

THE GREAT EMERGENCE

By Phyllis Tickle

(Baker Publishing Group)

FALL STUDY 2023: A 4-Week Course

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OVERVIEW

The Great Emergence by journalist and historian Phyllis Tickle unpacks the last 2000 years of the Christian faith, against the backdrop of the development of Western culture and thought. Her hypothesis is that every 500 years, there is a significant and undeniable shifting pattern, as the Church adapts to culture and visa-versa. She then proposes that such a shift is imminently upon us.

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ABBREVIATED SYLLABUS

WEEK #1: Part I Intro * Chapters 1 & 2 * Study Guide Pt. I

WEEK #2: Part II Intro * Chapters 3 & 4 * Study Guide Pt. II (Chap's 3 & 4)

WEEK #3: Part II Chapter 5 * Study Guide Pt. II (Chap. 5)

WEEK #4: Part III Intro * Chapters 6 & 7

CONTENTS:

Basic Premises and Primary Points

Major Relevant Historic Events

Group Discussion Questions

Closing and Next Assignments

FALL 2023 BOOK STUDY
“The Great Emergence” by Phyllis Tickle
CLASS 1 Overview

Reading Assignment

- Preface; Part I Intro; Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 7-39)
- Study Guide Part I (pp. 177-188)

Emergence Theory

What comes from conflicted, chaotic and transitional states is something both new and unexpected, suggesting the convergence of those factors or elements brought about something that was greater than the sum of their individual parts.

The 6 “Greats” in 3000 Years of History

Transformation (900 BCE – 200 BCE); Birth (100 BCE – 500 CE); Gregory (540 CE – 950 CE); Schism (900 – 1500 CE); Reformation (1500 – 2000 CE); Emergence (present)

The 3 results of a “500-year Church Rummage Sale”

- A new more vital form of Christianity emerges.
- The organized expression of Christianity is reconstituted into a more pure, refurbished expression of itself.
- The faith spreads more widely, both geographically and demographically, than in its previous incarnation.

The Cable of Meaning

- Outer shell/waterproof covering – the story of the community – its agreed-upon history
- Mesh sleeve – the common imagination/consensual illusion – how the world currently works
- Inner sheath – the anatomy of meaning – spirituality, morality, corporeality

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your overall take on the book so far? What are the major “A HA !” points for you?
2. What is your understanding of “Emergence Theory”? How is it being manifest today?
3. One of the insightful and earmarking elements of this book is the author’s assertion that there is a global sociological and religious shift every 500 years (p. 16, last paragraph). How does this statement strike you, particularly the term “intolerable carapace that must be shattered”? Is it encouraging, offensive, affirming, cruel, or neutral?

4. In the “Cable of Meaning”, what would you say is the “old” story now, and what is the new story today? How is that story being expressed here at D.C.C.?
5. In what ways are we “talking past each other” as we transition from one story to the next, and what are the language or terminology examples of that?
6. Like the issues 500 years ago of the divinity of Jesus, Communion bread, where the Holy Spirit comes from, Mary’s motherhood, and indulgences – what are the questions at the center of the 500-year shift we are entering now? And what are the most defining questions in terms of the new expression(s) of Christianity currently emerging?

RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS FROM THE STUDY GUIDE

1. Where have you seen evidence of the Great Emergence, in religious settings or society?
2. Does this shift toward an emerging world view support your understanding of the world?
3. In what ways can you draw a parallel between Emergence Theory and your own spiritual/faith journey?
4. How can local congregations effectively handle the inevitable tensions and anxieties that come with rummage-sale transitions?
5. How do you respond to the idea that our current religious tradition and experience of church is being “rummaged and sold” in its current form?
6. Do you consider the current shift different from the typical generational gaps that divide a parent’s generation from their children’s?
7. In what ways have you seen or experienced the “old story” clashing with the new emerging one in our church and/or in Davis? In the overall Church institution?

Reading Assignment for Class 2:

- Part II Intro, Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 41-75);
- Study Guide Part II, Chap.’s 3, 4 (pp. 189-198)
- Select ONE QUESTION from the book study guide (or your own) you’d like to discuss

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CLASS 2 Overview

Reading Assignment

- Part II Intro, Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 41-75);
- Study Guide Part II, Chap.'s 3, 4 (pp. 189-198)

Major Historic Events

- 1378 – election of two popes (Italian and French);
- 1384 – John Wycliffe dies, who presenting Scripture in the common language
- 1408 – a 3rd pope joins the race – not resolved until 1418
- 1440 – Gutenberg invents the printing press
- 1453 – Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, drive Eastern Orthodox Christians out
- 1450's to 1650's – 200 years of Muslim-Christian wars
- 1469-1527 – Machiavelli writes on sound governance and moral leadership
- 1514 – Copernicus proposes that the earth was not the center of the universe
- 1517 – Luther's 98 Theses on the Wittenburg Castle door
- 1580's to 1630's – Counter-Reformation of the RCC (D.B. Bass's “re-traditioning”)
 - Spanish Mystics * Ignatius and the Jesuits * Seminaries are created
 - 5 Councils of Trent – reforming theology and doctrine
- 1859 – Darwin publishes “*The Origin of Species*”
- 1860's – Faraday promotes/publishes “field theory” (electro-magnetism and gravity)
- 1895 – Conference of Conservative Protestants – 5 fundamentals for Christian belief:
 - Inerrancy of the Scriptures * Divinity of Jesus * Literality of the virgin birth
 - Atoning nature of Jesus' death for humanity's sins * Physical return of Jesus
 - 2 adds: Literal resurrection from the dead of Jesus * The mandate to evangelize
- Early 1900's – Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung write on the unconscious mind
- 1930's through 1940's – invention of, and mass public access to, radio and television
- 1950's to 1980's – Joseph Campbell challenges Christianity's exclusivity on radio/TV

Primary Points

- Protestantism required literacy – Bible made available to everyone
- “Sola scriptura, scriptura sola”
- Serfdom and trade are replaced by centralized towns and cities
- Capitalism is born, with city merchants using money for exchange
- Individualism emerges, and the nuclear family replaces the “tribe”
- Denominationalism is created – due to numerous interpretations of Scripture/doctrine
- Where “Authority” resides is the primary question – shifts from Rome/Pope to Scripture
- Music becomes primary vehicle/conduit for theological reform (for the Protestants)

Issues of Authority

- The Cycle of Authority:
 - 0 – Authority is lost
 - 100 years – seeking the answer to the authority question
 - 250 years – society agrees on where authority lies
 - 400 years – authority erodes as society challenges it (peri-reformation)
 - 500/0 – Cycle begins again
- “Hegemony” (pride of place) – those holding it will re-entrench it when attacked
- Two dominant questions attending the question of authority (for the current shift):
 - What is human consciousness, and how is it either quantified or identified?
 - What is the relation of all religions to one another?

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. In what ways are we “talking past each other” as we transition from one story to the next, and what are the language or terminology examples of that?**
- 2. The question of authority is mentioned several times as the critical question in a “hinge” time. Where is authority being found in the current post-modern Christian expression?**
- 3. (From previous week, if not used:) Where have you seen evidence of the Great Emergence in society, and in what ways have you experienced the “old story” clashing with the new emerging one in our church, and in the overall Church institution?**

QUESTIONS FROM THE STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 3: #1, 3, 7, 8

Chapter 4: #1, 4

Reading Assignment for Class 3:

- **Part II, Chapter 5 (pp. 77-117)**
- **Study Guide Part II, Chap. 5 (pp. 198-204)**
- **Bring ONE question of your own to the discussion**

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CLASS 3 Overview

Reading Assignment

- Part II, Chapter 5 (pp. 77-117)
- Study Guide Part II, Chap. 5 (pp. 198-204)
- **One question**, written or emailed, to present for discussion to the class

Major Historic Events

- 1848-67: Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*
- 1860's: The U.S. Civil War
- 1869: Vatican I Council
- 1905-16: Einstein, *Annus Mirabilis*; Discovery of the atom; 2 Theories of Relativity
- 1906: Azusa St. revival/beginning of Pentecostalism – the concept of “authority” shifts
- 1908: The arrival of the Model T automobile
- 1927: Heisenberg “Uncertainty Principle”
- Reimarus and Schweitzer – the quest for discovering who Jesus was, modern theology
- 1935: Bill Wilson drafts the 12 Steps of recovery, eventually adopted by A.A.
- 1945-47: Discoveries of the Nag Hammadi and the Qumran
- 1962: Vatican II Council
- 1963: Martin Luther King Jr., *I Have a Dream* speech, and the March on Washington
- 1965: The Immigration and Nationality Services Act – Buddhism enters the U.S.
- 1969: U.S. lands on the moon (the “footstool of God”) – common imagination shifts
- 1960's thru 1970's: The Drug Culture
- 1973: Roe vs. Wade – triggers Evangelicals' political activism
- 1950's thru 1980's: Churches create programs and structures meant to substitute for both home and school, creating a uniformity of social context and experience
- 1990's: Invention and broadening application of the internet
- 1990's thru present: The Catholic priest pedophile scandal emerges, eventually growing to global proportions (though its primary seedbed was in the U.S.)

Primary Points

- The challenge to the idea that there is absolute truth; i.e., *relative truth*.
- The late 20th Century brought the Jesus Seminar, and an official challenge by theologians and scholars as to the veracity of the quotes of Jesus in the gospels.
- The arrival of Pentecostalism brought with it two primary pivotal ideas:
 - Egalitarian understanding of gender and race participation in religion/worship
 - The idea that experience was the primary way to understand God/spirituality
- The invention of the car forever changed how Sundays were spent by the family, thus eroding the day as an exclusively religious and family event.
- Communism took authority out of the hands of the church and assigned it to the State.
- The concept of religion/spirituality morphs during the post WWII period, to the present.

- Religious and spiritual teaching in traditional churches continue to decline, and become more ambiguous throughout the 60's and 70's, causing young people to seek spiritual stimulation and answers elsewhere.
- The issues of slavery (and the valuation of the human being), divorce, the ordination of women, and finally homosexuality all contributed to the eroding of "sola scriptura," and raising once again the *question of authority*.
- The issue of abortion also raised the question of "What is a human being?", which was added to by medical and genetic discoveries and manipulations in the 21st century.
- Morality and consciousness continually entered the stage with new iterations during this time period, impacting and eroding the inner core of the "Cable of Meaning."
- Computer science and technological advances change the academic and scientific landscape, and eventually the social landscape as well.
- The understanding of the nuclear family as the primary social unit is essentially abandoned, and both the concept and purpose of "home" changes drastically.
- Globalization and information replace cash and localized trade.

Issues of Authority (revisited)

- 3 dominant questions attending the question of authority for the current shift:
 - What is human consciousness, and how is it either quantified or identified?
 - What is the relation of all religions to one another?
 - What now is society's basic or foundational unity based on?

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tickle purports that the "gay issue" is the final battle over "sola scriptura," and the last nail in the coffin of its seat of authority in the current dispensation. Agree or disagree?
2. What has the greatest bearing on one's morals – the church's teachings, the family unit, or personal experience? Where do "spiritual but not religious" get their moral sense?
3. What impact will technology (Internet and A.I.) have on Christianity and DCC in the years to come, and do you see them as beneficial or destructive?"
4. People are getting their religious info, services, podcasts, and even pastoral care by means of the internet. With little to no vetting or "credentialed access," how do we navigate dis-information? Are these resources a life raft or a danger zone?

Reading Assignment for Class 4

- Part III: Intro and Chapters 6-7 (pp. 119-165)
- **One question** to bring to the class for discussion
- Your **own summary** of the reading, to refer to during class discussion

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CLASS 2 Overview

Assignment:

- Part III: Intro and Chapter 6-7 (pp. 119-165)
- One question for the group to discuss
- Your own summary of the reading, to refer to during class discussion

SUGGESTED POINTS of REFLECTION

1. If there is a parallel experience of Emergence in global Judaism, and perhaps in Islam as well, is it fair or responsible to suggest that the new expression of Church and Christianity will be interfaith in nature, or present as having interfaith components?
2. How do you suppose “watercooler theology,” in all its possible expressions, has altered religion and the Christian experience in your own life? In DCC’s?
3. Related to that, to what extent do you believe “conversation” will become the new theology – or a viable and predominant approach to it?
4. *“The ‘inherited church’ was that from which they had come, and to which they literally now had no means of returning, let alone any desire to do so.”* Do you believe the premise of this statement? And to the extent to which it is accurate, how is the grieving process over that fact impacting the current Church? Impacting DCC?
5. What “ecclesiastical quadrant” were you raised in, or found the majority of your faith experience within? How and when did that change for you, if it did?
6. What aspects of the “backlash” are the mainline churches or denominations creating? And if those aspects are not necessarily institutional, but more based on individuals or local congregations, how would you describe them?

YOUR QUESTIONS for GROUP DISCUSSION

For an additional week or take-home resource:
Post-book reflections lecture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aG-GNvDeFV8>