrines.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

Yes—but not in regard to the core.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Sometimes the doctrines must live in tension, because the point is Jesus not ideas about him. But other times, when the theological debate affects the core, we need to speak clearly as churches and denominations on the faith once delivered.

- Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

The creedal witness of the Church.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles (‘apostolicity’) as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils (‘orthodoxy’) play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

It is absolutely central. Without it we have mass mayhem.

- To what extent might the ‘Body of Christ’ and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

We cannot know God apart from our connection to each other and to him. As Cyprian said, to paraphrase: There is no salvation outside of the Church. I believe too there is no real knowledge of Christ outside of a connection with the body of Christ through faith and baptism.

## ROB'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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1 Where are you from?

Denver, Colorado, USA

2 How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was born and raised in the church. I was a part of my parent's Baptist church for 29 years before joining the church of which I am currently on staff, -----.

3 How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

My wife had friends that attended ----- We started attending because we had our first child and wanted a church that had others in a similar season of life. I came on staff as a volunteer within three months of starting to attend because -----went through a church split that summer and a number of staff positions opened up and they needed help.

4 How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I would consider -----on the line of progressive-evangelical or post-evangelical. In addition, -----is a missional church.

5 How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

I believe the local church is best when it functions as the body of Christ. We believe it is our job as staff to equip and empower our congregation to do the work God calls them to. It is not our job to do all of the work. But, each church is also an organization and must function with fiscal responsibility.

6 What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I believe that the evangelical church in America needs to understand it is our responsibility to care for the widow, the orphan and the immigrant in our midst. It is the church's job to help mature our followers into the likeness of Christ which is living open-handed with what we have been given, live generously toward others, be the moral conscience of the Government, and continue to heal the injustices and inequities in our national (racial, gender, etc.).

7 In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

We recently moved to a place of full-inclusion for the LGBTQ community. This means that anyone who identifies as LGBTQ can do anything in the context of our church that anyone else can. This is a departure from traditional evangelical doctrine.

## What and how can we know about God or know God?

8 What can humans know about God?

We can know a lot...from Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience, Context, etc. We can understand a great deal about his Character and his Kingdom from these things.

9 How can they know?

From reading and reasoning Scripture, receiving and questioning our Traditions, understanding our context, and discerning our experiences.

10 How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

We can trust what we know when it is supported by Scripture, Tradition, Experience and Reason. When we invite community in to our learnings and hear their thoughts and experiences. But we should always leave room for doubt. We do not need to be certain of everything to have a healthy and vibrant spiritual life.

## Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

1. What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?

I believe Scripture was divinely inspired and written by humans.

2 Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I am not sure we can, at least definitively. We can use our reason, listen to scholars, listen to our community, see what Tradition has to say, but we must always leave room for doubt and further learning.

3 Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

I think we can reach consensus for what we know and understand today. But, again, leaving room for what we may learn or experience in years to come.

4 To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

I think we should always be asking questions of Scripture and of God. But, I think we should never do so in isolation. Without community, tradition, and the experiences of others...we can get ourselves into trouble.

5 What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

I think Christians should continue to dialogue and debate. I do want to make the distinction between Dogma and Doctrine. We can still debate Dogma, but there is less wiggle room here in my opinion. But there is a lot of margin within Doctrine. There is great research on many sides of different doctrinal issues.

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

This is a difficult question. I think there are some elements that can be named here...for instance the Apostles' Creed can provide good boundaries. Beyond these general ditches, there is too much research by scholars from all perspectives to define a very definite, certain center.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I think much of what they passed down is helpful. But it cannot be all we use to understand God's character nor His Kingdom.

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Both can play a huge role in knowing God and truth.

## SOFIA'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from? Phoenix, AZ
- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was raised in a Christian home by parents who believed in living and working with the poor in Phoenix, Arizona. We continue to live and work in the inner city here in Phoenix. Through them I have learned what it looks like to love others and be Jesus to others. This looks like showing up in practical ways including providing food, visiting the sick, teaching job skills, visiting those in jail, mentoring children, assisting children in school, providing for health care needs, immigration reform, speaking out against injustice in our communities, marching, voting etc... This is what it means to be Jesus' hands and feet, Jesus with skin on, a faith community.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I was born into this ministry and into this community. I have chosen to become a nurse as a practical way of ministering to others. I have always worked and lived in my community. I am back in school working to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. This is to continue to meet a big need in our community for psychiatric providers and mental health care. This need seems even more pressing with the increased trauma our community has been facing with our current political climate, increasing deportations and subsequently families being ripped apart.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, PaleoOrthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I am not familiar with any of those categories. Honestly I have been wanting to redefine my spiritual orientation to simply someone who loves God and wants to follow him in loving others. I increasingly dislike the church and find myself disagreeing with most people within the American church. I feel hurt and angry by how their actions defy God's request for us to love each other but still speak and act using his name.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

I find myself not liking organized religion as it stands in America today. I don't differentiate the local church from the institutional church as it stands in America. I think that other countries have different expressions of church. I believe that in America we generally believe that the world revolves around us. That our expression of church is best and that things that are different are inherently wrong and bad. This is a generalization of course. I think that the body of Christ is diverse with many expressions and many languages that all are how God chooses to express himself through us. Our expressions of God are not perfect but maybe they are not meant to be as we are not perfect. God has chosen to use us anyways. I think that the body of Christ is beautiful, diverse and interesting and I look forward to heaven when this diversity will be celebrated in a way that I am not seeing here on earth.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most

need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I am frustrated with the above. I am also frustrated with the church's need to nit pick at theology and has used differences in theology as grounds for separations and dissent. It is ugly and unnecessary. God has asked us to love him and love others. Everything else complicates things unnecessarily and causes separations that I don't believe are within God's heart for us. I am also frustrated with the fact that the church seems more and more a franchise. People come to church to see the "show." They want to be entertained and to feel good for the day. Pastors want to entertain to grow their church to be successful and make more money. It is a business just like any other here in America. That is the complete opposite of how church should be. I have known Pastors to graduate and look for a job with a denomination based on the 401K and health plans. Currently we cannot escape the fact that there are maybe the majority of churches in America that preach a Republican agenda from the pulpit. Also not okay.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I currently attend a small community church that is connected with our ministry. Our community and church are engaged in the social justice issues that address the needs that are within our community. We have been likened by some to be like a church out of a third world country. Our focus in in trying to love each other and our community well.

What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

We can know that God is good and that God is love. We can know that His heart is breaking for the state of our country and our world. We can know that there is a purpose and a plan in the pain and in the good. We can know that this life is temporary and that God promises a life eternal.

- How can they know?

We can know these things through our love for each other. We can know these things through faith. We can know these things through the quiet ways that God speaks to our hearts.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

That is between God and them. God isn't afraid of doubt. Faith plays a role. God can meet them where they are at and can speak to their hearts and show up in practical ways in their life if they are quiet and waiting to hear from him and waiting to see him show up.

Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?

I believe that scripture is a story kind of like Greek mythology. It teaches us truth and is one way that we can know God. It is filled with truth but may not always speak literal truth. Meaning, all of the words in the bible are not literal truth. They are metaphorical truth and they serve to teach us truth and teach us about God.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I don't know to be honest.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how? I know that at this time this is not an important question personally for me to have answered. I might have an answer some day but I do not today. I was raised to think that the Bible is literal truth and I don't believe that now. I am not a preacher nor a teacher of the Bible and would have to think further about this issue to have an intelligent response.
- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

I personally don't believe that heresy is a problem as long as we are preaching a love for God and a love for others. If we are preaching a loving God who cares for the orphan, the poor, the alien in our lands. If we are preaching a gospel that demonstrates the beatitudes... a gospel where when we face God at the end of our life and he can say to us, I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was a stranger and you took me in. God says people will know you are my disciples by your love for one another. I think the heresy we need to be dealing with is the fact that the church has chosen fear over love and its expression as an end result is hate for their brother.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Again, I think there is room for a difference in opinion without the need for agreement on all non essential theology. What I have spoken about above is what I feel is necessary to agree on as a church. I will say that I am not a pastor, nor have I extensively studied theology. My opinions may seem idealistic and oversimplified for most people in a pastoral role.

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

If you say you love God but hate your brother/ neighbor you are a liar.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I cannot speak to this.

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

As stated above.

## TERESA'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?  
Originally from -----, but have lived in Phoenix, AZ since -----, and in the “hood” since -----

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?  
I am a convert to Christianity (cir. -----) and receiving a calling to serve the poor at the same time. The grace-filled work of the Lord has led me to the “long obedience/long prayer” type of spirituality. I consider myself a mystic activist following in the footsteps of Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Desmond Tutu and ... St. Francis. Our work has been embedded in an ethnic poor community, Latino.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?  
I suppose “arrive” is a good word, maybe led or found is more accurate. I was introduced in the -----’s, early in my calling to the young evangelicals who were re-discovering God’s heart for the poor. We have been co-mentoring each other for the past almost 50 years in this journey of ----- . I am the founder/President of a local urban ministry: ---  
-----

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

There are some that call the movement we belong to part of the stream of an Incarnational Mission(al) Community. Incarnational Mission would be its theological parent, for those who study this nuanced theological stream. And inside that stream, we are what are called, Radical Discipleship. It is an old term but it places us inside the evangelical understanding of living and working incarnationally among the poor. I’m not sure how you would term it these days. Even inside the CCDA movement, we are both church centric as well as community centric and that is an odd bird. We mentor those from the movements named above, because of our story and life lessons.

- How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

I have attached my dissertation (see chapter on church) for my answer.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

If you have time, you can read my chapter on justice to answer this question.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?  
We have become a bridge from old to new, white evangelical to Latino activist leaders, immigrants to Fox News listeners, community organizers to community developers, churchy people to people who want to be Jesus with skin on. It is a wonderful and always an awkward place to live.

## What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

We believe that God is known in our sufferings, in our deepest places of need. The words of the beatitudes introduce us to the God who is found in the “upside down”. Jeremiah 22:16 -- He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.

- How can they know?

There is something about stumbling into the heart of God, a lot like the Good Samaritan did or those in Matt. 25, who said “when was that you?” It is the heart of a seeker and a finder, the running into his character or person, if you will. The bible is good for this, it confirms what the heart is trying to know experientially. “Seek me and you will find me, if you search for me with all your heart.”

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

There is 2000 years of testimony ... there is the scripture ... there is the witness of the Spirit (deep calling unto deep) ... there are people of wisdom (with a myriad of counselors there is safety) ... there is a growing body of evidence inside the life that has grown old in Christ

## Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

Scripture – from Fuller Seminary

This doctrinal commitment is built on a submission to the authority of Scripture, which must stand as teacher and judge of all that we think and do. It both inspires and corrects our doctrine and our conduct. It must always be clear that for us as evangelicals, the Scriptures outrank all of our doctrinal statements...

At times, some Christians have become unduly attached to the precise wordings of doctrine—whether of events in the last days, the meaning of baptism, or the use of a catch phrase like “the inerrancy of Scripture.” But it is well to remember that all our formulations of Christian truth must ultimately conform not to some preset statement but to the Scriptures, all parts of which are divinely inspired. Thus, sloganeering can never be a substitute for the careful, patient analysis of what God’s Word teaches, including what it teaches about itself.

This being true, when it comes to a loyalty to the trustworthiness, the inspiration, the authority, and the power of Scripture, we are convinced that our commitment matches anything to be found in contemporary evangelical Christianity. As for a doctrine of Scripture, which is always pivotal to evangelical faith, we have only one aim: to believe and to teach precisely what the Bible teaches about itself. We seek to be thoroughly biblical in our view of the Bible and have phrased as follows our understanding of what the Bible says about itself:

“Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power.”

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

(see Fuller statement ... I can’t say it better than this)

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

I'm unsure about this. I can't say that I have experience seeing this happen. Meaning, consensus.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? I am a student of liberation theology, as an example. I believe this is an innovation, and to study the originators of the movement, you grasp (and believe) their adherence to orthodoxy. Possibly, one way to answer your question would be to be familiar with an innovative movement that pushed the church into "new wine" territory and watched the church (both new and old) suffer with how to embrace the truths embedded within it. I'm not sure we can determine "to what extent" Christians are free to innovate. It is the Holy Spirit who innovates ... and possibly, I would say that this same Spirit leads us to refrain from veering off, into heresy, as you say.
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

It has been years since I got into a doctrinal argument ... I appeal to this verse: Matt. 23:24  
You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

Luke 10:25-37

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

(a great deal, see earlier response on how can they trust they know God ... )

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Absolutely essential – we cannot know Him apart from both

## TREVOR'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Where are you from?

I was born in ----- but have lived in Phoenix, Arizona since the age of five.

• How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was raised by Christian parents and grew up very involved in our local nondenominational church. I 'invited Jesus into my heart' at age five or so and as a teenager I experienced a God's love and grace at work in my life. In my college years I began to own my faith and recognize my need for Jesus in greater ways and a desire to follow Jesus as his disciple. In my late twenties I had a meaningful experience with the Holy Spirit that brought greater intimacy and purpose in God.

• How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I have been working with a mission organization called ----- for the past thirteen years and for the past three years have been serving as the President. I met -----, the founders of -----, while I was in college and their influence on my life was significant. They helped nurture within me God's heart for every, tribe, tongue and nation. They facilitated a mission trip to the Balkans in -----, at the tail end of the war, that I went on. It was a life-altering experience for me.

• How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, PaleoOrthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

I worship in the Anglican church, but I find it most helpful to identify simply as a follower of Jesus. I resonate deeply with the Biblical view of one church in a city. I view myself as part of the church in Phoenix. I resonate with New Monastic, New Friar and Simple Church movements but do not necessarily place myself exclusively within one of these categories.

• How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

I would define the church as the body of Christ. It is the family of God, it is as Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, the community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ, where we belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. The church can best be understood in view of its reason for existing, It finds its identity in the role it plays in the biblical story. Which is primarily for two closely correlated purposes: to worship God and to work for his kingdom in the world. My understanding of the local church that they are diverse and unique communities that make up the larger body of Christ.

• What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

My greatest frustration with Christianity in my context, that I will define as Western Christianity and more specifically American Christianity is that it appears to be becoming increasingly more

superficial. It is losing its ability to be salt and light and to ability to demonstrate consistently the life-transforming power of the gospel. The areas of encouragement for me in Christianity are: the growth of the church in the global south The rediscovery of the importance of liturgical worship The growing influence of the charismatic renewal The movement towards reconciliation and unity in the body of Christ.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

I believe “Spirituality that enriches the church and advances God’s kingdom in the world must be Trinitarian, historically rooted, mission oriented, and Spirit-empowered.” The Bible narrates the story of God’s journey on that long road of restoration. It is a unified and progressively unfolding drama of God’s action in history for the salvation of the whole world. We need to restore biblical discipleship to its central place in the purposes of God to redeem creation. Many understand discipleship incorrectly and teach information to be memorized and applied; Jesus teaches a way of life to be imitated and practiced. His epistemology is better. Many Christians have a theology that says just believe it and it will happen. Jesus taught the pursuit, “follow me, and do the things I am doing. Join me in my Father’s work. The Eastern Church Fathers rightly understood that the Holy Trinity was the source of all reality. The trinity was the most basic community of persons living for one another in self-emptying love. Jesus imaged this unique personhood of self-emptying love in his abandonment on the cross. His heart was pierced and from his side flowed blood and water The resurrection of Jesus means that the present time is shot through with great significance....Acts of justice and mercy, the creation of beauty and the celebration of truth, deeds of love and the creation of communities of kindness and forgiveness—these all matter, and they matter forever. “It is of crucial importance that the cross of Jesus Christ is in the center of our hearts – central to our calling, and central to our mission. The Lamb of God on the cross stands before the throne of God. (Rev. 5:6) The cross is the center of the universe. We must experience its meaning in its height, depth, and breadth as a mystical revelation through the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to believe it; we must ask God that we may be allowed to experience it in a living way.” -J. Heinrich Arnold The cross is not a defeat, but a victory. It is the dramatic reassertion of the fact that God’s love is sovereign, that the rulers of the world do not have the last word, that the kingdom of God has defeated the kingdom of Satan, that the kingdoms of the world have now become, in principle, the kingdom of our God, and of his Messiah: and he shall reign for ever and ever. -N.T. Wright Source:

What and how can we know about God or know God? • What can humans know about God?

“When you are too sure about God and faith, you are sure of something other than God: of dogma, of the church, of a particular interpretation of the Bible. But God cannot be pigeonholed. We must press toward certainty, but be suspicious when it comes too glibly.” -Stanley Wiersma We know God through the story of God from creation until now. We know God primarily through Jesus who becoming one of us and coming near reminds us that we are meant to flourish and function as human beings in the context of a love story. We know God through His life in us through the Holy Spirit. We have been brought into the life of the Trinity (John 17:21)

- How can they know?

“We have heard the fact,” says Saint Augustine, “let us seek the mystery.”

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

We have to understand that The church’s message, the gospel, and its understand of who is God is inevitability articulated in linguistic and cultural forms particular to its own place and time. Thus

a rehearing of the gospel can be vulnerable to the ‘gospels’ that we may be to read back into the New Testament renderings of it. The first tellings of the gospel in Scripture themselves have richly varied quality. They are as culturally particular as our own. Nevertheless, they are the root narrative of God’s action in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world, and as such the church’s originating message. It is of the essence of the church to root itself in what those first tellings portray of the character, actions and purposes of God” -George R. Huntsburger, (Missional Church 1998, 87). Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy • What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’? I believe authority of scripture is really important. We need to make sure we have a broad and historic understanding of what this means not simply a narrow and fundamentalist view of what this means.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

I am not sure about this

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

yes and no! Not completely as there will always be a variation in how Scripture is interpreted but if we can agree on the essentials we will be okay. As we grow in learning to listen to one another and to serve together and learn from the wisdom and treasures of the different Christian traditions we might get closer in our agreements or at least we will learn to agree to disagree. • To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? I think innovation and contextualization is not only necessary but is an essential work of the Holy Spirit. Our boundaries should include the historic Christian creeds

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

Tradition and the writings of the Church Fathers are essential along with Scripture. We should also learn to mutually submit to our global brothers and sisters especially those who have endured under great suffering and persecution. We should listen to the voices of Christian brothers and sisters from across all orthodox denominations lines. • Is there a ‘center,’ a ‘set of boundaries’ or ‘markers’ that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why? I believe the Nicene Creed is a doctrinally sound barometer around which most followers of Christ can rally. The Nicene Creed remains the only ecumenical creed agreed upon by the entirety of the body Christ (with possible exception of the Messianic Jewish witness), or at the very least, whose theology is upheld historically by most traditions. We believe doctrine is important and our committed to be faithful to the Scriptures. Regardless of our doctrinal distinctions, we seek to love and show Christ to all:

- In essential beliefs — we have unity. “There is one Body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all...” (Ephesians 4:4-6) • In non-essential beliefs — we have liberty. “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters... Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls... So then each of us will give an account of himself to God... So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.” (Romans 14:1, 4, 12, 22) • In all our beliefs — we show love. “...If I hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but also the very secrets of God, and if I have the faith that can move mountains — but have no love, I amount to nothing at all.” (1 Corinthians 13:2—Phillips)

o To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Tradition and the writings of the Church Fathers are essential along with Scripture to knowing God and knowing truth today. The councils consisted of fallible humans just like the writers of Scripture but we must trust God's Sovereignty to accomplish His purposes through these Councils,

o To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

Without the Holy Spirit: God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the gospel is a dead letter, the Church is simply an organization, authority a matter of domination, mission a matter of propaganda, liturgy no more than an evocation, Christian living a slave morality. But with the Holy Spirit: the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the Kingdom, the risen Christ is there, the gospel is the power of life, the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity, authority is a liberating service, mission is a Pentecost, the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation, human action is deified. ~Orthodox bishop

## TROY'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from? Glendale, Arizona
- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I grew up in a Christian family, learning God's true story from an early age. My parents were in college and youth ministry for several years, so I was saturated in local church ministry most of my life. I came to faith in Christ as a child, and recall having a real joy and love for God from my earliest memories. This passion carried with me through high school and college. Late in my college years, I had a difficult season of life that brought me to a crisis of faith. For the first time in my life I really was forced to believe that Christ is who says He is—the true King and Lord. This experience radically shaped my heart and led me to pursue pastoral ministry.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

After several years of pastor ministry in several roles (youth pastor, associate pastor, worship pastor), I helped plant a church in the ----- region nine years ago.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

----- is a part of the Missio Dei Communities family in ----- . We are connected to the Soma family of churches, We believe that the Church is the missionary people of God sent into all of life to accomplish his purposes. We believe that a gospel community on mission (Missional Community) is the primary structure for making disciples.

- How would you define the concept of 'church'? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the 'body of Christ'?

We believe that the Church is the diverse people of God—the family of God, sent as servant missionaries who make disciples. We believe that the local church is an expression of the body of Christ sent to make disciples to the community in which it is placed.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

I am encouraged to see more and more churches equipping the body of Christ to see the centrality of mission to the nature of the church and embracing the reality that the church is to be a faithful presence in a contemporary world. We're seeing churches being planted who see that central to the biblical story is God's mission to restore the whole creation and all of human life.

We need to see more churches that preach the word of God as central to their gatherings, not catering to the idols of materialism and consumerism plaguing our culture. We need

churches that are convinced that the Bible is God's true story of history, that Jesus is King, and that God's people are his light to the nations. This reality must be preached, sung, and embraced in our churches--not just on Sundays, but everyday.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

We are committed to teaching our people the true Story of God and equipping them to inhabit the Story of God's kingdom that is 'already but not yet.' We are focusing lately on bringing more liturgical practices into our gatherings that help shape our people's hearts and imaginations around the gospel.

### What and how can we know about God or know God?

What can humans know about God?

They can know God as he has revealed himself in and through His Word, namely in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God's own Son. They can know that God is love--the heavenly Father who is on a mission to rescue and restore all creation from the tragic effects of sin through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, through the power of his resurrection, and through the empowering and renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Humans can know that Jesus is exalted as reigning Lord, and at his return he will execute God's judgment, destroy Satan, evil and death, and establish the universal reign of God.

- How can they know? God has breathed out his very word, the holy Scriptures, that testify and declare the good news of God's true Story. By the power of the Holy Spirit, who brings dead hearts to life, humanity can know God and learn to walk in His ways.

God has also given his church for the sake of the world. As God's church lives out their resurrection lives in obedience, worship and love, the world comes to see that Jesus is the true King of the world.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true? The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the heart to see and know God as he really is, as revealed through his power and through his Word.

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the 'authority of scripture'?  
I believe that 'all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' -2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Scripture is the Spirit's witness to Christ, through human witness, to bring renewal and to form a distinctive people in their whole lives, in a particular context for the sake of the world. Scripture is the authoritative word of God because the Holy Spirit testifies in it concerning Christ, the Word-made-flesh as its matter and content.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?  
I would like to shout a bold, "Yes!" However, there are many men and women I respect

who love Jesus whose interpretation of scripture doesn't gel with mine. Am I right? Are they? Are we both? We have the Spirit of the living God within us, so how can we differ? With that said, I do believe that we must strive to learn the why and the how of interpretation that proves to be most faithful and sound to God's purpose for his people—his missional purpose.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how? I think we're always going to have differences across the spectrum of what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like because we're dealing with sinful humans trying to interpret the perfect word of God. With that said, I do believe that dialogue is crucial and that the Holy Spirit has, and is, working to bridge differences and to bring a unity of what is faithful and true. We're seeing this happen across ----- with the -----Network!
  
- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem? Postmodernism, consumerism, and globalization have crept into the church, pushing against sound doctrine and faithful theology. We must be on guard and extremely careful in thinking that we are free to 'innovate' what centuries of the church has shown to be faithful. Liturgical practices and ecclesiological structure may vary—and I do believe there are some freedoms allowed—but we must always consider how what we do points to who God truly is.
  
- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates? First of all, Christians should pray. We need the Spirit's counsel, direction and wisdom on these issues. Secondly, we need to have dialogue with those who are different from us. Find out the differences. Debate the differences. Find the common ground and work from there. Who do we appeal to? Denominational hierarchy? Church fathers? Or are we looking to appeal to our great God who works to through His Spirit to bring us wisdom and unity? Wow...I have more I could say on this!
  - Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why? I believe that there are core 'markers' or doctrines that are crucial in differentiating a faithful, Christ-exalting church and heretical church. For example: Jesus was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory; salvation is found in Christ alone; we must be born again by the Spirit of God. I can expand this list tenfold.
  
  - To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? I believe it plays a significant and faithful role in our knowing God and knowing truth. We can—and must—learn from church history to help us with this.

○ To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth? Without the Holy Spirit we can never know God or know truth. The Spirit is our counselor, advocate and helper that enables us to know Jesus and him crucified. More could certainly be said on this! I believe that the members of the body of Christ, the family of God, are given gifts to build up the body, which God uses to draw us near to him and to know his truth.

## WARREN'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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- Where are you from?

My father was a combat search and rescue pilot in the U.S. Navy. So, I was born in Honolulu, but raised mostly in San Diego and Monterey. My family goes back four generations in California though. We have lived in ----- for almost nine years.

- How would you briefly describe your Christian journey?

I was raised in a fairly nominal Catholic family. My Catholicism was more of a functional ethnicity than a belief system. However, I was taught that the Trinity is real and the Bible is good, and God used that foundation to bring to faith when I was 14. I left the Catholic Church when I wanted to learn more about Jesus and did not believe I could do that in the local Catholic Church.

- How did you arrive in your current church, ministry or role?

I was actively engaged in college ministry while I was at -----. I explored what a call to ministry would look like then, but after a reading a few books, including a biography about George Whitefield, it became clear to me that unless God's call is clear and powerful, I wanted nothing to do with ministry. I loved the local church. I loved serving. I just did not want any more responsibility than God was calling and equipping me to take on.

I pursued a seminary degree for personal growth and as a means of bridging between a science and engineering background and a Ph.D. in history. I moved with my wife and son to ---- in 2003 to start my Ph.D. program. I was at a secular university, but I was research area was the emergence of individualism in early American Evangelicalism. I focused on the Presbyterians in the middle colonies and the challenges they faced with planting and building churches, training men for ministry, establishing their ecclesiology, all while being influenced by the Enlightenment and popular pietism.

A year into that program, we helped plant a church in -----. Through that church planting experience, God redirected our lives towards ministry. I finished my coursework, put the dissertation on hold, and started preparing to plant a church back in San Francisco. We planted the church I now lead in -----.

- How would you describe your current Christian expression, denomination or tradition? Would you also identify with any new expressions or movements of church renewal such as: Missional, Emerging, Emergent, Neo-Calvinist, Simple Church, Confessing movement, New Monastic, New Friar, Paleo-Orthodox, Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative or something else? Are such categories helpful?

We have learned from a number of groups on this list, but we would not identify entirely with any of them. We have sought to be rooted historically, but intelligible to those with little to no exposure to Christianity. For example, our liturgy follows an historical pattern of Adoration, Confession, Assurance, Thanksgiving, Word, and Sacrament, but each of those elements is explained very simply in a handout we make available. We have also added a Mission Highlight to our liturgy because we believe that being sent by Jesus (John 20:21) is part of our identity as followers of Christ.

- How would you define the concept of ‘church’? Would you differentiate between the local church, institutional church, or the ‘body of Christ’?

We believe that everyone that believes in the Triune God and that is calling out to Christ for salvation, is called a brother or sister in Christ. We do our best to love and serve the wider Body of Christ in our city. We take John 17 and other calls to unity very seriously. We hold to the Reformed Confessions, but we believe those confessions help to equip us to love Christ and His Body. We do differentiate between the wider body and our particular local church, but we view our church as an expression of the wider Body of Christ.

- What are your current points of encouragement and/or frustration with Christianity, the church and/or its doctrines and practices? What might need to be most defended and which might most need to be renewed or reformed? Why?

The lack of unity and love. The Body of Christ is made up of every tribe, tongue, and nation. There was no greater ethnic barrier in the ancient world than Jew and Greek and no greater socioeconomic barrier than slave and free, but their oneness in Christ transformed the Roman Empire. We do not cease being who we are, but our differences are supposed to be an opportunity to learn from each other. I love how Desmond Tutu puts it, “Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.” I believe that the gospel has been significantly weakened in our country because of the lack of unity and diversity. If your church is homogeneous in a diverse area, then the primary tie that is binding you together is not Jesus. God is amazing and still works in so many contexts, but that doesn’t make it right or good.

- In what ways might you be talking about, thinking about or practicing defense, renewal, or reformation of doctrines or practices in your current situation(s)?

We do a lot to facilitate learning and dialogue in our church, among churches, and across our city. I can elaborate on the phone, but we are working hard to train our people to think rightly about God, themselves, and our world.

#### What and how can we know about God or know God?

- What can humans know about God?

God has written eternity on the heart of every human being. Humanity was created to live with God and for God. We are hardwired to go outside of ourselves for our sense of purpose and identity because we are created to live in God’s presence. In a broken world common grace reveals to us the existence of God, but God has revealed Himself fully in the person and work of Jesus Christ through the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

- How can they know?

God reveals Himself in His Word through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our knowing God depends on his condescension to us. The Holy Spirit works through God’s Word and God’s people to reveal Himself.

- How can they trust that what they know about God is true?

The Bible is the authoritative revelation of God to humanity. We interpret the Bible rightly in community and through our connection to the historical Body of Christ.

### Questions about Scripture, Apostolicity, Orthodoxy and Heresy

- What do you believe about the ‘authority of scripture’?

I believe that the Bible was inerrant in the autographs and has been preserved faithfully through the ages. However, I also understand that the Bible has been interpreted differently at different points in history and that it is important to understand that. I uphold the authority of Scripture, but it must be interpreted and applied correctly. Fundamentalism and Biblicism can be as destructive as Liberalism.

- Can we know that our interpretation of scripture is the authoritative interpretation? Why or why not?

Yes and no. We can speak with great authority about God’s unfolding plan of redemption that is fulfilled in Christ. The gospel message has been consistently preached for most of the history of the church back to the time of Jesus. I think we should speak with less authority on areas that are not as central or clear. I hate the idea that an individual can sit down alone with their Bible and come up with an authoritative interpretation. Interpretation should be done in dialogue with the wider Body of Christ, across traditions, and across history.

- Is it possible for Christians today to reach consensus on what faithful interpretation and authoritative use of scripture should look like? If so, how?

I think it is possible when the central theme is our desperate need of Christ to redeem and renew us. I think consensus should be based on a robust understanding of Christ’s work. If someone believes in the Trinity and is calling out to Christ for salvation, we have way more in common than we have differences. I think we can have varying levels of consensus depending on what we are talking about.

- To what extent are Christians free to innovate today in their theology, doctrines and/or practices and to what extent must there be boundaries? Is heresy a problem?

I love innovative explanations of orthodox doctrine. Departing from the historic creeds means you are no longer orthodox. I believe there should be boundaries. The Nicene Creed is a great starting place for those boundaries. Sure heresy is a problem, but it has always been.

- What should Christians do if there is disagreement on interpretations of scripture or on essential Christian doctrines today or in the past? Whose voices or authority should Christians appeal to in order to settle debates?

If someone is not in agreement with the historic creeds they are likely not a Christian. Authority is tricky the more you get away from central doctrines. The Reformers did their theology in conversation with the historic church. They knew the writings of the Fathers. They had a ton of appreciation and deference for tradition.

- Is there a 'center,' a 'set of boundaries' or 'markers' that might help Christians to differentiate the true gospel or the true church from that which is heretical or false? If so, what might they be? Why?

I would start with the historic creeds (Apostles, Nicene, etc.). There is no Christianity without the Trinity and salvation in Christ alone in my opinion.

- To what extent might the original faith transmitted by the Apostles ('apostolicity') as passed down through their successors in the early church and confirmed via the orthodox consensus of the ecumenical councils ('orthodoxy') play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

I think it should be foundational.

- To what extent might the 'Body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit play a role in knowing God or knowing truth?

We have no ability to know truth apart from the Body of Christ, past and present, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

