
THE EMERGING
CHURCH
AND
PERICHORESIS
MOVEMENTS
EXAMINED

March 2014 - Update

Hank Overeem

March 2014 - Update

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¹ This booklet can be ordered, or downloaded from his website at <http://hank.overeem.co.nz>

The Emerging Church and Perichoresis Movements Examined

What is it?

What does it represent?

How will it affect the Church in New Zealand?

PREFACE

I am well aware that this paper will not satisfy everyone. The complexity of the Emerging Church Movement is such that it is simply impossible to get a complete hold on what this Movement represents and promotes. Like every other historical movement, only in hindsight will we be able to get a proper overview and evaluate what positive and negative outcomes this Movement has brought to the Church at large.

As Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruit...every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” Some fruit is obviously rotten to the core, whereas other fruit only shows its rottenness when you take a bite.

One of the problems in researching this Movement has been its diversity and scope of expression and thought. In this paper, you will learn that there are acceptable practices and beliefs and unacceptable ones within the Emerging Church Movement. An irritant, while researching this Movement, has been the level of accusation brought against anything and everything “Emerging Church”. This in turn, has substantially clouded the issues involved. Without doubt, there are indeed questionable links between a number of *Emergent*² leaders and liberal theologians, as well as connections with New Age religious groups. However, by painting everyone with the same brush, some very good people involved in the Emerging Church Movement have simply by association been judged and declared guilty of beliefs they may or may not share. This is not helpful. Nevertheless, there is certainly cause for alarm. There are aspects to the *Emergent* stream within the Emerging Church Movement who undoubtedly are tinkering with long-held biblical doctrines of the Christian faith. That should cause alarm bells to ring loudly. Those of us who have witnessed the destructive consequences of liberalism within the mainstream churches³ of New Zealand (and worldwide) will recognise similarities with the Emergent Revisionist Stream of the Emerging Church of today.

As part of this paper, I have included a section on those who promote the *perichoresis* concept in relationship to the Trinity. Although the concept itself falls within orthodox belief—its re-interpretation and additional thought—places it in a dubious position, and has the potential to lead people away from the centrality of the Cross and Christ’s substitutionary atonement.

² See pages 11-12 for an explanation of the terms “*Emerging*” and “*Emergent*”.

³ Anglican (Episcopalian), Methodist, Presbyterian, and to some extent Roman Catholicism.

This paper is not an end in itself, or complete. I will continue to update it, and consequently, present it as a discussion paper rather than an in-concrete set of views. My main reason for writing has been to bring *awareness*.

“Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

Hank Overeem

March 2014 Update

Going by the many responses and discussions that have taken place since making this discussion paper available on line, I have been encouraged to update the 2010 version.

In this latest update, I have added some additional information in the *Emergent* section of the *Emerging Church* and some further material about the *Perichoresis Movement* – especially the relationship between the Incarnation and the Atonement.

I would like to thank those who have commented on the 2010 Update, those who agreed and disagreed, and those who entered into further discussion. This is all good – for it is just in open and honest discussion that, as the proverb says, *Iron that sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*⁴

A fellow seeker of truth - together in his love

Hank Overeem

⁴ Proverbs 27:17

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The Emerging Church Movement Examined

**What is it? What does it represent?
How will it affect the Church in New Zealand?**

1. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt frustrated by such environmental groups as *Green Peace*, or by anti-war groups who demonstrate against injustices in the world? On the one hand, you do agree with some of their ideals, but unfortunately, these same groups often have hidden agendas. More often than not, there is a political agenda attached to their cause. So what do you do? *Usually nothing!* You stay frustrated, even embarrassed on the sideline. Wishing in your heart that there were channels through which you could express your views with integrity. In many ways, this is how I personally feel about the “Emerging Church Movement”. There are certainly features within this Movement that I can relate to and even welcome. Some things are simply a continuation of the forever-adapting Christian methods of doing church. On the other hand, there clearly are aspects to this Movement that fall well outside my comfort zone. I do get concerned when there are clear departures from the traditional fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Akin to shying away from any involvement with the aforementioned secular environmental and “peace” movements, I experience that same feeling of frustration with the Emerging Church Movement. On the one hand, there are positive and healthy developments taking place, but on the other hand, there are also developments taking place with which I do not want to be identified.

To complicate matters further, there are those who take such a strong reactionary stand against everything “emerging” that they “throw out the baby with the bathwater”. Therefore, from the outset I distance myself from those who over-react against anything and everything with the label “Emerging Church”. Some, in my opinion, have lost sight of the real issues involved by concentrating on lesser important secondary issues. For example, Roger Oakland, in his otherwise excellent book *Faith Undone*⁵ loses sight of the main issues by expounding his personal eschatological and strongly held anti-Roman Catholic views, which cloud the real issues at stake. Even though I do share some critical views held by those opposing the Emerging Church Movement, I detest the satirical tone of some critics. There is a difference between being passionate and being derisive. Such responses levelled against *all things* Emerging Church unfortunately lessen the impact of their critique, especially when it comes to the all-important fundamental issues, which are the main concern.

One of the popular words used in the Emerging Church Movement is the word “conversation”. I like it! It is healthy to have “conversations” about biblical, theological, ethical, and methodological

⁵ Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone - The emerging church - a new reformation or an end-time deception* (Oregon: Lighthouse Trails Publishing).

issues. I long for it, but I must admit I seldom find anyone with whom to have an open and honest conversation on such issues. In most cases people become defensive, cannot (or dare not) look beyond their long-held viewpoints.

Some years ago, a group of us met to do “conversation” (based on Francis Schaeffer’s discussion group at L’Abri, Switzerland). One person, after having done some research, would put a topic on the table for discussion. Open and honest dialogue took place because no one was “shot down” for holding to a supposedly wrong view, or for simply being ignorant. Besides the historical fundamentals of the Christian faith, I do not think any of us had definite views (set-in-concrete views) on some of the non-essential doctrines of the Christian Faith. This study group, like no other, stimulated my thinking. Sometimes I became more convinced of the rightness of my point of view, other times I modified my position, or stood corrected.

I strongly believe in the need for free, open, healthy dialogue amongst Christian leaders. It is here that I applaud the Emerging Church Movement. Church history shows us some amazingly positive outcomes of those who sincerely met together to seek further wisdom and understanding to all aspects of the Christian faith and to seek answers to contemporary issues in every arena of life.

Paul longed to see that and accordingly prayed that we would be “... *filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, ... please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God...*”⁶

If “conversation” results in an ever-increasing knowledge of God and knowing his will, together with being “filled with spiritual wisdom” (wisdom from above⁷) then, as Paul said, the outcome will be a life pleasing to God; a life that will bear fruit for his Kingdom in everything we do.

⁶ Colossians 1:9-12

⁷ James 3:17

2. THE CONTEMPORARY EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Emerging” Movements in History

From the early beginnings of the Christian movement, we witness the emergence of individuals, or small groups who affected their own and future generation in major ways. The Christian era starts with John the Baptist and his disciples, who called people to repentance “preparing the way of the Lord”. While John was still preaching, Jesus and his followers came on the scene. No other movement has had a greater impact upon the world than Jesus and his followers. Jesus, and the subsequent “Jesus Movement,” has influenced every strata of society worldwide. No man has dominated the history of the world more than Jesus Christ has. His life and message continues to challenge the world.

Following on from Jesus and the apostles there have been many individuals, or small groups of people who met together for “conversation” and subsequently became world changers. At the core of many Roman Catholic Orders and Movements, you will find one or more individuals who through inspiration or by responding to societal needs brought about major changes in the Church and society-at-large. The legacy of such saints as *Augustine, Francis of Assisi, John Wycliffe* and *John Huss* is still evident in today’s world as well as the inheritance left behind by the likes of sixteenth century Protestant Reformers as: *Luther, Zwingli* and *Calvin*. Three centuries of evangelical awakenings in Europe and North America followed the Reformation Period. The Church was greatly blessed by renewal movements and missionaries like the *German Pietists*, the *Moravians* (Zinzendorf), the *Puritans* (John Bunyan), *George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley* (Methodists), *William Carey* (Baptist Missionary Society), *Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, Charles Hadden Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Hudson Taylor* (China Inland Mission), and twentieth century evangelist *Billy Graham*. (Of course, there were many, many more movements and key people not mentioned here). They all influenced their own world and beyond. Many of these movements started with “conversations” and prayer meetings (one in a haystack!⁸), resulting in unprecedented revivals, and renewals, as well as large numbers of believers responding to the call of foreign missions.

Often these individuals and movements were influenced by preceding reformers or associated renewal movements. For example, the radical English Church reformer John Wycliffe (1330-1384)⁹ impacted the Bohemian preacher John Huss who subsequently influenced the Moravian Brethren, who in turn stirred up John and Charles Wesley. The resulting Methodist denomination became the precursor of the Salvation Army, Holiness, Revivalist, Pentecostal, and the late twentieth century Charismatic renewal movements and churches.

Besides the different movements and individuals that have shaped the belief of the Historical Church, *methodological* changes (ways of doing church) also affected the Church from its conception. The New Testament Church developed within a Jewish culture and so naturally used

⁸ Five students from Williams College met in 1806, in a grove of trees near Williamstown Massachusetts, to debate the theology of missionary service. Their meeting was interrupted by a thunderstorm and they took shelter under a haystack. The resulting American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810) sent out the first formal missionaries from North America to India (1812). This was the beginning of the greatest missionary endeavour the world has seen.

⁹ John Wycliffe (1330-1384), English philosopher, theologian, and religious reformer, a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. He encouraged the translation of the Bible into the everyday language of the time.

the existing Jewish Synagogue model for conducting church gatherings. Unsurprisingly, when the Greek/Roman Gentile churches became dominant, they took forms and structures suited to the prevailing Roman culture. The Jewish congregational synagogue model was adapted to the Roman *parish/diocese* model (several parish churches within a diocese and with a bishop as overseer). The traditional Jewish missionary bands (e.g. Paul and Barnabas) in due time also underwent structural changes by adopting the Roman military structures along the lines of monastic orders.¹⁰ (Some Monastic Orders were not unlike equivalent modern-day mission agencies or para-church organisations such as Bible societies, medical missions, and social agencies etc.) The Church throughout its history has always adjusted itself to the prevailing culture within any given society. In that sense, the Church has always been *emerging* from one generation into the next and from one culture into another.

¹⁰ See Ralph D. Winter's Essay, *The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission*, Published in *The Perspective on the World Christian Movement – A Reader* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), B-45

3. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PRESENT-DAY EMERGING/ EMERGENT CHURCH MOVEMENTS

The Origin of the Term “Emerging Church”

Leadership Network first used the term “Emerging Church” around 1997.¹¹ This discussion group deliberated over the changing trends taking place within the postmodern church culture of the 1990s and facilitated a number of conferences. These conferences looked at ways of responding to the emerging “Generation X”. Initially, the expression “Emerging Church” applied mainly to youth focussed churches. Later, various churches and ministries (ministering across all age groups) experimenting with alternative ways of doing church, accepted the term. Its primary focus involved innovative alternative forms of worship, church planting, and mission. Around 2003 the term “Emerging Church” became increasingly popular and more and more churches and ministries began to use the term. By using the term “Emerging Church”, they identified themselves as being a church that used relevant alternative ways to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the emerging culture. Some began to use the term “Emerging Church” to mean, “Missional Church”.

Two Confusing Terms: “Emerging” and “Emergent”

To get a handle on the Emerging Church Movement is not easy. To complicate matters even further there is another parallel Movement identified by the term “**Emergent**”. This Movement originated in 2001 out of the Leadership Network theological discussion group. Those involved in this original group, among others, were Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Chris Seay, Mark Driscoll, and Doug Pagitt. Sometime later, the theology discussion group disbanded and was renamed ‘Emergent’. Today it operates under the name “Emergent Village”.

Mark Driscoll (Mars Hill Church, Seattle, USA), was among the first participants of this small theological conversation group, but subsequently, he and his *Acts 29* ministry, have distanced themselves from the “emergent thread” of the Emerging Church Movement. But more about that later.

While the original *Emerging* Church discussion groups focussed mostly on relevant ways of doing church (methodology), the *emergent* groups fixed their attention on revising historically accepted *theological* and *doctrinal* beliefs of the Church. It is important to understand that there is a clear difference between the two movements. Many people today use the terms “Emerging Church” and “Emergent” as being one and the same. This is not so! Dan Kimball in his blog writes,

“Because the words are so similar they have become interchangeable rather than two distinct terms as they were originally. Because “Emergent” was part of the growing “emerging church” discussion, it sort of became confusing knowing what was *emerging*, what was *emergent*, what was the same, what was different.”¹²

The main differences between the two movements briefly are:

- *The Emerging Church*
 - Its primary focus is about rethinking what it means to be the church in our emerging culture (methodology)

¹¹ Leadership Network was co-founded in the USA in 1984 by Bob Buford as a church growth think tank.

¹² Dan Kimball, *Origins of the terms "Emerging" and "Emergent" church* – posted by Dan Kimball (April 21 2006) Permalink

- The term “Emerging Church” has become an umbrella for many different movements, churches, and para-churches
- *Emergent*
 - Its primary focus is about redefining and revising long established historical biblical doctrine and theology
 - The term “emergent” applies to the *Emergent Village* organisation as well as other similar movements

It is no wonder that people are confused. Both terms are employed, yet mean different things to different people. Therefore, discernment is required. Rather than focussing on terminology, it is better to focus on what people actually teach.

Now that we have a better grasp of the terms used to describe these two distinct groups, let us look at what these groups entail. *Mark Driscoll*, who once was part of the original “conversation,” has written an excellent objective essay on the Emerging/Emergent Church called, “*A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church*”.¹³

He writes,

“In the mid-1990s I was part of what is now known as the Emerging Church and spent some time traveling the country to speak on the emerging church in the emerging culture on a team put together by Leadership Network called the Young Leader Network. But, I eventually had to distance myself from the Emergent stream of the network because friends like Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt began pushing a theological agenda that greatly troubled me. Examples include referring to God as a chick, questioning God’s sovereignty over and knowledge of the future, denial of the substitutionary atonement at the Cross, a low view of Scripture, and denial of hell which is one hell of a mistake.”¹⁴

¹³ Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, USA

¹⁴ Mark Driscoll, *TheResurgence.com*

4. THE THREE STREAMS WITHIN THE EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT

Mark Driscoll in his essay identifies *Three Streams* within the Emerging Church Movement: *Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists*.¹⁵

A breakdown of the Three Streams within the EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT:

(1) Relevants

Basically, “*Relevants*” are endeavouring to communicate the gospel contextually to the emerging generations. They use cultural relevant forms in such areas as worship, preaching, dress, leadership, music etc. Theologically they are largely within the traditional evangelical – reformed framework.

Relevants Analysed:

- Theologically conservative evangelicals
- Constantly updating:
 - Relevant alternative worship styles
 - Relevant preaching styles
 - Relevant church leadership structures
- Their goal is to be relevant, especially to postmodern-minded people
- Endeavour to keep younger people from leaving their churches
- Strong emphasis on planting churches
- Pastoral leadership predominantly male
- Some well-known leaders are: Dan Kimball, Donald Miller

Mark Driscoll: “Within the Relevants there is also a growing group of outreach-minded Reformed Relevants, which look to men like John Piper, Tim Keller, and D. A. Carson for theological direction.”¹⁶

Relevants Critiqued:

Positives

- Appeals to variety of age groups, especially to young people
- Superb communication through gifted preachers/teachers
- Attracts gifted communicators, musicians, and singers

Negatives

- A tendency to doing little more than conducting “cool church” for hip young people
- Lack of discipleship, especially in mega-size churches
- Some present a weak gospel message and have an inclination to be (“Me” centred)
- Transfer growth, but no significant conversion growth

¹⁵ The following has mostly been compiled and adapted from Ed Stetzer, *Understanding the emerging church*, First-Person: Baptist Press (6 January 2006) and Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006)

¹⁶ Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006), 87-93

(2) Reconstructionists and Disillusionists

Reconstructionists — Whereas the Relevants continuously look for creative ways of doing church, Reconstructionists in contrast are dissatisfied with contemporary worship services. In some cases, the seeker-style services have not given them the spiritual food required. Others, unable to relate to the loud music and contemporary worship forms, are seeking for a more satisfying way of doing church. Some are looking for either: meaningful, incarnational, organic church forms in the way of Christian communities or simple small “house style” churches.

Disillusionists — I have included these alongside the Reconstructionists although their response to the contemporary Church is quite the opposite to that of the Reconstructionists. Rather than embracing “incarnational” or “house type church” models, they have (re)discovered contemplative, liturgical styles of worship within traditional mainline churches e.g. Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Reconstructionists and Disillusionists Analysed:

- Theologically evangelical
- Are dissatisfied with the current forms of church (e.g. seeker, purpose, contemporary)
- Believe that current church forms have failed to create life transformation
- Many are disillusioned with church and do not attend any church at all
- Some attend more informal, incarnational, and organic church forms such as house churches
- Some have formed “new monastic communities;” have contemplative type services which may include the use of candles, incense, liturgy, icons, and a strong Anglo-Catholic-like experience of the Eucharist
- Some are (re)discovering the value of traditional liturgical style churches
- Others, disenchanted with the extremes within charismatic/pentecostal churches, are finding safety within non-charismatic/pentecostal conservative churches
- Some have found a home within the Greek/Anthiochian Orthodox churches¹⁷
- Reconstructionists look to such leaders as: Neil Cole, Australian Michael Frost, and Alan Hirsch

Reconstructionists/Disillusionists Critiqued:

Positives

- Although struggling with church forms, they have not rejected their Christian faith
- Many are genuinely looking for more meaningful ways of expressing worship and gaining spiritual food

Negatives

- They are seen as a collection of disgruntled Christians who are overreacting to contemporary forms, or the megachurch trend
- Transfer growth, but no significant conversion growth

¹⁷ **Some examples:** Franky Schaeffer, son of the late Francis Schaeffer, formerly a Presbyterian; Anthony Scott and Tom Walker were Southern Baptists; John Morris, a Fulbright scholar and professor of history, was raised in the United Methodist Church. Maria King, an associate professor of nursing who was an Episcopalian (Anglican) nun – missionary. In 1987, Peter Gillquist and Gordon Walker from Campus Crusade, together with a congregation of about two thousand joined the Anthiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (since then another 17 congregations have followed suit). Others have come from organisations like Youth for Christ, Young Life, the Evangelical Free Church, and the Christian Missionary Alliance. As cited from Daniel B. Clendenin’s book, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity - A Western Perspective* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 11-12

Summing up

Every generation has had to find its own expression (relevancy) of worship and appropriate methods of gospel presentation. In general, we are *not* talking here about “rights” or “wrongs” (providing whatever is done is God honouring), but rather about personal preferences. As in taste, fashion, music, art, so too in worship we will have individual tastes, likes and dislikes. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. Doing church has always seen changes. Let’s face it; we have moved a long way from the original Jewish synagogue model of doing church! The *methods* may change providing the *message* remains the same!

(3) Revisionists (Emergents)

It is the *Revisionist* stream within the Emerging Church Movement that causes the greatest concern. Revisionists are theologically liberal and question key evangelical doctrines by reviewing their appropriateness for the emerging postmodern world. Revisionists are not talking so much about adapting structures and ways of doing church, but are tinkering with the historical, biblical fundamental truths of the Christian faith.

It is not wrong to have “conversation” regarding *why* and *what* we believe. It is when we take into question such fundamental truths as: *the divinity of Christ*, *Christ’s substitutionary atonement* and *the authority of Scripture* etc., that we enter the “danger zone”. The Church, in centuries past, has *already* debated and fought its battles regarding the truthfulness of these vital biblical doctrines. Undeniably, the Holy Spirit led the Early Church fathers when they formulated clear conclusive statements of faith¹⁸ as to what the universal Christian Church ought to believe. These statements of faith (creeds) have kept the Church (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant) on track throughout the last two thousand odd years.

The Emergent Village

The *Emergent Village* is the main driver behind the Revisionists. The Emergent Village is an organisation that operates in the U.S.A. and the U.K. The American organisation is directed by Tony Jones and the British by Jason Clark. Other names connected with the Emergent Village include: Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Tim Keel, Karen Ward, Ivy Beckwith, and Mark Oestreicher.¹⁹

Brian McLaren is probably the best known and drives much of the theological debate. He has written many articles and books. He has visited New Zealand a number of times, most recently (October 2009) as a guest speaker at Laidlaw College in Henderson.²⁰ It is important to note though that “emergents” are not just confined to the Emergent Village. Many have taken up the Emergent Village initiatives and endlessly debate and blog long-held doctrines of the faith.

Rob Bell a Revisionist

In the 2010 Update of this Discussion Paper, most commentators placed Rob Bell among those evangelicals, whom, although associated with the Emerging Church, remained within the boundaries of orthodoxy. However, with the publication of his book *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*²¹ he moved well and truly into the “danger zone.” Rob

¹⁸ e.g. *Apostles Creed* (general statement of faith), *Nicene Creed* (divinity of Christ), *Athanasian Creed* (Trinity), *Chalcedon Creed* (Christ’s two natures)

¹⁹ Scot McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church* (Christianity Today - 2007).

²⁰ In conjunction with World Vision – Topic: *Where Faith meets the World*

²¹ HarperCollins’s description of Rob Bells book is as follows, “Millions of Christians have struggled with how to reconcile God’s love and God’s judgment: Has God created billions of people over thousands of years only to select a few to go to heaven and everyone else to suffer forever in hell? Is this acceptable to God? How is this “good news”? ...What if the story of heaven and hell we have been taught is not, in fact, what the Bible teaches? What if what Jesus meant by heaven, hell, and salvation are very different from how we have come to understand them?”

Bell in this book not only denies the existence of hell as a place of punishment, but also implies that ultimately everyone will be saved (universal reconciliation). His reasoning: otherwise, God would have lost and Satan won. Though he does not say outright that he believes in universalism as such, nevertheless he states, "Whatever objections a person may have of [the universalist view], and there are many, one has to admit that it is fitting, proper, and Christian to long for it."²² Such well-respected conservative evangelical leaders as Albert Mohler, John Piper and David Platt have strongly criticised the book. Mohler commented that the book was "theologically disastrous" for not rejecting universalism."²³ In an interview with TIME, Mohler commented, "When you adopt universalism and erase the distinction between the church and the world, then you don't need the church, and you don't need Christ, and you don't need the cross. This is the tragedy of nonjudgmental mainline liberalism, and it's Rob Bell's tragedy in this book too."²⁴

Rob Bell has also spoken out in favour of Gay marriage²⁵ and hence moving further away from the scriptural position on homosexuality²⁶ and evangelical orthodoxy. Tragically, this places Rob Bell into the category of the Revisionists.

Like the Relevants and Reconstructionists within the Emerging Church Movement, the Revisionists are equally difficult to analyse as a whole. Many of its leaders or adherents address different topics and may not necessarily agree with each other. Tony Jones summed its make-up well when he wrote in *Christianity Today*,

"Within Emergent are Texas Baptists who don't allow women to preach and New England lesbian Episcopal priests. We have Southern California YWAMers and Midwest Lutherans. We have those who hold to biblical inerrancy, and others trying to demythologize the scripture. We have environmental, peacenik lefties, "crunchy cons," and right wing hawks."²⁷

Author, pastor, and innovative teacher Rob Bell presents a deeply biblical vision for rediscovering a richer, grander, truer, and more *spiritually satisfying* (italics mine) way of understanding heaven, hell, God, Jesus, salvation, and repentance. The result is the discovery that the "good news" is much, much better than we ever imagined. Love wins."

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rob_Bell

²³ Meacham, Jon (April 14, 2011). "Pastor Rob Bell: What if Hell Doesn't Exist?". *Time*. Retrieved May 5, 2011.

Jump up ^ "Baptist Press -NEWS BRIEFS: David Platt weighs in on Rob Bell controversy; Colo. civil unions advance - News with a Christian Perspective". *Bpnews.net*. March 24, 2011. Retrieved August 15, 2013

²³ TIME Cover: No Hell? Pastor Rob Bell Angers Evangelicals - TIME

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2065289,00.html#ixzz2maC9jsAg>

²⁵ Hear Rob Bell support same-sex marriage, say Evangelicals need to 'repent'. *MLive.com*. Retrieved August

²⁶ Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9

²⁷ Is Emergent the New Christian Left? Tony Jones responds to the critics, May 23, 2006

5. DANGER ZONE:

REVISION OF MAJOR HISTORICALLY, UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED DOCTRINES

In this section we want to take a closer look at what doctrines the Revisionists are challenging, revising and even openly denying.

Mark Driscoll outlines the following doctrines under review by the Revisionists:

- **Scripture.** This includes the divine inspiration, perfection, and authority of Scripture.
- **Jesus Christ.** This includes his deity and sovereignty over human history as Lord.
- **Gender.** This includes whether or not people are created with inherent gender differences, whether or not those gender roles have any implications for the governments of home and church, and whether or not homosexual practice is sinful. This also includes whether or not it is appropriate to use gender specific names for God, such as Father, like Jesus did.
- **Sin.** The primary issue here is whether or not human beings are conceived as sinners, or are essentially morally neutral and are internally corrupted solely by external forces.
- **Salvation.** The issue is whether Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation and whether or not salvation exists for people in other religions who do not worship Jesus Christ.
- **The Cross.** The issue here is the doctrine of penal substitution and whether or not Jesus died in our place for our sins, or if He went to the Cross solely as an example for us to follow when we suffer.
- **Hell.** The issue is whether or not anyone will experience conscious eternal torment, or if unbelievers will simply cease to exist (annihilationism), or eventually be saved and taken to heaven (universalism).
- **Authority.** This issue is perhaps the most difficult of all.²⁸

It is clear from reading many blogs online that much of the “conversation” taking place is between people who have very little understanding of the historical fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Many have no knowledge of past controversies that led the Christian Church to state its beliefs through historical statements of faith. Mark Driscoll writes:

“With the authority of Scripture open for debate and even long-established Church councils open for discussion (e.g. the Council of Carthage that denounced Pelagius as a heretic for denying human sinfulness), the conversation continues while the original orthodox or heretical doctrine purpose of getting on mission may be overlooked because there is little agreement on the message or the mission of the Church.”²⁹

“As a pastor I find the entire conversation encouraging, stimulating, and frightening. What I find encouraging is the groundswell of interest among Christians who do not want to separate from culture like fundamentalists, or simply baptize culture like liberals, but want to earnestly wrestle over the nature of the gospel and how can it be most faithfully contextualized in culture. What I find stimulating is the growing

²⁸ Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006), 91

²⁹ Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006), 92

focus on doctrine and the way it forces people to reconsider their doctrinal positions and dig more deeply since pat answers to tough questions are no longer sufficient. But, what I find frightening is the trend among some to drift from what I consider to be faithful conservative evangelical theological convictions in favor of a less distinctively Christian spirituality. The result is a trip around the same cul-de-sac of false doctrine that a previous generation spent their life driving around while touting their progress.”³⁰

Let us take a more in-depth look at some of the major doctrines under review by the Revisionists:

(1) Authority of Scripture

There is nothing new under the sun! Like in the days of Adam, the Devil (yes, I do believe in the Devil) still tempts us with the same question, “Did God really say?”³¹ The moment you entertain such a thought (which is nothing less than an accusation against God’s truthfulness) you have entered the danger zone and stepped with one foot on a slippery slope. Take the next step and you are on your way down the slope to suffer a disastrous, possibly fatal landing. Does that mean that we cannot raise any questions, or have “conversation” regarding our faith? Certainly not! It is the attitude behind the question that is the all-important issue here. You can legitimately ask God (with a humble attitude—always realising your proper place in relationship to the all-loving, all-wise, all-knowing and sovereign God) “Why Lord, did this happen to me?” Or, “Why did my best friend, who served you faithfully, die from cancer?” Alternatively though, you can ask the same “why” questions, but in such a way that you take into question God’s holy character — “*Why* God! *Why* did this happen to *me*!” Implying “Who do you think you are!”

A Little Bit of Church History

Study Church history and you will find that every possible heresy has had its beginnings when the authority of Scripture was questioned and subsequently overruled, and replaced by man-made, fabricated ideas.

The infant Church had hardly begun when disputes arose. Some were of a minor nature others of major importance. Paul confronted any teaching that was contrary to the gospel forcefully and denounced such people and their teaching. Listen to what he wrote in his letter to the church of Galatia:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”³²

The authority of Scripture has been challenged or usurped by other teachings throughout the two thousand year history of the Church. Very early on, extra-biblical writings and traditions often took centre stage at the expense of God’s Word. Whereas the early Church councils had brought clarity

³⁰ Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006), 92

³¹ Genesis 3:1

³² Galatians 1:6-9 NIV

to the fundamental doctrines of the faith, subsequent councils and popes introduced various traditions, which were not compatible with Scripture. For example, the elevation of the status of Mary, the mother of Christ: honouring became adoration; her natural birth became an immaculate conception (untainted by original sin). Furthermore, she is attributed with never having committed a personal sin, and her natural death turned into a physical ascension into heaven. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church attribute to her the title “co-Redemptorist”. While it is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus that is our sole redemption, they believe that Mary assisted redemption through her obedience to God’s will.

The inclusion of the apocryphal books³³ within the Canon of Scripture caused further non-biblical teachings and practices (e.g. belief in purgatory) to be accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. However, it was not only Western Christianity (Rome) which took on board non-biblical beliefs. Eastern Christianity (Constantinople) too, incorporated much teaching over and above that of Scripture. “Tradition” is recognised as being co-equal to Scripture by Eastern Orthodox churches. They believe that the Bible is not a *thing-in-itself* that can be isolated or separated from the context of the church and tradition. Eastern Orthodoxy tends to affirm one source for revelation (Holy Spirit) which has come to the church in two forms—*written* and *unwritten*: “Scripture and Tradition”. Both sources are equally valid and authoritative.

The Protestant Reformation, with the rediscovery of the biblical truth of *justification by faith, through grace* by Martin Luther, brought a much-needed correction to unbiblical teaching and practices within the Church. They restored the Bible to its rightful place of authority in matters of faith and conduct—*Sola Scriptura*.

(2) The Deity and Humanity of Christ

It is not surprising, once the apostles had died, that the young Church was confronted with even greater ferocious opposition. The enemy’s attack came in the way of the question: “Is Jesus Christ *really* the Son of God?” followed by denials of his incarnation and true humanity.

The first major assault came by the way of a different “gospel” known as *Gnosticism*.³⁴ Gnostic philosophy (besides many other heretical beliefs) denied the deity of Christ and taught that he was

³³ The word apocrypha means “hidden,” while the word deuterocanonical means “second canon.” The Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals were written primarily in the time between the Old and New Testaments, as well as additions to the books of Esther and Daniel. The books are named: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees.

The Apocrypha / Deuterocanonical books teach many things that are not true and are not historically accurate. The Roman Catholic Church officially added the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals to their Bible at the Council of Trent in the mid 1500’s A.D., primarily in response to the Protestant Reformation. The Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals support some of the things that the Roman Catholic Church believes and practices which are not in agreement with the Bible. Examples are praying for the dead, petitioning “saints” in Heaven for their prayers, purgatory, and “alms giving” atoning for sins. Some of what the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals say is true and correct. However, due to the historical and theological errors, the books must be viewed as fallible historical and religious documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God. The Jews treated the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonical books with respect, but never accepted them as true books of the Hebrew Bible. The early Christian church debated the status of the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals, but few early Christians believed they belonged in the canon of Scripture. The New Testament quotes from the Old Testament hundreds of times, but nowhere quotes or alludes to any of the Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical books. Further, there are many proven errors and contradictions in the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonals.

³⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia: *Gnosticism*, “A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and pantheistic-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a deprivation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Saviour.”³⁴

inferior in nature to the Father, a type of super-angel or an impersonal emanation of God. They believed that all matter was evil and, therefore, Jesus could not have been human.

Apostles Creed (2nd – 3rd century)

With gnostic teaching permeating the young churches, the Church fathers saw the need to set out clearly what the Church believed. Based on the four Gospels and the Epistles they drew up a number of statements of faith, which became known as the *ecumenical* (universal) *creeds*. The Apostles Creed was written to combat Gnosticism, especially against the denial that Jesus was truly human. The emphasis of the Apostles' Creed is to rebut this error. (Apostles Creed: See Appendix 1).

Arius – Arianism

However, one battle won did not mean the end of the war for truth. For some three hundred years, the question of Jesus' deity remained one of the main controversies. Two bishops of Alexandria, the elderly Arius (who denied Jesus' deity) and the young Athanasius (who defended it) faced the question head-on. It greatly divided the Church.

Arius taught that Christ, although somewhat like God, is after all not fully God. According to Arius, Christ is the first and the highest of all created beings. But, he did not exist from eternity, and is not of the same substance with the Father.

Athanasius, on the other hand, taught that Christ is fully God. He said, "*Jesus, who I know as redeemer, cannot be less than God.*"

Nicaean Council (AD 325) – Nicene Creed

The Arian controversy raged for a long time and with great violence and bitterness. At last, the emperor Constantine called a general council to settle the dispute. This Council met in the year 325 in Nicaea, a small town in Asia Minor (Turkey). More than three hundred bishops were present. The outcome of the proceedings of the Council of Nicaea was that the views of Arius were condemned as heresy. A statement of the true doctrine of the Person of Christ, and thus the Trinity, was adopted as the faith of the Church. This statement became known as the *Nicene Creed* (325). A few changes were made to the original Creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and so it is this Creed we use today. (Nicene Creed: See Appendix 2).

Thus, the Church confessed its belief in the most fundamental article of the Christian faith: the deity of Christ and him being the second Person within the Trinity.

Chalcedonian Council (AD 451)–Chalcedon Creed

Now with the question of Christ's deity settled, the next controversy arose regarding Christ's *incarnation* and his two natures: *divine* and *human* (hypostatic union). After some bitter disputes between the Western and Eastern churches, a unified formula was accepted and stated in the somewhat wordy Creed of Chalcedon (AD 451). (Chalcedon Creed: see Appendix 3).

Summing up: Church Councils and Creeds

These early Church councils, through intense study of Scripture, formulated some of the major and essential beliefs of the Christian Church. These in turn have been the accepted foundational doctrines of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches. These formal statements of faith have formed the basis for orthodoxy and have been the main measuring stick against heresy.

Although doctrinal differences e.g. between Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches—as well as divisions among Protestant denomination—are clearly evident and have divided the Universal Church (Body of Christ), nevertheless, the historic creeds, outlining the

essential Bible based doctrines of the Church, have been her bedrock throughout the last eighteen centuries.

Departures From the Historical Faith – Heresies

Throughout the Church's history, there have been those who advocated revision of the accepted Ecumenical Creeds. There have been many, but for the sake of time, I will jump many centuries until we come to about the late seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century and examine the so-called *Enlightenment* period. In my opinion, this period reflects the present-day Emergent Revisionist Church Movement the best.

6. PARALLEL:

TODAY'S EMERGENT CHURCH REVISIONISTS AND THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT *RATIONALISM — DEISM*

Seventeenth – Eighteenth Centuries

While studying the *Age of Enlightenment* (also called, the *Age of Reason*) which began around the eighteenth century, striking similarities with the *Emergent Church Revisionists* became apparent. As said before, “there is nothing new under the sun.” History, with slight modifications, always seems to repeat itself in one way or other. So let us have a closer look at the conversation of the “enlightened” intellectuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Historical Backdrop

Throughout the Medieval Period, the basic truth of Christianity was largely unquestioned within Christendom. The Reformation had argued about biblical truth, but for the most part, the truth of Christianity itself was not seriously questioned. However, all this changed at the beginning of the seventeenth and climaxed in the eighteenth century. This era became known as the Enlightenment Period during which time we saw the emergence of *Rationalism* and *Deism*.

Rationalism

During the Enlightenment Period, *human reasoning* replaced divine biblical revelation. There were those who claimed to be able to discern truth without appeal to God-breathed biblical revelation. The movement’s philosophical reasoning embraced not only the possibility for humankind to think logically, but also to reason their way to understanding God and what God required of them. In other words, they created gods in their own image and imagination. They became known as *freethinkers*. They advocated at least six areas: *reason, autonomy, nature, tolerance, optimism, and humanism*. Furthermore, they critically questioned traditional institutions, customs, morals, and advocated *reason* as the primary basis of authority. This brought a steep decline in the influence of authoritarian institutions such as nobility and the church. Therefore, rationalism made major inroads, replacing long-held biblical truth with man-centred reasoning. It challenged any biblical teaching and doctrine (including the historic ecumenical creeds) that could not be explained by rational reasoning.

It challenged such treasured doctrines as:

- The authority and inerrancy of Scripture
- The Trinity
- The deity of Christ
- Salvation by grace through faith

This biblical truth fell well and truly outside their accepted norms of rational thought. In its place they introduced a form of *universalism*³⁵ (Christ died for all and *all* will be saved regardless).

³⁵ Socinianism

Although besides its man-centeredness, anti-establishment and anti anti-authority attitude, it did in the process redress some deeply seated wrongs within the dominating existing authority structures of its time, both civil and church. For example, the power shifted from authoritarian to more democratic governmental structures resulting in greater rights for ordinary people. A focus on science and natural philosophy made astounding advances during that one hundred year period. (Sadly, like with so many scientific discoveries today, God was left out of the picture and denied his rightful place.) Rationalism, although strongly moralistic, was theologically ambiguous and had little or no spiritual life. In many ways, it foreshadowed nineteenth century and modern-day liberalism.

Deism

Rationalism produced another movement during the eighteenth century period—*Deism*. It also advocated a simplified form of religion based on *reason* as an alternative to Christian *revelation*.

“Deism, asserted that while God was indeed the creator, He had created a clockwork image universe which operated by natural law. God himself would not interfere with his creation; hence, miracles became impossible because they would violate the inviolable laws of nature. Works appeared such as *Christianity as Old as Time*, arguing that Christianity merely republished the revelation of God which was available to man in nature. God himself was *transcendent*, separated, above and uninvolved in creation.³⁶

This led to the following outcomes:

- No personal relationship possible between humankind and God
- God is transcendent to such a degree that he was no more than an impersonal force
- God himself had become completely separated and detached from the created world
- He could only be known through the natural world
- Christianity merely reflected the revelation of God which was available to man in nature
- They attacked the supernaturalism of historic Christianity

Neologians

Another group of scholars emerged during that time who came to be known as the *Neologians*³⁷ (or Innovators—new theology). As usually is the case, they too began questioning the doctrine of biblical inspiration. Furthermore, they either questioned or wholly denied such major orthodox Christian beliefs as:

- The validity and revelatory nature of Scripture
- The doctrine of the Trinity,
- The doctrine of deity of Christ
- The doctrine of the atonement
- The virgin birth
- The resurrection
- The Nicene/Chalcedonian Christology
- The existence of Satan and Hell

These German Neologians, as well as the more moderate Deists of England, deliberately remained within the churches to modify established orthodox historical doctrines in the direction of Enlightenment—Rationalist philosophical and theological thought.

³⁶ [Http://WWW. Bible.Org](http://WWW.Bible.Org)

³⁷ Neology: The Rationalistic interpretation of Scripture. The word is Greek, and means new-(theo)-logy. Those who accept this system are called *Neologians*. Source: Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, E. Cobham Brewer, 1894

Summing up

When we boil it all down, the so-called enlightenment was no more than a Godless “Christianity”. It was in total opposition to the biblical revelation of God. The God of the Bible is personal and has never left his creation to its own devices “For God so loved the World that he gave His only begotten Son...”³⁸ The so-called enlightened, in their pride, put themselves above the biblical and historical faith of the Church. All major, essential doctrines e.g. Trinity, deity of Christ, atonement were questioned, found wanting and replaced with a fabricated, man-made and Spirit-devoid religion.

The enlightenment became the foundation for nineteenth and twentieth century modernism and liberalism. The damage that liberalism has done (and still does) to the life of the Church is nothing less than tragic. One only has to look at the church attendance in those churches that have embraced liberal, Christ-less theology and observe the empty pews.

As you can see, there clearly is a parallel between the Emergent Revisionists and the “Free Thinkers” of the eighteenth century. When we look again at the list that Mark Driscoll put together regarding doctrines questioned by the Emergent Revisionists you will not fail to see the similarities.

Doctrines Under Review by Emergent Revisionists:

- **Scripture.** This includes the **divine inspiration**, perfection, and authority of Scripture.
- **Jesus Christ.** This includes **his deity and sovereignty** over human history as Lord.
- **Gender.** This includes whether or not people are created with inherent gender differences...appropriate gender specific names for God.
- **Sin.** The primary issue here is whether or not human beings are conceived as sinners, or are essentially morally neutral and are internally corrupted solely by external forces.
- **Salvation.** The issue is whether Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation and whether or not salvation exists for people in other religions who do not worship Jesus Christ.
- **The Cross.** The issue here is the doctrine of penal substitution and whether or not Jesus died in our place for our sins, or if He went to the Cross solely as an example for us to follow when we suffer.

Comment: An extreme case in point is that of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann’s unbiblical belief regarding the doctrine of penal substitution. In their book “*The Lost Message of Jesus*” the authors deny that the Father sent his Son to die for our sins. They argue that if that were so, then Christ’s crucifixion would be nothing less than “*a form of cosmic child abuse.*” Brian McLaren endorses this book and this view. He writes, “That sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?”³⁹

- **Hell.** The issue is whether or not anyone will experience conscious eternal torment, or if unbelievers will simply cease to exist (annihilationism), or eventually be saved and taken to heaven (universalism).
- **Authority.** This issue is perhaps the most difficult of all.⁴⁰

³⁸ John 3:16

³⁹ (ibid. 166).

⁴⁰ Mark Driscoll, *A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church* (CTR n.s.(Spring 2006), 91

Decay Counteracted by Revival

However, God stood not idly by. For while many theologians replaced their once biblically based faith with humanism, traditional forms of Christianity not only survived, but the Church experienced some of the greatest evangelical revivals (Britain, America, and Europe) of her entire history! As Jesus promised, "...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."⁴¹

In the following section, I will endeavour to draw one more historical comparison. This time it is between the eighteenth–nineteenth century theologian/philosopher *Friedrich Schleiermacher* and present-day Emergent Revisionist leaders such as Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Jason Clark, Karen Ward and many others. By now you, will have become aware of a familiar pattern that seems to repeat itself throughout the history of the Church. Schleiermacher is no exception!

⁴¹ Matthew 16:18

7. PARALLEL:

THE EMERGENT REVISIONISTS AND THE “FATHER” OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

Who was Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher? What is the parallel between him and the present-day Emergent Revisionists?

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher — Theologian and Philosopher (1768-1834)

Despite being the son of a Reformed clergyman, who served as a chaplain in the Prussian army, Schleiermacher studied under the Moravian Brethren (Herrnhutters). Moravian piety called for an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, it focused on one’s personal experience of God, as well as how to make that an active, visible reality in daily life. Becoming frustrated with the rather restrictive Moravian theology, against his father’s wishes, he left the seminary and enrolled for study at the University of Halle in 1787. It was there that he began to read such Enlightenment rationalist thinkers as Emanuel Kant and Spinoza. After his ordination in 1794, he accepted a position as a Reformed preacher in Berlin. There he mingled with German romantic philosophers, became a friend of Friedrich von Schlegel, and began a translation of the works of Plato. Apart from a period when he was professor of theology at Halle (1804-07), most of his life, from his ordination in 1794 until his death, was spent as a preacher and teacher in Berlin. From 1810, he was professor of theology at the newly founded University there.

Schleiermacher in Historical Context

In order to understand what Schleiermacher was attempting to achieve we must place him in his own eighteenth century time period. He began writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, in an intellectual, philosophical religious environment shaped by the Enlightenment Period.

Schleiermacher’s Moravian roots shaped his own spirituality over and against Deisms, human rationalism and dead orthodoxy. He took a radical new approach, for he mingled his Pietist and Moravian “experience” orientated theology with the rationalistic theology of the Enlightenment thinkers. He supported the view that *religion is nothing but feeling and experience*. He rejected any form of established doctrine.

Schleiermacher’s “Revelations” Defined

Schleiermacher gave a completely new sense of meaning to the word “revelation” by saying, “every intuition and every original feeling proceeds from revelation”.⁴² He redefined the term “revelation” to mean, “Every religious experience of each individual”. In addition, he wrote, “Every original feeling proceeds from revelation...If nothing original had yet been generated in you, when it does come it will be a revelation in you also.”⁴³

Previous movements, Schleiermacher felt, had excluded genuine spirituality by reducing religion to either science, in the case of the Deists; or morality, in the case of rationalist; or just cold

⁴² Tony Lane, *The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought* (Herts: Lion Publishing, 1984), 172

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 172

doctrinal facts, in the case of the dogmatists.⁴⁴ Stephen Happel explains, “Thus, Schleiermacher, [in his book] *Speeches on Religion*” maintained that religion has its origin, not in scientific thought, nor in morality, but in *feeling* of absolute dependence upon God.”⁴⁵

It is not too hard to imagine that such “revelations”—unanchored to well established, historical doctrinal and biblical theological thought—opened the door to all sorts of weird and wonderful beliefs!

Like rationalists before him, Schleiermacher too rejected the Bible as the exclusive benchmark to the Christian faith and conduct. Rather, he believed the Bible to be nothing more than a record of man’s religious experience. He denied the Bible being a revelation from God, or an account of God’s activity in history.

Historical Doctrines Rejected

It is not surprising that as the result of holding to such views, the major doctrines of the Christian faith were either denied or questionable in his eyes and that of his followers. He reinterpreted, among others, such traditional Christian doctrines as the *Trinity, Sin, Atonement, Justification, Christology, Judgement, Hell and Heaven.*

Take note: Although it is desirable to connect doctrine to experience, to alter doctrine to fit experience however is very dangerous indeed. It is dangerous because our concept of Christian experience may be flawed and because we are liable to reject or modify doctrines if *we* cannot see their value in relationship to our experiences. It is of great importance, therefore, that experience should always be tested against the standard of Scripture and that doctrine should not be rejected or modified in the light of our experiences only.

Schleiermacher foreshadowed nineteenth and early twentieth centuries liberalism. His Christian humanism laid the foundations for the development of the evolutionary theories of the last two centuries. Furthermore, his attempt to bridge rationalism and supernaturalism laid the ground for the theories and the principles of *Ethical Culture* movements of the twentieth century.

Doctrines Rejected by Schleiermacher:

1) Schleiermacher rejected the authority of Scripture

Instead of the accepted unchanging standard of a biblical based faith, Schleiermacher moved away from and replaced the place of Scripture with an internal *religious consciousness*. Louis Berkhof writes, “This religious consciousness of man was substituted for the Word of God as the source of theology. Faith in Scripture as an authoritative revelation of God was discredited, and human insight based on man’s own emotional or rational apprehension became the standard of religious thought.”⁴⁶

2) Schleiermacher did not believe in the Trinity

He regarded the three Persons simply as *three aspects* of God: the Father being God and the underlying unity of all things, the Son as coming to the consciousness personality of man, and the Holy Spirit is God as living in the Church.⁴⁷ Although slightly repackaged, this

⁴⁴ Dogmatists were those who held to a systematic (orthodox) theology.

⁴⁵ Stephen Happel, *Romanticism* - Allan Richardson, John Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 513

⁴⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 19-20

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 83

belief is nothing new as Sabellius taught something very similar in the third century while living in Rome (Sabellianism or Modalism⁴⁸).

It is surprising that a man like Schleiermacher would set aside the historic teachings of the Early Church fathers, scholars, and the magnificent ecumenical creeds, which clearly stated belief of the oneness of God in three Persons (not to mention the biblical revelation).

3) *Schleiermacher denied the deity of Christ*

To Christ, Schleiermacher allocated a position of mediator, thereby leaving great doubts as to the divinity of Jesus and his identity with God. He believed Christ, like the Arians before him, to be nothing more than a mere man.⁴⁹ He believed him to be a man of pure compassion and kindness, who set a moral example in all that he did.

Such a belief is a natural outcome of those who deny Scripture, for the Bible contains an abundance of evidence that led the Church fathers to the biblical revelation of the deity of Christ.

4) *Schleiermacher believed Jesus to be just a perfect divine man*

Louis Berkhof writes that Schleiermacher believed that “The supernatural Christ made way for a human Jesus; and [that he replaced] the doctrine of the two natures,⁵⁰ for the doctrine of a divine man.” In addition, he regarded Christ as a new creation, in which human nature is elevated to the plain of ideal perfection.⁵¹

What does this all mean? In essence, it means that Jesus is simply a newly created human being who possesses a perfect union with the divine. Jesus, for that reason, is not divine, but simply a *divine human*.

5) *Schleiermacher denied the personality of the Holy Spirit*

Like so many today, especially those with a leaning towards New Age beliefs, Jehovah Witnesses and in liberal circles, the third Person of the Trinity is denied his place as a personal Being within the Godhead.⁵²

6) *Schleiermacher denied Christ's substitutionary atonement*

Because he had an inadequate concept of man's sinfulness, he believed that Jesus Christ did not come to atone for sin. Rather, he saw the Cross as an *example* for us to follow. Because of Christ's essential sinlessness and absolute perfection, he was different from us sinners (divine human). This “difference from us” gives him all that we need for our salvation.

7) *Schleiermacher believed in the mystical theory of the atonement*

This theory sees the atonement as nothing more than an influence, for God simply does not require retributive justice, and thus there is no punishment for sins committed. God's justice is not compromised, and so he can pardon whomever he wills without the need for Christ's sacrificial death. Louis Berkhof: [they believe] “the death of Christ did not atone for sin; neither did it move God to pardon sin. Christ saves men by revealing to them the way of

⁴⁸ Modalism or Sabellianism is named after *Sabellius*, who taught that: God actually exists in three “modes” at different times. So God exists in: “Father” mode at one point in time, “Son” mode when on earth and “Spirit” mode in certain occasions. The modalistic solution to the paradox of threeness and oneness was, then, not three persons, but one person with three different names, roles, or activities. Although this solves the problems of God's existence, it created new ones.

⁴⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 94

⁵⁰ Doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ (Hypostatic Union). The union of the two natures of Christ. According to the Chalcedon Creed, Christ exists as "one person" but "in two natures". That those natures did not mingle but operated as a hypostatic union. See Appendix 4 - Chalcedon Creed.

⁵¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 308

⁵² *ibid.*, 96

faith and obedience as the way of eternal life.”⁵³ We will look at this obvious heresy in more detail in the next section when we look at the concept of *perichoresis*.

8) *Schleiermacher believed that humankind was created with a sensuous nature*

Schleiermacher did not believe in the Fall, but rather believed that man was created with a sensuous nature,⁵⁴ and that sin is simply the result of a lack of God-consciousness (This implies that God is the author of sin!) He believed that sin has no objective existence and for that reason only exists in man’s consciousness.

9) *Schleiermacher rejected the original state of righteousness of Adam*

Because of his view that Adam was created with a sensuous nature, he rejected that Adam’s original state was righteous—“*very good*”. This clearly violates the Scriptural understanding that man is created in the image and likeness of God.⁵⁵ Furthermore, he denied the fact that after having been created good, Adam and Eve subsequently sinned as a direct personal response to the Devil’s temptation.⁵⁶ The Bible is clear that Adam’s sin “infected” all his descendents and the consequences of his sin have affected the human race and creation as a whole ever since “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁵⁷

Take note: An inadequate view of man’s sinfulness leads to a defective view of the work of Jesus Christ (i.e. substitutionary atonement). This in turn leads to a low view of the Person of Christ (denial of his deity). It is this perversion of truth that we see over-and-over again throughout the history of the Church, including in present-day liberal theology.

10) *Schleiermacher rejected a spiritual regeneration*

Regeneration and conversion according to Schleiermacher is nothing more than an ethical change brought about through the process of an *awakening* of a “religious consciousness” (God-consciousness). This is of course contrary to Scripture, for it speaks of an inner spiritual change brought about by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus likens conversion to “being born again”.⁵⁸ Paul describes conversion as a *rescue*, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”⁵⁹ This clearly infers a situation far more serious than just a need for ethical change. This is nothing less than a life or death situation. That such a rescue needed drastic action is clear from the fact, that God sent his only begotten Son to save us. Paul wrote, “For while we were still helpless at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.”⁶⁰ No wonder Christ is called *Saviour!*

11) *Schleiermacher denied justification by faith*

Justification to Schleiermacher meant little more than the sinner becoming conscious of his mistake in thinking that God was angry with him.⁶¹ This seems absurd when we recall the heart-felt cry of the Saviour, “My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”⁶² Our salvation was very costly, for it was paid for with his own blood. This has nothing to do with an “angry” God; rather, this has everything to do with a

⁵³ *ibid.*, 387

⁵⁴ *Sensuous*: In religious use meaning: Devoted to sensual pleasure, destitute of spiritual life, worldly, irreligious. Animal instincts and appetites...lower nature (as distinct from reason) regarded as the source of evil

⁵⁵ Genesis 1:26-27

⁵⁶ Genesis 3:1-7

⁵⁷ Romans 3:23

⁵⁸ John 3:3-6

⁵⁹ Colossians 1:13-14

⁶⁰ Romans 5:6

⁶¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 513

⁶² Matthew 26:39

loving Father “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”⁶³ Paul wrote, “But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God.”⁶⁴ The Father did not send his Son as an angry Judge; rather, by sending his Son to save us, he demonstrated the greatest act of love the cosmos has ever witnessed! (Although there will be a future judgment for those who reject his offer of salvation.⁶⁵)

12) *Schleiermacher rejected the need for salvation and the gift of grace*

For Schleiermacher salvation and grace through faith in the finished work of Christ were irrelevant issues. Because he denied the existence of objective guilt, there was no need for salvation and grace in the traditional Christian sense.

13) *Schleiermacher rejected the doctrines on last judgement, Hell and Heaven*

It should not come as a surprise that as a direct result of his rejection of the authority of Scripture and the historical ecumenical creeds—together with his feeling orientated subjective theology—that he therefore also rejected the scriptural understanding of judgement, Hell and Heaven. It is a logical outcome.

Summing up — History Lesson

Schleiermacher came from a solid German Reformed background. Eighteenth century German Reformed (Calvinism), would have been strong on doctrine⁶⁶ and their church services of a more formal and sombre nature. Contrast this with the Moravian Brethren and German Pietists⁶⁷ and you have the exact opposite. Before transferring to the University of Halle, he studied firstly with the Moravian Brethren, who were closely linked to the seventeenth century German Pietist renewal movements of Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and August Francke (1687-1727).⁶⁸

What Pietists stressed:

- They claimed that faith is not the acceptance of correct theological propositions, but trust in Christ

⁶³ John 3:16

⁶⁴ Romans 5:8-9

⁶⁵ John 3:17-18

⁶⁶ The main Reformed doctrinal confessions: German: The Heidelberg Catechism (1563); French Speaking Belgium: The Belgic Confession (1566); Dutch: The Canons of Dort (1619); Swiss: Second Helvetic Confession (1566); English: The Westminster Confession (1646).

⁶⁷ Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), 228

The basic principles of Pietism: Personal conversion for holiness; Close fellowship in the societies; Responsibility to witness; An expectation of the return of Christ; Christ’s return will be preceded by a great outpouring of the Spirit on the Jews and heathen; The need for foreign missions (as part of the above).

⁶⁸ *Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705)* - Spener experienced a transformation after reading *True Christianity*, written by the German mystic Johan Arnt. Other works by English Puritans like Bunyan and especially Richard Baxter also greatly influenced Spener.

August Francke (1687-1727) - Francke in 1687 experienced the “new birth” at the age of 24. He met with Spener and joined the Pietist movement. Francke took on a position at the newly founded University of Halle (Germany), which became the intellectual centre of Pietism. The university and other institutions organised by Francke in Halle sent out lay and clerical leaders to influence the ruling class of Protestant Germany and the younger generation of pastors. He also established a Bible Institute for the publication of Bibles. Besides encouraging spiritual renewal, Francke also practised the piety that he preached. He built a school for poor children and an orphanage.

When the Danish king Frederick could not find anyone prepared to go as missionaries to the Danish colonies in India, he sought the help from among the students at Halle. They prepared many missionaries for service around the world. During the eighteenth century alone, no fewer than sixty went from Halle to the mission field in Africa and Asia. Many of the Lutheran pastors in colonial America were Pietists educated at Halle.

- They insisted that pastors should have such faith in addition to their theological learning
- They were convinced that the world could be won for Christ through the conversion and Christian training of individuals
- Pietists stressed the importance of education⁶⁹

After leaving the Moravian Brethren seminary, he studied at the University of Halle; although this university had a Pietist beginning, by this time, Halle had embraced such enlightenment rationalist thinkers as Emanuel Kant and Spinoza.

Although Schleiermacher's Reformed and Moravian roots shaped his theology, by rejecting the authority of Scripture he ended up with a radically different theology that bore no resemblance to the Christ-centred and Word-honouring faith of the German Reformed Church, Moravians and German Pietists.

Take note:

Present-day Emergent Revisionists (evangelical heritage), are not unlike Schleiermacher, tinkering with the essential fundamentals of the Christian faith. Directed by their soulish *feeling-orientated* faith they are falling head-long in the same trap and ultimately will end-up, like Schleiermacher, with a Word-less, Christ-less, Cross-less man-made religion. A good contemporary example (New Zealand) would be Professor Lloyd Geering, a Presbyterian minister who began his liberal journey by questioning the truth of the bodily resurrection⁷⁰ and ended up a "Religious Atheist".

As we further analyse both the Emergent Church Revisionist and the Perichoresis movements you will see many more similarities to Schleiermacher views. In the next section, we will look at Schleiermacher's influence within evangelicalism today.

⁶⁹ Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), 228

⁷⁰ Geering, Lloyd, *Resurrection – a Symbol of Hope*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971).

8. SIMILARITIES OF SCHLEIERMACHER'S VIEWS WITH THOSE OF THE EMERGENT CHURCH REVISIONISTS

It may come as a surprise to you, that we are seeing Schleiermacher's unbiblical theological beliefs (repackaged) infiltrating many evangelical, pentecostal, charismatic churches and parachurches by the way of Emergent Revisionist teachers.

While doing my research on Friedrich Schleiermacher I discovered that I was not the only one who had made the connection between Schleiermacher's theology and the Emergent Revisionists. I came across some very interesting articles written by a number of people. One of them, Brandon Hensinger, wrote a paper titled, "*The 'Emerging Church' of the 1820s?*"⁷¹ He draws a comparison between the view of the nineteenth century Schleiermacher and the twenty-first century Emerging Church Movement, and especially with the Emergent Revisionists. He opens his paper with the question: *Did the Emerging Church attempt to Emerge in the 1820's?* He too, uses Louis Berkhoff's Systematic Theology⁷² to draw out these similarities. He writes,

"While reading Berkhoff, and at the same time reading more about the position of the emerging church...I found it to be amazing that there actually appears a very similar view to that of the emerging church which emerged by the hand of Schleiermacher."⁷³

But, others too have made the same connection. On the Lo-fi-tribe website I read the following comment:

"Today, Schleiermacher would probably earn the tag "Christian Humanist," or "Religious Humanist ... Some well know Christian Humanists (either by proclamation or action), include very recognizable names, past and present, such as: Tony Campolo, T. S. Eliot, Erasmus, Soren Kierkegaard, Thomas Merton, Blaise Pascal, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Jim Wallis."⁷⁴

In a blog posted at *The Spyglass*, Rob Harrison also makes some very interesting comments in his paper "*Fear of the culture and the American church.*" He writes,

"Fear of the culture has driven the church in a lot of ways over the last two or three centuries. The first part of the story is the birth and rise of modern liberal theology. (Note, I said liberal *theology*, not liberal *politics*; this isn't about whether one voted for John Kerry, or supports Barack Obama. Though it can be related, it's a different set of issues, as can be seen from the number of prominent evangelical leaders who are quite liberal politically, such as Ron Sider and Tony Campolo.) Liberal Protestantism, though its roots may go back further, began in earnest in 1799 when

⁷¹ For the full paper: Brandon Hensinger - <http://upchurch.wordpress.com/> January 31, 2007 - by [djbaker](#)

⁷² Louis Berkhoff (1873-1957) completed his Systematic Theology in 1932. In 1938, he decided to write a Preface To Systematic Theology, in which he describe the history, nature, and task of Systematic Theology (referred to as Dogmatic Theology by Berkhoff). Berkhoff does an excellent job of laying out what the history of Systematic Theology is,... He walks through history showing many different views of the discipline of systematics, and when he reaches the 1800's, he spends a significant amount of time discussing the views of Shleiermacher, a German theologian, who wrote several books during 1810-1840.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Lo-fi-tribe, *Schleiermacher and Humanism* posted April 18, 2009

Available: <http://www.lofitribe.com/schleiermacher-religious-humanism/>

Friedrich Schleiermacher published his book *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers.*⁷⁵

Harrison gives a very good overview of the history of Schleiermacher's theology and the reaction to it by the early twentieth century Fundamentalists and subsequent tensions that erupted between them and Evangelicals in the USA.

Summing up

Of course, much more can be said, but I trust that by now you will have gotten the drift of my proposition. My main purpose of this whole paper is not to blast the Emerging Church Movement as a whole, but rather to bring *awareness* as to what is happening in the Christian World. There are many developments associated with the Emerging Church Movement that I can live with, even though they may not necessarily excite me personally. In my personal view, some actions are nothing more than “waterless clouds” and unlikely to bring renewal or revival to the Church. However, when it comes to “how we do church,” naturally personal preferences will dictate opinion. Like Paul, I am not interested to do battle on such minor issues of “what to wear,” “what to eat or drink,” or how we ought to celebrate the Sabbath etc. But, when the essential truths of God's Word, like the gospel message, the deity of Christ, the Person of the Holy Spirit, Christ's substitutionary atonement, and the Trinity are denied or perverted then I must speak out. Then the time has come to stand up and proclaim the unadulterated Word of God!

Now just when you think that this is the end of the paper, you are wrong! There is one more issue that is causing some confusion within the Church. Although it may not come under the Emerging Church umbrella directly, it nevertheless does have strings to it—it is the issue of *perichoresis*.

⁷⁵ Rob Harrison *Fear of the culture and the American church*, posted Saturday, August 02, 2008. Available: <http://the-spyglass.blogspot.com/2008/08/fear-of-culture-and-american-church.html>

9. PERICHORESIS

(TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY)

INTERPENETRATION – MUTUAL INDWELLING WITHIN THE TRIUNE GOD

We are coming to yet another movement in this present-day “Age of Reason”. This parallel movement, in certain areas walks in step with that of the Emerging Church Movement. However, interestingly, while the Perichoresis Movement has at its core the mutual fellowship between the members of the Trinity, many others among the Emergent Revisionists are actually questioning the validity of the Trinity! Although the Perichoresis Movement clearly has a linkage to certain areas of that of the Emerging Church Movement, all the same, this Movement has a life altogether of its own.

Once again, we face a dual dilemma. For once more (as with the Emerging Church Movement) there are aspects to Perichoresis (Trinitarian Theology — also known as Social Trinity) that fall within historic orthodox Christianity, but equally, there are aspects to the present-day *application* and *interpretation* and *added-on views (such as on the atonement)* that fall well outside orthodoxy. Firstly, what do we mean by *perichoresis*?

A Definition of the Term Perichoresis

“Perichoresis” (Greek) or “circumincession” (Latin) is a term in Christian theology first used by the Church fathers, but now reinvigorated among contemporary figures such as Dr. C. Baxter Kruger⁷⁶, Jurgen Moltmann,⁷⁷ John Zizioulas⁷⁸, Miroslav Volf and Colin Gunton⁷⁹ amongst others. The term first appears in Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 330-389), but was explored more fully in the work of John of Damascus.⁸⁰

“Perichoresis” has been defined as,

“A term used in the theology of the Trinity to indicate the intimate union, *mutual indwelling*, or *mutual interpenetration* of the three members of the Trinity with each other.”⁸¹

The basic idea of perichoresis is to ascribe to God *the ability of communication between the members of the Godhead*. The theological tradition has viewed the indwelling as fellowship. John of Damacus (AD 676–749) described it as a “cleaving together”. He wrote,

“Such is the fellowship in the Godhead that the Father and the Son not only embrace each other, but they also enter into each other, permeate each other, and dwell in

⁷⁶ Baxter Kruger, *The Parable of the Dancing God* (Jackson: MS, USA, Perichoresis Press, 1994) Internet download www.perichoresis.org • www.dancingGod.org

⁷⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, Trans. Joseph Donceel (NY: Crossroad, 1997), 10-11

⁷⁸ John Zizioulas is perhaps the best known contemporary proponent of the social understanding of the Trinity, which he labels relational ontology. Wikipedia: John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1985)

⁷⁹ Colin Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993 and also *Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology in Schwobel and Gunton, eds., Persons: Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1991).

⁸⁰ Wikipedia.org/wiki/perichoresis

⁸¹ McKim, K. Donald. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1996).

each other. One in being, they are also always one in the intimacy of their friendship.”⁸²

Indwelling

The word “indwelling” rebuts the concept that each member of the Trinity is a separate and independent person. Cornelius Plantinga, another proponent of perichoresis or social trinity doctrine, explains it like this, “For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, and no fear of being transparent to another.”⁸³

A Modern-day Description of the Concept

“The break down of the term seems to include the prefix *Peri* which means ‘around’ and the stem *chorea* being related ‘to dance’. The perichoretic relationship within the Trinity is to be conceived of as a dynamic relationship. Like dancers in a performance there is a constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others.

Perichoresis describes the ongoing mutual self-giving and mutual indwelling within the divine community of the persons of the Trinity. It emphasizes that each divine person harbours the others at the centre of his being.”⁸⁴

Perichoresis Applied to the Trinity — John of Damascus

It was John of Damascus who in the mid-seventh century took the existing concept of perichoresis and applied it to the doctrine of the Trinity.⁸⁵ He applied the term *interpenetration* or *mutual indwelling* to the *relational* aspect existing between the members of the Triune Godhead.

The Rev Angus Stewart writes the following about John of Damascus’ view of perichoresis,

“John was a Trinitarian thinker rooted in and seeking to develop the faith set forth in the writings of the church fathers and the ecumenical creeds. The creed drafted at Nicea (325) declared that the Son was *homoousios* (of the same essence or nature or being) with the Father. Later, the Holy Spirit was also confessed as of the same essence or nature or being with the Father and the Son. Since all three divine Persons possess the one infinite being of God, they must mutually penetrate and indwell each other wholly. Thus the homoousios leads to the perichoresis.”⁸⁶

In his exposition of the *Orthodox Faith* John of Damascus writes,

“The subsistences [i.e., the three Persons] dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescence, or commingling or confusion. And there is one and the same motion: for there is one impulse and one motion of the three subsistences, which is not to be observed in any created nature.”⁸⁷

⁸² Wikipedia

⁸³ Plantinga, Cornelius. *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 28.

⁸⁴ Adapted from Fini. *357 Magnum* — November 3, 2006)

⁸⁵ Previously the concept had only been applied to the *incarnation—two natures of Christ (Hypostatic Union)* and in this early version of *nature-perichoresis*, there was no clear concept of *interpenetration*.

⁸⁶ Rev. Angus Stewart, *John of Damascus & the Perichoresis - The Development of the Doctrine of the Covenant* (5), (British Reformed Journal) page 44 - <http://www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk/articles/development>

⁸⁷ St. John of Damascus Exposition of the Orthodox Faith 1.14

John's perichoretic understanding of God went somewhat beyond the accepted orthodox faith of his day; nevertheless, it could be accommodated within the Nicene-Constantinople and Chalcedon (creeds) understanding of God. Though it appears important conceptual changes have taken place from the way perichoresis was understood by the Early Church fathers to what the concept means today, (We will address these changes later in this paper). Present-day perichoresis finds its roots in what is generally known as *Trinitarian Theology*.

Contemporary Trinitarian Theologians

Twentieth century Trinitarian theology advanced predominantly in the West largely through the work of Karl Barth and his students, including the three brothers: Thomas F. Torrance, James B. Torrance and David Torrance, and their students.

In the twenty-first century, there are hundreds of Trinitarian theologians scattered among many denominations, including Ray Anderson, Elmer Colyer, Michael Jinkins, C. Baxter Kruger, Alan Torrance, Trevor Hart, and the late Colin Gunton.

Key Biblical Texts Used to Support Perichoresis

The concept of perichoresis has primarily been deduced from the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel, more so than the synoptic Gospels, reveals the *eternally existing relationship* between the three Persons of the Godhead.

Jesus:

- *“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; **even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You**, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”⁸⁸*
- *“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ... ‘My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but **I and the Father** who sent Me.’”⁸⁹*
- *“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, **so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.**”⁹⁰*
- *“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him...Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? **‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. ‘Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.’**”⁹¹*

It is unmistakably clear from these beautiful revelatory words of Jesus, that from eternity there is in existence a loving, caring, and mutually honouring relationship between the three Members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although God remains an incomprehensible mystery to us mere humans, yet God in his wisdom has revealed more than enough—through his Word, his Son and the created world around us—for us to come to know him and put our trust in him. For his estranged human sons and daughters to enter into a trust relationship with him he revealed his omnipotent power, omniscient knowledge of all things, his ability to be present everywhere at once, his overriding sovereignty, his unchangeable nature (immutability) as well as his eternal existence

⁸⁸ John 17:20-21

⁸⁹ John 8:12-16

⁹⁰ John 10:37-39

⁹¹ John 14:8-11

which has no beginning and no end. However, beside all these incredible natural attributes, he has also revealed, in both words and actions, that his loving-kindness knows no boundaries, his holiness is without question, his goodness is unsurpassed, his faithfulness knows no limits, his mercies “are new every morning” and are always in keeping with his justice for he is “just in all of his ways”. Above all, he has revealed himself in his Son “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...”⁹² So far we have only described a fraction of who the God of the Bible really is! What is clear here though is that God is *personal*. The God of the Bible is a Trinity of beings who communicate, who honour and share a (perichoretic) eternal love relationship of the highest order possible with each other.

*Perichoresis Applied to the Church*⁹³

We could also relate the concept of perichoresis to the community life of Christians within the *Church*. For as Paul writes, “For by One Spirit we are all baptized into one body...”⁹⁴ Yet, just as there is only one God, there is also only one Church—*His body*.⁹⁵

The Church is a singular body made up of many members. Like the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity, the Church with its many members is but one body in unity.⁹⁶ The Church is a relational entity, for just as in the communal relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in perichoresis, so the Church too should manifest a loving relationship between one another in the body. The three Persons of the Trinity have perfect love for one another in their perichoretic relationship. We are to be likewise, Paul wrote, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour.”⁹⁷

***“By loving one another the way God loves,
the Church reflects the perichoresis of the triune God.”⁹⁸***

Summing up

This understanding of the Greek word “perichoresis,” with some variations, is well within the boundaries of historic orthodox Christianity. Personally, I find this kind of perichoresis comforting and it fits my understanding of God’s self-revelation very well.

So then, this brings us to the question, “Where does the present-day application of perichoresis and added-on views move *outside* the boundaries of historic, orthodox Christianity?”

⁹² John 14:9

⁹³ Adapted from Fini. *357 Magnum* — November 3, 2006)

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:13

⁹⁵ Ephesians 1:22-23

⁹⁶ Romans 12:5

⁹⁷ Romans 12:10

⁹⁸ Fini. *357 Magnum* — November 3, 2006)

10. WHERE PERICHORESIS — TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY — ENTERS THE DANGER ZONE

Before we look at some “red flag” issues associated with Perichoresis/Trinitarian theology, it is important to state the sincerity of many Christian brothers and sisters who hold to this particular view. Like with Calvin and Arminius, often their followers enlarge or build onto their views resulting in extremism not at all intended by them. We find much the same among those holding to a Perichoresis/Trinitarian theology.

Whatever the case may be, there are areas of concern regarding this Movement and in this section, I will highlight some.

(1) An Unbiblical “Oneness” of the Church with the Trinity

There are some, today, who incorporate the body of Christ—the Church *into* the exclusive triune perichoretic union of the Godhead to such a degree that it becomes not only unbiblical, but also heretical. In some cases, the unbridgeable boundary between God and man becomes so ambiguous that it leads to apostasy. The scriptures that are often the cause of confusion, (because of incorrect interpretation) mostly come from John’s Gospel. Jesus, at the Last Supper, prayed the following prayer:

*“...that they may all be one; even as **You Father are in Me and I in You**, that **they also may be in Us**, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The Glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one; **I in them and You in Me**, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me.”⁹⁹*

“Oneness”

At first sight, these are very compelling scriptures supporting an extraordinary “oneness” of the Trinity with that of the Church. Jesus clearly prays that, as he is *in* the Father and the Father *in* the Son, we too may be *in* the Father and the Son. However, when you take some distance from these scriptures and look at the bigger picture you will immediately realise that Christ never intended the Church to become a kind of “fourth partner” within the triune Godhead. That would be wholly impossible and unscriptural. Why? God is *uncreated* whereas we are *created*. He is *infinite* whereas we are *finite*. God is without beginning or end whereas humans clearly do have a beginning. Therefore, the created can never become part of the essence of the uncreated. If that were possible then we would take on divinity and be God. Of course, that would be utter nonsense! Clearly, that is not what Jesus implied when he prayed for his disciples and the future Church.

So then, what did Jesus mean when he prayed that wonderful High Priestly Prayer? Firstly, the primary emphasis here is on unity *between* the believers. In verse 21 Jesus prays, “...that they may all be one.” In verse 22 Jesus said again, “...that they may be one, *just as we are one*.” The emphasis here is on Jesus’ own unity with the Father as a *model* for his disciples (and future believers) to follow.

⁹⁹ John 17:21-22

Although this still leaves us with a perceived dilemma, because of Jesus' extraordinary prayer about us being "*in the Son*" and because of his perichoretic relationship with the Father "*in the Father*."

Once again, we need to take a wider view of God's Word to be able to interpret these verses rightly. Many Scripture references deal with God *entering* into our lives. By his Spirit, the *uncreated* God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) makes his abode within *created* humanity. "...He [Holy Spirit] abides with you and will be *in* you" Jesus said.¹⁰⁰ However, just because God's presence is now *within* man and thus in a unique way "united with God," God always remains the *uncreated*, transcendent-eternal God, while humans will always be his *created* sons and daughters! God, by indwelling us with his Spirit enters into a Spirit-to-spirit personal relationship with us, and so in a small way, we do enter into the intimacy of the perichoretic fellowship that exists between the Father, Son and, Holy Spirit. Now let us look at where this "oneness" with God has the potential to go off track and enter the danger zone.

Eastern and New Age "Oneness" Views

Many who are involved in eastern religions, various cults and New Age groups embrace the *pantheistic* concept of man's "oneness" with God. In eastern religions and in New Age terminology this concept usually refers to the *Higher or True Self*, which is considered to be God.

Personhood of God and Pantheism

Pantheists believe that "*God is all*" and "*all is God*". Thus, all matter or substance is God. *Everything is God*, and *God is everything*. God is synonymous with the material universe. God is simply the sum total of the universe. Pantheism teaches that God is "the ground of all being," or an "impersonal force" or "the planetary consciousness" in human beings. They do not hold God to be independent or separate from creation. This implies that God, as an *impersonal force* is in some mystical way connected to all of creation. In essence, that makes us (plus Satan and fallen angels) also God!

This is very different from the biblical revelation of a personal, independent, transcendent, and self-existent Creator—who, although created us in his own image and likeness—remains at all times distinct from us. The truth of God's personhood stands totally opposed to *impersonal* pantheism. Pantheists propose a created order that is co-eternal with God, whereas classical, orthodox Christians affirm that *all* of creation is created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and thus has a definite beginning. *Only* God is eternal. Furthermore, orthodox Christians believe the God of the Bible to be wholly separate from his creation (transcendent), even though his personal Holy Spirit is everywhere-present in the material universe (God is immanent). There is no place, where we can hide from God, "Where can I go from Your Spirit?"¹⁰¹

Pantheists, however, believe that an *impersonal* universal "*force*" pervades the whole cosmos—which in turn produces an awakening of unimagined powers of the mind. To get in touch with this impersonal "force", they teach various forms of meditation (e.g. TM, Yoga). Others try "tree hugging," or practice various forms of mysticism to get "in touch" with this impersonal life force.

Panentheism: "all-in-God"

To complicate matters further there are those (including within the Emergent Revisionist Stream), who embrace and promote an offshoot of pantheism called *Panentheism*. What is panentheism?

"It is a belief system which posits that God exists and interpenetrates every part of nature, and timelessly extends beyond as well... In panentheism...the cosmos exists within God, who in turn "pervades" or is "in" the cosmos.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ John 14:17

¹⁰¹ Psalm 139:7

¹⁰² Wikipedia

Briefly put,

- in **pantheism**: “*God is the whole*”
- in **panentheism**: “*The whole is in God*”

Although panentheism asserts that God is greater than the universe it does claim, however, that all of the universe is contained *within* God. While panentheists accept that God is a personal Being, however, they also believe that he created the whole material universe as a part of himself. This brings it awfully close to its pantheistic cousin!

Pastor Ken Silva writes,

“But for now we consider that if the world is all a part of God anyway...then all of what God created would already be divine—including Satan himself”.

Since this would naturally also include mankind, then to the panentheist human beings would have to be considered as a part of God, or deity. In eastern religions and in New Age terminology this concept is usually referred to the Higher or True Self...¹⁰³

That panentheism is within the danger zone is clear from this excerpt from Sallie McFague’s book “*Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology And Economy For A Planet In Peril*” where she describes her full “conversion” to panentheism as follows:

“As I have come to realize that we all live and move and have our being in God, the names of each person, species, creature, and element are superimposed over God’s name. God is reality; God is the source of reality of each of us. **Panentheism seeing the world as in God**—puts God’s “name” first, but each of our names are included and preserved in their distinctiveness **within the divine reality**” [emphasis added].¹⁰⁴

This panentheistic view of “*all of creation being in God*” has major implications as to the need for redemption. Some of the proponents of this view have made statements saying that the heart of the gospel message is not Christ’s atoning sacrifice, but a “becoming aware of our already-existing Oneness in God.” The Christian faith is nothing more than just another “way” to God. Evangelism leading to conversion (being born again) becomes completely meaningless. This is exactly what we are seeing in some of the Emergent Revisionists teachings. Brian McLaren in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy* writes on page 254 that the Christian faith “should become (in the name of Jesus Christ) a welcome friend to all religions”.

Dr Al Mohler makes the following comments on McLaren beliefs: “McLaren claims to affirm that Christians should give witness to their faith in Jesus Christ. But, before you assume this means an affirmation of Christian missions, consider this statement by McLaren:

‘I must add, though, that I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all?) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. This will be hard, you say, and I agree. But frankly, it’s not at all easy to be a follower of Jesus in many 'Christian' religious contexts, either.’”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ BRIAN MCLAREN AND EVANGELICAL PANENTHEISM (PART 2) As posted by Ken Silva, pastor-teacher at January 19, 2006 - apprising.org/2009/08/brian-mclaren-and-evangelical-panentheism/

¹⁰⁴ BRIAN MCLAREN AND EVANGELICAL PANENTHEISM (PART 4) As Posted by Ken Silva, pastor-teacher at January 22, 2006 - apprising.org/2009/08/brian-mclaren-and-evangelical-panentheism/

¹⁰⁵ Ibid (part 5)

How could this view possibly be harmonised with the traditional view of God found in the Bible and with the historic orthodox Christian faith that springs from it?

What Does Historic Orthodox Biblical Christianity Believe about God?

Historic Orthodox Christianity believes that God is omnipresent (everywhere present), but at the same time separate from his creation. Another way of putting it is that he is *immanent*, yet *transcendent*. There is often confusion about these two divine natural or incommunicable attributes of God.

As immanent God, he pervades and sustains the universe, yet he is always distinct from it (transcends). He is everywhere, yet not part of everything. He is personally intimately involved, yet remains distinct. Though he is the only true transcendent and sovereign God, nevertheless he is personally involved in each of our lives. He is our true source—*from him*. He is our dynamic life—*through him*. He is our ultimate destination—*to him are all things*. For some further reading on God's immanence and transcendence, see Appendix 4.

Summing up

What we are seeing here is nothing less than a renaissance of Gnosticism. Precious words of Jesus perverted to mean something he never said. The total opposite to what he taught! His prayer for our union with the Triune God *never* implied an “oneness” of the kind we see in the unbiblical added-on interpretation of perichoresis, pagan pantheism or panentheism. If we follow this track, we will end up with a Christ-less, atonement-void Gospel, and Universalism (universal reconciliation-salvation).

(2) The Eastern Orthodox View of Theosis – the Deification of Humanity – and Perichoresis

There is yet another view that needs some attention here, for it lies at the root of the present-day shift in theology witnessed through the emergence of both the Emergent and Perichoresis movements.

We have already discovered how the views of the seventh century Eastern Church father and mystic John of Damascus has influenced the present-day Perichoresis Movement. However, John also greatly influenced the Eastern Orthodox churches of his day. His views are still very evident in Eastern Orthodox theology today and it is just these theological views that set the Eastern Church apart from the Western Church. When we analyse the present-day Perichoresis Movement you will find that much of its teaching is rooted in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It is important, for that reason, that we have at least some understanding of the theological differences between the Eastern and Western churches of Christendom.

Whereas Western Christianity lays strong emphasis on the *atonement* as the central issue of the Christian faith, Eastern Christianity, however, stresses the *theosis—the deification of humanity* as the central focus of Christianity. The following quotes are from some well-known Eastern Church fathers about what they believed about *theosis*:

Irenaeus (c.115-202)

*“If the Word is made man, it is that men might become gods.”*¹⁰⁶

Basil the Great (c. 330-379)

*“From the Holy Spirit there is the likeness of God, and the highest of all things to be desired, to become God.”*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Clendenin Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 117

Athanasius (c. 293-373)

*“For he became human that we might be divine.”*¹⁰⁸

A Scripture that is often used to support this view is 2Peter 1:4,

“For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature...”

Those of us who have lived under the Western Churches’ (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) emphasis on the substitutionary atonement find the Eastern focus on theosis very strange indeed, even unsettling. Therefore, it is no wonder, when confronted with the theosis teaching, alarm bells start ringing loudly!

The History of Theosis – Origen – Orthodox Church

Although John of Damascus accentuated the “Theosis” theology, its roots go back as far as the latter part of the first century. We have already quoted Irenaeus (c.115-202), who wrote, *“If the Word is made man, it is that men might become gods.”* However, it is probably the scholar and theologian Origen (c.185-254), who developed the concept of theosis. Tony Lane makes the following comment, “Origen’s real essence of salvation is becoming ‘deified’ through contemplating him...this concept of salvation is thoroughly Greek and has more in common with Gnosticism than with biblical Christianity”.¹⁰⁹ Much of Origen’s theology (and many of the Church fathers) is infused with Platonism. Origen’s understanding of the Trinity clearly reflects this. He believed in a three-tier or graded Trinity—meaning that the Father was greater than the Son, who in turn was greater than the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, according to Origen, the Father alone is “true” God. The Son is the same as the Father, but at a lower level and subsequently the Holy Spirit at a lower level from the Son. This of course is heretical teaching and greatly conflicts with the biblical revelation of God and the ensuing creeds of the ecumenical councils.

When we understand his position on the Trinity, then we can also see why he held to a perichoretic view of the Trinity. For he believed, that just as the Son participates in the Father, so do we—the Church—participate into the perichoretic fellowship through the Son with the Father. “Thus the Son participates in the deity of the Father and we in turn are ‘deified’ through the participation in the Son”.¹¹⁰ It is *Theosis—the deification of humanity*—that is the central focus of the Eastern Orthodox churches rather than the *atonement*, which is the central focal point of the Western churches.

Whereas the Church father Tertullian is generally regarded as the most influential theologian of the Western Latin Church, Origen’s influence was paramount in the Greek Eastern Church and shaped its subsequent scholars and theologians.

The Greek Church father Athanasius of Alexandria (the one who held his ground against Arius in the controversy about Jesus’ deity) believed “that when God descended, assumed humanity, and was ‘incarnated,’ he opened the way for people to ascend to him, assume divinity, and become ‘ingodded.’”¹¹¹ He wrote, “He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity.”¹¹² Other Cappadocian

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 117

¹⁰⁸ *The Incarnation of the Word* 4, 20, 54: Lane Tony, *The Lion Concise Christian Thought* (Herts: Lion Publishing, 1984), 31

¹⁰⁹ Lane Tony, *The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought* (Herts: (Lion Publishing, 1984), 23

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 24

¹¹¹ Clendenin Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 121

¹¹² Ephrem the Syrian, in *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 72-74 as cited in Clendenin Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 129

Church fathers who embraced and taught various forms of deification were, among others, Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Basil of Caesarea (330-379), and Gregory of Palamas (1296-1359). The Council of Constantinople (1351) accepted Gregory's leading ideas, including theosis, as doctrine. Although this was not an Ecumenical Council, nevertheless, its rulings were accepted and still recognised by all Eastern Orthodox churches today.

Defining Theosis

Now that we have a basic historical perspective of the development of theosis, it is important that we understand the Eastern churches definition of *theosis*—*deification of humanity*. There is much room for confusion here, and the potential for perichoresis proponents in the West to misrepresent this doctrine.

So what does it mean to be “divinised,” or to “become god”? To many in the Eastern churches theosis is a mystery, it simply cannot be defined. Tony Lane writes,

“Even Gregory of Palamas, who devoted an entire treatise to the subject, is nevertheless reluctant to describe the indescribable: ‘...we have never dared to write about deification. But now, since there is a need to speak, we will speak, reverently, with the Lord’s grace, though to describe it is beyond our skill. For even when spoken of, deification remains unutterable: as the Fathers say, it can be identified only by those who have been blessed with it.’”¹¹³

An analogy sometimes used to describe deification is that of the heating of a piece of iron in fire. As the heat permeates the iron, it becomes transformed without ceasing to be iron. Similarly man becomes permeated by the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁴

As you can see, there clearly is reluctance on part of the Eastern churches to give definition to theosis. Perhaps a better way to gain some grasp of this concept is by finding out what theosis is not.

What Theosis is Not — It is Not Pantheism

All Eastern theologians, both modern and ancient, categorically repudiate any hint of pantheism. Whatever deification means, it certainly does not imply that humanity becomes one with God to the degree that his essence or human nature is lost in the process. Tony Lane explains it as follows:

“There is a real and genuine union of the believer with God, but it is not a literal fusion of confusion in which the integrity of human nature is compromised. Orthodox consistently rejects the idea that humans participate in the essence or nature of God. Rather, we remain distinctly human by nature but participate in God by the divine energies or grace. At no point, even when deified, is our humanity diminished or destroyed”.¹¹⁵

Maximus the Confessor wrote:

“All that God is, *except for an identity in ousia* [substance or essence], one becomes when one is deified by grace. When the Logos became man and deified us, he changed human nature ‘not in its essential nature but in its quality.’”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Gregory of Palamas, *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* 3.1.32 (in Mantzaridis, *Deification*, 127). As cited by Clendenin, Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 130

¹¹⁴ Mollard, Einar, *Christendom* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1959), 21-22

¹¹⁵ Clendenin, Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 130

¹¹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Book of Ambiguities* 41 (cited by Pelican, *Spirit*, 267) As cited by Clendenin, Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 130

Western Theology versus Eastern Theology

The theological differences between Eastern and Western Christendom may have come as somewhat of a surprise to those unfamiliar with Eastern Orthodox theology. We would have expected the redemption through the Atonement—Christ’s work accomplished at the Cross—to be the central tenet of the Christian faith everywhere. Not so! Redemption accomplished by Christ in Orthodox theology is not only connected with his crucifixion, but also with his whole life. It was through the Incarnation that God and man became one and that salvation became possible. One of the best examples of what divides the Western Church from the East is the doctrine of justification. This doctrine, so prevalent in the West, is almost totally absent from Eastern thought. The sixteenth century Reformer Martin Luther insisted that Christianity would stand or fall with this doctrine. He stressed the idea that God declares sinners righteous based on the perfect righteousness of Christ that is credited to the believer. This certainly is very different from the notion of mystical union with Christ. John Calvin described justification by faith as the “hinge on which all true religion turns”. He wrote, “Just as a man deemed innocent by an impartial judge, is said to be justified, so a sinner is said to be justified by God when he asserts his righteousness.”¹¹⁷ Both Luther and Calvin based their teaching on Paul’s letters, especially his letter to the Romans, where Paul structures his teaching in terms of divine law and justice, and that justification by faith answers the question of how guilty humanity can stand before a just and holy God. This teaching, which is so central in the Western Church, is in total contrast to Eastern Orthodox theology that places the accent on *all* of Christ’s life, including the Incarnation, and *through* the Incarnation the mystical union—deification. Thus, the process described in the Western Church as justification and sanctification is called deification in the Orthodox Church. Tony Lane makes the following comment,

“In the history of Orthodox theology, on the other hand, it is startling to observe the near total absence of any mention of the idea of justification by faith. Justification by faith has received ‘short shrift’ in Orthodoxy; in fact, the most important text of Orthodox theology, John of Damascus’s *Orthodox Faith*, never even mentions the idea.”¹¹⁸

It is this issue, more than any other, that divides the Eastern church from the Western Church, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Whereas the Western churches are mostly silent on the concept of theosis and speak about the idea of salvation in juridical terms, the Eastern churches in turn largely neglect the concept of justification by faith in favour of deification.

Entering the danger zone

What we are seeing in the present-day Perichoresis and Emergent-Revisionist movements is an embracing of some of these Eastern Orthodox views, and in doing so substituting the atonement-centred teaching of the Western Church with those of the theosis-centred teaching of the Eastern Church. That is the real concern!

Theosis—deification, in the sense of “becoming Christ-like” or “becoming conformed to the image of His Son,”¹¹⁹ is certainly not unscriptural. Therefore, in Western Christianity, “deification” is understood more in the context of *sanctification*—becoming like Christ. Sanctification is a life-long process that begins immediately after salvation. Through the new birth, John Wesley said, “We are safe and secure “in Christ” (justification) but not yet “like Christ.”¹²⁰ It is here that the Holy Spirit begins the on-going, life-long process of sanctification—becoming like Christ—in the life of the believer.

¹¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.2

¹¹⁸ Clendenin Daniel B., *Eastern Orthodox Christianity – A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 123

¹¹⁹ Romans 8:29

¹²⁰ Lewis, Greville P., *An Approach to Christian Doctrine* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 121

There is yet another matter that takes this theological shift even further into the danger zone. Namely, the undue importance placed on the *Incarnation* at the expense of the atonement. This too is a cause for great concern.

11. PERICHORESIS:

CHRIST'S INCARNATION IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE ATONEMENT

THE GOSPEL

Some have allowed Trinitarian/Perichoresis—mutual indwelling of the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit together with the Church's participation in it—to become a redemptive model in itself, *without* the explicit need for Christ's substitutionary atonement. They argue, that the reason Christ came into this world was to reconcile it to the Father (which is right), however, they then go on to say that, this reconciliation was not accomplished through Christ death on the cross, but rather through his *Incarnation*. They claim, when Christ became human he *adopted* [deified] all of humanity into the perichoretic relationship of the Triune God.

Baxter Kruger, among others, holds to this erroneous view, he writes:

“Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity and he is fully God and fully man. Because he created everything and everything inheres in him [panentheism], all of creation was crucified and resurrected with him (John 1:3-4), Colossians 1:15-20). *Because divinity and humanity meets in him, mankind are now participants in the perichoresis or the divine dance of love within the Trinity*” [italics mine].¹²¹

Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J. in his paper, “*The Incarnation: God's Gift of Love*” writes,

“The answer most frequently handed on in everyday religion emphasizes redemption. This view returns to the creation story and sees in Adam and Eve's sin a fundamental alienation from God, a separation so profound that God must intervene to overcome it. *The Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, is considered God's action to right this original wrong*” [italics mine].¹²²

Though Overberg is right in pointing out the immense importance (often overlooked) of the Word becoming flesh, however he does so *at the expense* of God's redemptive mission and the substitutionary atonement. He is even more explicit when he explains that the atonement is an enigma in his eyes,

“For many of us who have lived a lifetime with the atonement view, it may be hard at first to hear the minority report. Yet it may offer some wonderful surprises for our relationship with God. From this perspective, God is appreciated with a different emphasis. God is not an angry or vindictive God, demanding the suffering and death of Jesus as a payment for past sin. God is, instead, a gracious God, sharing divine life and love in creation and in the Incarnation (like parents sharing their love in the

¹²¹ Kruger C. Baxter, *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited*. (Cited from Wikipedia *Trinitarian Universalism* 8/06/2008).

¹²² <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an1201.asp>

life of a new child). Evidently, such a view can dramatically change our image of God, our celebration of Christmas, our day-by-day prayer.”¹²³

The above views contradict the biblical gospel message, because the centrality of the Cross is always paramount in Scripture. By the centrality of the Cross we mean Christ’s death to be a *substitutionary* act—Christ died in my place “...in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us”¹²⁴

To substitute the Atonement with the Incarnation will lead to a cross-less “gospel” and Universalism (more about that later). Before we continue let us firstly establish the traditional historical Church’s view of the Incarnation.

The Traditional Orthodox View of the Incarnation

The church’s view of the Incarnation is based on the scriptural revelation of God “becoming flesh” in Jesus Christ “And the Word became flesh, and dwelled among us...” the apostle John wrote.¹²⁵ In his first letter, John’s exposition of the Incarnation is as follows: “What was from the beginning, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us...”¹²⁶

Some facts we should know about the Incarnation:

The Three Basic Facts of the Incarnation

- 1) The *divine nature* of the Person of Christ
- 2) The *human nature* of the Person of Christ
- 3) The *hypostatic union* of the Person of Christ — the mystical union (*unio mystica*) of the human with the divine nature within the divine Person of Christ

Although the divinity of Christ has been questioned from the very beginning, the scriptures are unequivocal regarding its truthfulness. That Christ became human is also clear from Scripture even though the first and second century *Gnostics*—who regarded all matter as sinful—could not reconcile Christ’s human nature with his divine nature. After much debate, the Church Councils reached a final authoritative decision regarding the divine and human natures of Christ (hypostatic union) by the way of the Chalcedon Creed (AD 451 - See appendix 3). It explicitly states that through the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity—the Word—became fully human, yet he continued to be fully divine. There was no intermingling of the the two natures or mutual confusion of natures. This is a great mystery indeed and simply cannot be fully comprehended by us mere humans. Paul wrote, “...Christ Jesus, who, although existed in the form of God, *did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...*”¹²⁷ To add to the mystery, as the Son ascended with his human body into heaven, he will return with the same body and reign eternally as God-man. *Maranatha! – Come Lord Jesus!*

Incarnation, or Atonement?

Now let us come back to those who claim that at the time of Christ’s incarnation *all humanity* was *adopted* or *deified* into the fellowship of the triune God, rather than through the finished work of Christ on the Cross—the *Atonement*.

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ Romans 5:8b

¹²⁵ John 1:14. Cf. Psalm 2:7

¹²⁶ 1 John 1:1-2. See also Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:15; 1 John 1:2; Hebrews 2:14

¹²⁷ Philippians 2:6

The example often used to support this unbiblical view is Luke Chapter 15. There we find three parables: *the Lost Sheep*, *the Lost Coin*, and *the Prodigal Son*. In all three parables, but especially in the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son, do we see both the loving shepherd and the loving father seeking and embracing that which was lost. The parable of the prodigal son especially brings out the fact that the loving father accepts his wayward son back into the family.

Rightly, they point out, that one reason why Jesus told this parable was to correct the erroneous perception held by the religious leaders, who saw God as an angry judge, ready to pounce every time someone missed the mark. Unfortunately, they replaced this erroneously held God-understanding with an excessive emphasis on the loving father's "*unconditional*" forgiveness and acceptance of the wayward son. They call attention to the waiting father, who seemingly takes no notice of the son's confession, "*Father I have sinned...I am no longer worthy to be called your son...*"¹²⁸, but instead embraces him, restores him and calls for a party "For the son of mine was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."¹²⁹

Of course, we can all identify with "the loving father" in the Parable for indeed this is very much God's heart to all sinners, who, like the prodigal son, come to their senses and return home with a contrite heart. Jesus spoke lovingly about how his Father loved the world so much that he sent his Son into the world, "not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."¹³⁰ God is always the initiator when it comes to reconciliation or salvation. The problem here is that some have drawn a wrong conclusion from this Parable. They stress the "unconditional" forgiveness of the father in the parable to such a degree that it contravenes the true gospel message. For, if we go back again to John's Gospel, you will notice that there are conditions to receiving forgiveness. Firstly, we have to believe in Christ "*Whoever believes* in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." As Paul puts it so beautifully "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."¹³¹ Secondly, even though Christ did not come to judge, he does however say that, "...*he who does not believe* has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Thomas F. Torrance's view on unconditional universal forgiveness borders on *Universalism* (more about that later) when he writes,

"Because all sins have been paid for, *all sins are forgiven*. Divine forgiveness *precedes human response* and this forgiveness is both love and judgement because to say, 'I love you' and 'You have sinned against me'. Man can respond by agreeing with the judgment (repentance) and receive both the love and forgiveness or he can deny the judgment and refuse God's love and forgiveness" [emphasis mine].¹³²

Unconditional Forgiveness?

If we take unconditional forgiveness too far (universal forgiveness) then Christ's death on the Cross becomes entirely pointless.

Miroslav Volf, a proponent of this unbiblical view, writes,

"Christ 'died for all, and therefore all died' (2 Corinthians 5:14). So 'Christ's death doesn't replace our death. It enacts it.' And 'What happened to him happened to us. When he was condemned, we were condemned. When he died, we died.' Since the

¹²⁸ Luke 15:18-19,21

¹²⁹ Luke 15:24

¹³⁰ John 3:16-17

¹³¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

¹³² Torrance James B. *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, ISBN 0830818952 (Quoted from Wikipedia *Trinitarian Universalism* 8/06/2008)

sinner then participates in Christ's death, '*Death then separates* the doer from the [guilt of his] deed.'

The implications of Christ's death for 'all' are 'immense.' 'All means all without exception.' So God doesn't wait for confession to forgive; '*God forgives before we confess.*' Does that mean God unjustly overlooks unconfessed sin? No, he still condemns sin, and he does so by forgiving it. To forgive someone is to implicitly acknowledge the fact that they have sinned; that implicit acknowledgment, then, is a form of condemnation, i.e. justice" [italics mine].¹³³

As you can see this clearly is not in agreement with Scripture. It demeans Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross. Baxter Kruger in his paper, "*Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love*" quotes Vladimir Lossky, who, like Kruger, denies the traditional view of Christ's substitutionary sacrificial death, he writes:

"Vladimir Lossky contends that the Western preoccupation with the redeeming death of Jesus as a sacrifice *to God* leaves us in a place where the larger emphasis of the New Testament and of the early Church, 'that God made Himself man that man might become God,' seems to be strange and abnormal."¹³⁴

Kruger explains that Christ death must be seen in context of our union into the Triune Godhead. Again, he quotes Lossky,

"Lossky, and the [Eastern] Orthodox tradition, include the death of Christ within the larger purpose of the Triune God's union with us and our union with the Trinity. Paul's way of saying the same thing is by way of the concept of adoption. "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself."¹³⁵

Kruger comments,

"The point here is that the larger purpose of the Father, Son and Spirit for humanity is not merely the deliverance from sin and corruption (though this is critical), *but our exaltation into the very trinitarian life of God* [italics mine]...Logically speaking, when the great apostle stated that the Father predestined us to adoption before the foundation of the world, he is setting forward the ultimate framework within which we are to understand the coming of Jesus. It is about relationship, about communion, about *union* with the very life of the Father, Son and Spirit [italics mine]."¹³⁶

As you can see, the emphasis here is on *adoption* accomplished through Christ's *incarnation*, rather than through the finished work of Christ on the Cross. This is a serious departure from orthodoxy! Kruger, "The issue of reconciliation *is not* about satisfying *legal justice* [penal substitutionary atonement]; it is about how God gets through our darkness and makes Himself knowable to us" [italics mine].

What he means here is that God (like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal son) has never stopped loving us and has never rejected us. It is *we*, starting with Adam, and subsequently Israel,

¹³³ <http://www.9marks.org/CC/article/0,,PTID314526%7CCHID598014%7CCIID2249680,00.html> as quoted from Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge*, chs. 4-6; esp. 147, 164).

¹³⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 98-99. - Baxter Kruger: *Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love*. perichoresis.org dancingGod.org

¹³⁵ Ephesians 1:5

¹³⁶ Baxter Kruger: *Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love*. perichoresis.org dancingGod.org

who have formed a warped understanding of God. In our minds, we have created a cruel, vengeful, angry unapproachable god. According to Torrance and Kruger, the problem that has separated men from God is *our delusional and warped understanding of him and not sin!*

Schleiermacher Revisited

It is extraordinary that it was Schleiermacher, who used this exact same mistaken premise! About justification by faith (based on the substitutionary atonement), Louis Berkhof wrote that Schleiermacher based his belief on the notion that justification by faith meant little more than *the sinner becoming conscious of his mistake in thinking that God was angry with him* [italics mine].¹³⁷ As said before, this God-understanding is absurd. It makes a complete mockery of a loving Father who sent his loving Son to an unloving world, not to judge it, but to save it! For Schleiermacher, salvation and grace through faith in the finished work of Christ were irrelevant issues. Because he denied the existence of objective-guilt there was no need for salvation and grace in the traditional Christian sense. All one needed was to come to a “religious consciousness” of the fact that God loves us unconditionally.

Schleiermacher believed the atonement to be nothing more than an influence, for God simply does not require retributive justice, and thus there is no need for punishment of sins committed. God’s justice is not compromised, and so he can pardon whomever he wills without the need for Christ’s sacrificial death. Let me quote again what Louis Berkhof wrote about Schleiermacher’s belief of the atonement, “...the death of Christ did not atone for sin; neither did it move God to pardon sin. Christ saves men by revealing to them the way of faith and obedience as the way of eternal life.”¹³⁸ It all sounds all awfully familiar!

Kruger bases much of his teaching on that of Thomas F. Torrance, and so he quotes him as follows,

“Torrance has here thrown almost the entire Western discussion of reconciliation on its head. Far from being about appeasing the wrath of an offended and angry deity, or about fulfilling God’s honor code, or pretending there is no problem, reconciliation is about the Triune God deliberately embracing us in the twisted trauma of our fallenness and drawing so near to us in real relationship that *we feel* the hellish anguish of our estrangement, and lash out against him.”¹³⁹

Kruger and Torrance’s views are based on the *mistaken premise* that those who hold to the penal substitutionary atonement position see God as an angry, vengeful and unapproachable God. This could not be further from the truth! The Western Church, which emphasises Christ suffering at the Cross, see just *that* as God’s central means to “opening our eyes” to the love of God. A God from whom you do not have to hide, a God, who, like the father in the prodigal son parable, is waiting to forgive, embrace and restore! Kruger could not be further from the truth when he wrote:

“Reconciliation is not about changing God, as if somehow our failure altered the Father’s heart or his eternal dreams for us. Reconciliation is about how the love of the Father, Son and Spirit finds a way to do the impossible—*reach us* in our terrible confusion.

The problem for God is not, ‘How can I declare righteous those who are not righteous,’ but ‘How can I restore to communion with me those so utterly lost in their own fallen minds that they hate me and run for cover from my sight?’

¹³⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 513

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 387

¹³⁹ Baxter Kruger: *Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love*. perichoresis.org dancingGod.org

In our pain, we, like Adam, have condemned ourselves, created a god in the image of our shame, and hand-crafted a religion to go with it, all of which we project onto the Father and defend with a vengeance. *The issue of reconciliation is not about satisfying legal justice; it is about how God gets through our darkness and makes Himself knowable to us.* [italics mine]¹⁴⁰

According to Kruger, not even God-inspired biblical revelation is able to penetrate our hearts and convince us of the truth about God's true nature and character!

Kruger: "Revelation seems the obvious answer, but is it? **What good is revelation, even inerrant divine transcripts, when our minds are so twisted that we could only misread them?** How could authentic communication be possible at all when our fallen imaginations paint the Lord's heart by the numbers of our own guilt?"¹⁴¹

This is nothing less than a gross disdain of the power of God's Word! The author of Hebrews writes, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword..."¹⁴² Equally revealing are the words of Jesus when he spoke about the promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit—"But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you in all the truth."¹⁴³

It seems unbelievable that Kruger could have drawn such a bizarre conclusion. For this calls into question the faith of all those Old Testament saints who clearly based their view of God on his Word (both written and as conveyed by the prophets). Where would that leave King David and his revelatory view of God? David, a sinner, nevertheless painted the nature and character of God in the most intimate and delightful poetic language imaginable! "I will sing of the loving-kindness of the Lord forever; to all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth" he wrote. How could Abraham possibly have been a "Friend of God" if he had a warped God-understanding and if his mind had been "twisted" as Kruger claims! All the saints mentioned in Hebrews 11 put their total trust in the God whom they knew to be trustworthy, merciful, and full of loving-kindness and goodness.

Torrance and Kruger teach that the reason for Christ's suffering and death at the Cross was not to die for our sins, but to show us the Father's unconditional love through his Son, and to breakdown our false and twisted God-understanding. They imply that through Christ's incarnation God has *already* forgiven us! Christ, by coming to earth and through becoming one of us, was thus able to make known (through word and deed) the unconditional love of the Father. By becoming human, he *reconciled* us with God, and *adopted* all humankind into the eternally existing perichoretic relationship of that of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Kruger in his blog writes, "And thus you cannot speak of this Jesus' incarnate life, death, resurrection and ascension without speaking of the new covenant relationship he has established in himself between the trinitarian life of God and the human race, and indeed with the whole cosmos."¹⁴⁴

Kruger on Adoption:

"But in what sense has Jesus taken away our sin? Is the 'taking away' to be understood as his suffering the punishment of God upon us, thus removing the legal penalty for our sins by satisfying an external justice?"

¹⁴⁰ Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love ©C. Baxter Kruger, 2007 perichoresis.org dancingGod.org

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² Hebrews 5:12

¹⁴³ John 16:13. See also Luke 12:12

¹⁴⁴ Kruger's Blog after having spoken at a YWAM Leaders Conference Oakridge, New Zealand

Or is sin, and Jesus' taking it away, far more personal and relational? Could it be that he 'takes away' our sin by overcoming it, by meeting us in our wickedness, thus taking our utter confusion and wrong-headedness, and our hatred of God, and all of our dastardly deeds out of play relationally? Could it be that by the removal our sin is meant that Jesus has so met us in the corridors of our wrath that he has established a real relationship with us of the most profoundly personal order?

Having borne our curse, Jesus has not only met us in our fallenness, but penetrated to the core of our very being, on the other side of the original sin. In doing so he has overcome our sin and blindness. And it is here in Jesus himself that the Father's eternal dream for our *adoption* is accomplished" [italics mine].¹⁴⁵

The following blog by Clarence E. Roberts clearly brings home how this kind of teaching is influencing many others within the Evangelical world. He writes,

"This is a very insightful article. God is Father, Son and Spirit, a relational Being. It's a relationship so beautiful and joyous that they couldn't keep it to themselves. From the foundation of the world, humans were predestined to be sons and daughters of God in Christ Jesus. *Through the incarnation of Jesus, all humanity shares intimately in the relationship of God the Trinity.* Jesus is our life. We now live in His ascended humanity. Now Jesus, the God/Man, who dwells face to face with the Father in the fellowship of the Spirit, shares forever, the beauty and joy and blessedness of His shared life with the Father and the Spirit. *God's sole purpose in creating was to adopt us.* That eternal purpose has already been accomplished in Christ. Amen"¹⁴⁶ [italics mine].

As you can see from this blog, the centrality of the Cross is completely missing. It states that *prior* to Christ's redemptive work on the Cross "*All humanity shares intimately in the relationship of the Trinity.*" It puts all the redemptive acts of God onto the Incarnation and Adoption without any acknowledgement of Christ redemptive work accomplished at the Cross.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ A blog by Clarence E. Roberts - January 22, 2008 9:48pm

12. A FURTHER LOOK AT THE ATONEMENT

Since writing this Discussion Paper, I have received many responses. Some favourable and some not, and others asking further insight on some issues. One brother raised the question, “*What is the great danger you see in Perichoresis of Kruger?*” In my reply, I explained that my concern is not the concept of perichoresis as such (the relational trinitarian concept), but rather the shift, or added-on change of emphasis: from the *substitutionary atonement*¹⁴⁷ of Christ as the central Gospel message to an all-embracing *incarnational soteriology* (salvation). Beside other concerns, it is *this*, in my view, which constitutes a major shift or even departure from Scripture. There is a need to clarify such questions as, “What is the atonement?” “Why did Jesus Christ have to die?” There are various references to the atoning work of Christ in Scripture, all dealing with one or two strands of this greatest act of love ever witnessed in the human history. Paul, in his writing lays stress onto the atonement as a process of justification and he uses such concepts as redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. Other scriptures highlight the victory Christ won at the Cross, whereas some lay emphasis on the example of Christ suffering for us to follow.

Throughout the last two thousand years, efforts have made to give definition to Christ’s work on the Cross. This has resulted in many different views or theories. Unlike such fundamental truths as the Deity of Christ, the Trinity, the two natures of Christ for which clear and precise statements were made in various ecumenical creeds, the question of the atonement was never clarified in this way.

I have included some further particulars regarding the Doctrine of the Atonement. Although, there are a many views that fall within acceptable biblical orthodoxy, yet not all do.

Various Views of the Atonement

There are various scriptural views as to *why* Christ died on the cross. (For a more extensive overview of the major views, see appendix 5). These various views caused theologians to draw different conclusions regarding the necessity and meaning of Christ’s sacrificial death at the Cross. Some stress Christ’s sacrifice to mean nothing more than an *example* of his love for the world. Whereas others emphasise the fact that sin required punishment and through Christ’s sacrifice God could pardon sin and at the same time satisfy his justice. John the Baptist said, “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*”¹⁴⁸ It is important, when we evaluate the different views of the Atonement, to maintain a balanced tension between the *love of God* (For God so loved the world...) ¹⁴⁹ and the *justice of God* (“... so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”).¹⁵⁰ It was the love of God that provided an escape for lost sinners, but it was the justice of God, which met the demands of the law. The Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof stated it well when he wrote,

“In love and justice combined. It is necessary to avoid all one-sidedness in this respect. If we represent the atonement as founded only in the righteousness and justice of God, we fail to do justice to the love of God as a moving cause of the atonement, and afford a pretext to those enemies of the satisfaction theory [penal

¹⁴⁷ There are a variety of different views within the understanding of the “substitutionary atonement.” e.g. general substitutionary atonement (Christ suffered for us) and the penal substitutionary atonement (Christ was punished for us). However, both express the belief that Christ died in our place (vicariously) because of our sins.

¹⁴⁸ John 1:29

¹⁴⁹ John 3:16

¹⁵⁰ Romans 3:26

substitution] of the atonement who like to represent it as implying that God is a vindictive being, who is concerned only about His own honour. If, on the other hand, we consider the atonement purely an expression of the love of God, we fail to do justice to the righteousness and veracity of God, and we reduce the sufferings and the death of Christ to an unexplained enigma. The fact that God gave up His only begotten Son to bitter sufferings and to a shameful death cannot be explained on the principle of His love only.”¹⁵¹

Within the *Penal Substitutionary* view, there two major points of view about the *extent* of the atonement.

(1) Limited Atonement View

There are those who hold to the belief that Christ’s death was limited to the *elect* only. They, who support the limited atonement view, maintain that God provided salvation only for his chosen people.¹⁵² Thus, Christ’s death was not to provide salvation for all humankind but exclusively assured the salvation of the elect only. The elect are those for whom Christ died, only those whom the Father gave to him. “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out....*”¹⁵³

(2) Unlimited Atonement

Then there are those who hold to the belief that the death of Christ was sufficient *for all people*, although this does not mean that all people will necessarily be saved. Two scriptures used to support this view are 1 Timothy 2:4 “... *God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* and 2 Peter 3:9 “*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*”

The *Limited Atonement* view is held by those holding to a Calvinistic¹⁵⁴ theological position (Reformed, Presbyterian and Reformed Baptists), whereas the *Unlimited Atonement* view tends to be held by those of an Arminian¹⁵⁵ theological persuasion (Methodists, Evangelicals, General Baptists, Pentecostals and Charismatic churches).

Kruger/ Torrance and the Acceptance Theory of the Atonement

This then brings us back to Kruger and Thomas F. Torrance’s views of the atonement. To understand their views (Kruger is seriously influenced by Torrance) we have to go back to the thirteenth-century Scottish Franciscan monk and philosopher *John Duns Scotus* (1270-1308).¹⁵⁶ John Duns Scotus proposed the *Acceptance Theory of the Atonement*. This theory of the atonement

¹⁵¹ Lois Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1981), 368

¹⁵² *His own* (Matthew 1:21); *His sheep* (John 10:15); *His friends* (John 15:13); *The church* (Acts 20:28); *The bride* (Ephesians 5:25)

¹⁵³ John 6:37-40

¹⁵⁴ Calvinism is based on the theological beliefs and teaching of Swiss theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvinism puts the emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God, predestination, the total depravity of man, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints (tulip).

¹⁵⁵ Arminianism is based on the teaching of Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminianism emphasises conditional election based on God's foreknowledge, man's free will through prevenient grace to cooperate with God in salvation, Christ's universal atonement, resistible grace, and salvation that can potentially be lost.

¹⁵⁶ John Duns Scotus was born in Duns in Scotland in 1265, and thereby derived his name “Scotus” (the Scotsman from Duns). He became a Franciscan and a famous teacher at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Paris. He taught in Paris until 1307. From there he was transferred to Cologne, where he died on 11th November 1308 and was buried in the church of the Friars Minor. He is held to be one of the greatest teachers of the Middle Ages and has influenced Church and Western thinking and faith until this day. On 20 March 1993, Pope John Paul II beatified him.

teaches that our atonement comes from the arbitrary choice of God. (see appendix 5) This view has been taken up, if not in full, at least in part, by Thomas C. Torrance and subsequently by Kruger and others. John Duns Scotus did not believe in any of the prevailing “substitutionary atonement views” of the Cross, stating that the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was not necessary for the redemption of humankind. He believed that Jesus did not have to die to make God love us. Neither was he paying a debt nor was there a need to change the Divine mind. He stated that Jesus was incarnated into the world *to change our mind* about the nature of God. Thus, Christ’s actual mission was to love humankind to the extent that this love was stronger than sin and thus able to overcome sin. In addition, he believed that the incarnation of the eternal Word of God was planned from all eternity to embrace *all things* in the God-man Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁷

Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J writes the following about Duns beliefs,

“Hundreds of years later, Franciscan John Duns Scotus (died in 1308) boldly proclaimed and defended the primacy of the Incarnation. He argued that God's supreme work, the Incarnation, had to be first and foremost in God's mind. It could not be dependent on or occasioned by any action of humans, especially sin.”¹⁵⁸

So, where does that leave Christ’s work at the Cross? John Duns Scotus saw the Cross as God’s means of drawing us into his love and making us aware of God’s love for his creation. The Cross was a means for humankind to re-enter into the embrace of a loving God. The Cross was not in any way redemptive or a means of atonement for sins committed. Moreover, he believed that whereas the Cross draws humankind into God’s love, Christ’s resurrection helps them to be victorious over sin, sickness and death. Scotus taught that by encountering God’s loving embrace, humankind would naturally rise above the things of this world and express that love, together with him (as co-lover), to a love-needy world.

The Roman Catholic Franciscan Friar, Seamus Mulholland, is another one who strongly endorses the teaching of fellow Franciscan, John Duns Scotus. In his article, *Incarnation in Franciscan Spirituality – Duns Scotus and the meaning of Love*, he writes,

“Franciscan Spirituality sees ***the Incarnation as the guarantee of union with God***. It is not something to be hoped for or to be looked forward to – it is something, which is happening NOW. God is Love and that Love is our redemption and ***redemption is not primarily being saved from sin, but is rather the gift of the possibility of openness to the experience of the divine Other in our life***. How can it be otherwise when we posit the notion of the divine and human in Jesus?¹⁵⁹ [italics mine].

Entering the Danger Zone

The *Acceptance Theory* of the atonement is a departure from the generally accepted biblical understanding of the substitutionary atonement view. Therefore, we should address this issue from *biblical* rather than a *philosophical* basis. I do value the writings of the Church fathers and theologians; yet, one can forever discuss their points of view, whereas ultimately Scripture has to be the final authoritative voice in all things we believe. I am convinced that the substitutionary

¹⁵⁷ Adapted from a paper by Herbert Schneider OFM, *The Wellspring of Christian - On the love of Jesus Christ according to the teaching of John Duns Scotus*. Originally published in 2000 by *Stella Maris Verlag*, Bittenwiesen as *Was den Christen froh macht: Über die Liebe von Jesus Christus nach der Lehre von Johannes Duns Skotus*. Translated: Ty Mam Duw 2006

¹⁵⁸ Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J., *The Incarnation: God's Gift of Love*
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an1201.asp>

¹⁵⁹ *Seamus Mulholland OFM is a Roman Catholic Friar and lectures in Biblical Studies and Franciscan Spirituality at the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury* <http://franciscans.beimler.org/Incarnation%20Spirituality.html>

atonement view is the closest to what Scripture reveals regarding God's redemptive purposes for humankind.

Eventually – when all is said and done – we always come back to the once-for-all finished work of Christ at the Cross and his victorious resurrection. God's ultimate love is portrayed wholly through what his beloved Son accomplished at the Cross. To me there is no greater love! This has nothing to do with an "angry father." This has nothing to do "comic child abuse." This has everything to do with the fact that "God so loved the world..." When we study the Old and New Testament scriptures regarding the need of man's redemption, without exception, it points to the need of the shedding of blood. There is no reference, not even implied, about the notion of humanity being drawn into the Godhead at the time of Christ's incarnation. The first proclamation of the Gospel message at Pentecost clearly focuses on Christ dying on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection.¹⁶⁰ The Early church (especially seen through the emphasis on the celebration of the Eucharist), most of the Church fathers, the Ecumenical Creeds¹⁶¹ and the Evangelical tradition have always emphasised the centrality of the substitutionary aspect of the atonement and Christ's life within us. Like the Reformed theologian J. I. Packer,¹⁶² I accept that there are layers of truth in the diverse views of the substitutionary atonement and therefore, personally, I am a little hesitant to ascribe exclusively to the "one only" approach.

Acceptance Atonement Theory and Incarnation

Add to the *Acceptance Atonement Theory* the *Theosis/Incarnational/Adoption* concepts as means of *drawing humankind* into the Perichoresis of the Godhead and suddenly you end up with a *cross-less gospel*. That's where it gets serious!

Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J.

"The emphasis on Jesus as the first thought can free us from violent images of God and allow us to focus on God's overflowing love. This love is the very life of the Trinity and spills over into creation, grace, Incarnation, and final flourishing and fulfillment. What a difference this makes for our relationship with God! We are invited into this divine dance. Life and love, not suffering and death, become the core of our spirituality and our morality."¹⁶³

I came across the following blog that shows where things are going,

"...We have two different points of view when we approach the issue of our world view. This is very important as we need to know why we think what we do. I have highlighted the two biases as '*sin is separation from God*,' on the one side and on the other side we have, '*objective union*'. ***These points of view are diametrically opposed to one another.***

The beginning point is always Jesus Christ, God in union with all things. A friend in South Africa calls this the Incarnational Code. He found the truth of all truths is ***the reality of God becoming man, flesh of our flesh and bones of our bones as the interpretive tool for everything we need to know about God.***

¹⁶⁰ Acts 2:22-24; 3:17-22

¹⁶¹ Nicene Creed "... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ... For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven... For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again..." For the complete Nicene Creed see Appendix 2

¹⁶² Reformed theologian J. I. Packer, for example, although he maintains that 'penal substitution is the mainstream, historic view of the church and the essential meaning of the atonement... Yet with penal substitution at the center', he also maintains that '*Christus Victor* and other Scriptural views of atonement can work together to present a fully orbbed picture of Christ's work. Trammel, Madison, 'Cross Purposes' in *Christianity Today*, 2 Jul 2007. (accessed 20/12/10)

¹⁶³ Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J., *The Incarnation: God's Gift of Love*
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an1201.asp>

The Incarnation means the over-lapping of beings of the I AM of God with the I am of our fallen humanity where the two become one, what is understood in technical terms as hypostasis.

To understand the Incarnation as the Father's [Church fathers] understood it is of vital importance to the implications of this event in our human history. Jesus is the Emmanuel, *God with us*, the Saviour, *who saves us by coming to be one with us by being one of us*¹⁶⁴ [italics mine].

Hmmm..., without for a moment diminishing the importance of the Incarnation, I do not think so!

One more example:

“The Incarnation shows us that our human faculties were appropriated as well as our human body and assumed into the life and love of the Father, Son and Spirit. In actual fact, the faithfulness of God has been inserted into us in such a way that it can be tangibly appropriated and exercised.”¹⁶⁵

Appropriated at the Incarnation? *Before* his crucifixion Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because ***He abides with you and will be in you.***”¹⁶⁶

Christ clearly indicates the future indwelling (post resurrection) of the Holy Spirit *within* humankind. Obviously, this had not occurred at the Incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity into the world. Reason: because Christ redemptive work on the Cross had not yet taken place. This fact is further confirmed when Jesus appeared to the disciples *after* his resurrection. This is what happened,

“So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”¹⁶⁷

The disciples could only receive the Holy Spirit *after* his death and resurrection and only then enter into relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The disciples experienced a further empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to equip them for the task of world evangelisation.

The right order: God’s redemptive plan is realised through:

- (1) The Word becoming flesh – the Incarnation
- (2) His life and ministry – the Gospel
- (3) His sacrificial death on the cross – substitutionary atonement
- (4) His resurrection – victory over death

¹⁶⁴ Objective Union verses Sin defined as Separation from God by Website Manager on Jun 18 in The mind of Tom Torrance

¹⁶⁵ The Future Direction of Faith 16 June 2011

¹⁶⁶ John 14:16-17

¹⁶⁷ John 20:19-22

- (5) His ascension – and coming again
- (6) His eternal future reign in Heaven and New Earth

13. BAXTER KRUGER'S PERICHORESIS FURTHER EXAMINED UNIVERSALISM

In his statement of faith “*Perichoresis: A Trinitarian Ministry*”¹⁶⁸ (For full statement see Appendix 6) Baxter Kruger explains his basic understanding and modern-day application of the concept of perichoresis.

Whereas the orthodox understanding of perichoresis fell within the boundaries of orthodoxy, Kruger’s interpretation and adaptations and Acceptance Theory Atonement view falls well outside these boundaries. Although he claims that he is committed to the historic Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity and the Gospel, in essence he does not at all ascribe to the generally accepted and held traditional views of these doctrines. He especially diverts from orthodoxy with his view of the Incarnation in relationship to the Gospel. This is partially due because of his departure from the biblical view of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Danger of Universalism

What we are confronted with here is a form of universalism. Universalism claims that eventually everyone will be saved. This position holds that the concepts of hell and punishment are wholly inconsistent with a loving God.

The older form of universalism, originating in the second century, taught that salvation would come after a temporary period of punishment. The more recent form of universalism declares that all men are *now* saved, though not all realise it. Therefore, the job of the preacher and the missionary is to make people aware of the fact that they are already saved. Passages like John 12:32; Philippians 2:11; and 1 Timothy 2:4 are typically distorted out of context in support of universalism. When interpreted properly, you will see that these scriptures do not support universalism at all. So let us look at these scriptures in light of *all* of Scripture:

- *John 12:32* says that Christ’s work on the Cross makes possible the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. Notice, however, that the Lord in the same passage warned of judgment of those who reject Christ (verse 48).
- *Philippians 2:10-11* assures us that someday all people will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. However, even those in Hell will one day have to acknowledge Christ's Lordship.
- *1 Timothy 2:4* expresses God’s *desire* that all be saved, but does not promise that all will be. This divine desire is only realised in those who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures consistently categorise people into one of two categories of people: *saved* and *unsaved*, or *believers* and *unbelievers*, and portrays the final destiny of every person as being one of two possible realities—*Heaven or Hell*. Jesus himself plainly painted, through direct teaching and parables, these distinctions:

- In *Matthew 13:30* Jesus in this parable said, “Allow both [tares and wheat] to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “*First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the*

¹⁶⁷ Perichoresis: A Trinitarian Ministry - ©C. Baxter Kruger, 1994 www.perichoresis.org www.dancingGod.org - www.perichoresis.org.au

wheat into my barn.” Here unbelievers and believers are spoken of as tares and wheat. Clearly two categories of people.

- In *Matthew 13:49* Jesus said, “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous...” Again, two categories are mentioned — wicked and the righteous.
- In *Matthew 25:32* Jesus said that following his second coming, “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Here the terms “sheep” and “goats” differentiate believers and unbelievers. The sheep will enter into God’s kingdom (verse 34) and inherit eternal life (verse 46). The goats go into eternal punishment (verse 46).

Unmistakably, these scriptures speak of two categories of people, the saved and the unsaved; and of two possible destinies: Heaven for the saved and Hell for the unsaved. Each respective person ends up in one of these places based upon whether or not he or she placed saving faith in Christ during his or her time on earth.¹⁶⁹

Baxter Kruger: Quasi-Universalism?

Baxter Kruger raises and answers the question about what he believes about universalism (For the full statement see Appendix 7).

It is a rather ambiguous statement, but the underlying message is clear. His first statement “That Jesus Christ loves us all and *has included us everyone* in his life with his Father and the Holy Spirit, I consider to be an *absolute, eternal fact*” indicates where he is coming from. His basic view is that through Christ’s incarnation all of humankind has been incorporated into the life of the Triune God. It is now for man to appropriate or embrace that “absolute eternal fact”.

Kruger parts ways here with both the Calvinistic and Arminianistic views. Calvin stressed irresistible grace through predestination of the elect, and Arminius believed in resistible grace because of man’s freewill and the need for the sinner to repent and accept Christ personally.. Kruger wrote,

“The truth does not leave you with yourself, and/or with whether or not you are included. The truth in Jesus leaves you with your eyes fixed on Jesus who has included you. There is no rest in Calvinism or Arminianism, for neither can proclaim to you that you are included, and therefore neither can give you a place to rest.”¹⁷⁰

Whereas Kruger promotes the idea that although we are all included he seems to say that we can opt out. If that is the case then he does not fully support universalism. Although Kruger may not seem to adhere to universalism as such (even though he never quite says so), nevertheless his position seems only a step away from it. If not he himself, it may lead others to do so. A comment on Kruger’s blog probably confirms my concerns,

“I know quite a few people like me who were into the Perichoresis message but went further into Universal Salvation which is more consistent. In the end I found

¹⁶⁹ Adapted from: *Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries*, P.O. Box 80087, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688

¹⁷⁰ OCTOBER 2, 2012 AT 3:53 PM

[HTTP://BAXTERKRUGER.BLOGSPOT.CO.NZ/2012/09/UNIVERSALISM_10.HTML](http://BAXTERKRUGER.BLOGSPOT.CO.NZ/2012/09/UNIVERSALISM_10.HTML)

Perichoresis official message virtually no better than the Arminianism which is dominant throughout most of the western church.”¹⁷¹

Summing up

Baxter Kruger and others, who hold to the perichoresis concept, have incorporated *additional questionable unbiblical theological views* that bring it very close to universalism. In doing so, they have thrown a questionable light on the perichoresis concept as a whole. This combination of: *Perichoresis/Theosis*, the *Incarnational Soteriology* and the *Acceptance View of the Atonement* will greatly affect our evangelism and preaching of the Gospel. The Great Commission “To go into all the world and preach the gospel” becomes nothing more than making people aware of what Christ accomplished when he became human and entered into the human race and as such he embraced all of humankind unconditionally. Take it or leave it!

By rejecting Christ’s redemptive act as the only remedy for sin and a fallen world, the Cross means no more than just an example of God’s ultimate love.

¹⁷¹ OCTOBER 1, 2012 AT 9:43 AM -
[HTTP://BAXTERKRUGER.BLOGSPOT.CO.NZ/2012/09/UNIVERSALISM_10.HTML](http://BAXTERKRUGER.BLOGSPOT.CO.NZ/2012/09/UNIVERSALISM_10.HTML)

14. “THE GOSPEL” OF THE PRODIGAL SON THE TRUE GOSPEL

Of course, there is certain element of truth in this “gospel”. For the Father is waiting and longing for his children to return to him. Of course, he will embrace anyone who realises his lostness and repents in his heart saying, “Father I have sinned...I am no longer worthy to be called your son...”¹⁷² The father’s embrace, indicates total forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation, and restoration into God’s family. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”¹⁷³

However, we must not lose sight here of the larger picture. Forgiveness is possible only because of what Christ has done for us at the Cross!

Paul wrote,

“You have been bought with a price.” “...the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”¹⁷⁴

Peter taught,

“...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”¹⁷⁵

Lastly, the writer of Hebrews made this point unmistakably clear when he wrote,

“By this we will have been sanctified through the offering of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ once for all.”¹⁷⁶

Accordingly, when you look at the bigger picture you will always see the centrality of the Cross as the heart of the gospel message, not the Incarnation. Naturally, without the Incarnation, there would not have been the Cross, so in no way must we diminish the importance of the Incarnation. All of Heaven held its breath when the Son of God left his glorious heavenly place to take on a human body and the status of God-man on earth. Paul dramatically paints the picture of the Incarnation in his letter to the Philippians,

“...although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”¹⁷⁷

Jesus himself said, “...Abraham rejoiced to see My day [Incarnation], and he saw it and was glad.”¹⁷⁸ By twisting the meaning of the Incarnation, we end up with an unbiblical view that has the potential to lead many astray. For this so-called gospel bypasses the necessity of the Cross. A “gospel” without Christ’s atoning work on the Cross simply is no Good News at all and cannot produce salvation! That is a serious departure from the historical biblical Christian faith!

¹⁷² Luke 15:19,21

¹⁷³ Luke 12:32

¹⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:20; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁷⁶ Hebrews 10:10

¹⁷⁷ Philippians 2:6-8

¹⁷⁸ John 8:56

The Gospel Message According to Peter

Compare Peter's first sermon in Acts chapter 2 with the *incarnational gospel* and you will see what I mean. While preaching his first sermon Peter explains that in fact, every member of the human race is guilty of having nailed Jesus to the Cross (since Jesus was crucified in our place).¹⁷⁹ When the people listening to Peter realised **why** Jesus had died, and **who** were responsible they became very anxious,

“...they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brethren what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**’”¹⁸⁰

Three thousand people responded to the true Gospel message. They accepted that Jesus Christ was indeed their Saviour. That he had died in their place and had risen from the dead. Once they realised that, they responded to what Peter told them. Result: Three thousand people repented from their sins and were baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They were “baptised by one Spirit into one body”.¹⁸¹ They experienced forgiveness of their sins and received what God had promised—the Holy Spirit. That is the true Gospel message, the only Good News message of the grace of God! When responded to by faith it will set us free from the law of sin and death. Only this message will lead to being born again by the Spirit. It is only through this Gospel message “For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son” that reconciliation with God the Father is made possible. The only message that will result and grant us the privilege of “participation” into the eternally existing fellowship (perichoresis) of that of the Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit.

Adolphe Monod Deathbed's Message

I have a treasured little book in my library written by a well-known nineteenth century French Reformed Church preacher, Adolphe Monod (1802-1855), *Adolphe Monod's Farewell*. While reflecting over his life on his deathbed, he gave short exhortations of the thoughts of his heart — things that mattered (that is why these writings carry a lot of weight for me) — to his friends gathered at his bedside every Sunday morning. One section he called, *A Dying Man's Regrets*. He reflects on such topics as, the reality of sin and forgiveness; the frequency and meaning of communion; the Trinity; prayer; the importance of reading the Bible, and many more. There is one exhortation of which I would like to quote two excerpts (all week he would have meditated as to what to say at these precious Sunday meetings); it is in relationship to *sin and the cross*,

“But I am full of things to tell you as I contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ, around which we gather to celebrate the memory of His sacrifice. It means, as you well know, that we are purified from our sins by His blood, redeemed by His bitter sacrifice, our sins atoned for by His cross, in the simplest, easiest-to-understand and yet profound way, all at the same time, Jesus Christ being the propitiatory victim who reconciles us to God by His death. ***There is the foundation of the Gospel, there is the heart of it: and, apart from that, there is only a poor faded Gospel, lacking in power.***”¹⁸²

“Dear friends, this Communion sets before our eyes memories of the deepest imaginable joy; but let us not forget that as Jesus Christ walked towards glory and towards the resurrection by the way of the cross, ***this joy can be felt only by those who have first felt the bitterness of sin.***”

¹⁷⁹ Acts 2:22-36

¹⁸⁰ Acts 2:37-38

¹⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 12:13

¹⁸² Adolphe Monod, *Adolphe Monod's Farewell*, Tr. Rev. Owen Thomas (London: The Banner Trust, 1962), 35

“O infinite sweetness, to rest fully at the foot of the cross! I am beginning to understand how great is my misery; but I embrace the cross of my Saviour. I desire only His cross, His grace, and His righteousness...my works, they could only condemn me; *but redeemed by Him, washed in His blood, which has made atonement for my sins, I seize His cross, and I lean upon the sacrifice of my Saviour.*”

“*Let us seize hold of the cross. Let us embrace it, proclaiming it,* and our deaths will be the beginning of life, and God will be glorified in our bodies, whether by life, or by death, and before all by the blood and redemption of the Lamb of God. That is what I ask for each one of you, as I do so for myself, through the love of Christ which I implore Him to increase in us. Amen.”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Adolphe Monod, *Adolphe Monod's Farewell*, Tr. Rev. Owen Thomas (London: The Banner Trust, 1962), 39, 42, 43

15. FINAL SUMMING UP

AWARENESS IS THE KEY

We have covered a lot of ground, even though we have only scratched the surface! All the same, we have to stop somewhere (although I will continue to update this paper). My keyword regarding the Emerging Church/Perichoresis Movements is *awareness*. There are clearly elements within these movements that follow normal changes in the way we do church that have occurred throughout Church history. Some of these changes we may like, some we may not. However, in themselves these often cultural or generational modifications are not wrong or unbiblical (even though some dear people may not see it that way!) When I was young, the church we attended in a small town in the Netherlands was very particular as to what was acceptable in a Sunday worship service. For example, only Psalms were allowed to be sung, and very slowly at that. The only “right” musical accompaniment was an organ. Only on very special occasions, a trumpet would be permitted. When the church decided to introduce a few hymns to commemorate Christmas, Good Friday/Easter etc., a number of people left the church, for they could not handle such a “major” departure from the “true” way of doing church! Of course, today, that same church no longer holds to any of these once-valued, even fought-for practices.

As a rule of thumb, the motto: “*Methods* may change providing the *Message* remains the same” is a good guide when we have to evaluate change. Before getting all hot under the collar, it is always good to ask the question, “Is it the method, or is the message being tinkered with?”

So what about if the *message* is under review? Every generation has to ask the questions “*why*” and “*what*” they believe for themselves. That is not wrong in it self. Where we do cross into the danger zone, however, is when we draw conclusions that are contrary to Scripture and when long-held essential, biblically sound doctrines of the Christian faith are revised or discarded. The Early Church fathers, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, not only recognised and compiled the New Testament Canon, but also construed from Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) biblical doctrines to guide the Church. They drew up a number of statements of faith—*Creeeds*. Throughout the history of the Church, these historic creeds have kept the Church on track. Whenever, individuals, movements or churches departed from these essentials, the outcome has always been the same—*spiritual death* (like many liberal churches). For example: the founding fathers of Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons (and many other cults¹⁸⁴) departed from the truth as revealed by Scripture, consequently became cut off from the flow of the River of Life, and disconnected from the Body of Christ. (Often they have become very successful organisations, but that is all they are!) One more reason that we, as pastors and teachers, must not neglect to instruct our congregations the fundamentals of the Christian faith, including the essential doctrines and Church history.

Christianity Today,

“This is why J. I. Packer, on his 80th birthday, said that the greatest challenge of evangelicalism is to re-catechize¹⁸⁵ our churches. More than ever, Christians need to be able to speak intelligently and courageously about the hope that lies within. Personal faith is of course vital, but it is not sufficient. And yes, doctrine has often

¹⁸⁴ Many cults started of as Christian movements or churches before moving off track e.g. *Children of God*; *Jonestown* - Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones etc.

¹⁸⁵ Many of the older church denominations e.g. Presbyterian/Reformed, Roman Catholic, systematically instructed young people the historic doctrines of the Church by the means of a catechism. Catechisms are doctrinal manuals often in the form of questions followed by answers.

been taught so that it comes across as dry and dusty. But as Dorothy Sayers noted, once we grasp what Christian doctrines teach, ‘The Dogma is the Drama.’”¹⁸⁶

Church history is also a much-neglected study in our present-day churches. Many of the excesses seen in our churches and para-churches today could have been avoided had they been aware of past happenings. In this paper, I have tried to make connections between some historical movements and individuals (e.g. Friedrich Schleiermacher) and explain the similarities and parallels with the present-day Emergent Revisionists. Why? So that we may learn from these past events and not repeat the same, disastrous, costly, and often painful mistakes all over again. In the case of perichoresis: although the concept falls within accepted orthodoxy, by tinkering and adding unbiblical beliefs to the basic concept, however, it crosses well and truly into the danger zone.

Finally, when all is said and done, and if there is one thing we should learn from history, it is the fact that there is “nothing new under the sun!” Repeatedly, in every age the same biblical doctrines have been challenged and often denied: the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the deity and the humanity of Christ, the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, the Cross, the Resurrection, his ascension, substitutionary atonement, sin, judgement, and the belief in Heaven and Hell. Let Scripture have the last word...

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”¹⁸⁷



***Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,
to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time
and now and forever. Amen.***¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Christianity Today, *Doctrine Bears Repeating*. Evangelicals need to brush up on basic Christian teachings. Charles Colson with Anne Morse | posted 3/24/2009.

¹⁸⁷ Colossians 2:8

¹⁸⁸ Jude 24-25

APPENDIX 1

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.
From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic¹⁸⁹ Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

APPENDIX 2

Nicene /Constantinople Creed (AD 325/381)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only son of the Father, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died, and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in fulfilment
of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right of the Father.
He will come to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Note: When the term “catholic” is used in the Creeds, it refers to the true Christian Church of all times and all places. It is not a reference to the Roman Catholic Church. “Catholic” means “universal”

¹⁹⁰ Modern wording

APPENDIX 3

Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

In a nutshell, the Definition affirms that:

- Christ is **divine** - against the Arians, who proposed that the Son was the perfect creature with derivative divinity, something like a Demiurge whom God generated (in effect, created) to the agent of creation
- Christ is **human** - against the Apollinarians, who proposed that the Divine Logos occupied human flesh like a mind 'inside' a body, thereby denying a rational human will to the Son
- Christ's two natures (divine and human) **cannot be separated** - against the Nestorians, who proposed what amounted to a moral union of two beings, Jesus the Man and Christ the Son of God. It is quite unlikely that this was the view of Nestorius, whose key intention was to *distinguish* the two natures, insisting that Jesus manifested both properties.
- Christ's two natures (divine and human) **cannot be confused** - against the Eutychenes, who proposed that after the incarnation where there were two natures there remains only one. The humanity of Christ was so absorbed into His divinity that the former was no longer 'in play'.

The unity of Christ's two natures is at the level of *Person* i.e. Christ is one Person (*'hypostasis'*) in two natures (*'homoousios'* or *'physis'*). Alan Lewis summarises this well:

"(According to Chalcedon), Christ therefore exists as "one person," but "in two natures". There is just one personality and individual, Jesus Christ, one subject of the human nature as well as the divine, and that subject is the Word, the second person of the Trinity... **Christ's humanity is not diminished by, nor absorbed into, his divinity, but maintains its wholeness in the union.**" (*Between Cross & Resurrection*, Lewis p.154)¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ <http://www.angelfire.com/journal/althehare/chalcedon.html>

APPENDIX 4

God is Immanent and Transcendent

(1) God is Immanent (his presence fills everything)

The literal meaning of the *immanence of God* is “to be within,” or “near” in relation to God’s creation. Immanence is closely related to God’s *omnipresence*, in that God is always present within the universe, though distinct from it. God is “within” the universe in that God is its sustaining cause.¹⁹²

Scriptures: “Am I only a God nearby,’ declared the Lord,’ and not a God far away” Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declared the Lord. ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:23-24); “In Christ all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

The immanency of God and Pantheism

The immanency of God is very different from the pantheistic New Age beliefs. For although we believe that God is omnipresent and, for that reason, his presence fills everything, nevertheless the God of the Bible is clearly separate from his created order.

According to the Bible, God is both and immanent and *transcendent*.

2. God is Transcendent (he stands apart from his creation)

Being transcendent means that God is independent of, above, and distinct from this universe. He is outside, above, and before this time-space universe. That God is transcendent is clear throughout Scripture. For instance, even the very name of God *Yahweh* reveals his separateness. Most scholars agree that the basic meaning of this name Yahweh is “I Am that I Am,” which clearly states God’s transcendent-independence and existence.¹⁹³

God’s transcendence is expressed in the following passages:

Isaiah 46:8-10

“Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning. And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’...”

Psalms 115:3

“But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Proverbs 5:21

“For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.”

Psalms 33:13-14

“The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; from His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth.”

¹⁹² Theopdia

¹⁹³ Exodus 3:14

Romans 11:34-36

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

APPENDIX 5

Various Views of the Atonement¹⁹⁴

Some of the Major Views

- *Ransom to Satan View* – Christ’s death was a ransom paid to Satan to purchase captive man from Satan’s claims (Origen). Scriptural support: Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Corinthians 6:20
- *Recapitulation View* – Christ in his life recapitulated all the stages of human life, in so doing reversed the course initiated by Adam (Irenaeus). Scriptural support: Romans 5:15-21; Hebrews 2:10
- *Dramatic View* – Christ is Victor in a divine conflict of good and evil and wins man’s release from bondage (Aulen). Scriptural support: Matthew 28:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
- *Mystical Theory* – Christ took on a human sinful nature but through the power of the Holy Spirit triumphed over it. Knowledge of this will mystically influence man (Schleiermacher). Scriptural support: Hebrews 2:10, 14-18; 4:14-16
- *Example View*
Christ’s death provided an example of faith and obedience to inspire man to be obedient (Pelagius, Socinus, Abelard and many within the Emergent Church today). Scriptural support: 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6
- *Moral Influence View* – Christ’s death demonstrated God’s love, which causes man’s heart to soften and repent (Abelard, Bushnell, and Rashdall). Scriptural support: Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Colossians 3:24
- *Commercial View*
Christ’s death brought infinite honour to God. So God gave Christ a reward which he did not need and passed it on to man (Anselm). Scriptural support: John 10:18
- *Governmental View*
Christ’s death demonstrates God’s high regard for his law. It shows God’s attitude towards sin. Through Christ’s death, God has a rationale to forgive the sins of those who repent and accept Christ’s substitutionary death (Grotius). Scriptural support: Psalm 2, 5; Isaiah 42:21
- *Acceptance View*
This view promotes the idea that Christ’s atonement was not the only way restoration could be made, but it was the arbitrary decision of God.
Although listed here as part of the various views of the atonement, but in fact this view is more a change of emphasis from the substitutionary views of the atonement to the Incarnation as God’s means of redemption (acceptance of the elect or universal acceptance). Theologians John Dun Scotus and William Ockman

¹⁹⁴ Adopted from Views of the Atonement: H Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) 64-65

promoted this theory. Torrance gave further backing to this view and today is embraced by an ever-increasing number of theologians, including, Baxter Kruger as an added-on to on his trinitarian perichoresis teaching.

- *Penal Substitution View*

Although there are various shades of understanding within the penal substitutionary view, nevertheless, all support that Christ's death was a vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice that satisfied the demands of God's justice upon sin. Paying the penalty of man's sin, bringing forgiveness, imputing righteousness, and reconciling man to God (Calvin). Scriptural support: John 11:50-52; Romans 5:8-9; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18

APPENDIX 6

Perichoresis: A Trinitarian Ministry **Baxter Kruger**

Perichoresis is a thriving, engaging, Christ-centered fellowship that fosters Christian faith and hope, brings healing to relationships, marriages, and families, promotes authentic community, and frees people to embrace their humanity. We are committed to the historic Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity and are determined to share the gospel with the widest possible audience.

- We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, and we believe that this God created, reconciled and embraced the world in the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, as it was eternally purposed.
- We believe Jesus Christ is the Father's eternal Son sharing being and life and all things with the Father and the Spirit, and that this Son became human for our salvation. He died to cleanse us of our alienation. He rose again to give us new birth. He ascended to take us to His Father.
- We believe that in the Incarnate, Crucified, Resurrected, and Ascended Son the human race and creation have been lifted into union with the Father, Son and Spirit.
- We believe that Jesus Christ is himself the union between the Trinity, humanity and creation, and that this relationship is the truth of all truths underneath creation itself and human existence and history within it.
- We believe the Triune God is now at work in all creation, revealing the truth of our adoption in Jesus Christ, breaking through the deception and darkness that binds us, so that we may discover and believe and experience our inclusion in the Son's relationship with His Father in the Spirit.
- We believe that the Church is called to participate in the Spirit's work of revealing the truth about God, humanity and creation until the knowledge of the Triune God fills the earth and all creation as the waters cover the seas.

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APPENDIX 7

Baxter Kruger's View on Universalism

Universalism?

Here are two definitions of Universalism:¹⁹⁵ (1) “The theological doctrine that all souls will eventually find salvation in the grace of God.”¹⁹⁶ (2) “The doctrine...that hell is in essence purgative and therefore temporary and that all intelligent beings will therefore in the end be saved.” Here is my position on universalism.

“That Jesus Christ loves us all and has included us everyone in his life with his Father and the Holy Spirit, I consider to be an absolute, eternal fact. That every human being will come to experience this life fully, I consider to be a hope, but not a fact. It is a hope grounded in the astounding love of the blessed Trinity—in the endless fidelity of the Father, the complete and finished work of Jesus, and the redeeming genius of the Holy Spirit. I think we have every reason to hope for everyone to come to know the truth so as to experience salvation. But to make such a hope an absolute fact, or a conclusion, or a doctrine is, to me, a mistake. That would be to deny, theologically speaking, the authenticity of our personhood and our real freedom to participate. We are real to the Father, Son and Spirit, distinct persons within the life of God, with our own minds, hearts and wills, which will never be violated by the blessed Trinity. So there remains the possibility that in our distinctness, we will choose to live against our own beings. Such a violation of reality is as absurd as it is painful, but possible. It is not possible for the Father, Son and Spirit to morph into another God, with another dream for humanity. In this universe, and in all universes to come, the Father, Son and Spirit will never, ever give up their dream that we would all come to experience fully the trinitarian life together.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F. L. Cross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁹⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, David B. Guralnik, editor, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1980).

¹⁹⁷ POSTED BYC. BAXTER KRUGER, PH.D. AT 1:24 PM

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