THE Great EMERGENCE

How Christianity Is Changing and Why

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Preface to the Paperback Edition

One singularly sunny midsummer day in 2006, Chad Allen, Doug Pagitt, and his wife, Shelley, took me to lunch. While I remember very little about what we ate, what we talked about has lived in every part of my life every day since, and that is a bold statement.

Allen, who is now editorial director of Baker Books, was an acquisitions editor at the time; and Pagitt was, as he still is, senior pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis and a major voice in Emergent Village and Emergence Christianity both in this country and in the world at large. In 2006 he was also two other things. He was the editor, for Baker Books and in cooperation with Emergent Village, of a line of books designed to present and explicate this new form of Christianity that was burgeoning forth among us. He was also smart enough to bring Shelley to lunch. Of the three of them, she was probably the most persuasive about the fact that what the gentlemen wanted done did indeed want to be done. And what the gentlemen wanted was a book, under the ēmersion imprint, which would report in narrative form the history of Emergence and describe in accessible terms its place in North American Christianity in the twenty-first century.

Out of that luncheon came, in 2008, the original edition of the book you now hold in your hand. The only difference that has been effected in it over the years is that *The Great Emergence* no longer bears the ēmersion imprint, simply because Emergence and the Village have grown to such stature as to no longer need a series of books to introduce themselves to each other or to their fellow Christians. Pagitt, Allen, and Baker Books have done their job well, though I suspect Shelley and I are both a bit sad at the loss of ēmersion their success has brought with it.

But in all the changes and growth, listening and strenuous praying in the years since that pivotal luncheon, one thing has remained constant: Shelley was right. The Great Emergence and the Emergence Christianity that has come out of it, and that continues to come, have a story that wants telling . . . a story that must be told . . . a story both very holy and very human. So if this edition of *The Great Emergence* can be said to be dedicated to anything other than the urgency of its own message, then it is dedicated to Shelley Pagitt, who knew and understood from the first and had the grace to say so.

Preface

A word or two of explanation seems warranted, since what you are about to read has had a somewhat unusual story behind its presentation here.

While I began life as a teacher—first of Latin to high school students, then as a college instructor, and finally as a college dean—I have spent the bulk of my professional career in publishing. I left the academic world in 1971, in fact, to open and run a small Southern publishing house that, over the years, grew and morphed and grew again. All through those years, however, my yearning and urgency were toward my own writing; and in 1990 I left secular publishing to turn my full attention to living the life of the professional writer. But the late eighties and early nineties were also the years when religion was overtaking every other segment of America's book publishing industry. By 1992, religion as a category of publishing was approaching triple-digit annual growth, and something had to be done by the larger industry to accommodate such massive change.

Publishers Weekly is the trade journal of the book publishing industry in the English language; but prior to 1992, it had not had a religion department for, truth be told, none had been needed. When

the tsunami came that year, however, the journal had no choice other than to establish such a department, and quickly. Happily, for me anyway, I knew publishing from years of experience in the industry, I was a devout and observant member of the world's largest religion, and I was free, more or less.

When *Publishers Weekly* called, I was startled at first. Most people who think they have the rest of their lives mapped out, only to discover otherwise, are startled, I suppose. But in due time and after further conversation, I was intrigued, came out of my self-imposed retirement-to-write stance, and went to New York to create out of whole cloth something that had never been before, and do it immediately. My training in religion is, as a result, not in any way formal. Rather, I became a student of religion by being cast dead center of the maelstrom and having to learn to swim right there and right then.

For religion books to get to the general readers who were ravenous for them, religion publishers had to be merged into secular media and secular retail book outlets. The industry's trade journal was the logical forum for the transfer of the data and information required to effect such an integration of the niche into the general market. Many secular publishing houses, for their part, had never done much, if any, religion publishing. Suddenly, however, they had to have effective, accessible, and deadly accurate information about what was happening in American religion, why it was happening, what to publish that would feed the needs thus identified, and what was likely to come next. Again, the industry's journal was the immediately obvious place for that transfer of data.

Over the years of that exchange, I changed too, of course. I became what is called a public intellectual or, in my old haunts as an academic, would have been called "a scholar without portfolio." What those terms mean is that I was in a field where there were not yet programs for formal training. I was, to use the more common

expression, receiving on-the-job training in spades. I was being transformed into a sociologist of religion as it is commercially applied; I was learning to see religion and its patterns as they could be tracked and validated in sales figures and book subcategories and title/format flow as well as in more traditional demographic studies. I also (for I shall always be an academic) began to read and study what scholars had said, and were saying, about religion both now and in other times of upheaval and flux. Always, obviously, I read through the lens of my own professional obligations at *Publishers Weekly* and in terms of my own industry's stated expectations of what their trade journal should provide; but I also learned far more than what was immediately applicable to publishing needs and purposes.

As a Christian, I became increasingly persuaded that what *Publishers Weekly* had taught me or had allowed me to learn had a greater place in the Christian community at large. Accordingly, I resigned my post at the journal and began a whole new life of talking to people—both lay and ordained—around the country about what it is that is happening to us just now, and why, and to what probable result. The book you are about to read is, in essence, a hard copy at last of what those lectures and speeches and interviews have been about.

One of the great joys for me in writing this book has, in fact, been the realization that at last I am being given the opportunity to assemble into one coherent, narrative whole what I have been delivering in pieces and parts for the last several years. I am grateful for that gift, just as I shall remain always grateful to those of you who come to share with me here this particular overview of the Great Emergence through which we are presently living.

PART 1

THE Great EMERGENCE

What Is It?

"The Great Emergence" refers to a monumental phenomenon in our world, and this book asks three questions about it. Or looked at the other way around, this book is about a monumental phenomenon considered from the perspective of three very basic questions: What is this thing? How did it come to be? Where is it going? The third question is loaded, by the way. Fully stated, what it really means to ask is, not just where is this thing going, but also where is it taking us as it goes?

As a phenomenon, the Great Emergence has been slipping up on us for decades in very much the same way spring slips up on us week by week every year. Though it may have sent us a thousand harbingers of its approach, we are still surprised to wake up one balmy morning to a busy, chirping world that, a mere twenty-four hours before, had been a gray and silent one. Our surprise does not mean that all of us have failed to notice the first, subtle shiftings of the seasons. It just means that most of us haven't bothered to think about them; because at a practical or useful level, spring isn't "here" until it's fully enough here to make a difference in our mundane lives—in what we decide to wear, how we plan our activities, and what to do with our time, even in what and how much we decide to eat. So it has been with us and the Great Emergence. If it was indeed coming our way, then most of us would prefer to deal with it after it was fully here and not while it was merely sending intimations of itself.

There has been a certain economy of effort in that "Wait 'til it actually gets here" attitude. For one thing, even during the closing years of the twentieth century, the Great Emergence was as hard to catch as spilled mercury on a high school lab counter. Like mercury, its major, public use was for making either conversation or amateur temperature gauges. For another thing, and very unlike liquid mercury, it was amorphous, lacking any cohesion or, for that matter, any clear borders or definable circumference. But since then, a century has rolled over us, bringing with it the rejuvenating hopes and promises of a new millennium and the keen awareness that, whatever it may be for good or ill, the Great Emergence is to be a major part of this new season in our human years.

Like every "new season," this one we recognize as the Great Emergence affects every part of our lives. In its totality, it interfaces with, and is the context for, everything we do socially, culturally, intellectually, politically, economically. When, for instance, a book

on global economics can become a mega-seller, what we are really acknowledging to ourselves at a popular level is something we had already sensed but had not wanted to acknowledge, namely that the world really has gone flat again. Among other things, we are admitting at last that classic economics do not apply nearly so well to a service-based economy as they once did to our production-based ones. We are acknowledging as well that national borders and national loyalties no longer hold as once they did. We are accepting as well the absolute fact that now even a small nation can hold a large one hostage, because technology and the knowledge of how to use it have leveled the playing field. No one is privileged anymore, or at least not in the old ways of physical wealth and sheer manpower.

When we become agitated—and agitate each other—about how we are drowning in information overload, in correspondence, and in the stress of unending "To-Do" lists, we are talking about the Great Emergence, or at least about one small part of its presence as a new time in human history. When, for example, we discover we can no longer do so simple a thing as running sums in our heads, but instead have to turn to our calculators, we are recognizing that we are storing more and more of our "selves" outside of ourselves and thereby creating a dependency that is, at the very least, unsettling. Dependency on machines, in other words, is part of the Great Emergence, and it infiltrates far more than our mundane activities. It infiltrates as well our unsettled and unsettling inability to determine where the line is between us and machines . . . how many of them we will allow into our bodies, how much we will allow them to simulate our actions, how long we will be able to control them. For that matter, we pale before the questions of creating life itself or even of simply engineering it. We grow ever more alarmed that the so-called footprint of human presence in our tech-driven world is killing the earth, yet we feel powerless to stop her demise. Or we have to accept the relativeness

of universal laws and the unpredictabilities of quantum physics and cannot stop those facts from leeching over into our ways of seeing "truth" and "fact." These also are signs and evidences of the Great Emergence. Their listing, in fact, is almost boundless, so pervasive is the nature of the shift we are passing through.

It is, however, not with the whole of the Great Emergence that we are concerned here. Rather, it is with religion—and specifically with Christianity in North America—that we are concerned at the moment.

The Right Reverend Mark Dyer, an Anglican bishop known for his wit as well as his wisdom, famously observes from time to time that the only way to understand what is currently happening to us as twenty-first-century Christians in North America is first to understand that about every five hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale. And, he goes on to say, we are living in and through one of those five-hundred-year sales. Now, while the bishop may be using a bit of humor to make a point, his is nonetheless a deadly serious and exquisitely accurate point. Any usable discussion of the Great Emergence and what is happening in Christianity today must commence with yesterday and a discussion of history. Only history can expose the patterns and confluences of the past in such a way as to help us identify the patterns and flow of our own times and occupy them more faithfully.

The first pattern that we must consider as relevant to the Great Emergence is Bishop Dyer's rummage sale, which, as a pattern, is not only foundational to our understanding but also psychologically very reassuring for most of us. That is, as Bishop Dyer observes, about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur. When that mighty upheaval happens,

history shows us, there are always at least three consistent results or corollary events.

First, a new, more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self. As a result of this usually energetic but rarely benign process, the Church actually ends up with two new creatures where once there had been only one. That is, in the course of birthing a brand-new expression of its faith and praxis, the Church also gains a grand refurbishment of the older one. The third result is of equal, if not greater, significance, though. That is, every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread—and been spread—dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity's reach as a result of its time of unease and distress. Thus, for example, the birth of Protestantism not only established a new, powerful way of being Christian, but it also forced Roman Catholicism to make changes in its own structures and praxis. As a result of both those changes, Christianity was spread over far more of the earth's territories than had ever been true in the past.

1

Rummage Sales

When the Church Cleans Out Its Attic

Five hundred years back from our twenty-first century places us solidly in the sixteenth century and what is now being called "The Great Reformation." The *Great* part in that term, while it has always been there to some extent, was not much used in general conversation until fairly recently. One of the amusing, though hardly major, details of current religious discussion, in fact, is how *Great* as a qualifier has come to insinuate itself into popular discussions of the Reformation. We human beings discover what we know by listening to ourselves talk; and the installation of *Great* as a permanent part of "The Great Reformation" speaks volumes about our unselfconscious awareness of a pattern that more folk than just bishops are beginning to engage.

If then, five hundred years back from our time takes us to the Great Reformation, where does five hundred years back from the Great Reformation take us? Obviously to the Great Schism, which happily has had its *Great* all along and for good reason.

Most of us have some working knowledge of the sixteenth century. If we don't know in detail what Martin Luther thought and wrote, we do know who he was and that we live in the consequences of whatever it was that he did think and write. We are aware in general, if not in particular, that there were other men like Luther—men like Wycliffe and Müntzer and Zwingli, Knox and Calvin and Hooker—who also were discomforted with the Roman Church, but who disagreed violently among themselves about what to do with their discontent. The result was Protestant Christianity with all its grandeur, its shredding divisiveness, and its inestimable gifts of rationalism and enlightenment upon which Western culture now stands. But not so with the Great Schism.

The Great Schism is for most of us more a faintly familiar combination of words than a sharply defined event in history. In dealing with our times of re-formation, we have a tendency to assign a specific date to them, a particular time to which we can point and say, "Aha! Here is where and when this thing happened." For the Great Reformation, that date is October 31, 1517, and Luther's alleged nailing of his 95 Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. For reasons we shall see shortly, the Great Reformation no more began in 1517 than it ended in 1518. Assigning a date to it is more a matter of convenience than of accuracy. A date allows us to feel that we have some grip upon the thing, whether we do or not. And the date for the Great Schism is 1054, a neat and convenient five centuries prior.

Like 1517, 1054 is assigned to the Great Schism because it was the date of a particular and a pivotal event. Luther had his Theses and his hammer. In 1054, the Patriarch of Greek or Eastern Orthodox Christianity had his anathemas and Leo IX had his bulls of excommunication. The Patriarch had Constantinople and the Pope had Rome. One had Greek and used leavened bread for the mass and believed that the Holy Spirit descended from God the Father. The

other called Latin the language of God and God's uses, used only unleavened bread in the communion meal, and argued that the Holy Spirit descends equally from God the Father and God the Son.

While questions about whose mother tongue is to be used in worship and about whether or not yeast should be incorporated in consecrated bread may seem minor to us now, they were not in the eleventh century. They were major, not just because of religious enthusiasms, but because of what they symbolized in each of the cultures for which they were habit and sacred means. As we shall see over and over again, religious enthusiasms in all holy rummage sales are unfailingly symptomatic or expressive of concomitant political, economic, and social upheavals. And in the year 1054, all those pieces and parts of two rapidly diverging cultures that had coexisted in a state of discontent and unrest with each other for more than a century coalesced at last over the *filioque*, or in plain English, over where, how, and from whom the Holy Spirit comes. Rome excommunicated Constantinople, and Constantinople, which saw itself as Constantine's creation of a better, purer Rome, returned the compliment. It would be a Crusade or two and a millennium later before the breach would be repaired. Greek and/or Eastern Orthodoxy would be the faith of the Eastern world, and Roman Catholicism would be the dominant expression of Christianity in the West.

Gregory the Great

Five hundred years prior to the Great Schism takes us to the sixth century and what once upon a very recent time was labeled as "The Fall of the Roman Empire" or "The Coming of the Dark Ages." Nowadays, however, some wits are increasingly pleased to say that going back five hundred years from the Great Schism takes us to Gregory the Great. While this is a joke or tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of

over many *great*'s among us, it nonetheless is arguably accurate. For one thing, Gregory, who technically is Gregory I in terms of papal ascent and St. Gregory I in the Roman tradition, has been popularly referred to as Gregory the Great almost from the beginning, and for very good reason.

Born ca. 540 CE, Gregory came to the papacy sometime around 590 CE, which means that he did indeed preside over the closing decade of the tumultuous sixth century and the first four years of the new century. Far more important, however, and unique to this re-formation is the fact that Gregory I did not become Gregory the Great because of what he did to lead a revolution. He became "the Great" because of his brilliance in cleaning one up. Popular or lay recognition of Gregory's greatness—he was canonized immediately after his death in response to public demand, in fact—rests, instead, upon his having led a continent that was in total upheaval into some kind of ecclesio-political coherence and, building on the work of St. Benedict, upon his having guided Christianity firmly into the monasticism that would protect, preserve, and characterize it during the next five centuries.

As we shall see in greater detail later, each of the five-hundred-year re-formations that we have gone through as a people has had many contributing factors, many events that came into confluence and tripped every aspect of communal life over into chaos. The upheaval of the sixth century was, however, the most chaotic of them all and the one to which it is most difficult to assign a single date. It is impossible, in this instance, to say of a single person, "Ahhh! Here was the leader of this thing," or of an event, "Here—just here—is where it really became obvious that reformation was in process."

Rome was, by the sixth century, dead. It had been dying for quite a long time, but moribund and dead are not exactly the same thing. In 410 CE the barbarian hordes successfully breached the city's

walls for the first time. They would return after that, time and time again; but it was not until 480 CE that the Roman Senate finally and officially disbanded itself in recognition of the fact that there was no longer either a city or an empire to govern. In between those two pivotal dates, there is another, equally informing one for Christianity.

In 451, in the city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor, the Eastern emperor Marcian convened the Church's Fourth Ecumenical Council, known now, unimaginatively enough, as the Council of Chalcedon. Marcian was a devout Christian as well as a skilled politician. Functioning out of both those skill sets, he assembled the Council in order to determine, and then codify, what was, and was not, correct doctrine. Several elements of two basic issues were threatening to break the Church apart, and especially to sever the bonds of commonality and affection between Western Christianity and some parts of African and Middle-Eastern Christianity. Those major questions were whether or not Mary could be called "Mother of God" and whether or not Jesus was one "person" of two natures or two "persons" inside one skin. Like yeast in communion bread, it's a bit hard for us today to grasp the seriousness of such differences, much less to empathize with the passion which surrounded them. What really was at stake, of course, was the nature of incarnation, that is, the nature of what Jesus of Nazareth was. By calling Mary "the Mother of God," we imply that His divinity and His physicality are inseparable, that He was indeed "one Person in two natures." And by saying "one Person in two natures," we obviously are asserting that God and humanity were totally and inviolately integrated in Jesus of Nazareth and that He is of the same substance as both the Father and us.

Not only is it difficult for many twenty-first-century Christians to fathom the ferocity of the Chalcedonian arguments, but it has also been even more difficult at times for Protestants to

appreciate the full implications of why "Mother of God" historically should matter as much to them as it does to Roman Catholic Christians. If Protestantism does not venerate the Virgin, it still owes to the Roman insistence on doing so an appreciation of what might otherwise have been the Western Christian traditions out of which Protestantism came. Had Chalcedon accepted Mary only as mother of the human vessel in which the divine was trapped or out of which it operated—had it, in other words, rejected the Virgin as "Mother of God" and discerned instead two entities, only one of which she was the mother of—Christian doctrine would have been open to conceptualizing Jesus as a guru soul inhabiting for a time a human vessel. Even the agony of the cross itself and of the path leading to it would have thereby been diminished and rendered less sacrificial.

But not everybody at the Council of Chalcedon was of one mind or spirit after the battles were, technically speaking, "over." So bitter was the dissension and so vociferous were the arguments, in fact, that in the end Oriental Christianity was exiled from (or withdrew from, depending on one's point of view) both Western and Eastern Christianity. Chalcedon was, that is, the beginning of what are still today the three grand divisions of the faith: Western Christianity, which at the opening of the twentieth century was composed largely by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; Eastern Orthodoxy (also often called Greek Orthodoxy), which traditionally is thought of as existing primarily in Greece, Asia Minor, Eastern Europe, and Russia, but today has a firm and increasingly secure footing in North America, China, Finland, and Japan; and Oriental Orthodoxy (or the Oriental Orthodox Church, again depending on one's point of view), which in our time is also growing in strength and is usually subtitled as Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, or Syrian Christianity.

How Gregory and the Monastics Saved Civilization

Stupendous as this reconfiguration was, and has been, for global Christianity in all three of its major parts, the agonies of the sixth century gave something of far more immediate and dramatic use to Western Christianity and culture. They gave the Western world a reconfigured form of monasticism that functioned not only as a way of private holiness but also as a way of societal and political stability.

During the long decline of its civil governance, the population of Rome was increasingly composed of illiterate barbarians who had grown weary of raiding the Eternal City and decided instead to take up residency and stay awhile. Because Christianity was the religion of the Empire, many, many of these new raiders-turned-citizens adopted it; but they also and inevitably adapted it as well.

The holy writings of the new Christian canon, the sayings and teachings of the Desert Fathers, the liturgy of the urban basilicas, the homilies of the great men of the Early Church, the observance of the daily prayers—all these things that are familiar to us now and that had been the Christianity of Constantine and his immediate successors require at least a rudimentary literacy as well as a civil stability that allows the free flow of worshipers from home or business to places of worship and godly instruction. Late fifth-century Romans had neither. Instead, they had a growing illiteracy in their domestic worship and unmanageable lawlessness in their streets. What politically and culturally would very swiftly spiral down into the Dark Ages was already at work peeling the Christianity of the Early Church away from the laity and inserting into the resulting vacuum a kind of animistic, half-magical form of a bastardized Christianity that would characterize the laity and much of the minor clergy over the next few centuries.

During those centuries of darkness, and largely because of Gregory's prescience and acumen, Western Christianity would be held in trust in Europe's convents and monasteries. The monks and nuns

would not all be pure or brilliant or even, in many cases, themselves literate. But enough of them would be so that the great treasures of the first five centuries of the Church would be preserved, and then added to, by the great minds of the Dark Ages. Almost all of those conservators and pioneering thinkers were Christian clergy, monks, or nuns; all of them were educated either in monasteries and convents or as a result of them. And that sanctuary for both the exercise of the Christian faith and the perpetuation of intellectual vigor and excellence was the direct product of one St. Gregory I who laid the foundation upon which it rested. Before it was all over, Europe would discover that such power as there was in that fearsome time was the power of the abbots and the abbesses, the priors and the prioresses.

The tumultuous reconfigurations of the sixth century, pivotal as they were for the faith, pale in importance before those of the first century. It is here, of course, that Christianity is born. The birth, public ministry, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah would cause even the epochs of human time to be redated, and this by believers and nonbelievers alike. In that momentous century, the Judaism out of which the new faith came and Messiah spoke was ground down into such small parts that its adherents would be forced to leave their natal land, regroup, and ultimately broadcast the seeds of their faith, be it Christian or Jewish, all over the known world. In 70 CE the Temple of stone would be destroyed. In 130 CE the Holy City would be permanently barred against Jewish blood even entering it. And between those two dates, much of the structure that we know as the Church was born.

The Inner Workings of Rummage Sales

When Christians despair of the upheavals and re-formations that have been the history of our faith—when the faithful resist, as so

many do just now, the presence of another time of reconfiguration with its inevitable pain—we all would do well to remember that, not only are we in the hinge of a five-hundred-year period, but we are also the direct product of one. We need, as well, to gauge our pain against the patterns and gains of each of the previous hinge times through which we have already passed. It is especially important to remember that no standing form of organized Christian faith has ever been destroyed by one of our semi-millennial eruptions. Instead, each simply has lost hegemony or pride of place to the new and not-yet-organized form that was birthing.

During the sixth century, the Apostolic Church, with its presbyters and anchorites, gave way to an organized monasticism as the true keeper and promulgator of the faith. Yet we must remember three things: first, the Apostolic tradition, with its canon, its John Cassians, and its Augustinian theology, even its pursuit of mysticism, did not cease to be. Second, because of the reconfiguration of those treasures into new shapes and vessels and accommodations, the faith they testify to was scattered across a far broader geographic and demographic area than it had previously occupied. And third, Oriental Christianity most certainly did not cease to be. Rather, it was freed to develop a praxis, liturgy, and theological richness that are today of ever more fascination and interest to the rest of the Church.

In sum, what all of this means is that the more organized, formalized monasticism which came with the sixth century never left us either in tradition or by practice. In adapted and updated forms, monasticism still influences and informs Christianity all over the world. All that really happened was that its somewhat decentralized system gave way to an increasingly more centralized one in Rome. Rome in turn, for political as well as religious reasons, severed itself in the eleventh century from a non-Western threat to its absolute

theological and ecclesial authority. In that Great Schism, however, Eastern or Orthodox Christianity was hardly destroyed. Far from it. Instead, it was freed to become fully itself and fully an expression of its own experience of living out the Christian faith in its own circumstances. Indeed, one of the great gains of the last half century for North American Christianity has been the re-introduction of Orthodoxy to Western Christian practice, understanding, and appreciation.

Certainly, as is patently obvious, Roman Catholicism did not cease to exist with the coming of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. It did, however, lose dominance, social and political as well as religious. But any honest observer would have to say that in the course of that loss, the Roman Church was itself also freed—freed to weed out its errors and corruptions while at the same time evolving a more "Roman" way of being "Roman" than had previously been the case. That very process, which the scholar Diana Butler Bass calls "re-traditioning," has occurred with each turn of the eras and is a substantial dynamic in the progression from upheaval to renewed stability.[1] It certainly constitutes an important part of what must be discussed in any analysis of where both established Protestant and Emergent Christianity are going—and taking us—in both the near and more distant future. And "taking us," we must remember, is central to any analysis of re-formations, whether past or present.

When an overly institutionalized form of Christianity is, or ever has been, battered into pieces and opened to the air of the world around it, that faith-form has both itself spread and also enabled the spread of the young upstart that afflicted it. Christianity became a global religion as a result of the Great Reformation. A large part of that globalization was in direct consequence of Protestantism's adamant insistence on literacy, which in turn led more or less directly to the technology that enabled world exploration and trade. As a result, Catholics and Protestants

alike could, and did, carry Christianity out of Europe and into the world beyond, often in strenuous—and energizing—competition with each other. But the more or less colonialized Church that Reformation Protestantism and Catholicism managed to plant was, obviously, more or less colonialized, with all the demeaning psychological, political, cultural, and social overtones and resentments which that term brings with it. One does not have to be particularly gifted as a seer these days, however, to perceive the Great Emergence already swirling like balm across that wound, bandaging it with genuinely egalitarian conversation and with an undergirding assumption of shared brotherhood and sisterhood in a world being redeemed.

Broader Upheaval

Before we entirely leave the discussion of rummage sales, though, one or two further points should be made just in the interest of thoroughness, if nothing else. While this present discussion is concerned more or less entirely with Christianity and with our perceptions as North American observers of a mighty upheaval, we still need to acknowledge the existence of rummage sales elsewhere and among other faiths. Specifically, when a Christian speaker talks to a Jewish audience about five-hundred-year cycles, almost always some good rabbi will point out that much the same sort of scheme appertains to Judaism. That is, if one goes back five hundred years from the destruction of the Second Temple and priestly Judaism in the first century CE, one hits the Babylonian Captivity which decimated Solomon's Temple and scattered Judaism away from Judea and into much of the Middle Eastern world. Five hundred years before the Captivity, our good rabbi will point out, was the end of the Age of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy out of which King David and the Davidic line would come in preparation for Messiah. Thus it can be legitimately argued

that what we have in our cycling ways is not so much a Christian phenomenon or pattern as it is a Judeo-Christian one. Of late, an Islamic scholar or two has begun to argue that the same kind of cycling can be discerned in that faith's history. If that can be true, we may be able in time to say that ours is but one presentation of an even larger pattern that informs all three of the faiths of Abraham.

We should also note, if only in passing, that Christianity's pattern of cycling may be seen as peculiar not only to itself and to either or both of its religious siblings but also to something more general. That is, there is a more or less definable period in history that stretches from ca. 900 BCE to ca. 200 BCE, which, if one chooses to see it that way, incorporates two upheavals under one name. The shorthand of one label may be due to the fact that our distance from the immediacy of those centuries allows us the emotional and cultural remove to lump them together into one. Whatever the reasons for their grouping, though, the centuries from 900 to 200 BCE have long been recognized by even armchair historians as seminal for human civilization. Not only did David and Elijah and Jeremiah live during this time, but so too did Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, not to mention Confucius or the souls that wrote down the *Upanishads* and sang the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or Lord Mahavira, Siddhartha, the Buddha, and Homer with his epic record of Zeus and his fellow gods. This time, it was humanity, in other words, that was emerging; and it was bringing with it both its religions and a growing sense of itself as more than victim to circumstance.

It was not, however, until 1948 that a name was assigned to those centuries of tumultuous transition. In that year, a German scholar, Karl Jaspers, applied the name "the Axial Age" to it; and the name stuck until 2006. In 2006, Karen Armstrong, a scholar of great distinction but also of broad, popular appeal, produced a brilliantly researched and highly influential treatment of the Axial and pre-Axial

centuries under the title of *The Great Transformation.*[2] Her term seems to have stuck, thereby adding yet another *great* to our catalog description of rummage sales.

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1. See in particular her *The Practicing Congregation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004) and, with Joseph Stewart-Sicking, her *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006).

2. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).