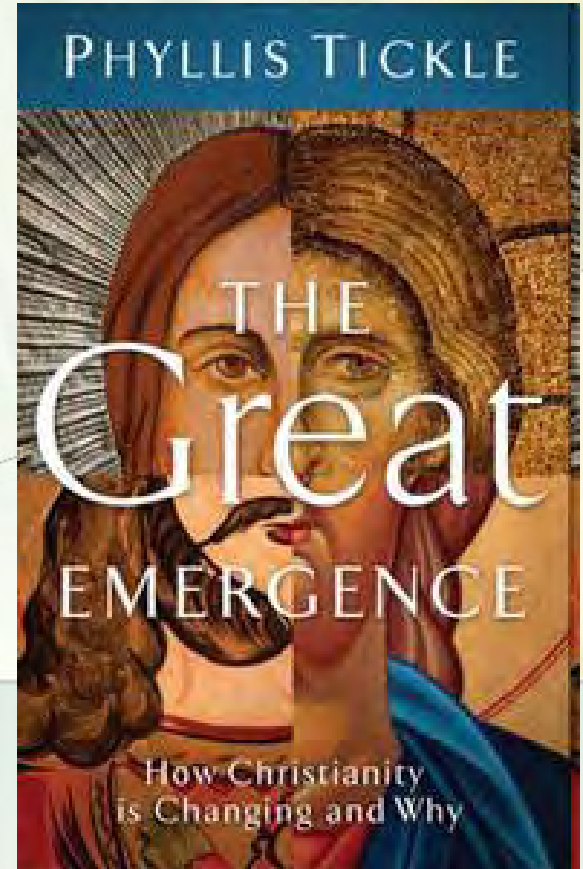


St. John in the Wilderness

The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why

From the book by Phyllis Tickle, c. 2008
by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI

The Rev. Marilyn Baldwin
St. John in the Wilderness Episcopal Church
White Bear Lake, MN
June, 2009



Emergence, Emersion

- **The emerging church** (sometimes referred to as the **emergent movement**) is a Christian movement of the late 20th and early 21st century that crosses a number of theological boundaries: participants can be described as evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, charismatic, neocharismatic, and post-charismatic. *(Wikipedia)*

Emerging Church

- Proponents... call it a "conversation" to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of standpoints and its commitment to dialogue. What those involved in the conversation mostly agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church and their support for the deconstruction of modern Christian worship, modern evangelism, and the nature of modern Christian community. *(Wikipedia)*

The Great Emergence

- **Part I: *What Is It?***
- **Part II: *How Did It Come To Be?***
- **Part III: *Where Is It Going?***

Part III: *Where Is It Going?*

- No one really knows – we can only imagine, forecast possibilities
- Like others before
 - A generalized social/political/economic/intellectual/cultural shift
 - Initiating in, but not limited to, Western experience
- We speak of North American Christianity but other religions, areas involved as well
 - Emergence in UK 20 years ahead – useful for our purposes



Learning From History

- After “sale” was over, Christianity readjusted, grew, and spread
- Today’s Emergents have spread
 - Geographically
 - Numerically
 - In depth
 - In passion
 - In belief of Christian call to brotherhood of all
 - New way of living out faith?

The Gathering Center

Many Faces of a Church Emerging

- Early church first called “Christian” only when Barnabas and Paul were called to Antioch
- “Protestant” name used at least 12 years after Luther’s Theses
- No way to pinpoint when, where, what history will see as emergent
 - Walter Rauschenbusch, 1907, first id’d Western humanity in “a revolutionary epoch... as thorough as Renaissance and Reformation”
 - Paul Tillich, 1950’s, spoke of “shifting times and shifting foundations”

Sketching the Church

- 1960's observers noted changes in a diagram – a quadrilateral

Liturgicals	Social Justice Christians
Renewalists	Conservatives

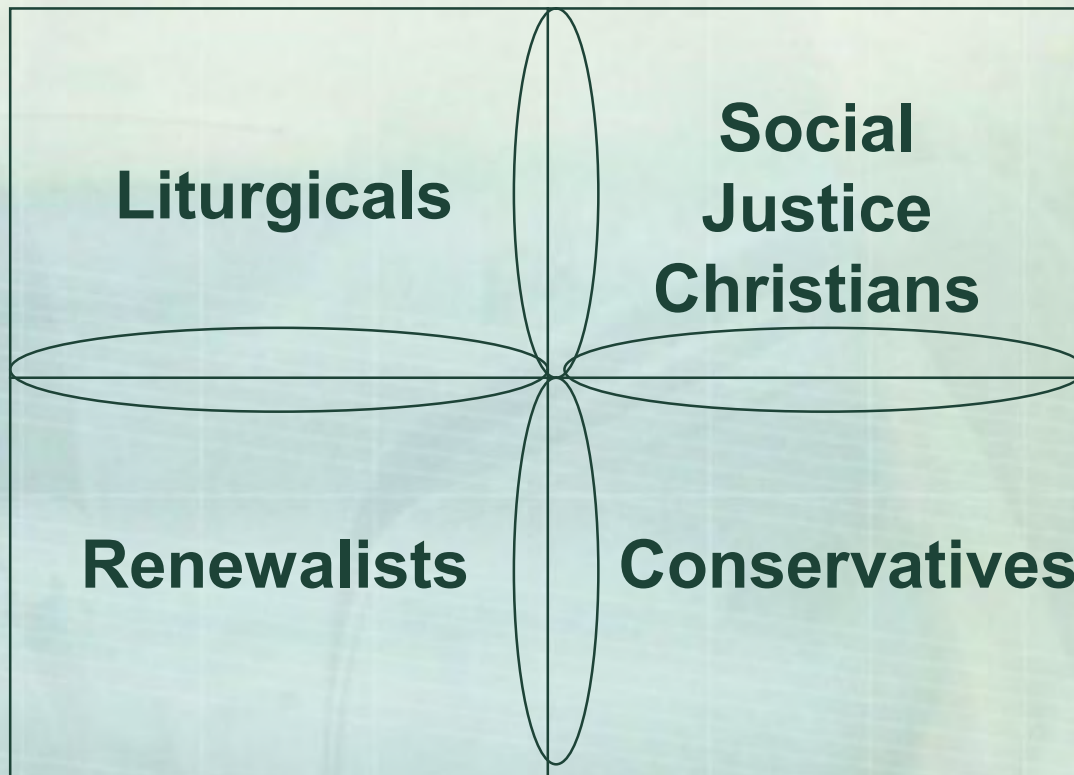
aka Mainline

Aka Fundamental

*aka
Charismatic &
Pentecostal*

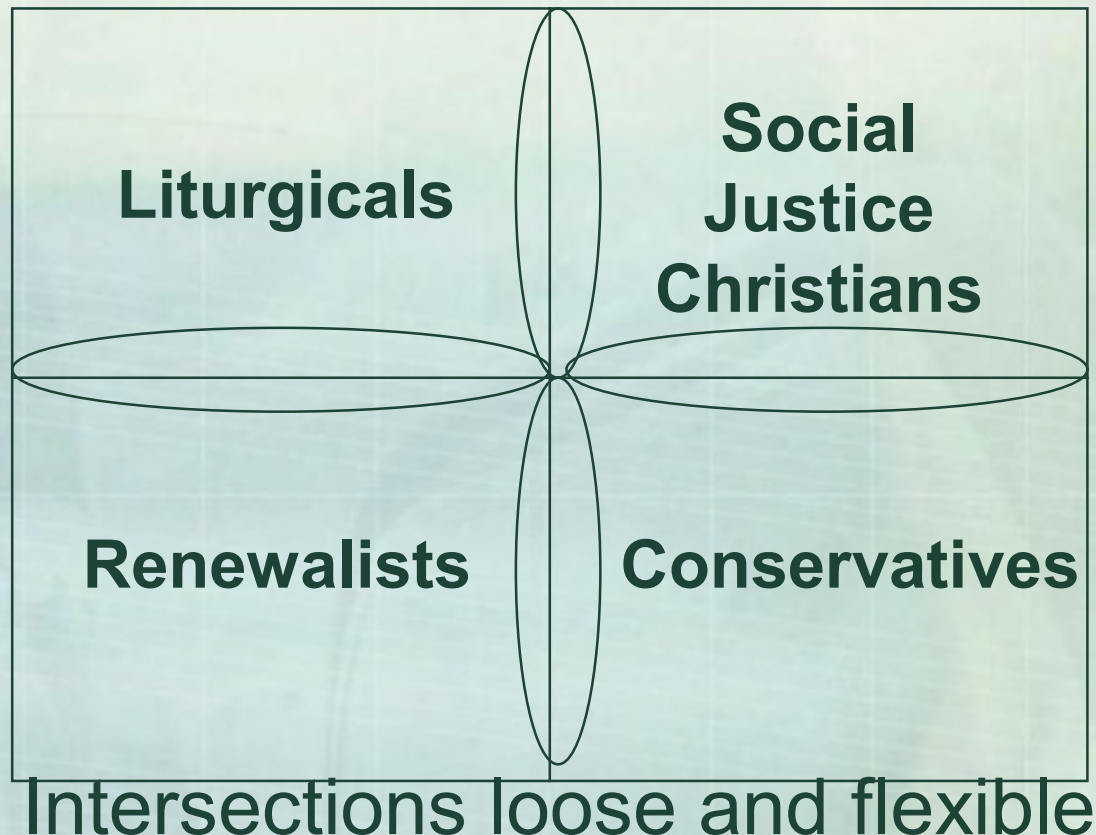
Changing Shapes

- No longer fit neatly into boxes
- Now more of a cruciform shape



Changing Shapes (cont'd)

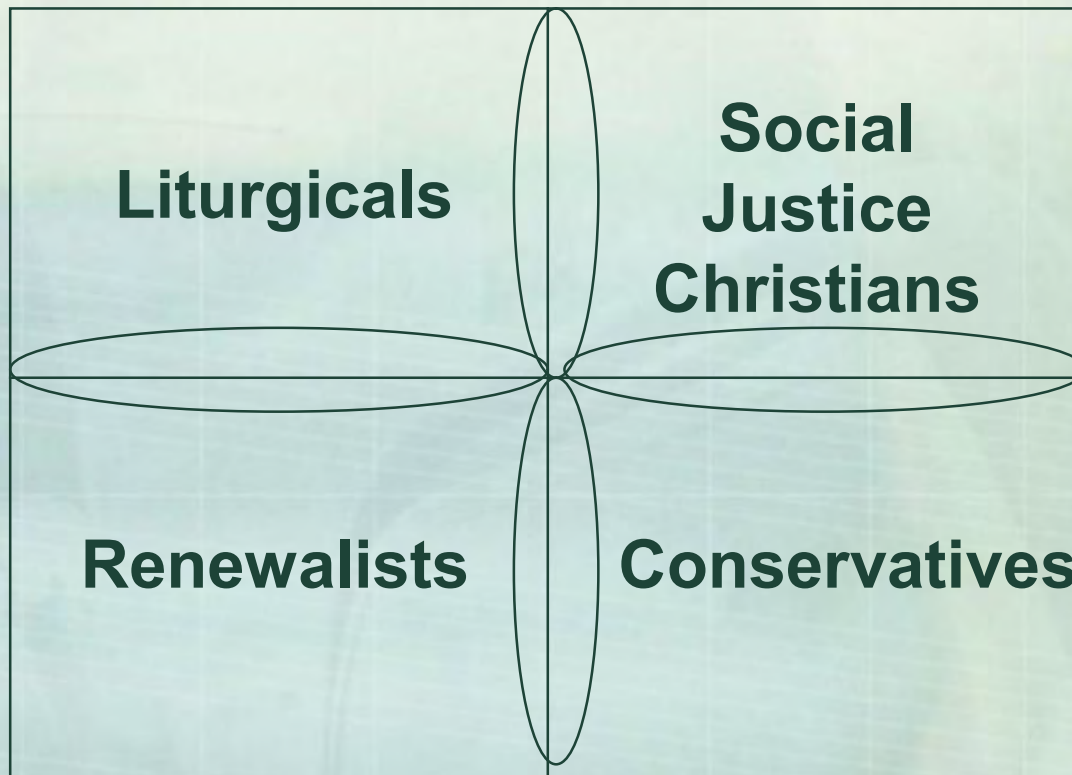
- Locate self or community based on importance in Christian practice



Changing Shapes (cont'd)

Top: Intersection between faith & works

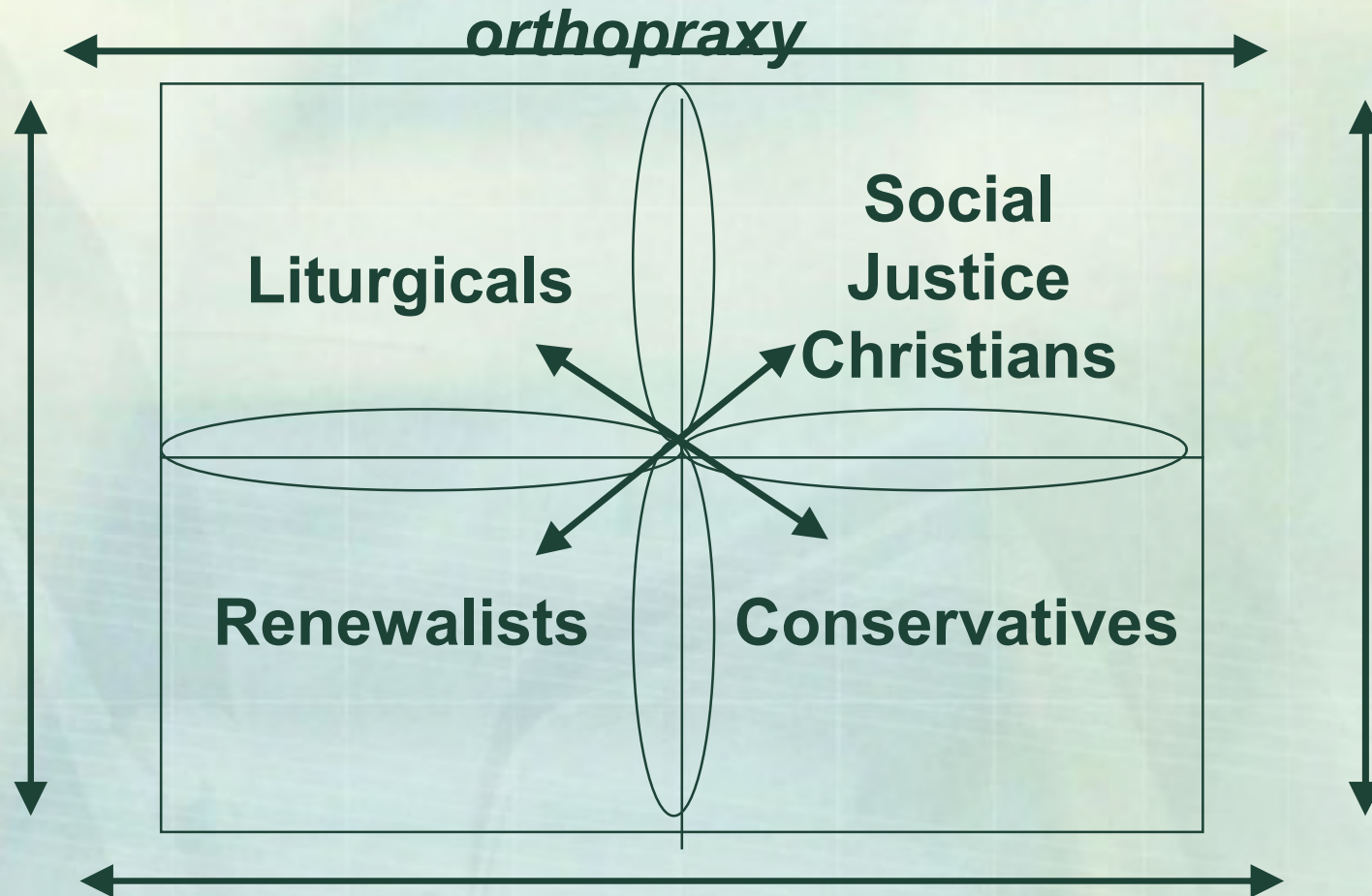
Where will you be at 10 AM on Sunday?



Places on a spectrum rather than boundaries

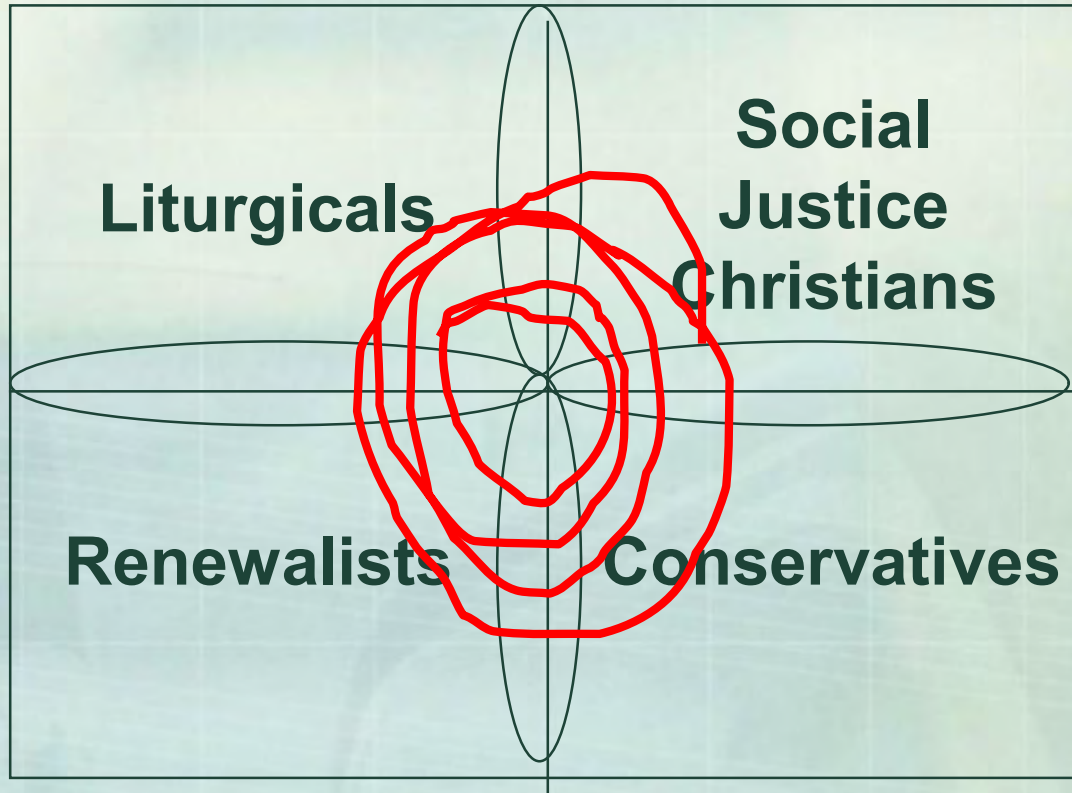
Changing Shapes (cont'd)

Top: Action more important than belief -



Bottom: Belief more important than what
one does - *orthodoxy*

The Gathering Center



The Gathering Center (cont'd)

- 20th – 21st Century changes
 - Lifestyle from rural isolation to high-density suburban/urban
 - Labor from solitary to constant contact
- Given that religion is relatively very important to Americans, it is natural that we should discuss it in both private & working lives
 - “Watercooler theology”

Watercooler Theology

- Conversation about God in public
- Diversity in conversationalists about God
 - No longer just reserved for clergy
 - Open opinions on interpretations of current events
- Old divisions begin to melt, especially in “four corners” area
 - Finding “empty spot” or hunger or question or experience to talk about

Ubiquitous theology

- Public, shared, and vital
- Media age expedited communication and diversity
- New center not quite Protestant or any other
 - Melange picked from each quadrant
 - Established churches could not accommodate
- New faithful began meeting among themselves
 - House churches sprang up along with unlikely meeting places
 - All share incarnational characteristic: Jesus is incarnate as is worship – of the whole body

Centripetal Force

- Gathers energy by bringing in more of its own
 - Swirling, mixing from quadrant to quadrant
 - Sweeping toward center
 - Expands in waves of influence
- Results in new way of being Christian & church
 - Predicted by scholars
 - Dismissed as generational by established churches

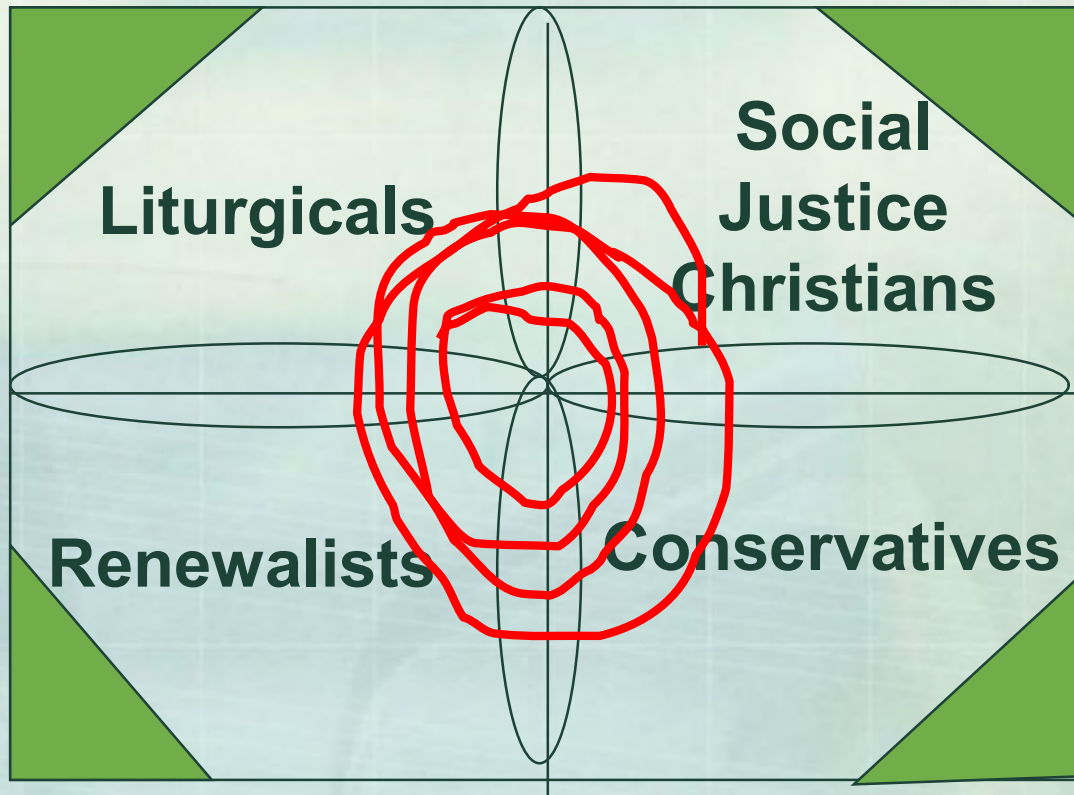
Error in Assessment

- Denominations failed to account for “rummage sale” factor – massive cultural shift
- Culture had become post-*everything*
 - *Modern*
 - *Denominational*
 - *Rational*
 - *Enlightenment*
 - *Literate*
 - *???*
- No means of returning/no desire to do so

Backlash

- Major changes between inherited and emergent church result in backlash
- Dramatic change perceived as threat to status quo
 - Fundamentalism (early 20th C.) one example
 - Reaction is not necessarily a bad thing
- Scholars predicted @ 10% of born Christians would push back violently against center; new diagram

The Rose



The Rose was the symbol of the Great Reformation

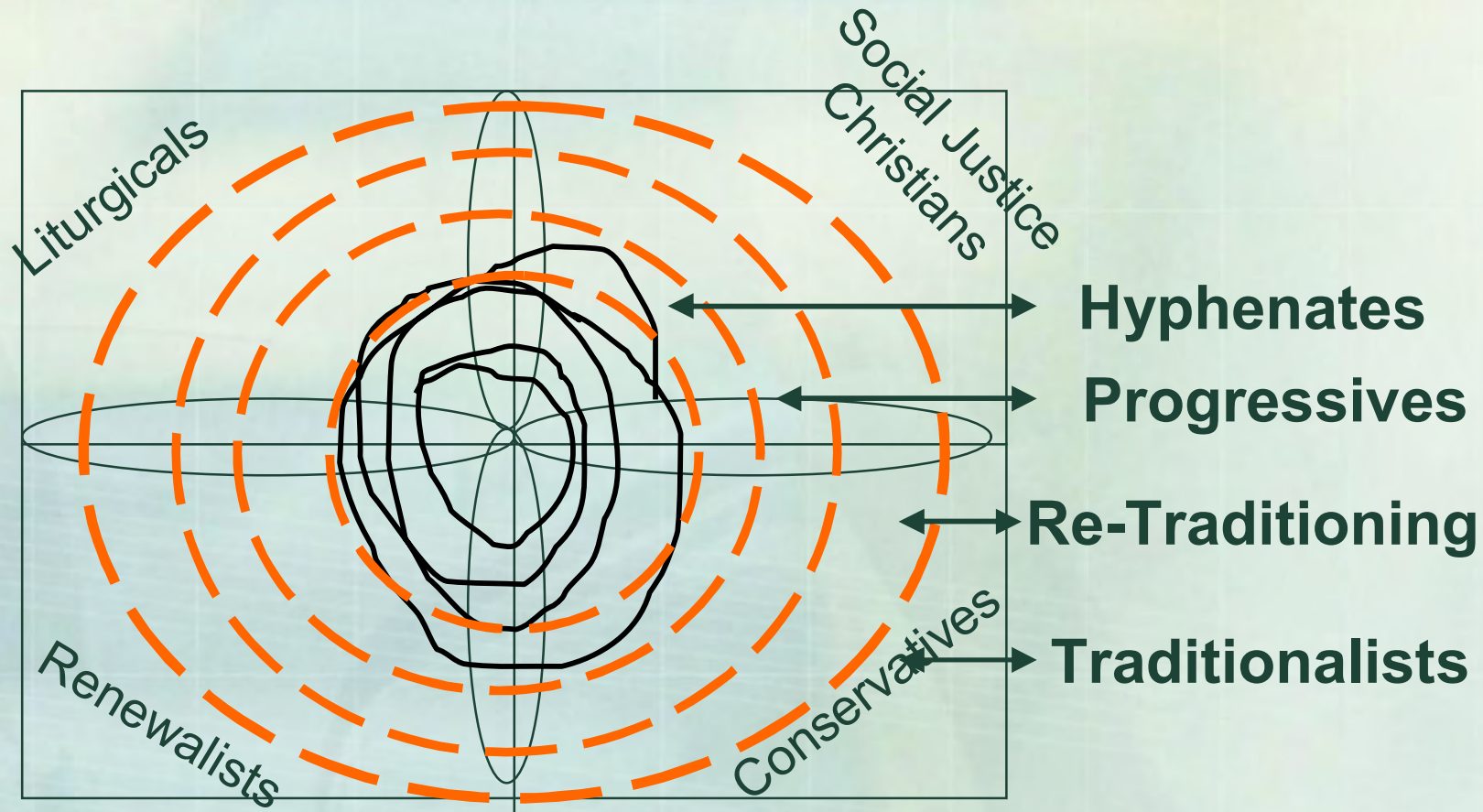
Backlash Examples

- Congregations, ecclesial units, individuals would aggressively dedicate resources to reversing all changes
 - Fallout from consecration of Bp. Robinson in Episcopal Church
 - Election of conservative Roman pontiff, local bishop
 - Splintering of Presbyterian Church
- Choosing sides unavoidable
 - Each quadrant develops reactionists, purists
 - “Ballast” against too-hasty changes in stormy sea

Surrounding Currents

- Other sections of quadrants can be assigned by rough percentages
 - Exception: Unknown % emergent
 - Spectrum or sliding scale in widening ring
- Ultimately 60% may be Emergent by the time the movement is mature
 - 30-35% neither Emergent or reactors

The Surrounding Currents



Surrounding Currents

- Flexible, open boundary lines
- Outer corners peopled by persuaded quadrant dwellers
 - Inherited church of parents, grandparents
 - Lend stability to faith in transition
 - Will accommodate to and assist gradual change
 - Will participate in realignments across sectarian lines

Re-Traditioning Christians

- 1 ring closer to center
- Choose to stay with inherited church but wish to make it more fully what it was
 - “Fond refurbishers” want to fix & live in it for all time
 - Increase comfort, beauty, welcome to all
 - Their task is the most remarkable, arduous, and richest of all

Progressive Christians

- 1 track closer to center
- Want to maintain position in institutional Christianity yet give up controlling doctrine, practices
 - Remain within Protestant communions
 - Seek to adapt to realities of postmodernity
 - Remodelers, not refurbishers; “open place up”
- Def: *Believes in loving God, neighbor, self; thinks that 2 out of 3 ain't bad* – Eric Elnes

“Hyphenateds”

- Nearest to center
- Names bear literal or implied hyphens:
Presby-mergents, Anglo-emergents
Meth-emergents, Luth-emergents, etc.
 - Now losing the “-”
- Most schizophrenic of circles; most vibrant, colorful, vital
 - Tear down the house on Grandpa’s land; build anew
- Most difficult to predict future

7. The Way Ahead

Mapping Fault Lines and Fusions

■ Different Bases of Authority

- Left of vertical axis has different base of authority than the right

Left: (all in tension)

Scripture +

Spirit +

Liturgy +

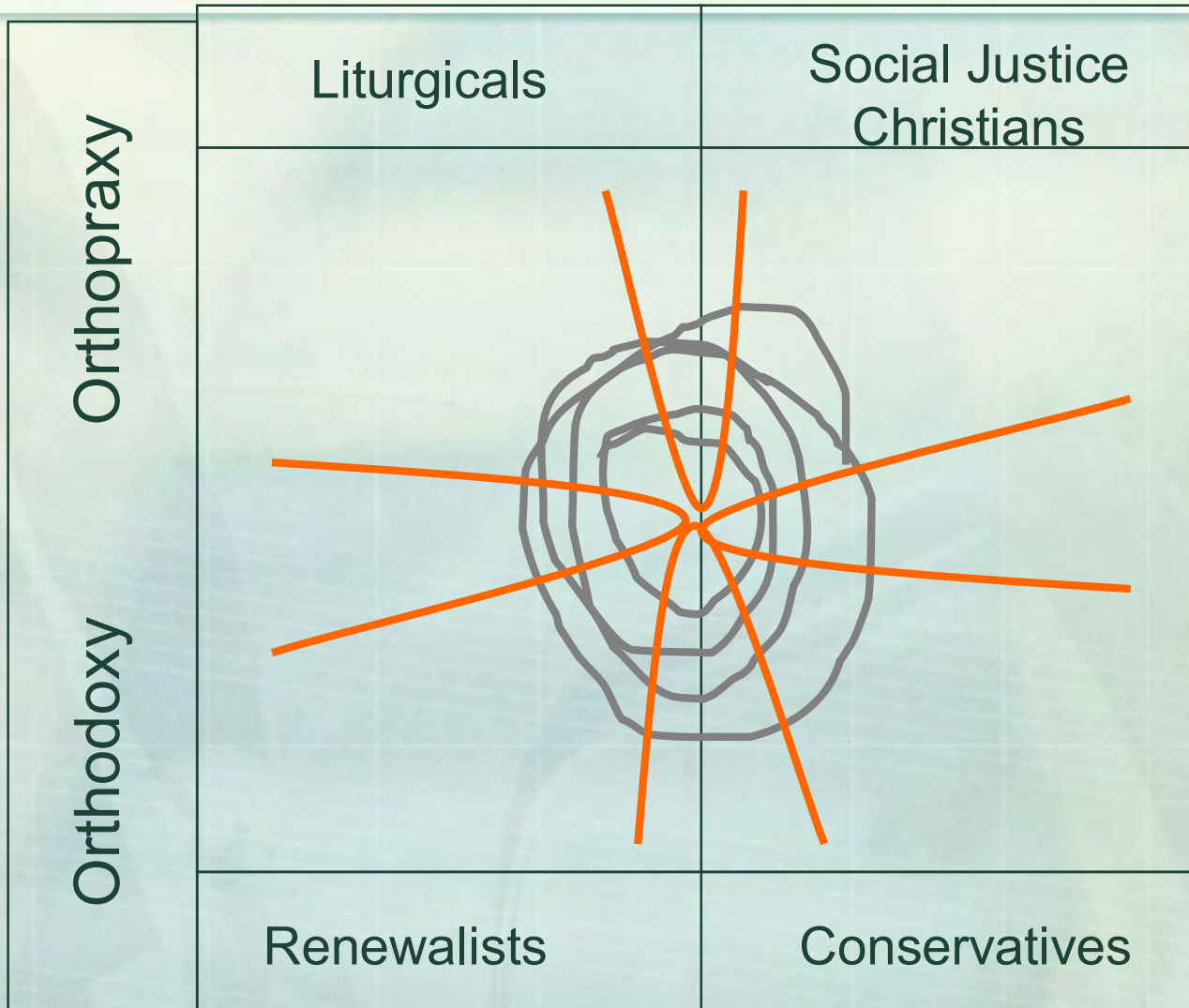
Apostolic tradition +

Right:

sola scriptura

scriptura sola

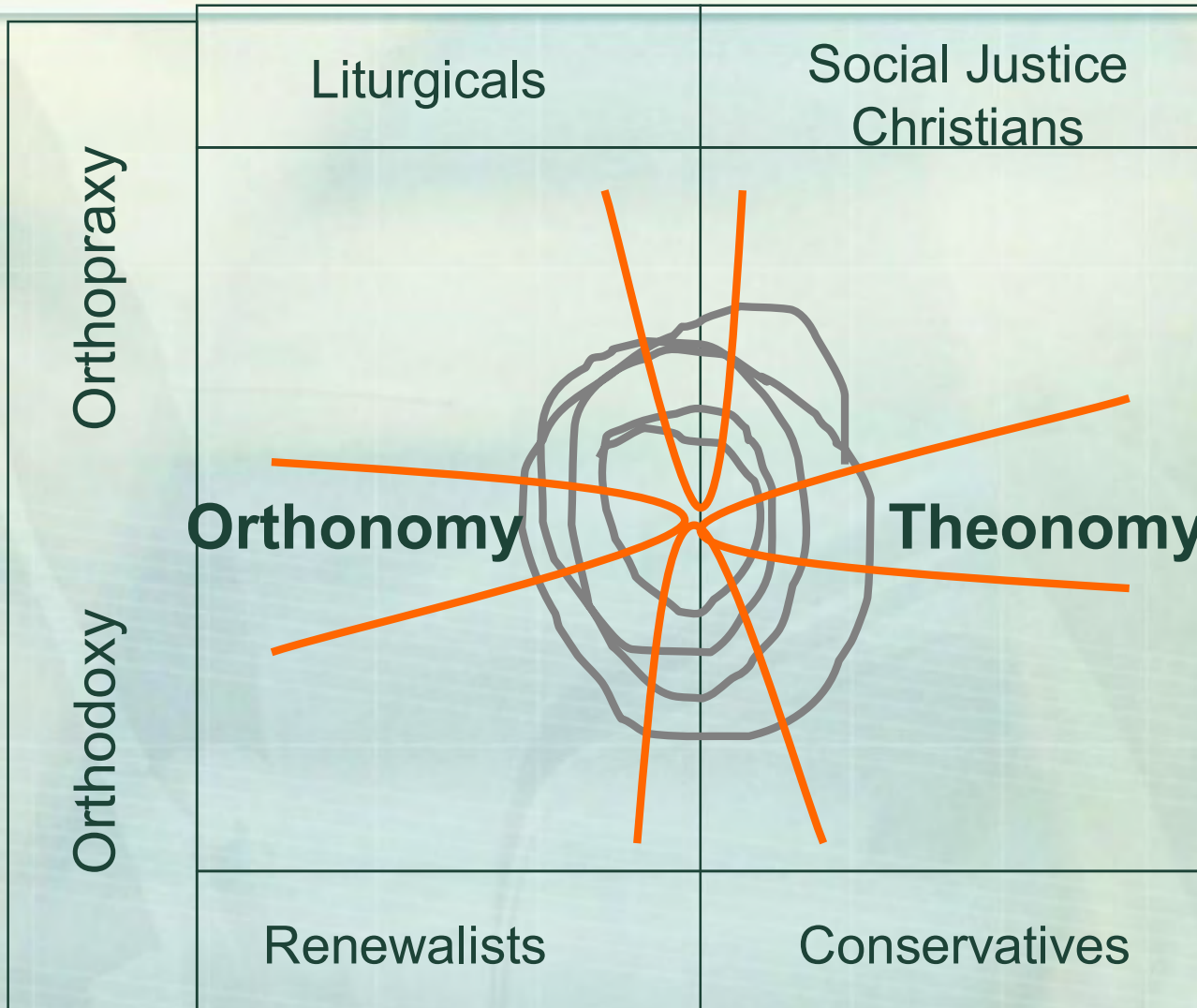
The Bases of Authority (a)



Orthonomy and Theonomy

- Numbers diminishing for traditionalists
 - Orthopraxy (right practice) remains in upper quadrants
 - Orthodoxy (right doctrine) in place for lower quadrants
- Emergence grows & occupies no quadrant; comes from all of them
- Open space on both sides of vertical axis

The Bases of Authority (b)



Orthonomy

- New word coined from ancient Greek

Ortho = correct + *nomy* = naming harmony,
divine beauty

“correct harmoniousness”

Employment of purity to discern truth

- Many emergents confused about arguments over exact historicity, doctrine
 - “Must be true since it is so beautiful”

Orthonomy – Keatsian Heresy?

- “Beauty is truth and truth beauty” =/= Beauty in the eye of the beholder
 - Action or object not divine or authoritative just because of its beauty or harmoniousness
- Emergents on right side of axis use a word of their own: *theonomy*
- Greek “*theos*” = God + “*nomy*”
 - “Only God can be the source of perfection”
- How best to understand God’s meaning?

Networked Authority

- New Christianity/emergent church must discover
 - Authority base
 - Delivery system
 - Governing agency
- Must find something other than Luther's *sola scriptura*
 - Seen as insufficient, outmoded

Historical Authority

- Church has always utilized ideological currents of culture in general
 - Early church copied Rome's governance
 - Under Gregory church's authority was administered through monasteries and convents in similar hierarchical order
 - Roman church defined authority in single position: system of kings, lords of pre-Reformation culture
 - Reformation created democratic theology of priesthood of all believers; elected leaders

Emergent Authority?

- Scripture-and-community combined:
network theory (math, physics, Web)
- Church more of a network than an entity
 - Self-organized system of relations between parts
 - Each part of smaller networks in complex levels
 - Each is a working piece as long as connection remains intact
 - No one part or network has entire truth
 - **Crowd sourcing** = total egalitarianism

New Concept of Church

- Egalitarianism = respect for worth of each
 - Indifference to capitalism, individualism
- Becoming the church = discovering what it means that the kingdom of God is within
 - Each person a bit of a much grander network
- Established leaders, scholars, priests have only human understanding
 - Message will flash to, from remote parts of network and be tempered by community

“What Is Emergent/Emerging Church?”

- A conversation: bottom-up vs. top-down
- Global: no barriers as to nationality, race, class, economic status
- Radical: relational, non-hierarchical, post-democratized form of Christianity for the future
- Impetus in the secular emergence
- Theory and tools found in theology, experience of quadrants plus one group

A Gift from the Quakers

- Early support in conservative quadrant Evangelicalism
 - Lacked flexibility to shift to new model
- Quakers belong in no quadrant
 - “Proto-network theory” in interplay of revelation, discernment, Scripture, governance
 - Recent writers described different approach to spirituality and orderly being
(Richard Foster, Parker Palmer, J. Brent Bill), John Wimber of Assn. of Vineyard churches)

A Gift from the Quakers (cont'd)

- *I believe...we are witnessing a new reformation ...challenging not doctrine the the medium. These new paradigm churches have discarded many of the attributes of established religion...creating a new genre of worship music, restructuring the organization, and radicalizing the principle of the priesthood of all believers.-- Donald E. Miller, Firestone Professor of Religion, USC, 1997.*

Center Set and Bounded Set

- Don't always fit into established churches or quadrants
 - Often don't fit the community from which they came
- Center-set: let people sort out by how close they want to get to the center
 - Assumes something other than rules holding things together
- Presence of rules assumes some authority, consequence
 - Bounded-set = defining who's in, out

Center Set and Bounded Set (cont'd)

- “Believe-behave-belong” fits bounded-set
Roman Catholicism, historic Protestantism
 - Requires adherence to beliefs, conduct
- “Belong-behave-believe” reverses process
 - Occurs in center-set approach
 - One can belong and can seek more
 - Will begin to behave in a different manner not imposed by rules
 - Behavior shapes belief until both are one

Narrative

- Emergence thinking often critiqued as anti-intellectualism
- Postmodern/emergents recognize paradox in life and logical thinking
 - Logic suffers from sufficient perspective
 - Meta-narrative also product of human thought
- Narrative speaks truth to the heart so it may inform the mind
 - Markedly different principle of human organization and understanding

The Problem With Constantine

- Growing distrust for precepts, teachings of post-Constantinian church
 - Doctrine formalized at his direction
 - Theology shifted from Judaic wholistic concepts of life and structure
 - Became Hellenized dualism, Greco-Roman cultural hierarchy
 - Body = evil, suspect; soul = separate, good
 - Salvation concept went from how to live out God's will to a guaranteed ticket to Paradise
- Great Emergence about restoring wholeness to Christian life

Future Possibilities

- Great Emergence may rewrite Christian Theology
 - Atonement, origin of evil up for question
 - New theology may be more embodied, paradoxical, narrative, mystical than before
- Roman, Protestant communions will need to adjust to massive changes
 - Protestantism will have major impact
 - Will need to assume greater collegiality

Not Easy To Discern

- How will the Great Emergence interface with results, consequences of realignments?
- How will Emergents themselves consider resulting Christianity?
- The growing emergent movement must be intentional about faith and what it is to become
 - Once-inocuous movement no longer is

The Emergent Mission

“The church became a place to go.



...Let us make it a people to be.”

