An Emerging Pneumatology: Jürgen Moltmann and the Emerging Church in Conversation*

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Abstract
The emerging church has recently gained attention in regards to its liturgical innovation and postmodern methodology. Viewed through the lens of Jürgen Moltmann’s theology, however, the emerging church is not merely another church growth movement but is in fact reflecting key pneumatological principles, emphasizing and exhibiting a more holistic perspective on the broad work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in this world.

Keywords
pneumatology, Jürgen Moltmann, emerging church, Holy Spirit

I. Introduction

By placing Jürgen Moltmann and various leaders of the emerging church movement in conversation, a new holistic perspective on pneumatology in the church begins to take shape that allows experience and reason to both contribute to a holistic theology. This perspective understands the kingdom of God as a pneumatological reality emphasizing relationship rather than power, politics, or territory. In this relational kingdom, the Spirit works to increasingly bring the world into the perichoretic fellowship of the triune

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* This paper was previously presented at the Joint Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society & the Society for Pentecostal Studies with the Wesleyan Philosophical Society and the Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology, Duke University, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, March 14, 2008.

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God. That which expresses this kingdom among us is the more complete and lasting evidence of the baptism of the Spirit.

I will begin this conversation by introducing the conversation partners, spending a little more time with the emerging church which might be, for many, an unknown contributor to church and theology. Following this, I will explore nine traits of the emerging church that Moltmann’s writings will help to identify as pneumatological. Finally, I will show how the fruits of this conversation can help provide a framework and guide not only for the emerging church, but also for all those who are interested in a full theological and practical exploration of pneumatology.

II. The Conversation Partners

The name ‘emerging church’ derives from a website developed in 1999 by Karen Ward, then working at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America headquarters.¹ She was frustrated with the attempts to minister to younger generations. Others, many of whom had been addressing the same issues for a while, began to coalesce around this name.² In continued conversation with one another, certain trends and definitions began to take shape that helped unite the loose amalgamation of participants. It became clear the Western church no longer constituted Christendom and response to the broader

¹ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, Emerging Churches (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 30. However, there seem to be different sources that led to the movement as a whole adopting the name. Dan Kimball writes, ‘When I wrote the book The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations, I used the term because I first saw the organization, Leadership Network (www.leadnet.org), using it. They used to describe themselves as “advance scouts for the emerging church.” I liked this use of the word “emerging”, because it felt like an adventurous exploration of new horizons, which the Spirit of God was leading amongst churches in our emerging culture’; ‘The Emerging Church and Missional Theology’, in Robert Webber (ed.), Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 81-105 (83).

² In 1996 Dieter Zander began New Song, considered the first ‘Generation X’ church that catered to the children of Baby Boomers. ‘Where the flock likes to rock’ was the motto. It shared many of the values of what later became the emerging church, however with many distinctions as well. It is seen as a precursor more than an early full fledged expression. I attended this congregation from 1991 to 2003. Cf. Robert Webber, Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches, pp. 9-18, for an excellent and brief study of the historical development of emerging churches.