A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH'S EPISTEMOLOGY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER of THEOLOGY

at the
SOUTH AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
in
JULY 2011

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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

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July-2011

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thankfulness to my wife Teresa. Her encouragement, support and insights have been invaluable in completing this project.

For clear guidance and wisdom, I want to also thank my supervisor, Dr. Bill Grover. I know it was not always an easy task, but the commitment and character of Dr. Grover was an inspiration to me.

The greatest debt of gratitude is owed to my Lord. His grace has sustained me, His power has strengthened me, and His word has taught me. I am more passionate for truth and more committed to apprehending knowledge of Him, with the help of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God. Soli Deo Gloria.

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ABSTRACT

The Emerging Church (EC) is a loosely connected group of Christians involved in "conversations" about how to effectively engage the postmodern generation in spiritual activities. At the heart of these conversational communities lies the conviction that cultural changes from modernism to postmodernism require that a new kind of Christian must rise from the ashes of modernistic evangelicalism to inhabit a relevant church which engages postmodernism on a deeper level.

The philosophical affinity shared by the EC and postmodernism initiates concern about the orthodoxy of their theological trajectory. Investigation of the epistemic impetus behind the EC's recommendations is necessary.

In light of this need, this study clarifies the EC's epistemology by means of literary analysis. The same method is used to ascertain the biblical view of truth and knowledge. After summarizing the respective epistemic positions, a comparison was made to establish the extent of congruency which the EC's epistemology shares with Scripture.

This thesis concludes with a summary of the EC's faithfulness or infidelity to the biblical view of truth and knowledge. Subsequent to summary of findings, recommendations are made in an attempt to foster an appropriate response to the EC.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the last decade a controversial group of diverse postmodern Christians has formed loosely connected conversational communities called Emerging Churches. At the heart of these conversational communities of faith lies the conviction that changes in the culture from modernism to postmodernism signal that a new Church is emerging. Some would say this Church is past the point of emerging but has "become an established part of mainstream contemporary evangelical ecclesiological literature" (Bolt 1996:205-206). As this growing generative friendship among missional Christian leaders (Henegar n.d.:¶7) becomes more influential, this researcher considers it to be expedient and appropriate to conduct a study critiquing the Emerging Church's epistemology from a biblical-theological perspective.

Epistemology is the philosophical discipline concerned with questions about knowledge and belief as well as related issues such as justification of propositions and truth. It attempts to distinguish true knowledge from false knowledge. Embracing an incorrect epistemology limits one's ability to distinguish truth from error. Dubray (1909:§3) rightly concludes that epistemology has implications and relevance beyond the foundations of philosophy, reaching as far as the Church's acceptance of propositional statements essential to the gospel.

Jesus' commission of the Church to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20) presupposes the need for the gospel to be understood in every culture and era.

Therefore in every historical period the Church has felt the impact of that era's epistemic foundations. Of special interest to this researcher is the fluid epistemic progression from the intellectual freedom of the Reformation, leading to the rationalism of modernity to the current anti-foundationalism of the postmodern movement.

That the Reformation provides an incubatory environment for modern rationalism has been observed by Philip Schaff in *History of the Christian Church* (1910:§1.9). The Reformation began as a movement of religious protestation against corruption found in the highest levels of the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther (1885:25), in one of his essays about the Reformation identifies one of the "tottering walls" of Catholic leadership to be their assumption that they are considered masters of the Scriptures. The Catholic Magisterium believed Scripture to have a literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogic sense giving latitude for traditions to take precedent over the Bible's clear teaching, thus the literal meaning of Scripture was held captive by the Church's dogma or allegorical manipulation (Farrar 1886:299). Maintaining the fourfold sense of Scripture was a matter of the Catholic Church's survival for it was necessary if traditional dogma were going to reign supreme (Farrar 1886:299).

The Pope's elevation of dogmatic tradition over the authority and clear teaching of the Bible lead Martin Luther (1885:26) to accuse the Pope and his followers of not being true Christians. Widely regarded as the primary catalyst of the Reformation, Luther believed and proclaimed, contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, that Scripture was perspicuous, especially as it related to salvation and other essential matters (Luther 1957:125). As a response to the Reformation (also referred to as the Counter-Reformation), the Catholic leadership conducted the Councils of Trent to frame official Church doctrine challenging Luther's heresies. In the fourth session of the Councils, the Catholic Church's authoritarian control over biblical interpretation and application was reiterated (Catholic Encyclopedia 1912:¶1). The intended effect was to keep the interpretation of Scripture out of the hands of the laity and firmly into the grasp of the clergy and Magisterium. It is also clearly defined in Pope Pius X's

catechism dated in the early twentieth century (Catechism 2008:§28-31). The canons of Trent notwithstanding, Luther demonstrated his passion for bringing Bible study back to the people by completing his final revised translation in 1545 (Schaff 1910:§62).

French Reformer Jean Calvin (1846:vi), continued the Lutheran protest against Catholic tyranny by concluding that the Church was established on the foundation of the apostles and prophets before the Roman Catholic Church ever claimed authority over the teaching of Scripture. Calvin further concludes that if falsehood persists in any essential matters of doctrine, no Church can exist in that condition (1846:§4.1); the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church represented such a falsehood and therefore cannot represent the Church (1846:§4.2). In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Calvin (2005:94) interprets Jesus' promised presence and guidance by the Holy Spirit into all truth a promise given to the apostles, who would transmit the heavenly wisdom to us believers for the sake of our spiritual maturity. For him, the revelation of Scripture was plainly given by God to simplify and clarify the confusion encountered by common humans attempting to comprehend God (1846:§1.1).

The impact of the Reformers resulted in an enlightened Church characterised by self-study and personal interpretation of Scripture. Thus the allegorical approach to Scripture gave way to the grammatical-historical method of interpretation which required intelligent, meaningful consideration of biblical languages and historical context. Luther, in his preface to Isaiah, numerates his principles of interpretation including, among others, the necessity for grammatical knowledge (Farrar 1886:331).

All that remained for foundational rationalism to take hold of the newly enlightened mind was the right circumstances. Those circumstances came to light in the experience of Rene Descartes, considered by many as the father of rationalism. Descartes (2000:ch 1), seeking to find foundational common ground for the sake of communicating theism to his atheistic friends, embraced reason and method as the fundamental necessities if one was to arrive at truth. His quest led him to suppose that because senses could deceive, nothing was

as it seemed. Even if everything he thought was false, he was still thinking and thus his axiom, "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes 2000:60-61).

Rationality and intelligence became the measure of credibility to the extent that they took precedence over the authority of the Bible. The two epistemic foundations promoted by modernism which produced immense concern for evangelical Christianity are: (1) the rise of naturalism which denies the reality of the supernatural. The 1859 publication of Darwin's book *Origins of the Species*, naturalism as a modernist epistemology became increasingly popular and foundational (Sellars 1922:35) and, (2) belief that all sciences are a reflection of human intelligence and the scientific method is the only acceptable ground for obtaining certain and evident knowledge (Descartes 2000:2-3). The foundational nature of modernist epistemology had implications for all previously held metanarratives.

Therefore much of historic Christian epistemology is centred on the Church's interaction with modernism's rationalistic and naturalistic philosophies concerning the constitutional justification of certain and evident knowledge (Munro 2007:¶1). Though modernism accepted the existence of ultimate objective truth as foundational, the naturalistic foundation did not adequately answer people's questions in a way that provided insights to the meaning of life or a basis for morality, which ultimately contributed to its failure.

Though Grenz believes that challenges to modernity began in the late nineteenth century, becoming a full-scale assault in the 1970's (1996:5), Calinescu (1987:267) regards World War II, with its technology which increased the savagery of the conflict as that which brought to light "demonic modernity" and signalled its demise. There is little debate about the death of foundationalism as the key epistemic perspective of modernism; however there is much controversy over the epistemological belief that will replace it (Hoksbergen 1994:680). When describing this replacement to foundationalism, Groothuis (2000:40) calls postmodernism "modernism gone to seed."

D. A. Carson (2005:27) rightly identifies epistemology as primary in the transition from modernism to postmodernism. Since modernism's indubitable,

evidential knowledge, once confidently embraced by foundationalists, did not produce the desired outcomes, the reasonable response was to turn away from the failed project and move toward postmodernism as a reaction against the modernist epistemic convictions. Os Guinness (1994:105) offers a helpful contrast between postmodernism and modernism:

> In contrast, postmodernism announces itself a break with modernism just as modernism did earlier with tradition. Where modernism was a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation, postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair. There is no truth, only truths. There are no principles, only preferences. There is no grand reason, only reasons. There is no universal justice, only interests and the compilation of interest groups. There is no grand narrative of human progress, only countless stories of where people and their cultures are now. There is no simple reality or any grand objectivity of universal, detached knowledge, only ceaseless representation of everything in terms of everything else.

Though many philosophers, sociologists, artists, even economists have sought to define postmodern epistemology, one of the few commonalities shared by all definitions is that postmodernism is a rejection of modernist values and the denial of any valid foundational metanarratives. Given the postmodern reaction to modernism, it seems almost inevitable that French philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard (2004:¶3) defines postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives." "Incredulity" appears to have become more intense in McLaren's (2004:¶13) open letter to Chuck Colson, where he asserts that a metanarrative "implies domination, coercion, eradication of opponents, imposition of beliefs or behaviors on minorities against their will."

Another attempt to simplify postmodernist thought has been made by Scot McKnight (2007:¶6) who affirms that a postmodern epistemology does not exist because it requires one to move beyond the confinement of language. Groothuis also points out that the postmodern denial of objective truth leads to a belief that "God and all other concepts having to do with values, morality, spirituality and supernatural/immaterial realities became *only* concepts. They are mere 'linguistic signifiers' (or words, in common parlance) without objective

referents" (2000:41). Lyotard (2004:¶3), referring to clarity of communication, speculates that humans do not establish stable "language combinations" and even the ones established are not necessarily communicable. This perspective tends to encourage the postmodern disconnect of language to reality and contributes to the resistance of definitional clarity which informs postmoderns' propensity toward epistemic relativism.

Difficulties notwithstanding, attempts to define postmodernism abound. From the multiplicity of perspectives about how postmodernism should be defined, in addition to the above mentioned rejection of metanarratives, other themes surface such as negativity, dismissal of propositional truth, deconstructionism, pluralism, postfoundationalism, relativism, and inclusivism.

The implications of cultural postmodernism have been a source of concern for Churches who have been confronted by epistemic uncertainty as they share the propositional truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In an attempt to evangelise contemporary culture, the Church has developed a synergetic relationship with postmodern culture and philosophy. The "Christian story" has always been contextualized in every emerging culture and now the Church must engage with the emergence of the postmodern world (Webber 2007:9). The manifestation of the current cultural contextualization is seen in the Emerging Church. David Kowalski (2006:¶3) opines that the Emerging Church, in an effort to reach the postmodern world, is reshaping her beliefs and practices to conform to postmodernism. This mindset is disconcerting, especially when one considers postmodernism's penchant for relativism. One Emerging Church leader expresses his comfort joining epistemic forces with other religions and even groups who are not religions by referring to them as "collaborators" (McLaren 2004:35). Collaboration with incongruent epistemologies gives rise to concerns about the biblical reliability of the Emerging Church's epistemology. Not everyone who is, or once was part of the Emerging Church feels the same way about collaboration. Mark Driscoll (2006:21), in his comments on the Emerging Church asserts that both new and old "liberals" have collaborated; the distinction is that old liberals collaborated with modernity and the new accommodates postmodernity.

Emergent leaders have not been helpful in this regard. Like postmodernism itself, Emergent leaders offer no unified explanation of their movement's beliefs, opting rather for the more subjective concept of a conversation which sanctions conflicting ideas with equal legitimacy. Of course all beliefs and ideas did not receive equal legitimacy the conversation would terminate.

Though the Emerging Church's efforts to engage the postmodern culture are laudable, the movement is not without critics, but because defining the Emerging Church's epistemology is like trying to hit a moving target, many critiques have focused on the more readily definable, strategic methodologies. Some leaders in the Emerging Church movement believe the scope of current research has not been adequate to promote understanding of their epistemology. Brian McLaren, responding to D. A. Carson's critique of the Emerging Church proclaims that Dr. Carson doesn't understand the Emerging Church (Roach 2005:¶12). Therefore, more research must be done to understand its epistemology.

Because the Emerging Church's epistemic viewpoint has significant impact on the very essence of the orthodox Gospel, a clear understanding of the Emerging Church's epistemology is necessary in order to obediently and appropriately respond to the words of Paul in 1 Thess 5:21-22, *"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."*

Neither postmodernism nor the Emerging Church has thus far offered a contiguously coherent summary of their epistemology. Scot McKnight (2007:¶2), a theologian who considers himself to be part of the emergent conversation, expresses his view of the Emerging Church in terms of five streams flowing into "Lake Emergent." The essence of the five streams is prophetic, postmodern, praxis-oriented, post-evangelical and political (McKnight 2007:§2-6). Part of the difficulty in understanding the Emerging Church stems from the huge volume of terms introduced in the conversation. Confusion increases when one makes an attempt to define this new jargon and is confronted with postmodern deconstruction. Deconstruction questions the assumption that a logical coherence exists between what the author meant to

say and what he actually said; instead it looks for points of incoherence, where the author was actually communicating something different than intended (Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer 2003:87-89). Therefore the definition given by one Emergent may not necessary correspond to or be coherent with the definition given by another Emergent, resulting in disparate characterisations of Emerging Church thinking.

Given the great epistemic disparity among Emergents, this research project attempts to critique the perceived fallacious epistemology of three Emerging Church leaders from a biblical-theological perspective.

The research will focus on the epistemology of Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, and Doug Padgitt as representative leaders in the Emerging Church Movement. A prolific author and leader of the Emerging Church, Brian McLaren's book *A Generous Orthodoxy* has been called a "manifesto" of the Emerging Church (nd.:¶7). In February 2005 edition of Time Magazine, McLaren was listed seventeenth out of the twenty-five most influential evangelicals (*25 Most Influential Evangelicals*, 2005:§17). Dan Kimball has authored five books including the groundbreaking book, *The Emerging Church,* and serves on the board of Emergent-YS. Dan is one of the contributors to *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches,* edited by Robert Webber. Doug Pagitt, on his website describes himself as a speaker and consultant for Churches on issues of postmodern culture, social systems and Christianity (nd.:¶1). Doug has also authored several books including his latest, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope.* Though many other leaders exist in this movement, these three men, by virtue of their prolific authorship and speaking engagements have significant influence on the beliefs and direction of the movement.

The research will attempt to answer the following questions: What are the concepts involved in the study of epistemology? What is the epistemology of these representative leaders in the Emerging Church movement? What are the similarities and disparities in the epistemology of the three select Emerging Church leaders? What does the Bible say about the knowability of truth? Is the epistemology of this select group of Emerging Church leaders consistent with

the Biblical teaching about truth and knowledge? How should the Church respond based upon the results of the research?

1.2 Objective

The objective of this study is to conduct a biblical critique of three Emerging Church leaders' epistemology. The researcher will first attempt to clarify the epistemology of Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball and Doug Pagitt who are recognized leaders of the Emerging Church. Through content analysis of these leaders' contribution to the conversation taking place within the Emerging Church an epistemic foundation will surface.

Secondly, the study will seek to summarise the nature of biblical epistemology. While not using the term epistemology, the researcher believes the Bible does communicate the basic criteria of truth and its knowability.

Finally, the epistemology of the selected leaders of the Emerging Church will be compared, contrasted and critiqued in light of biblical teaching about truth and knowledge.

1.3 Motivation

Modernity's exaltation of rationalism has had a significant and in some cases harmful affect on the Church. Postmodernism's subjectivity and relativism, if not identified and addressed could potentially have the effect of emasculating the essential propositional truth of the gospel. In lieu of biblical verity, the researcher has observed a significant segment of the Church migrate away from embracing clear biblical truth to mystery and the promotion of perspectivism, individual felt needs and acceptance of conventional wisdom as a basis for living daily life. It is therefore the researcher's desire to bring to light the incorrect epistemology of the Emerging Church and advocate a renewed commitment to the perspicuity of and obedience to God's word.

1.4 Design and Methodology

The research design most suited to this study is qualitative literary research, namely, conceptual analysis (Mouton 2001:175). The main research questions are semantic and clarifying questions that seek to redact foundational epistemic concepts from the body of writing and select verbal communication from the designated leaders of the Emerging Church. Inductive logic will be employed as the researcher analyzes concepts generally held by Emerging Church leaders as observed in their communications in order to clarify the movement's general theory of the nature and knowability of truth and synthesises these discoveries into a summary of the Emerging Church's epistemology.

Once summarised, the epistemic foundation will be critiqued in light of the biblical-theological basis for truth and its knowability, followed by appropriate conclusions and recommendations.

Chapters three and four reflect the key elements of the study's methodology. Chapter three will attempt to provide a detailed definition of general epistemic concepts. This chapter is proposed to establish the relevant words and concepts which will be analysed in the literature of the selected Emerging Church leaders.

In chapter four, the researcher will seek to ascertain the essential foundation of the Emerging Church's epistemology on the basis of key epistemic concepts coded from its selected representative leaders' literature. This chapter will also attempt to code and analyse the epistemic concepts communicated by the authors of Scripture, summarising the biblical-theological perspective on the nature and knowability of knowledge.

Defining epistemic concepts in chapter three will involve a careful analysis of words, sets of words, or phrases which constitute an epistemic concept. It will also require the researcher to establish a pre-determined set of concepts to be defined including but not limited to, foundationalism, structuralism, metanarrative, deconstruction, empiricism, modernism, postmodernism,

pluralism, propositionalism, pragmatism, relativism, particularism, perspectivism, and rationalism.

Methods of research employed in chapter four will include concept analysis, utilising the pre-determined set of epistemic concepts established in the first stage of research. Comparative analysis will also be employed taking special note of the similarities as well as the differences between epistemic concepts and the Emerging Church's communication of these concepts. Special methodologies of thematic analysis and exegesis will be employed to identify and summarise biblical epistemology.

1.5 Definitions

The researcher makes the assumption that the Bible is inspired and inerrant and he agrees with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that the original Autographa of Scripture are inspired and inerrant. And, to the degree that a translation faithfully and accurately represents the original, it is the Word of God As such it is therefore authoritative for all matters of orthodoxy and praxis (Grudem 1994:1206-1207).

Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations will be taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 updated version (NAS95).

The Emerging Church will hence forth be referred to by the abbreviation EC.

1.6 Hypothesis

The researcher expects this study to reveal that the EC's epistemology is a syncretistic integration of secular philosophical postmodernism and biblical epistemology. The research is also expected to reveal some excellent criticisms of a modernistic mindset that have informed many traditions held by the Church today. The study is expected to uncover the EC's denial of the perspicuity of Scripture and aversion for propositional truth which negatively impacts interpretation and presentation of the Gospel, as well as its view of

personal holiness, all of which minimize effectiveness in promoting the purposes of God to the praise of His glory.

1.7 Overview

In schematic form, the thesis will be developed as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction: establishing the foundation and parameters of the research.

- Chapter 2 – Literature review: provides the literary framework for the research of the epistemology of the EC.

- Chapter 3 – Definition of general epistemic concepts. Philosophical epistemology will provide the scope and limitations of the epistemic concepts relevant to the study of knowledge. Categorical conceptual considerations that help form an epistemic framework is the aim of this chapter.

- Chapter 4 – Analysis of EC and biblical epistemology. Using the framework provided by the result of the previous chapter's research, communications from the selected leadership of the EC will be analysed for the purpose of redacting its epistemic values. Exegesis and theological analysis will be conducted on the biblical corpus to ascertain its teaching, doctrine of truth and its knowability.

- Chapter 5 – Comparison and critique of the EC's and biblical epistemology. Comparison of the two epistemologies will isolate similarities and differences. Similarities will be noted, while discrepancies will be critiqued with preference given to Scripture as inspired, inerrant and authoritative for all matters of belief and praxis.

- Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations: summarises research and makes a conclusion about the nature of the EC's epistemology. It is the desire of the researcher that the conclusions drawn from this study

will enable the Church to make educated decisions about the EC's contextualisation of the gospel in the postmodern culture and make practical suggestion about how the church should respond.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Given the EC's aversion to definability and its penchant for mystery, narrative and metaphor, one is compelled to enter an environment of interpretation with dubious certainty, not because of an epistemic presumption which rejects certainty, but for the fact that EC writers are intentionally vague. It is therefore crucial to reside closely to the language of the writers in an attempt to maintain interpretive continuity with authorial intent.

Consideration will be given to the writings of three EC leaders, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt who represent a range of voices in the emerging conversation. This reviewer will additionally consider critiques of the EC movement in an attempt to provide a broader perspective of the movement's beliefs and attempting to establish the critical acuity necessary to precisely locate this project among research already conducted in the field of study.

2.2 Dan Kimball

Of the three EC leaders being examined in this research project, Dan Kimball is theologically the most conservative. He holds a bachelor's degree from Colorado State University in the area of landscape design and has also earned a Graduate Certificate in Bible from Multnomah Biblical Seminary as well as a Master's degree from Western Seminary. Dan currently serves as an Adjunct

Faculty Mentor at George Fox Seminary where he is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree.

For the purpose of reviewing Kimball's perspectives as communicated in his writings, this researcher will consider *The EC*, published in 2003, and *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, published in 2007.

2.2.1 The Emerging Church

In the acknowledgements section of his first book, Kimball gives special recognition to Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt (among others) for his "rethinking of church and ministry" (Kimball 2003:11). The epistemic positions of McLaren and Pagitt are also included in the scope of this research project, therefore it is noteworthy that they have influenced Kimball's thinking.

Kimball's thesis is based on cultural changes in society which make the modern church ineffective and irrelevant to "emerging generations in what some call a postmodern or post-Christian context" (Kimball 2003:13).

He writes from three basic perspectives. First is the viewpoint that there is no single model for the EC. Each person comes to God in a unique context and therefore the mindset of modernity, which seeks to find a clean model for replication is no longer relevant. "You can't box-in the EC" (Kimball 2003:14).

Kimball's (2003:14) second perspective suggests that the EC is more of a mindset than a model. While similar to the first notion, Kimball moves from a multiplicity of models, to a change in how we think of the church. Exploration of new methods is not enough for Kimball. The real necessity is found in the inner core of how we view and even define the church.

The third perspective is a natural progression of thought from the first two positions. If one eliminates any singular model for the church, the logical next step is that one must explore inner realities to find the solution to irrelevance. Once the traditional values of the modern church model have been jettisoned, one must redefine success. Kimball's (2003:15) measure for the success of the church is defined as "missional." "The EC must redefine how we measure

success: by the characteristics of a kingdom-minded disciple of Jesus produced by the Spirit, rather than by our methodologies, numbers, strategies, or the cool and innovative things we are doing" (Kimball 2003:15).

The balance of the book is divided into two sections. Chapters one through eight, devoted to deconstructing postmodernism, serves as a foundation for reconstructing vintage Christianity which is the focus of chapters nine through twenty.

The foundation for Kimball's deconstruction of postmodernism is laid via the conversion experience of a twenty-four year old man named Sky. He tracks Sky's transformation from being a man turned off by his perception of Christianity as a man-made, organized religion where Christians were close-minded, judgemental people who believed that they alone had the only true religion, to a believer standing in the baptistry thanking the different and unusual people who helped him on his journey to Christ. Kimball's conclusion is derived from his pragmatic belief that Sky's conversion was facilitated by his contact with truly missional friends who demonstrated lives of discipleship in the context of vintage Christianity (Kimball 2003:ch 1).

Kimball moves next to an account of his own transition from being seeker-sensitive to post-seeker sensitive. His personal testimony reveals a pragmatic motivation as he confronted a new generation of students in his ministry. Students were no longer impressed or interested in high-tech church programming, a common methodology of seeker-sensitive ministries. The message of God's love became inadequate, worship and preaching were not connecting with the hearts of the young adults. After a nation-wide phone survey, Kimball discovered that young people were not responding to current outreach methods, they were not connecting with the contemporary modern church approach, they were feeling confused and in a state of transition. His conclusion; "rethink almost everything we do" (Kimball 2003:ch 2).

From chapters three to eight, Kimball gives his version of the historical transitions that bring us to the current emerging postmodern worldview. The launch point for this discussion focuses on the modernistic seeker-sensitive

megachurch, whose impact has waned, becoming all but irrelevant and ineffective. The reason for this diminution, in Kimball's mind, is the postmodern turn. He suggests that it is "futile to try to fix a surface issue without knowing the cause" (Kimball 2003:42). Kimball posits that historically, cultural transitions have affected our worldview.

Kimball (2003:44) summarizes the themes of each major worldview shift as such:

1) Ancient World – 2500 B.C. – 500 A.D. – "What is man that You are mindful of him?" Psalm 8:4.

2) Medieval World – 500-1500 – "I believe in order that I may understand." Anselm (1033-1099).

3) Modern World – 1500-2000+ - "Knowledge is power." Francis Bacon; "I think, therefore I am." Descartes (1596-1650).

4) Postmodern World – 2000+ - "If it makes you happy it can't be that bad." Sheryl Crow; "Every viewpoint is a view from a viewpoint."

Kimball (2003:47) quickly professes that because postmodernism is still in the process of development, it cannot be fully defined. There is no clarity about where it is taking us and yet, he claims that because postmodernism has deconstructed all that is necessary, we are now in the process of building upon its foundation. Kimball's pragmatic approach to the church and spirituality however, leaves one wondering about the legitimacy of rethinking church based on the opinions of a generation whose direction is unclear due to an unstable developing worldview.

Postmodernism does indeed represent a change in worldview. It is a reaction against and often a rejection of the values and beliefs of the modern era (Kimball 2003:49). Quoting from Stanley Grenz, Kimball (2003:50) explains that postmodernism "is an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set."

Kimball (2003:ch 4) lists some of the characteristic implications of postmodernism. One being that image no longer must align with original meaning. A postmodern may make a claim to spiritual belief without any external evidence by the way they practically live their life. To the postmodern, if beliefs blatantly contradict actions, no harm is done. Kimball further argues that the spiritual lines are blurred as spiritual relativism becomes the norm. A postmodern can embrace all major world religions, holding to the best parts of each.

Kimball (2003:chs 6-7) expounds on the implications of the postmodern transition for the church and ministry. He incorporates the use of heart-prodding narratives of disillusioned and hurt people in an attempt to elicit empathy toward people who may like Jesus but not Christians, especially modernistic, linear-thinking, proof-oriented Christians.

His first example is of religious pluralism. His point is that Christians must be more sensitive to those of other faiths. Since America has become more religiously diverse, our awareness of this reality should lead us to thinking about the mission field next door not only across the world.

Sexual orientation is another issue about which the EC is sensitive. Kimball tells of a straight girl who was offended by a modern linear-thinking preacher proclaiming the sinfulness of homosexuality. His point is that biblical evidences used by the preacher to prove that homosexuality was wrong did not convince this girl, but only made the church look repulsive to her. Kimball identified with the girl's repulsion, hence, demonstrating his affinity with the postmodern aversion to propositional conclusions drawn from diachronic divine revelation. Christians, in Kimball's (2003:82) mind, have created a subculture that alienates the postmodern generation and blinds modern believers to their own irrelevance.

Kimball (2003:ch 8) dubs chapter eight as the second most important chapter in his book. In it he compares the consumeristic church with the missional church. In a patently postmodern way, Kimball begins with a declaration that the Bible never talks about going to church. He explains that words have power and to

speak in terms of going to church communicates the wrong idea of the church's nature. The church has been given a mission by Christ to be witnesses and make disciples. Kimball contrasts the outward-looking missional church, which views itself as a body of believers sent on a mission, to a consumer church to which one attends or is serviced by. He insightfully reveals that the two perspectives can be identified by the direction of focus. Consumer churches are made up of people who focus on themselves, while missional churches are made up of people who focus on others.

Kimball astutely concludes that a church will not become missional by offering a few classes. It will mean a rebirthing of the church from the inside out. This is a sound and valid point, though one might question the connection between populous critiques from unsaved people and the biblical rebirthing of the church's ethos.

Kimball's (2003:chs 9-20) closing chapters focus on reconstructing the church so as to be effective in reaching the postmodern generation. His approach is foundationally pragmatic and essentially methodological.

The title of part two expresses Kimball's (2003:180) desire to establish "Vintage Christianity" in the EC. He rightly begins this section suggesting that values in the EC are changing or have changed, but quickly moves from values to methods as he describes four design approaches targeting the emerging generation. His favoured four-pronged approach is:

1) Start a life-stage outreach service in your church.

2) Start a worship gathering in your church with new values and a different approach, but remain one church.

3) Redesign your existing youth and college ministry.

4) Plant a new church to reach the emerging culture.

Kimball seems fixated on a comparison of "seeker-sensitive" churches and ECes. He explains the considerable difference in appearance and feel between the two, while drawing information from the feedback of those who are

questioning the sincerity of their experience in "seeker-sensitive" churches. He concludes that aesthetics and environment are important in an EC, both should reflect who you are and the identity of the community you are targeting (2003:141).

Some excellent suggestions are made in part two of Kimball's book. Multisensory worship is just one example, preaching being another. Kimball (2003:173) rightly opines, "In a culture void of truth and lacking understanding of the scriptural story, we need to proclaim, herald, and preach all the more." This says enough, but not for Mr. Kimball who adds to it by explaining that the methods we use to proclaim the story must change because the people we are speaking to have changed.

Using the Apostle Paul's message in Athens as an example, Kimball states the need for different starting points in the presentation of the Christian story. He urges us to think like Paul by avoiding any assumptions about where people are in their spiritual journey. Kimball (2003:178) however, tarnishes the point by stating that we need to deconstruct, reconstruct and redefine biblical terms.

Kimball continues his pragmatic redesign of the church's ministry by deconstructing evangelism, explaining that we must change our approach from trying to reach a pre-Christian "who does not have a clear understanding of Christianity but with the right approach could be convinced of its validity," to a post-Christian approach which addresses someone who has "already encountered Christianity at some level...and has decided to answer, 'Thanks, but no thanks'" (2003:288). Like a true pragmatist, Kimball's approach to evangelism emphasizes our role in the conversion or repelling of the heart. It communicates that culturally irrelevant or outmoded evangelistic methods, applied to the emerging generation, will hinder conversion. That humans can block the work of God in converting the soul, in effect minimizes the sovereignty of God in the process of electing, drawing, regenerating and placing souls in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual formation is the next element of emerging Christianity Kimball addresses. The path to spiritual formation is a decompartmentalised practise of

ancient disciplines that create what Kimball calls "vintage Christians" (2003:223). He explains that the modern church has been limited to Bible study, prayer, giving and serving while the neglected disciplines of weekly fasting, practising silence and lectio divina should be brought back into a holistic approach to spiritual formation. Though fasting is an appropriate spiritual discipline which Jesus assumed was a part of normative spiritual life (Mt. 6:16-18), Kimball's suggestion that the fasting be weekly, along with other third century Catholic monastic practises, illustrates the EC's characteristic lack of critical assessment and particularly with regard to spiritual formation.

Leadership in the church is the last section to be deconstructed by Kimball. He first claims that emerging culture needs compassionate leadership and defines it in terms of being motivated "like Jesus, by a broken heart" (2003:228). Kimball makes a valid point when he compares the CEO pastor who leads the church like an organisation as opposed to a more relational pastor who acts as a shepherd and guide in a common spiritual journey. Kimball's position on leadership is best summarised by his words at the end of chapter twenty,

> Leadership in the EC is no longer about focusing on strategies, core values, mission statements, or church-growth principles. It is about leaders first becoming disciples of Jesus with prayerful, missional hearts that are broken for the emerging culture. All the rest will flow from this, not the other way around.

In his personal epilogue, Kimball accurately affirms the important biblical truth that nothing will stop Christ from building the Church, but his last words are reminiscent of Sky, the man who was discussed in Kimball's first chapter. He closes the book with thoughts of many other postmodern emergents who have not experienced caring, passionate, kingdom-minded, simple, vintage Christians. "If only" (2003:146).

2.2.2 They like Jesus but not the Church

They like Jesus but not the Church published in 2007, is definitively pragmatic. It was motivated by an experience he had with a group of pastors to whom he was speaking about evangelising emerging generations. The pastors seemed to

be unaware and unconcerned about the "drastic dropout rate of younger people" as well as a "lack of people from emerging generations coming" into their churches (Kimball 2007:14).

Kimball observes that the once dominant churches (e.g., megachurches) of the seventies are now declining and in a few years they will be forced to shut down. The decline should serve as a wake-up call to the church about the reality that the world has changed and is no longer responding to the church's message as it once did. His answer to this dilemma is to get out of his office and start talking to members of the emerging generation. From the feedback he received in these conversations, Kimball develops his theme. He concludes, if the emerging generation is leaving the church because they don't like it, and we know that they do have a respect for Jesus, then the answer is for the church to change the way they relate to the emerging generation.

Pragmatic perspectives are generally amenable to differing methodologies due to the fact that one person's opinion may or may not be the only perspective on the matter. Most especially in the postmodern post-Christian culture, given its propensity for pluralism, one would expect a level of humility about what they consider to be truth. Not so with Kimball's book. His first task is to communicate with his readers introductory qualifications they should be aware of before proceeding. Ascertained from his first qualification, "This book is not just my opinions" (Kimball 2007:18), Kimball identifies the extent to which he has embraced the opinions of the emerging generation with respect to how the church should present herself in the world. This foundational base is represented when he argues that the EC is not a model but a mindset. Kimball, including himself with EC leaders at large, states "we need to change how we think of the church, rather than merely change our forms of ministry" (Kimball 2003:15).

Kimball admits that some of the conclusions are a result of misperceptions, "I think at the core of a lot of the confusion is the fact that most people are making conclusions about Christians and Christianity based on a few bad experiences" (Kimball 2007:34). He goes on to say that most of the people he spoke with

didn't even know a Christian personally so they formed their impressions of Christianity in other ways like movies, books, and television.

Those interviewed by Kimball have one thing in common, they all like Jesus but not the Church. Considering the comments from a pragmatic perspective leads one to conclude, if the emerging generation likes Jesus and not the Church, then it must be that the Church is not adequately representing Jesus to the emerging generation. To be sure, not all believers equally demonstrate Christ to the world, but is it not flawed logic to build an evangelistic approach on the basis of opinions about Christians and the Church from people who do not personally know Christians? Yet this is the approach Kimball takes throughout the remainder of the book.

Kimball's method of conveying the emerging generation's opinions of the Church and Christians is by means of six summary statements.

One: "The Church is an organized religion with a political agenda" (Kimball 2007:73). The reasons for this conclusion are first, people can relate to God without the imposition of the church's organizational structure and second, there is hierarchical control and governmental influence in the Church both of which the emerging generation is not comfortable. Finally, the structure and organization of the Church is more like a corporation with a CEO whose bottom line is power and control.

Kimball (2007:83) states his understanding of the need for organization. He does not advocate extricating the Church of all organization, he does however, state the need for younger generations to become part of significant leadership, as well as a change in the attitudes and communication of leadership in terms of how our faith is practiced in the world. Organizational leaders are viewed as power hungry and willing to manipulate others to acquire more power.

The main source of the manipulative power for many of the emerging generation is the preaching pastor. The elevation of the pastoral role in many Churches gives the impression of man-centred rather than Jesus-centred communities. Kimball's (2007:86-92) suggestions range from practical insights

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about reducing the number of "hoops" a person goes through in order to make contact with a leader on the one hand, to indulgence with regard to the number of times Jesus appears in the church bulletin or the physical set up of the auditorium on the other. Kimball's personal position relative to pastoral leadership is expressed in *The EC*, where he compares the "modern church" to the "EC," suggesting that the difference is a preacher led service in the modern Church as opposed to the preacher of an EC as a participant in a gathering (Kimball 2003:105).

Two: "The Church is judgmental and negative" (Kimball 2007:96). Concern was expressed about Church leaders who are not empathetic or kind to those who believe differently. Kimball's point is well taken as he urges the Church to be salt and light in the world and to take up the cause of the oppressed and poor as Jesus did while He was on earth. One of the elements missing from Kimball's response is the fact that believers do at times need to stand firm against injustice, heresy, and sinful lifestyles, a stand which may offend people who may interpret it as intolerant or unkind.

Three: "The Church is dominated by males and oppresses females" (Kimball 2007:115). Kimball acknowledges the unsettled debate between complementarians and egalitarians with reference to women's roles in the Church. Although he does not clearly reveal his position on the issue, he exhorts his readers to consider the insights of women from the emerging generation. Kimball also decries the lack of women in the highest levels of leadership, believing it to be evidential of the Church's oppression of women. As an introduction to some questionable comments about the feminine metaphors and characteristics of God, Kimball (2007:121) does state that he believes the Bible clearly teaches that we are to see God as a masculine Father. His concluding suggestions for the Church include having a balance of female and male leaders, making female leaders more visible, develop a well thought-out understanding of the Bible's teaching, communicate our position with the congregation, stop thinking in stereotypes, and include females in high levels of leadership and decision-making.

Four: "The Church is homophobic" (Kimball 2007:136). The perception from homosexuals is that the Church views them as enemies. Kimball urges us to understand the degree to which the emerging generation is aware of and has accepted homosexuality. He makes the point that he believes the Bible is clear that homosexual practice is sinful. Kimball (2007:138) has also concluded that homosexuality is not something people choose. He makes an important point about the cruelty and loveless response many Christians have toward homosexuality, which lends credibility to the emerging generation's conclusion of the Church being homophobic. Kimball (2007:149-150) states that we must understand how emerging generations view sexuality, and further suggests, "As homosexuality is being accepted as normal in our culture, I think many Christian leaders aren't in tune with that, so we either ignore it or just slam it down without any heart or thought." In addition to being more understanding of the emerging generation's normalizing of homosexuality, Kimball rightly expresses our need to master key theological arguments. With anecdotal experiences from homosexuals trying to fit into the life and ministry of the Church, he concludes the section by suggesting we accept and love homosexuals which can be done without affirming the sinful practice of homosexuality.

Five: "The Church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong" (Kimball 2007:163). Kimball begins this section with an extended history of a man whose father gave him an assortment of material on world religions. As a result, this man grew to appreciate the beauty and truth he saw in all religions. The interaction this man had with Christians who were uninformed about other religions yet held passionately to Christian orthodoxy led him to conclude that Christians are generally uninformed, disrespectful, arrogant and condemning of any religion that was dissimilar. Kimball (2007:167-185) advises that we, who live in a pluralistic culture, must understand, respect and coexist with all world religions if we are going to be effective missionaries to emerging generations. He is not clear however, what understanding, respect and coexistence looks like, an exclusion that causes this researcher to be hesitant in accepting Kimball's recommendation.

Six: "The Church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally" (2007:187). Early in this section, Kimball states that he embraces fundamental beliefs and takes the Bible literally. The stereotypical view of both fundamentalism and literalism causes the emerging generation to flee from the Church. It is problematic to formulate a strategic response based the uninformed opinions of emergents who disparage the Church's literal approach to the Bible. Kimball suggests that we must study, separate truth from opinion, teach people how to approach Bible study and discover its truth in the historical and cultural context, embrace fundamental beliefs and always communicate its truth in love.

The final section of Kimball's book explains how generally the Church should respond to the emerging generation. First, he gives a summation of the emerging generation's attitude toward the Church. Though not enough to redirect his obvious pragmatist tendencies, Kimball does clarify that the Church should not simply match what people want, that people's suggestions focussed on the main worship service, and that God uses many different types of Churches to reach emerging generations.

The emerging generation wants the Church to hold discussions rather than give sermons, to respect their intelligence by going deeper into theology rather than surface level entertainment, to be about people not a building, to de-programme by allowing more time for prayer and thought, to be a place of unconditional love, and to teach more about Jesus.

Kimball addresses the concerns of the emerging generation with the compassion and tolerance one would come to expect from the postmodern EC. Though he makes his beliefs clear on occasion, the majority of his book reflects a centrist's acceptance of both sides of the debate. Thus Kimball illustrates the general tendency of pragmatists, that is, one's strategic approach is determined by expediency and practical effectiveness.

2.3 Brian McLaren

In the last ten years, Brian McLaren has become one of the most recognizable leaders in the EC movement. He has become so popular that in the year 2005, TIME Magazine named him one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals. Mr. McLaren is by far and away the most prolific writer of the EC movement and as such, he has a large following. Among the many titles that McLaren has credited to his name, a few of his books are significantly representative of his practical, social and theological views of modern evangelicalism and an emerging postmodern culture to which the EC seeks to minister.

Reviewing each of McLaren's books is not possible given the scope and limitations of this research project, due to redundancy however, it is not compulsory to review every book in order to encapsulate McLaren's message. Therefore, this reviewer will initially review McLaren's trilogy, *A new kind of Christian, The story we find ourselves in,* and *The last word and the word after that.* Consideration will also be given to *A generous orthodoxy* and *The secret message of Jesus.*

2.3.1 A new kind of Christian

From the introduction it is clear that McLaren is not simply telling a story. In a parabolic style that suits his postmodern penchant for narratives, McLaren has an agenda and he effectively conveys his opinions and ideas vicariously via the mythical characters he animates throughout the trilogy and particularly in this volume.

McLaren's story centres on a pastor, Dan Poole, who has become disillusioned with his church and even his Christian beliefs. Poole then meets Dr. Neil Everett Oliver (Neo) a former pastor and current High School science teacher who understands Poole's dilemma and helps him navigate the course from a pastor, whose faith has been shaped by the cultural influence of modernity, to the reality of a postmodern world and a new kind of Christian.

Neo's first task is to lead Dan into an understanding of postmodernity. This is accomplished by pointing to the significance of two pivotal dates in history, A.D. 1500 and A.D. 2000. The year A.D. 1500 works as a transition from medieval

times to the modern era, while the year A.D. 2000 marks the transition from modernity to postmodernity. Both transitions encompass seven categories of change which include, new communication, new scientific worldview, new intellectual elite, new transportation technology, decay of the old economic system, new military technology, and a new attack on dominant authorities (McLaren 2001:43-46).

The next step in the journey to becoming a new kind of Christian is a comparison of the way traditional Christians approach hermeneutics, to the way a postmodern approaches biblical interpretation. This is identified by McLaren as "one of the biggest debates" (McLaren 2001:69). Neo instructs Dan about the difference between a traditional interpretive grid and a liberal grid. The traditional grid is fuelled by modernity and interprets the Bible literally. Neo's opinion of this approach is demonstrated by the following description, "But they seem generally unaware of this grid; they think they rigorously apply the Bible literally, and no one else is as faithful as they are. Their grid is like their own retina—they see by it, so they can't see it" (McLaren 2001:71). According to Dan's mentor, literal, conservative, traditional interpretation of the Bible is responsible for perpetuating slavery, exterminating the Indians, subjugating women, marginalising minorities and exploiting the environment (McLaren 2001:73).

The suggested solution to this problem of modern interpretation and literal application is to realise that the concept of authority as most people conceive of it is a thoroughly modern idea. The Bible then should not be viewed as an authoritative answer book or as the corpus which makes up the foundation of the Christian faith. McLaren (2001:78-79) illustrates his alternative to biblical foundationalism through the analogy of a spider web. For McLaren, the spider web is a better comparative to the faith than a building because a building is built upon one foundation while a spider web has many different anchor points. The Bible is only one of the anchor points of the Christian faith. Poole's alternative to the analytical hermeneutic he associates with modernity is a loose, less defined, postanalytical, postcritical, postmodern approach to reading the Bible (McLaren 2001:80-81).

The next aspect of Dan's thinking that must be reformed, in Neo's mind, is his view of evangelism and other religions. Instead of an aggressive quest to prove other religions wrong and Christianity right, a new kind of Christian will see evangelistic interaction with these religions as more of a dance. In a dance there are no winners or losers. Both parties are hearing and trying to move with the music. McLaren's relativistic tendencies are betrayed when Neo, his mentor, confesses a rudimentary understanding of Buddhism, but states that their teachings are wonderful and insightful as well as the teachings of Muhammad. McLaren, through Neo's persona, communicates to his readers that Christianity is actually an enemy of the gospel (McLaren 2001:90).

Neo sees no conflict with a Buddhist, Muslim or Navajo being a Christian but remaining consistently engaged in their respective cultures and communities (McLaren 2001:107). In response to concerns about syncretism and its dangers, Neo presents his definition of syncretism, "Well, syncretism is usually what Christians who are thoroughly immersed in one culture talk about when Christianity is being influenced by other cultures" (McLaren 2001:112).

McLaren's (2001:165) summary of his desired outcome for the transition from modern Christianity to the emerging postmodern Christianity is revealed by Dan's question to Neo on what a new kind of Christian will look like, to which Neo responds by reminding him of the most important areas of change,

> ...our understanding of the Bible and how we follow it, how we let it work on us, our posture in relation to other religion, and our understanding of Jesus not as IN the way, keeping people away from God, but AS the way, bringing people to God; our releasing of the ways in which our faith has been enmeshed with modernity, so we can discover what a Christian can be in a postmodern context; our exploration of theology free of the constricting, reductionistic categories of modernity; our escape from the narrowing of the gospel to an individualistic story only about saving souls to a missional, communal, and global story about saving the world.

The new kind of Christian will also look at hell very differently than traditional modern Christians. Rather than assessing a person's spiritual condition, Neo suggests that, for the new kind of Christian in a postmodern world, "It's none of your business who does and does not go to hell" (McLaren 2001:180). He further states that the way modern evangelicals use the word "saved" is terribly unbiblical, because it suggests that salvation is only about getting to heaven (McLaren 2001:184).

Neo's relationship with Dan comes to an end suddenly due to the death of Neo's mother and his subsequent decision to travel the world. The story concludes by Neo considering a return to the pastorate and Dan well on the path of becoming a new kind of Christian.

2.3.2 The story we find ourselves in

This book constitutes the second instalment of the new kind of Christian trilogy in which McLaren, through the use of allegorical narrative, communicates with his readers what is wrong with current evangelical religion and what must emerge if the church is going to be a significant force in the postmodern world.

Having already become acclimated to McLaren's narrative style, deciphering his message is a simpler task. Another reality contributing to the clarity of this book is that McLaren is much bolder and straight-forward about some of his controversial views, especially with regard to evolution and creation.

The story begins with Dan receiving an email from Neo eighteen months after he left on a world tour. In Neo's email he introduces Dr. Kerry Allison, an Australian with a rare form of cancer. He asks Dan to offer her help and friendship in what may prove to be the short time she has left to live. As Dan's relationship with Kerry grows, she relates the story of her connection with Neo.

McLaren, true to his postmodern paradigm, unfolds "the story we find ourselves in" (McLaren 2003:31) by means of a theological conversation between Neo and Kerry Allison as the primary conversants, but also including others who enter into the exchange.

Through Neo, McLaren engages us in the story which is revealed in seven episodes or instalments: creation, crisis, calling, conversation, Christ, the church and the consummation. The first episode is introduced by Neo's view of God, but in a postmodern deconstructionist framework, which he assures Kerry is "the real God, the One beyond our words and concepts...I mean the Being who really is..." (McLaren 2003:35).

McLaren's (2003:36) ultimate perspective of the current story is not exclusive but inclusive, a story which has room for all other stories as well, without exclusion or judgement.

As Neo talks about different elements of his beliefs related to God and creation it becomes clear that he accepts a theistic evolutionary theory as he asks his new friend to engage in an academic exercise of historical regression back to fifteen billion years when, he believes, the beginning took place with the big bang (McLaren 2003:38-39).

As one might conclude from his old earth beliefs, Neo is not a biblical literalist, a fact which is not in any doubt when he says, "I think that the literalism of many of my fellow believers is silly" (McLaren 2003:45).

The next instalment of the story deals with the obvious crisis in which humanity finds itself. The source of the crisis, in McLaren's mind, is humanity's progressive development. Humans were continuing to evolve, first living as hunters and gatherers. As human's brain capacity increased facilitating the development of language and other social innovations, it led to a series of crises which took place as a result of their intellectual and technological advances. Neo's summary conclusion posits that Adam and Eve decided they didn't want to answer to anyone and that is why they took the fruit. The ensuing imbalance of creation soon led to Cain's murder of his brother due to anger about Abel's encroachment on his agricultural territory (McLaren 2003:ch 10).

The story continues with the third instalment about calling. McLaren's inclusivism and his affinity for deconstruction surfaces here as Neo expounds on Abraham and concludes that for the last four thousand years we have

misunderstood the call of Abraham. The blessing is not an exclusive blessing in Neo's interpretation, it is rather, an instrumental blessing, that is, we are blessed for the purpose of blessing the world. If we see ourselves blessed over others we become part of the problem not part of the solution. To illustrate this, McLaren presents the concept of cursing. Neo explains that cursing cannot mean hell because Abraham had no concept of hell. Instead the idea of cursing is to be seen in contrast to blessing. Blessing is the giving of resources while cursing is God withholding help, refusing to give resources or encouragement (McLaren 2003:chs 12-13).

The story continues by discussing the ongoing conversation God had through the other patriarchs and then judges and kings. Later, God, as a faithful guide and companion, raised up prophets and priests to bring His people back to intimacy, away from their moral and ethical failures. Postmodernism's aversion to authority and sovereignty bleeds through the text as Neo concludes that God was more of a partner with the people not manipulating them or robbing them of that special gift of their freedom. Neo further argues that God, communicating through the Bible, doesn't tell us what to think, rather instead, he challenges us how to think (McLaren 2003:chs 14-16).

Christ is the object of the next episode in the story we find ourselves in. Dan's wife, Carol, explains the biblical foundation of atonement by communicating that Jesus came to take the punishment for our sins. McLaren (2003:143), illustrates weak conviction regarding the necessity of substitutionary atonement opines, "It's a possible explanation for how Jesus' life and death play a role in the salvation of the human race." Neo, in his explanation of Jesus points out that Jesus did not just come to establish the kingdom of God in the next life, but to be a revolutionary, radically changing the world here and now. The historic, eternal, global dimensions of Jesus' mission create in the author's mind, some of the most difficult theological challenges for Christians (McLaren 2003:chs 18-23).

The events of September 11, 2001 provide the backdrop for the next episode. As they understand the power of the terrorist cell networks, they become acutely aware of the need for different kinds of cell networks. This instalment of

the story focuses on community. McLaren promotes his view that Christianity is not about religion but about a messianic way of living. Through Poole's conversation with Kincaid, McLaren explains that the Holy Spirit first works in a person making them more like Jesus, He works through a person by involving him in God's mission, finally the Holy Spirit connects people together as they all work on the same cause. The strongest element of McLaren's views of the church is the communal aspect of his ecclesiology. The church is a community of imperfect, growing, learning believers who are seeking to live the life of Christ on earth (McLaren 2003:chs 24-25).

The final episode is shared by Neo as Kerry is celebrating her final birthday. As her friends gather around her hospital bed, Neo explains how all things come together in Jesus. McLaren (2003:207) offers a unique perspective of history by asking, "Instead of history being driven by the past, what if history is constantly being invited to receive the gift of the future?" God not only unleashed history in the beginning, He is also out ahead, calling history homeward. Neo goes on to explain that the church is a community of people who are learning to live the way everyone will live in the future. McLaren, who is not convinced in heaven as a place, opting for an ethereal non-locative heaven, suggests that God will merely amalgamate all the good memories He holds of each believer.

Dan and Neo admit that the deconstructing and reconstructing of their story is a frightening thing. McLaren (2003:229-230), taking advantage of an opportunity to disarm critics asserts, "But there's a problem: new paradigms in science can never be justified based on the criteria of the old paradigm, and I can imagine the same is true in theology." Their continuing discussion of eschatology addresses the question of the fate of unbelievers. Dan pushes to get an answer from Neo about what he thinks will happen to those who have not followed Jesus. Neo resists answering the question and instead offers an unsatisfactorily ambiguous answer that defies certainty and in no way models the clarity which the Bible provides on the subject (McLaren 2003:chs 27-33).

The second book in the trilogy ends with Dr. Kerry Allison's death and Pastor Dan Poole doing the memorial service in which he summarised the story told by Neo, the story we find ourselves in. The entire family goes to the Galapagos

Islands to spread Kerry's ashes. Upon Dan's arrival back home he receives a letter from the church board questioning the changes they hear in his doctrinal positions. Neo assures him that it isn't heresy to rethink the story and tell it straight, it's the gospel.

2.3.3 The last word and the word after that

Though embedded in an appealing narrative with fascinating characters, developing relationships and real-life problems, McLaren's first two books address a broad range of theological themes. McLaren states this book's purpose, "This book, in a sense, attempts to deconstruct our conventional concepts of hell in the sincere hope that a better vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ will appear" (McLaren 2005:xxvi-xxvii). Though McLaren repeatedly tries to convince us that his book is not about hell, the theology of hell cannot be ignored as the principal theme of consequence. McLaren skilfully communicates, in his allegorical way, and as the narrative unfolds his definition of a "better vision" develops with all the hallmarks of postmodern uncertainty and ambiguity.

In an effort to facilitate a more coherent picture of the underlying message of this book, this reviewer will address McLaren's viewpoints from a global perspective and therefore may not, in all cases, follow the strict chronology of the narrative.

The book begins where the previous book ended. Pastor Dan Poole has been placed on paid administrative leave from his church pending the outcome of an investigation by the church board into his changing theological moorings as they relate to the essential doctrines of the church. One day his daughter, a student at a local university, needs to discuss a crisis in her faith. She summarises her dilemma in two succinct statements, "It's about God, Dad, and my ability to keep believing in him, or her, or whatever." "If Christianity is true, then all the people I love except for a few will burn in hell forever" (McLaren 2005:6).

Dan begins by entertaining with his daughter four views on hell. Exclusivism, which limits eternal life to confessing Christians; inclusivism keeps the door

open for others to be saved who have never really identified themselves with Christianity; conditionalism is the idea that hell is temporary and leads to annihilation rather than eternal torment; and universalism which says that everyone will be saved. Dan's lack of real peace about the subject motivated him to research the doctrine of hell. His research forms the basis for the remainder of the book.

Dan is challenged by Neo to identify his "nonnegotiables" (McLaren 2005:57) as he begins to think through the subject of hell. Dan isolates his nonnegotiables as honesty to the Scriptures, conclusions must be logical, they must take into account what theologians have believed throughout history including also the minority views, and they must be faithful to what he feels in his heart.

From his historical research, Dan identifies that the Old Testament does not reveal any concept of hell. Through extra-biblical writings Dan finds four streams of thought about the afterlife and hell, the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Zoroastrian, and Greek perspectives of the afterlife.

McLaren (2005:86) then promotes the belief that the Pharisees used the ancient, non-Jewish concepts of hell as a tool to threaten sinners. According to McLaren, Jesus, the first biblical character to mention hell, actually deconstructs hell and reverses the argument back onto the Pharisees.

In his characteristic distaste for orthodox evangelicalism, McLaren sees Christians as using the doctrine of hell in the same way as the Pharisees, thus once again ending up on the wrong side of what is best and most godly. Neo, delighted with Dan's insight exclaims, "I think you may be in danger of becoming a radical follower of Jesus" (McLaren 2005:88).

McLaren (2005:ch 12) states that the point of the whole discussion is not really about a literal hell, but rather about justice. Jesus, in McLaren's mind, by using the language of hell, does not confirm it. Assuming that hell is not a theological reality in the mind of God himself, McLaren presents the idea that the question of confirmation is not the issue, rather, at issue is the question of why Jesus uses the language at all. We must ask ourselves why Jesus is using a

constructed concept of hell.   That the author does not believe in a literal hell is further illustrated by his introduction of Neo's analogy from the scientific world of what he calls "critical realism" (McLaren 2005:101). Scientific models are used to help us understand the relationship of protons and neutrons at an atomic level. The models portray these elements as little balls even though scientists know they aren't literally true. The purpose of the model is not to be literally true but to help us work with a mystery. Thus, critical realism tells us that we realise the language is about models, symbols and metaphors, thus, not intended to be taken literally, but symbolically referent to true reality. The clear implication is that when Jesus speaks about hell, He is using a truth-depicting model, it is not intended to be taken literally rather, as that which symbolically or metaphorically refers to a mysterious reality.

McLaren further implies that deconstruction is unavoidable. "...if the vision of God that we get through Jesus takes root, it's only a matter of time until—until the deconstruction begins" (McLaren 2005:105). Deconstruction implies a non-literal approach to the Bible which is illustrated by McLaren (2005:ch 13) through a conversation Dan has with Neo regarding passages in the New Testament that make an apparent reference to hell. McLaren (2005:ch 17) also, albeit indirectly through a minor character in the narrative named Casey, denigrates propositions in support of seeing the Bible as something to be preached and felt not to be studied or theologised.

Though not specifically about hell, McLaren shows his theological position by Dan's reaction to reading a statement of faith given to him by the church board seeking his agreement. Dan's comments are telling, "This isn't...this isn't evangelical. This is pure fundamentalism. Look at this: six-day literal creation, eternal conscious torment, whoa—they're completely overt about Exclusivism, literal fire and brimstone, even...three, four, five point Calvinism" (McLaren 2005:121). Fundamentalism, as McLaren defines it, receives another insult when Markus speaks of hell as the "frequent preoccupation of recovering fundamentalists" (McLaren 2005:185).

Having concluded his initial study on hell, Dan is invited to join a community of learning. The second half of the book is set in this context as Dan continues his

journey to become a new kind of Christian. Neil describes the group as, "the people I know with" (McLaren 2005:178). For the postmodern Christian, learning is ultimately a communal experience. Ruth offers Dan a new term, "deep ecclesiology" (McLaren 2005:194) to describe the communion of believers in all its forms. The immediate reference is the post-Protestant group to which Dan was invited, an unstructured, ephemeral, spontaneous church which sees all its activities as part of spiritual formation.

The journey Dan embarked on with Neo back in book one comes full circle when Chip, the man who was appointed by the church council to manage the investigation of heresy in Dan's new theologies, schedules a meeting with him to discuss his second thoughts about his position on the eternal punishment of sinners in hell (McLaren 2005:ch 26). The direction of their conversation is predictably the same as we have seen transpire between Dan, Neo and the community group. The ultimate goal and result of a loving Father is peace. We are not to think of our lives in relation to our eternal destiny but evaluate ourselves in light of our relationship to God. It is more about the here and now not the then and there. Now Chip is on his way to becoming a new kind of Christian. McLaren uses Chip to communicate that our modern misunderstanding of hell makes us irrelevant Christians. In an email to Dan, Chip expresses his desire, "...I am an irrelevant Christian desperate to be relevant to a world that is desperate for good news" (McLaren 2005:235).

It is relevance in a postmodern world that has driven Dan Poole on his journey to become a new kind of Christian, a journey that McLaren has been on for some time. He has not only been mentored, but is a mentor to many who, according to McLaren, need to become new kinds of Christians.

2.3.4 A generous orthodoxy

This instalment in McLaren's prolific writing career is not set in the narrative style we have seen in his new kind of Christian trilogy. *A generous orthodoxy* is a more systematic presentation of McLaren's views addressing a variety of theological themes.

In the introduction, McLaren (2004:19) establishes the definition of orthodoxy as "straight thinking" or "right opinion." Though a definition like this implies the antithesis, McLaren does not want to engage in "nauseating arguments" about theology, hence the adjective generous.

The remainder of the book is concerned more with generosity than with orthodoxy. In his subtitle, McLaren states that he is a missional, evangelical, post-protestant, liberal, conservative, mystical, poetic, biblical, charismatic, contemplative, fundamental, Calvinist, Anabaptist, Anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian. Having declared this, the author sets out to give us a better understanding of generous.

If his title choice did not forewarn us of McLaren's proclivity for controversy, all doubt is removed when he discloses, "...I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated..." (McLaren 2004:23).

In his own words, McLaren (2004:27) admits, "The book is absurd because it advocates an orthodoxy that next to no one actually holds, at least not so far." There is dissonance in the title. Orthodoxy does not normally impart generosity because two opposing or contrasting views cannot both be, strictly speaking, correct, straight, right and for this reason McLaren personifies orthodoxies and accuses them of being ungenerous toward other beliefs. It is this personification which betrays McLaren's deeper purpose for writing the book. He is relating more about his personal pilgrimage of faith than he is about true biblical orthodoxy.

Given the aforementioned introductory context, one may consider the paradoxical statement of faith presented by McLaren, not as a coherent theological repertoire, but as thinking out loud and recording his many contradictory thoughts in symbolic, poetic ways that withstand clear comparison with true biblical orthodoxy.

It seems to this reviewer that the most logical way to facilitate a lucid review is to briefly summarise McLaren's theological self-portrait.

McLaren (2004:chs 1-4) presents a brief sketch of his Christian faith. He defines Jesus, as he has known Him, from seven different traditions. The Conservative Protestant Jesus centres on the crucifixion and whose gospel was unsatisfactory because it did not speak clearly to justice for the world rather than the justification of the individual who believes.

The second Jesus McLaren knows is the Pentecostal/Charismatic Jesus. The gospel of this Jesus focuses on the Holy Spirit who continues to save believers, but as one might expect, this is not enough for McLaren so he suggests the third, Roman Catholic Jesus. The Catholic Jesus, in McLaren's opinion, is the resurrected Jesus. This Jesus was still too personal and individual and left McLaren once again feeling unsatisfied.

His search for a Saviour of the entire cosmos led him to the Eastern Orthodox Jesus. In this Jesus, McLaren sees the Trinity, not in an abstract way but in a dynamic, transcendent and cosmic way, which in his own words, "opened the door for three more" (McLaren 2004:59).

The Liberal/Protestant Jesus centres on the actual words and deeds of Jesus who gives us an example to follow in our own lives. The Anabaptist Jesus focuses on the ethical teachings of Jesus as the heart of the gospel. Finally, the Jesus of the oppressed led McLaren to a nonviolent liberation theology.

McLaren (2004:66) rightly asks the question, "Why not celebrate them all?" His generosity is revealed in that he labels all traditions as Christians who bring a distinctive blend of gifts to the table, contributing to a great feast of generous orthodoxy (McLaren 2004:67).

In chapter three, McLaren (2004:83) claims that Jesus came to free us from the dehumanisation and oppression that comes from powers in the world. He defines the good news as liberation from determinism.

For McLaren (2004:ch 4), Christianity has missed the point, indeed even missed the true message of Jesus. In his own words, "If we were to try to reinstate Jesus as Lord/Teacher, we would have to go outside the world of popular theology to find ways to think about the meaning of Lord/Teacher" (McLaren 2004:87). Thus McLaren continues in his attempt to shape our understanding of a generously orthodox Christian, a new kind of Christian who impacts the entire earth in the emerging postmodern generation.

McLaren (2004:ch 5) explains why he is a missional Christian. A missional Christian is one who wants "To be and make disciples of Jesus Christ in authentic community for the good of the world" (McLaren 2004:107). As McLaren has already stated he has gone out of his way to be unclear in this book, and as it relates to missional Christianity he has attained ambiguity. Missional seems to encompass everything we are and do as Christians. It removes the terms missionary and mission field. McLaren (2004:111) adds the idea of value to missional as he quotes his mentor, "Remember, in a pluralistic world, a religion is valued based on the benefits it brings to its nonadherents." McLaren's (2004:114) desire is for the gospel to be generous and universally beneficial for the whole earth, not exclusionary where Jesus comes to save those who believe and leaving everyone else.

McLaren also describes himself as evangelical, noting with special emphasis the lower case "e" in evangelical. Negative connotations associated with Evangelicalism led McLaren to drop the label. He accurately identifies the elements of Evangelical orthodoxy, but quickly adds, "When I say I cherish an evangelical identity, I mean something beyond a belief system or doctrinal array or even a practice" (McLaren 2004:117). He recognizes that his definition of evangelical is much different than the image which comes to most people's minds when they hear the term, so McLaren (2004:120) borrows what he considers a more appropriate term, post-evangelical. What makes this term apposite for the author is the prefix, which he defines as, coming, emerging or growing from, with an accent on both continuity and discontinuity. McLaren (2004:120) ends this section by stating his aspiration that "evangelical can

become an inclusive and positive term, rather than a sectarian and restrictive one—an essential element of a generous orthodoxy."

The author also describes himself as a post-protestant. Development of this ideal is heavily weighted in the historical roots of the protesting reformers in the vein of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin and others. McLaren's (2004:125) post-protestant label is precipitated by the ignominy he justifiably feels about Protestants not only protesting Catholic excesses, but also their protest of other Protestants. He sees this reciprocal protestation as facilitating a spiritual environment by which religion became a commodity to be peddled in search of loyal consumers. Although McLaren (2004:126) appropriately commends Protestants for their attention to Bible study, he mistakenly assumes the motivation for their study of Scripture is simply to prove themselves right and others wrong.

McLaren further suggests that generous post-Protestants become proactive testifiers of worthy things. In this new religious economy, he sees Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox people coming together to an extent that all groups acknowledge failures, no one considers themselves as superior and all groups learn from one another.

As a liberal/conservative, McLaren (2004:ch 8) equates what happened in the reformation with that which is happening in the emerging postmodern generation. He illustrates epistemic humility and suspicion of authority, which is prevalent in postmodernism, by his comments about our inability to properly interpret Scripture. It is best if McLaren (2004:133) speaks for himself on this point:

> How do "I" know the Bible is always right? And if "I" am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation, I'll also ask how I know which school, method, or technique of biblical interpretation is right. What makes "good" interpretation good? And if an appeal is made to a written standard (book, doctrinal statement, etc.) or to common sense or to "scholarly principles of interpretation," the same pesky "I" who liberated us from the authority of the church will ask,

> "Who sets the standard? Whose common sense? Which scholars and why? Don't all these appeals to authorities and principles outside of the Bible actually undermine the claim of ultimate biblical authority? Aren't they just the new pope?

McLaren justifies his scepticism about biblical interpretation by exemplifying historical uses of the Bible to support slavery, the oppression of women, abuse of the environment and other disturbing acts of injustice and irresponsibility amongst conservative literal interpreters of the Bible (McLaren 2004:134).

Additionally, McLaren makes a peculiar distinction between liberals and conservatives. Liberals are the pioneers of science and ethics whereas conservatives are laudable with regard to individual conversion and discipleship (McLaren 2004:139). It is beyond modernity (in the emerging postmodern world) that liberals and conservatives have the best chance of coming together in a generous, new, emerging, uncertain, humble, postmodern orthodoxy.

McLaren further labels himself as a mystical poet. For an introduction to this self-description, he refers to Walter Brueggemann, who in McLaren's (2004:144) words believes that the theological landscape is dominated by theological accountants, technicians, and scientists, but not theological poets. McLaren's point is that the average evangelical conservative analyses the Bible too much and misses the mystical poetry of the message. He further argues this phenomenon is reducing the poetry of the Bible to mere prose. He is not seeking the "language of the scientist" rather, he is seeking the "wilder language of the poet" (McLaren 2004:147). Essentially McLaren rebukes the arrogance of intellectualising by those who construct non-poetic cathedrals of propositions and systematic theologies.

The emergent approach is, in McLaren's (2004:152-153) description, coherent, contextual, conversational, and comprehensive. It is an approach that doesn't take itself too seriously, it is humble, it welcomes poets and mystics who understand that the Bible contains a small amount of "expository prose" (McLaren 2004:155). When we emerge to this level, we can then celebrate a truly generous orthodoxy.

The next instalment of McLaren's generous orthodoxy seeks to answer the question of why he is a biblical Christian. Like all other descriptive terms, McLaren offers his own unique definition. Having progressed beyond his upbringing, which taught him that the Bible was a book of answers, he no longer sees the Bible that way, rather, he assures his readers that although he regards the Bible differently, the Bible still has value for him (McLaren 2004:160). McLaren (2004:161) characterizes the inspiration of Scripture with the notion of a primitive language, possessing a creative life-giving vitality.

Furthermore, he points out that Scripture doesn't use words like authority, inerrancy, infallibility or revelation to describe itself, lamenting that, "hardly anyone notices the irony of resorting to the authority of extrabiblical words and concepts to justify one's belief in the Bible's ultimate authority" (McLaren 2004:164). He jettisons these concepts as extrabiblical because the Bible does not specifically use the words, which betrays McLaren's deepest views that the Bible is simply a book or narrative written for the purpose of helping us become equipped for acts of kindness and compassion in this needy world (McLaren 2004:166).

As a charismatic/contemplative Christian, McLaren (2004:174) humbly expresses his open attitude toward God, declaring, "God, give me all you've got." However, while he is not willing to accept extrabiblical words and concepts to describe the authority of Scripture, McLaren is more than ready to express gratitude toward Pentecostal/charismatics for teaching him to accept and welcome extrabiblical experiences. He describes charismatics as giving him a high school diploma in the things of the Spirit, but it was the Catholic contemplatives that gave him an undergraduate education in the Spirit (McLaren 2004:175).

McLaren further embraces generous rather than orthodox by his comparison of Catholic contemplatives with non-charismatic Protestants who are, as he describes, "preoccupied as they tend to be with modern rationality, abstract theory, and depressing topics such as total depravity" (McLaren 2004:177). This reviewer agrees that the topic of total depravity can tend to be depressingly

ungenerous, but orthodoxy requires one to believe in biblical anthropology no matter how it makes one feel.

By way of summary, McLaren makes it clear that in his mind, there is no room for generous discretion with regard to our adoption of his descriptions. "Without this charismatic/contemplative posture, I can't imagine what my life would be. And I don't think that a generous orthodoxy can consider this path an optional pursuit" (McLaren 2004:180).

McLaren further describes himself as a fundamentalist/Calvinist, but he soon distances himself from fundamental orthodoxy, rather proclaiming himself philosophically a post-foundationalist (McLaren 2004:183-184). In McLaren's mind, the Christian faith is reduced to loving God and loving neighbours. Questions, attempting to accurately delineate theological positions about God do not satisfy McLaren. For him, one does not learn about God from study. The basis for our knowledge of what God is like comes from the subjective experience of loving Him. Study can bring us more knowledge of God, but the essence of our knowing God is to love Him, because He Himself is love (McLaren 2004:185).

Using his analogical style of communication, McLaren (2004:186), in a derogatory way, likens the doctrine of divine election to a chess game in which God has ultimate control of the lifespan for any of the pieces on the board. Using this analogy as a springboard, he concludes that Calvinism is deterministic, making the idea of human freedom no more than an illusion.

The theological system of Calvinism is indirectly repudiated by McLaren when he equates all such ordered, reasoned, intellectual systems of thought with modernity. It is for this reason, reformed theology will struggle the most with the emergence of a new kind of Christian. The solution, for McLaren (2004:189), is for reformed Christians to reconstruct their faith in ways that are fitting for postmodern times. Thus, orthodoxy continues to be an ongoing construct in McLaren's mind with each version becoming more generous (which for McLaren means postmodern) than the previous version.

Expressing himself in an ungenerous way, McLaren (2004:191) says, "...our message and methodology have changed, do change, and must change if we are faithful to the ongoing and unchanging mission of Jesus Christ." As we have seen throughout this book, the implication of a generous orthodoxy means that one cannot state with authority what "must" happen in the faith journey of another; everything is open to change.

That McLaren is actually not a fundamental Calvinist in the truest sense of the word can be seen by his revision of the reformed acronym TULIP. McLaren (2004:195-197) proposes the following changes:

1) T – from total depravity to triune love. McLaren moves away from the biblical emphasis on the utter sinfulness of man, having a desperate need for God to act on his behalf. He instead embraces generosity rather than orthodoxy by focusing on God's love.

2) U – from unconditional election to unselfish election. In McLaren's description, we are not chosen before the foundation of the world that we might have eternal relationship with God; instead our selection is more missional in that we are chosen and blessed that we might bless and enrich others.

3) L – from limited atonement to limitless reconciliation. As an alternative to the forensic understanding of the atonement, McLaren prefers to focus on relational reconciliation. In this, there is no segregation between divine and human relational healing.

4) I – from irresistible grace to inspiring grace. McLaren views grace as God's passionate and powerful desire to shower us with healing, joy and good things. Absent is the concept of the irresistible nature of undeserved favour to the regenerated soul, or the practical ramifications of God's grace as experienced in the Messiah's substitutionary atonement.

5) P – from perseverance of the saints to passionate persistent saints. The keeping protecting power of God in the life of believers is not the focus in

McLaren's new orthodoxy. He instead suggests, believers will be resilient in the face of adversity, persistently sharing the good news.

It is hard to see why McLaren would describe himself as a fundamentalist/Calvinist. In a characteristic postmodern redefinition of the above stated descriptive terms which are established, in this reviewer's estimation, on clear biblical propositions, McLaren has embraced extreme theological generosity while leaving behind God-glorifying orthodoxy.

McLaren also describes himself as an (Ana) Baptist/Anglican. He begins this chapter with a description of a three stage experimentation process for the verification of truth. While it insinuates modernity, in reality it is unmistakably postmodern. His epistemic framework consists of practice, personal experience, and subjective validation from those who are considered to be experts (McLaren 2004:199). One wonders how orthodoxy can be validated without the inclusion of divine revelation. It becomes clear in this chapter that McLaren (2004:204) is not interested in associating with those who believe they have arrived at established orthodoxies.

As for McLaren's self-description as an Anabaptist, he would rather associate with his perception of sixteenth century Anabaptists. He offers seven reasons for this association:

1) Emphasis on personal commitment. They were not automatic followers. They became followers of Jesus through a process of being identified with Jesus and His other followers.

2) The Christian family was a way of life. They rejected scholasticism and believed that bearing fruit counted for more than orthodoxy.

3) They were radical cultural non-conformists. Specifically rejecting any form of modernity. It is difficult for this reviewer to understand how one can embrace a contra-cultural position while at the same time employing emerging culture as the primary impetus to become a new kind of Christian that has impact in the postmodern world.

4) They lived and worked in the margins. Their non-conformity resulted in them living as outcasts and outsiders.

5) They have made Jesus Christ central, meaning that they focus on the teachings of Jesus and interpret Paul's writings in light of Jesus'.

6) The Anabaptists seek to practice peace. McLaren clarifies that they refused to kill their enemies, which for them meant that they were in opposition to the military draft and capital punishment. McLaren at this point places his own exclamation point on this practice when he states, "While generous orthodoxy does not assume that everyone will become a strict pacifist, it does assume that every follower of Christ will at least be a pacifist sympathizer and will agree that if pacifism is not required for all followers of Christ just yet, *it should be as soon as possible*" (McLaren 2004:207). He further states that peace is the way into the kingdom.

7) They have practiced "community in creation." Community involves proximity to one another in a type of communal living.

McLaren sees a connection between Anabaptists and Anglicans so as to be included in the same chapter, thus he continues by describing three essential practices he learned from the Anglicans. The first practice, he calls dynamic tension. It is an epistemic philosophy that involves consideration and acceptance of reason, tradition, experience and Scripture. No single element is given authority over another and if there is disagreement at any stage, no contradictory source can be rejected. In other words, no source is solely right (including the Bible) or singularly wrong.

The second practice is compromise (McLaren 2004:211). The highest non-negotiable is unity; every other issue is a candidate for compromise. The dangerous combination of the first two practices is, in effect, epistemic syncretism.

The final practice is beauty. If in the course of the first two practices, Anglicans do not come to conceptual agreement, they find unity (the one non-negotiable) in a mutual appreciation for the deep beauty of liturgy. Even if they disagree on

what the liturgy means or requires of them as believers, they are united, being "charmed" by beautiful mystery (McLaren 2004:211).

Surprisingly, McLaren also describes himself as a Methodist, though not a modern Methodist who, having left Methodism's former identity as a progressive revival movement, having become instead, a group of religious and irreligious people between whom a deep canyon separates the groups from community (McLaren 2004:215-218). McLaren does however embrace the early Methodists as constructing a new system of religion to replace the once lost Catholic system of spiritual formation from the Middle Ages. McLaren's (2004:220) contemplative penchant and aversion to reasoned doctrinal positions comes to the fore again as he observes that "systematic theologies or biblical knowledge simply did not produce personal transformation." For McLaren, a generous orthodoxy requires us to reach back to early, contemplative, relational, community oriented Methodism.

Catholic is another term McLaren uses to describe himself as a generous orthodox believer. The use of the term catholic is not to mean Roman Catholic, though one might be confused by his emotional response while observing a woman venerating an image of Mary (McLaren 2004:221); his intent is to describe himself as a universal Christian. The term "universal" is, for McLaren (2004:ch 15), not exclusive but inclusive.

McLaren (2004:225-230) states six things that define him as a catholic Christian:

1) Sacramental, meaning that he mediates God to other humans as a means of grace.

2) Liturgical, claiming that we are all liturgical, in that we have a certain expectation of rhythm in our worship.

3) Respect of tradition, placing tradition and Scripture as brothers on the same level. In McLaren's view, if one rejects tradition for the sake of Scripture, he has become a Biblicist.

4) Celebrates Mary. Mary veneration is a good thing to McLaren because it helps us to know that we are simple humans. To be fair, he rejects Mary worship, but as this reviewer lives in Africa where ancestor worship is prevalent, there is no practical observable difference between ancestor veneration and worship.

5) Catholics know how to party. Quoting from Chesterton, McLaren (2004:229) states, "Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground."

6) Catholicism can't escape from its scandals. McLaren (2004:230) sees the scandals breaking in the Catholic Church, not as their problem, rather, as "our" problem. He adds that a generous orthodoxy acknowledges that we are all in trouble, not being judgemental and uprooting enemies but rejoicing whenever something good appears.

As a "green" (environmentally sensitive, concerned and actively involved in environmental protection as well as preservation endeavours) Christian, McLaren (2004:233) argues, a love for creation will be a significant characteristic of the new generous orthodoxy. He embraces a theology of "continuous creation" (McLaren 2004:234) which, lessens the impact of the fall and emphasises the more Eastern orthodox way of looking at the sacredness of God's very good creation. McLaren (2004:238) elevates his environmental passion to the limits by speaking of our God-given mission of love to include nonhumans, "...Jesus sends us with a similar saving love—love for the fatherless and widows, the poor and forgotten to be sure, but also for all God's little creatures..."

McLaren succeeds in bringing the plight of poor environmental stewardship to the fore, but goes beyond the issues to present his idea of a pseudo-Christian communism, suggesting, our economy should be based on stewardship rather than personal exclusive ownership (McLaren 2004:239). McLaren's green generous orthodoxy also contends against the nuclear and subatomic family in favour of extended families living intentionally in communal experiences.

McLaren is also incarnational in the sense that he is accepting of all peoples, but also of all religious beliefs which, in this reviewer's perception, is much too indiscriminate to be orthodox. McLaren (2004:50) describes himself as a follower of Jesus who is "bound" to Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, atheists, New Agers and everyone. The bond compels interaction with them in a more intimate way than just showing them the love of Jesus; instead the depth of the bond drives McLaren to believe he is called to actually become one of them.

Generous incarnational orthodoxy, admits McLaren (2004:251), is difficult to fully comprehend because it is so new. Current Christian ambition to make disciples of all nations is evidently not part of a generous incarnational orthodoxy as McLaren (2004:254) looks with aversion at the thought of eliminating all remnants of other world religions not faithful to Christian convictions. Instead of converting unbelief to belief, McLaren prefers to take every opportunity to learn all he can from other religions, and if possible, for them to learn from Christianity. Further, McLaren (2004:260) states, "...I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion." Though it appears he has abandoned all evangelical foundations, one must fairly state that McLaren, on many occasions makes a distinction between being a follower of Jesus and a Christian.

McLaren (2004:ch 18) describes himself as depressed-yet-hopeful. He is depressed because in his estimation, much of Christianity obstructs and contradicts the ultimate goal of the coming Kingdom of God to earth. McLaren is hopeful because that obstruction can be changed if Christianity, and every other religion in the world, repents of the atrocities they have perpetrated on people who espouse beliefs different than their own. McLaren (2004:269) suggests,

> A generous orthodoxy must, to be either generous or orthodox, look back on our first 2,000 years of Christian history and face our failures, atrocities, our abdications, our cowardice, our complicity, our betrayal of Jesus and say to ourselves, 'Never forget.'

McLaren's passion for reconciliation of past atrocities motivates him to share a few specific examples which, for those who have never heard of Christianity's past failures, could easily have the effect of causing one who is hopeful to become disconcertedly depressed by events which they have never thought about or contemplated, by way of intent or practice. For McLaren, remembering and repenting is the only hope in the midst of the depressing condition of ungenerous Christianity.

As an emerging Christian, McLaren formalises what he implied by the subtitle of the book and expressed in most every chapter throughout. Namely, as an emergent, McLaren (2004:276) lives simultaneously in two different worlds. Quoting Steven Johnson, McLaren defines emergence as a condition where the whole is more intelligent than the sum of its constituent parts. The definition, in McLaren's estimation, is an essential part of the bionetwork of generous orthodoxy. In uncharacteristic clarity and directness, McLaren (2004:278) states, "Emergent thinking has been an unspoken assumption behind all of my previous books."

Sin is a "counter-emergent virus" which causes the stages of development to not unfold as they always should (McLaren 2004:282). It is an unfolding story with emerging drama which McLaren equates with children growing and maturing spiritually. "What we will be is not yet clear to us" (McLaren 2004:283). No matter the fact that we see in a glass dimly, according to McLaren our emergence, whatever it will look like, will yield a superior form of Christianity, but still not right. The future, nebulous, emergent, generous orthodoxy, says McLaren, is above and beyond current alternatives. It is the "way of Jesus which is the way of love and the way of embrace" (McLaren 2004:287).

Predictably, McLaren's final self-descriptive chapter proclaims that he is unfinished. The emerging process continues. A Christian in a generous orthodoxy is not one who claims to have apprehended truth. Orthodoxy is, for McLaren (2004:293), to show love, to be missional, and to be seeking truth, not ever grasping it fully, but pursuing it nonetheless. He admits that if "getting it right" is orthodox, then his sort of orthodoxy is disappointing.

In the glory of generous orthodoxy right thinking recedes, only to be surpassed by humility, wonder, reverence, awe, and adventure. We must always be discontented with our representations of orthodoxy. For as McLaren (2004:297) suggests, "the adventure of generous orthodoxy is always unfinished..."

2.3.5 The secret message of Jesus

In terms of placing this book in the complete corpus of his writings, one may consider *A generous orthodoxy* as McLaren's principal doctrinal work and *The Secret message of Jesus* as an attempt to anchor his more controversial positions in the message of Jesus, which for 2000 years has been lost to a majority of Christendom. The book is an example of typical postmodern deconstruction, obviously informed by McLaren's theological viewpoints, progressively revealed in Neo's conversations with Pastor Dan Poole in the new kind of Christian trilogy, and more clearly expressed in *A generous orthodoxy.*

In an attempt to avoid redundancy, this reviewer will limit his specific comments to the configuration of McLaren's deconstructive approach and a few brief germane references.

McLaren organizes this book into three divisions: (1) Excavation: digging beneath the surface to uncover Jesus' message, (2) Engagement: grappling with the meaning of Jesus' message, and (3) Imagination: exploring how Jesus' secret message could change everything.

The goal of this book is clearly and simplistically stated in the introduction, "The goal of my exploration is to understand Jesus—and, in particular, his message" (McLaren 2006:ix). For those who believe they understand Jesus from the message of the gospels, McLaren believes we have failed to see them in their native wildness and original vigour. The necessity for true understanding is the deconstruction of Jesus' message from a cultural, historical, economic, social and political perspective. This is McLaren's point about excavation. Digging, or more accurately, deconstructing Jesus' teachings. McLaren's fundamental anti-perspicuous assumption about the Bible generally, and Jesus' message particularly, is implied by the book's title, illustrated throughout, and driven

home in the appendix where McLaren (2006:209) answers the question, "Why didn't we get it sooner?"

McLaren's practice of deconstructing Jesus' message gives him the freedom to reconstruct, not only the content, but the very intent of our Saviour's teachings. In the political context, McLaren (2006:16) reconstructs the political point of Jesus' message by saying, "this man is not just another revolutionary, he is calling for a revolutionary new sort of revolution." The revolution referred to is a new political, social and spiritual kingdom, which challenges the empire of Rome (McLaren 2006:17).

In the typical approach of postmodern literary analysis, McLaren (2006:ch 3) believes one cannot objectively understand the meaning of Jesus' words. His words can only be understood through the lens of his Jewish heritage. Absent is the consideration that this was the Word of God, who was God, and supernaturally reflects the glory of the unseen God, explaining His message to the world clearly and infallibly. McLaren (2006:34) believes that Jesus may have intentionally kept the message of the kingdom a secret so that it would not be grasped by those trying to objectify meaning through a systematic approach resulting in comprehension and repetition.

Eternal life, in McLaren's (2006:37) redefinition, means "knowing," which means an "interactive relationship." It is a full, interactive life and relationship with God. Understanding eternal life in this way is not, for McLaren (2006:39), an obvious truth because in conversation after conversation Jesus resists being clear and direct.

The second division of the book grapples with the reconstructed meaning of Jesus' message. Here, McLaren attempts to shake his readers out of slumber and come face to face with the implications of Jesus' second message which, as he describes it, is scandalous (McLaren 2006:ch 8). He pictures Jesus as tempting the religious leaders to misinterpret the meaning of His message.

McLaren's reconstruction of Jesus' miracles is troubling. In McLaren's (2006:ch 7) assessment, the purpose of signs and wonders performed by Jesus was in

part, to communicate His secret message. McLaren (2006:56-57) alludes to the variety of miracles Jesus performed like, feeding multitudes with a few morsels of food, calming storms, bringing the dead back to life, and the healing of a Roman soldier's servant. He also refers to different methods used by Jesus such as, spitting in mud, washing in water, touching, and healing from a distance. The diversity of Jesus' miracles leads McLaren (2006:57-58) to make some generalisations about Jesus' healing ministry:

1) The miracles involve healing rather than destruction. Jesus did not use His miraculous power to destroy detractors, rather, He used it to restore and heal.

2) The miracles are related to faith. Sometimes the wonder is done in response to faith, while other times it is done to generate faith.

3) The signs and wonders have symbolic and secret meaning. On the one hand they are symbolic of liberation, spiritual sight and new beginnings, they are also communicating something understood by only a few.

4) Jesus generally tells people to be quiet about His miracles. McLaren believes this phenomenon is related to the overall strategy of Jesus' secret message. In his own words, "better to have something brewing, bubbling fomenting under the surface than to have more sizzle than steak" (McLaren 2006:58).

5) Jesus' signs and wonders themselves are not the point. They are rather like road signs which point to the point.

Not satisfied to portray the message alone as scandalous, McLaren (2006:62) associates Jesus' with being a "loose cannon" and "a hothead who can't control his rhetoric."

Engagement with the secret message of Jesus, the message of the kingdom is for McLaren (2006:chs 9-10) something that should keep our hope and focus on the earthly things like beauty and bringing a reinfusion of art to this world. His inference claims that Christians have become too preoccupied with leaving this earth and going to heaven, thus missing Jesus' secret message about making

peace, eliminating theological margins, and including everyone as secret servants of the kingdom.

Postmodern engagement with the atonement is illustrated as McLaren (2006:99-100) revamps the concept of reconciliation to not only encompass the traditionally biblical view of reuniting God and fallen humanity, but also all "at-odds" people groups in the world. Jesus' message for today, in McLaren's notion, does not retain the God/man resolution which fills the corpus of biblical teaching, instead Jesus would speak of uniting soldier with pacifist, tattooed granddaughter with her pedantic grandmother, Christians with Jews, Muslims and Hindus and believers with sceptics.

In the third partition of *The secret message of Jesus,* McLaren revisits an identifiable theme throughout all of his writing, that is, things as they now stand must change. This section opens with a protracted exposition of Matthew 5-7, which McLaren (2006:ch 14) calls the "kingdom manifesto."

Of special importance to this section of the book is McLaren's (2006:ch 16) handling of kingdom language. Being consistent with his affinity for postmodern semantic theory, he explicates the language of the kingdom in terms of six metaphors:

1) The dream of God. Here, McLaren cannot fathom the idea of God's domination or absolute control, so he reconstructs a phrase from the pattern for prayer given by Jesus in Matthew 6. From, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," McLaren rewords the prayer to read, "May all your dreams for your creation come true."

2) The revolution of God. This metaphor implies that humans have constructed an unacceptable regime of lust, power, greed, pride, racism and nationalism. Therefore, God is recruiting people to join a revolution which will overturn the evil so that a new world can emerge.

3) The mission of God. This metaphor bears a modest but weighty variation. For McLaren, the mission of God is to send us out as agents of change with relational ramifications. We are healed so that we can join in a collaborative effort of healing others.

4) The party of God. Association is made in this metaphor to the kingdom of God being a party which calls for people to leave gangs, workaholism, loneliness, isolation and exclusivity to join one large inclusive party celebrating the goodness and love of God.

5) The network of God. McLaren suggests that that this metaphor points to God's universal invitation to join a "world wide web of love" (McLaren 2006:146), in which walls are broken down and everyone is empowered purposeful and hopeful. As ancillaries to the network metaphor, McLaren further proposes the metaphors of an ecosystem and a community, which introduce balance, harmony and health.

6) The dance of God. McLaren advocates this metaphor as a historical image for the inner-relationship of the Trinity. The universe was originally a reflection of the harmonious dance of God. Humans soon ruined the dance, but by the work of Jesus we can once again find the rhythm of and be "attracted to the beauty of His steps" (McLaren 2006:147).

McLaren (2006:ch 17) dedicates an entire chapter explaining that pacifism is a kingdom principle. He summarizes his thoughts thus, "Whether we are presently pacifists or supporters of preliminary violence reduction theory, whenever we pray, 'Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' we're praying that war and violence will end and God's *shalom* will come" (McLaren 2006:161).

McLaren (2006:chs 19-20) postulates about heaven, hell, and eschatology. Though it is beyond the scope of this work to make detailed enquiry into his specific eschatological tendencies, some inferences are difficult to avoid, namely the following statement,

> It is not an overstatement to say of us and our generation what we could have said of Jesus [sic] own contemporaries: depending on how we respond to his secret message of the kingdom of God, we will create two very different worlds, two very different futures—one hellish, the other heavenly.

McLaren concludes his volume by adding two appendices, the first, being expositional, proposes McLaren's (2006:211) argument for why the secret message of Jesus "could not have arisen" in previous generations. Seven reasons are given (McLaren 2006:211-215).

1) The church, originally Jewish, mutated to a primarily Gentile religion with anti-Semitic proclivities. Losing its Jewish character, the church also lost the ability to discern the secret message of Jesus.

2) Departure from its Jewish heritage, the church also embraced elements of Greek philosophy causing gospel readers to reduce Jesus' message to abstract timeless truisms instead of seating His message in its historical-cultural milieu.

3) According to McLaren, Constantine's fourth century declaration that the church was Rome's official state religion, thus scholars missed the secret message of Jesus, embracing instead less contentious interpretations that did not question the empire's dominant status quo mentality.

4) The corollary of the close relationship between empire and Christianity was the employment of violent barbarism enacted on those who disagreed, all in the name of service for the kingdom of God. The secret message of Jesus cannot be apprehended in the midst of violence.

5) It was the church's alliance with secularism after the Middle Ages that precipitated ignorance of the secret message of Jesus, for the contemporary mindset would have promptly consigned the message as deviant unorthodoxy.

6) New discoveries of ancient manuscripts have enlightened us with regard to the religious, political and social times in which Jesus lived. Without such documents, scholars would advocate conventional interpretations with no impetus for rethinking.

7) Until recent times, the church has not been humble enough to acknowledge failures which lead to further self-examination. Pride goes

before a fall and the church needed a fall before it would consider repentance and rethinking.

McLaren concludes with a warning against thinking that we have fully grasped the secret message of Jesus. His advice is to see this book as a catalyst for "a renewal of interest in the secret message of Jesus" which, "could mark the early beginnings of a new chapter in history, the birth of an unspeakably important adventure—an exploration that could change everything" (McLaren 2006:218).

2.4 Doug Pagitt

Since the year 2000 Doug Pagitt has been the pastor of Solomon's Porch, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He describes the church as a holistic missional Christian community where he is seeking to find creative, entrepreneurial, generative ways to join in the hopes, dreams and desires God has for the world (Pagitt 2008:¶7). As one of the leaders in the EC, Pagitt is most accessible through his blog and public appearances. While not as prolific as Brian McLaren, Pagitt's theological views are clearly expressed primarily through *Listening to the beliefs of ECes* and *A Christianity worth believing.*

Pagitt describes himself as "competitive and contrarian" by nature (Webber 2007:120), a description that permeates Pagitt's rhetorical expression.

Though Pagitt is only one of five contributors to Webber's anthology of EC beliefs, the book provides a functional outline for reviewing Pagitt's theological position. Webber approaches his compilation by giving each author an opportunity to both express their belief on a particular aspect of emergent theology and to respond to each other's position. This reviewer will make use of Webber's categories to summarise Pagitt's theology as expressed in his writings.

2.4.1 Biblicist theology

Mark Driscoll, one of the contributors in *Listening to the beliefs of ECes,* and author of the chapter on Biblicist theology, suggests the perspicuous nature of

Scripture by concluding, "God has chosen to lift the fog of human speculation with divine revelation" (Webber 2007:22). He further argues against the postmodern tendency to impose cultural meanings that "either ignore or alter the meaning of the Scripture altogether" (Webber 2007:26). Throughout his chapter, Driscoll consistently refers to the objective authority of Scripture as the foundation for his views on the Trinity and the atonement. According to the format established by Webber (2007:18) contributors have the opportunity to respond to each chapter written by one of their colleagues.

As a response to Driscoll's view on the authority of Scripture, Pagitt accuses him of employing a "complicated philosophical grid of rules for textual interpretation," which, to Pagitt suggests, a "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it" approach (Webber 2007:44). He further argues that reading the Bible to get the meaning does not provide credibility as a theological system.

Pagitt, in *A Christianity worth believing,* portrayed as a theological treatise, denies the diachronic nature of biblical theology (Pagitt 2008:48), instead constraining the significant teaching of Scripture to synchronic meaning only. In Pagitt's view, biblical authority is not a function of God's authority as the divine author of Scripture, rather it is an amalgamation of God and the "communities who grant it authority" (Pagitt 2008:64). The implication for this is expressed by Pagitt via his incredulity toward someone who wants Scripture to stand as authoritative for even those outside of the faith (Webber 2007:76). But, Pagitt wants to free all people from the Bible's authority as evidenced by progressional dialogue which gives people the opportunity to have a different relationship with the Bible, specifically, it "frees the Bible from being little more than God's declaration of how things are" (Pagitt 2005:194). That Scripture has no external authority is not exclusively a postmodern conception, it has a correlation with an unorthodox view of inspiration and thus inerrancy. Pagitt (2008:65) suggests, "The inerrancy debate is based on the belief that the Bible is the word of God, that the Bible is true because God made it and gave it to us as a guide to truth. But that's not what the Bible says." It follows that if one views the Bible as less than the word of God, it introduces a plethora of acceptable constructs from which to interpret Scripture. One such construct is the holistic approach

advocated by Pagitt with the result that, "Reading the Bible with holism as our framework changes much about what we've long assumed the Bible to say" (Pagitt 2008:90).

2.4.2 Incarnational theology

Acceptance of other world religions in the global community is of considerable interest to the generous theologians of the EC. The role of Scripture is vital if generosity toward historically unorthodox religions is to find acceptance with the evangelical community. One cannot avoid the question of biblical influence on culture, versus cultural understanding of biblical meaning. For Pagitt, the answer is clear. Language is intrinsically weak and inadequate to communicate spiritually diachronic meaning. Everyone, including most notably, Augustine, reads Scripture through the lens of culture with an inability to escape from its theological influence (Pagitt 2008:127). Pagitt further believes much of our current aberrant beliefs are "based on the limits of language" (Pagitt 2008:107). Therefore, he also argues, that to begin with a focus on Scripture is wrong, especially when looking to Scripture as a "revealer" (Webber 2007:76).

Pagitt agrees that theology must answer questions of culture without being conformed to that culture, but quickly concludes that it is "simply not possible" (Webber 2007:77). The inability of people to escape the influence of culture has led to a reading of the Bible which is dominated by a Greek mythological worldview, thus skewing the vision of God, humanity, sin and salvation (Pagitt 2008:100).

2.4.3 Missional theology

Emergent missiology necessitates living in such a way so as to experience the kingdom of God o earth in the here and now; it means addressing some of the cultural, religious, and theological issues of our day. Pagitt responds by distancing himself from the authority of creeds or the Bible as they address the question of how we should then live in the world. Pagitt is more interested in an emphasis on the Holy Spirit who, in his mind, is a better teacher (Webber 2007:113). Creeds do not express transcendent objective diachronic truth,

rather they are petrified and immovable beyond their historical and circumstantial context (Webber 2007:114). Referring to Augustine, Pagitt (2008:48) esteems his theological explanations as brilliant, however, brilliance notwithstanding, they were situational, grounded in the cultural assumptions which precipitated the exposition.

It is an individual's community of faith in his current culture which informs how he missionally engages those around him, not transferrable objective truths communicated in a culturally bound book like the Bible.

2.4.4 Embodied theology

Embodied theology, according to Pagitt, is something we believe because we want and need it to be true. Our life situation makes it impossible to remove ourselves from what we believe (Webber 2007:120). Pagitt reiterates his frequently stated aversion to diachronic biblical truth or authority by asserting that embodied theology is not something we can simply believe in, rather, it must be part of who we are, it is something that "comes from the life of the one who holds it" (Webber 2007:121). Theology is always contextual, not an independent culturally neutral reality. But, says Pagitt, these contexts are "tenuous at best" (Webber 2007:124), which means that theology is always changing.

Given this belief about theology and the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism, the EC is ardently pursuing a reconstructed theology. Pagitt's reconstructed theological approach is not founded in biblical authority, rather it is firmly placed on the shifting uncertain sands of progressive cultural constructs. The Bible serves its own context, not ours (Webber 2007:125), therefore, the alternative answer to our theological development, as Pagitt suggests, is found in communities of faith. "We are called to be communities that are cauldrons of theological imagination, not 'authorized re-staters' of past ideas" (Webber 2007:127). Expressed another way, the "Christian community serves as a hermeneutic of the gospel" (Webber 2007:127).

Pagitt's theological imagination, energized and defined by cultural cues, and interpreted by the community is thus expressed, "So as Christians we must never get to the place where we allow our worldview to be stagnant; it must always be able to be changed by the dance" (Webber 2007:129). The always changing nature of theology is grounded in Pagitt's denial of the objectivity of truth. He suggests, "if we connect truth to objectivity, we are in a bad place in light of our understanding of the world" (Webber 2007:142). As to the subjectivity of truth, Pagitt (2005:136-137) argues, "we all operate out of our own contexts" and "no perspective of reality matters unless it matters to someone." Another way he expresses this reality is by declaring truth as "progressive" not objectively settled.

Pagitt urges us to embrace a definition of the gospel which calls us to participate in the things of God wherever we find them (Webber 2007:131). The things of God are what He wants to do in this world. According to Pagitt, God creates for the purpose of partnership and collaboration (Webber 2007:134) which, Pagitt's suggestion means "to join with God and do as God does. God created, so we are called to create" (Webber 2007:136). The intent of these words is expressed in other of Pagitt's writings, "God also invites us to be re-created and to join the work of God as co-(re)creators" (Pagitt 2004:185). "It's created a framework in which all these ideas about holism, the integrated God, and humanity as co-re-creators with God flow into a glorious worldview of hope and promise and possibility" (Pagitt 2008:232-233).

An integral element of Pagitt's holistic co-creative theology is found in his denial of the doctrine of original sin. By necessity, sin must be defined in a way that eliminates the implication of death and separation. For Pagitt, the idea of God being separated or not integrated with His creation is not biblical, so he defines sin as "dis-integration" (Webber 2007:132). His belief becomes crystallised by the suggestion that, "...there are better ways to talk about sin than with the language of distance, I think sin is best described as disintegration" (Pagitt 2008:112). Pagitt employs the analogy of strained family relationships to illustrate the effects of sin on our relationship with God. Especially disdainful to Pagitt (2008:124-125) is the concept of total depravity, which he attributes to

fifth century Greek influence. He therefore expresses a desire to distance himself from terms associated with the legal system (Pagitt 2008:150). Due to Pagitt's penchant for analogy, mystery and narrative, one is often wondering if the author really means what you think you just read, only to be confused by another story that blurs the lines even more. However, in a moment of exceptional clarity, Pagitt (2008:153) perspicuously expresses his view on sin, "Sin does a lot of damage to that partnership—it disables us, it discourages us, it disturbs us—but it never destroys the bond that exists between God and humanity."

The logical ancillary to minimizing sin is minimizing the atonement. Pagitt (2008:156) summarizes,

> Rather than starting with Jesus and following his story, we've started with sin—more specifically, with our theologized assumptions about the way sin separates us from God. We've started with a problem that wasn't a problem until someone decided to make it one.

If then, sin is not just a wrong done that causes our never-broken relationship with God to become strained, the answer is not the substitutionary blood-sacrifice of Jesus our Saviour, it is rather our choice to get on with the programme of God and "to seek lives lived in harmony with God" (Pagitt 2008:160).

Pagitt echoes McLaren's sentiments about heaven and hell when he suggests they are not to be understood in the locative sense, asserting that Jesus made it clear that the afterlife wasn't a place (Pagitt 2008:221-222). Evangelical preoccupation with the afterlife leads to wrong questions based on wrong assumptions. For Pagitt (2008:233), the story of heaven finds its reality in the world in which we live, "the world that God is renewing every day and will continue to renew for all eternity."

2.5 Critiques of the EC

The EC's appraisal of evangelical Christianity has induced numerous reciprocal critiques of the movement. Given the movement's forecast of the future, responsibility dictates a careful investigation. The movement's alliance with postmodernism presents an investigative challenge. The movement is a hybrid with no clear lines by which to dissect the postmodernism from the evangelicalism, the ancient from the contemporary. Critics who attempt dogmatic dissection find that what may be true for one segment of the movement is not true of others. Mark Driscoll (2006:89-90), one of the early members of the movement is helpful as he classifies emergent conversationalists in terms of, relevants (theological conservatives who want to update methods to be more relevant in contemporary culture), reconstructionists (usually evangelical but dissatisfied with current forms of doing church) and revisionists (liberals who question key evangelical doctrines). Attempts to further subcategorize are futile. Therefore, given these realities, critics who have proven most constructive, address four major areas of the movement: their critique of culture and history, their approach to truth and knowledge, their view of the Bible, and their soteriology.

2.5.1 Cultural and historical critique

The EC makes no secret of the fact that one of its distinctives is the de-reconstructing of ministry and belief in the context of a postmodern world. D. A. Carson (2005:45), who considers reading the times as a strength of the EC, believes the "movement honestly tries to read the culture in which we find ourselves and to think through the implications of such a reading." Carson and others however, assess the EC's critique of culture and history as less than satisfactory.

Two elements of concern find expression with regard to the EC's interaction with modernism and history. The first concern relates to the movement's handling of the modernity postmodernity divide, and their historical interpretation of evangelicalism. Secondly, concern is voiced over the EC's uncritical veneration of postmodernism. Carson (2005:125) succinctly sums the concerns by suggesting that the movement, "vehemently denounces

modernism, but offers nothing very penetrating when it comes to postmodernism."

EC authors, who consistently disparage the evil distortions which modernity has wrought on evangelicalism, suggest a reconstruction of the Church in line with the postmodern turn. But one asks, is the divergence between modernism and postmodernism as distinct as emergent leaders describe? Carson suggests that EC leaders' assessment of the divide between modernism and postmodernism is "reductionistic" and "over polarized" (2005:125), and even a distortion of historical facts (2005:156). DeYoung and Kluck (2008:164) call Emergent distortions, "slipshod summaries of church history." It is the opinion of DeYoung that the EC "greatly exaggerates the differences between modernism and postmodernism" (DeYoung and Kluck 2008:152). On this point Phil Johnson (2007:¶5) opines, "my assessment of the 'EC movement' is that far from being the antithesis of modernism, this sort of 'evangelical *post*modernism' is really ultimately nothing more than Modernism 2.0."

The EC leaders, in an attempt to communicate the significance of their postmodern reconstructionist agenda, have over-stated the case and made absolute reductionist statements about the terminal condition of evangelicalism and the same type of statements about acquiescence to cultural priorities and pressures. Carson (2005:127-128), concerned about this very manipulative methodology, refers to McLaren as representative of the larger movement, whose recommendations for the evangelical Church are informed by an assumption that postmodernism represents an unalterable change in thought, leaving one choice: become a new kind of Christian, as advocated by McLaren, or be reduced to irrelevance. This however, is criticised as an overstatement of postmodern ubiquity. Though it is unnecessary to exaggerate the self-evident realities of the contemporary cultural shift, one wonders what may be the motivation of such methodology employed by the EC in their engagement with postmodernism. Wells (2008:44) suggests that they have "rested on naïveté so enormous, so breathtakingly unrealistic and untrue, that it puts the rest of the church...in quite an awkward position."

The EC's uncritical, almost anecdotal engagement with contemporary culture creates concern about the movement's emulation of postmodernism. Kowalski (2006:¶12) expresses his concern, "revising Christianity in a way that will be popular with postmoderns is such an inviting one that many believers welcome this 'revolution' in the church without duly considering the perils of this cultural accommodation." Wells (2007:60) is more direct when he states, "What makes for a bond with culture makes for a rupture, I will argue, with the ways of God."

The problem is crystallised by contradicting philosophies with regard to worldviews: postmodernism's perspective, expressed by François Lyotard as "incredulity toward metanarratives," stands in direct contradiction to the universal relevance of the gospel. Henegar (2005:¶18) argues that, "Emergent writers may correctly diagnose postmodern sensibilities, but their prescriptions tend to conform rather than transform." Johnson (2007:¶5) agrees, conveying his concern, "I think the Emerging movement has shown an uncanny knack for embracing the very aspects of postmodern thought and style that most need to be confronted with the truth of the gospel."

Oakland's (2007:16) critique is less generous when he calls the EC's cultural fascination "rebellion" and "embracing ideas and philosophies of man rather than the inspired Word of God." To this point, DeYoung and Kluck (2008:ch 4) argue that Emergents have improperly defined tolerance. Drawing from Carson, who gleaned from Voltaire, he suggests tolerance is defending the right of people to say what they think even if you disagree with their conclusion. In the current EC however, tolerance is never saying anything or anyone is wrong. The philosophical source of this belief will be discussed in more detail presently, suffice it to say at this time, in part, postmodernism's philosophy of deconstructionism removes objective, transcendent meaning from the text thus localizing, even personalizing knowledge and weakening the moorings upon which a meaningful debate of conflicting ideas takes place. For this reason, Wells (2007:17) argues, "They are not eager to engage (post)modernity critically. Indeed, they are as much submerged beneath it as they are emerging from it." Carson (2005:68-69) considers their engagement with postmodernism "intellectually incoherent" because,

> ...in the spirit of postmodern toleration, most emergent publications go out of their way to find good things about every other "ism"—Buddhism, say, or Islam or the Aztec Indians or tribal animism. The one "ism" about which some appear to find it almost impossible to say anything positive, especially in the publications of emerging leaders, is modernism (as they understand it).

He further suggests, "One has to disagree before one tolerates" (Carson 2005:69). Carson (2005:71) insightfully points out, "Once again, we find broad-brush condemnation of modernism, and the solution is postmodernism." This is an example of apparent EC naiveté or, possibly, manipulative agenda, which in either case bolsters concern about not only their description of, but also their uncritical engagement with contemporary postmodern culture as they understand it.

2.5.2 Approach to truth and knowledge

The cultural challenges of postmodernism, which the EC seeks to accommodate, are not primarily stylistic but epistemic. Kowalski (2006:¶1) argues, "The change which most characterizes postmodernism is a shift in epistemology." Carson (2005:27) states, what he believes is the majority view, that the transition from modernity to postmodernity is primarily epistemological, and as such, the most helpful target of investigation is the point at which the EC interprets these contrasting epistemologies.

Though the EC mimics postmodernism on many levels, a definitive epistemology has remained elusive. However, in spite of much philosophical debate related to postmodern epistemology, proponents and opponents alike agree that some congruent philosophies, characteristic of postmodern thought can be identified. Namely, aversion to propositional, objective, or overarching truth claims (metanarratives), especially confidence built upon certain knowledge of foundational truths.

Though it is not the particular focus of this researcher to review critiques on postmodern epistemology, due to the affinity which the EC has historically for its postmodern mentor, most critiques refer to postmodern and emerging

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epistemology interchangeably, thus giving the notion of equivalency. This researcher must therefore acquiesce to interchangeable language, though it may be shown in subsequent sections of this research project, there is indeed an epistemic identity unique to the EC.

Groothuis (2000:41) gives a helpful analysis of the postmodern view of truth which he describes as exaggerated modernism. Some elements of modernism must be abandoned but, laments MacArthur (2007:13), "*Rationalism* needs to be rejected without abandoning *rationality.*"

In contrast to the Biblical view of truth which is correspondent and objective, Groothuis (2000:ch 4) argues that postmodernism's view of truth is contradictory. Postmodern epistemology allows for a statement to be true and false at the same time. Quoting Walter Truett Anderson, he concludes postmodernism is "a strange and unfamiliar kind of ideological conflict: not merely conflict *between* beliefs, but conflict *about* belief itself" (Groothuis 2000:85). He contends that postmodernists reject a correspondent view of truth and propositional statements, relegating them as functions of modernistic thinking. Wells (2008:77) concludes,

> What has happened is that emergents, like the
> postmoderns they are mimicking, believe that the
> links between the truth statement and what that
> statement refers to have been broken or, at least, are
> obscure.

The truth, for postmoderns and for at least many in the EC movement, is self-referential (Wells 2008:77). The problem of self-reference and consistency is addressed by Groothuis (2000:106),

> Therefore, the postmodernist claim about truth is
> merely a social construction—and nothing more. But
> if it is only a social construction, then the statement
> itself cannot accurately depict the reality it
> purportedly describes. Therefore it is false.

When the connection between a truth claim and its external objective referent is severed, the only option, in the postmodern vocality, is the internal referent of self in the context of the social construct which interprets personal experience

as the only knowable reality. This definition of reality undermines consistency and confidence toward all truth claims. It removes, as Groothuis (2000:109) suggests, the bedrock of facts and is so "radically counterintuitive as to be absurd."

Though Carson (2005:103-104) draws our attention to some positives of postmodern epistemology such as, sensitivity to diversity, exposing weaknesses of extreme modernistic perspectives, and the postmodern humility which readily admits to human finitude in claims of knowledge, he similarly critiques the postmodern rejection of absolute transcendent truth, rather instead claiming that differences between right and wrong are social constructions not correspondent propositions (Carson 2005:112). Bolt (2006:210) argues, "One cannot separate the factual, historical, and cognitive from the personal, and to deny the factual objectivity of truth is to sin against the person." He further argues that postmodern epistemology, which sees truth as a social, personal, experiential construct, is wrong, "truth is not a creation of the human mind but a discovery by the human mind of reality itself" (Bolt 2006:211).

The implication of constructivism as it relates to biblical theology and the gospel's propositional metanarrative is significant. Though some have criticized him for over-stating postmodern epistemology, Colson (2003:¶8) understands the implication of losing an objective overarching story, "Since there's no such thing as truth, all principles are merely personal preferences." Wells (2008:79) suggests that truth in the postmodern vocality "is as shapeless as a wad of bubble gum—and as elastic." But the gospel is not shapeless, nor is it elastic. The gospel is propositional, overarching, universal, and objective. Therefore disquiet over the postmodern and often emergent view of truth is of great concern.

With regard to metanarratives, big stories, universal truths, or worldviews, Groothuis (2000:97) speaks about the need for logical coherence of truth. He critiques the postmodern philosophy for their internal personal coherence, which as a construct of their experience, does not necessarily conform to external reality. Socially constructed morality, that does not have to pass muster with an independent reality, leads to an emerging theology and reconstruction of the

biblical message conforming to contemporary culture rather than transforming it. It is, in Carson's view, absurd and arrogant (Carson 2005:ch 4). Kowalski (2006:¶9) agrees, stating, "...within postmodern thought no truth or morality can be 'normative.' 'Truth' and 'morals' are found in the context of a specific community and they vary from one community to another." He continues, "No one who embraces this epistemology has any room for others' proclamation of ahistorical, objective, universally authoritative meaning of a scriptural text" (Kowalski 2006:¶10). Speaking of postmodernism's anti-propositional epistemology, Wells (2008:79-80) refers to their view of speed limit signs, "So it is with all truth statements, they contend. These statements are only approximations made up by someone else. They are arbitrary rules that do not correspond to anything that is actually 'there.'"

Much of the EC's notion of truth impersonates postmodern epistemology while attempting to avoid complete alienation of evangelical Christianity. Lacking is an intellectually coherent discussion addressing the impact of philosophical postmodernism, which informs much of the EC's approach to theology. At the heart of the discussion there must be a consideration of how postmodern epistemology nuances the Emerging movement's embrace of biblical propositions. It is at this point in the debate that critics have turned to the EC's view of the Bible.

2.5.3 View of the Bible

Though not expressed in theological terms, EC leaders, namely McLaren and Pagitt, have been influenced by postmodern theologians Grenz and Franke, co-authors of *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context,* an influence reflected in their process and view of the Bible. Groothuis (2000:111) points out that some postmodernists are "claiming that an emphasis on the Bible as propositional revelation is questionable or even errant." He critiques postmodernists' disparaging view of metanarratives, seeking instead, through use of deconstruction techniques and language games, to bring subjectivity to the fore (Groothuis 2000:115). Though giving credit to postmodernists for contextualization of historical narratives, Groothuis (2000:135) argues that their demise is in "shrinking metanarratives to a

micronarrative and then severing these stories from objective truth." Carson (2005:143) speaks of the "extra-textual referentiality" of Scripture, something not espoused by postmoderns. Emergents are willing to affirm the importance of the Bible as a presenter of Christian ideas, but disinclined to accept extra-textual realities as being true. Erickson, Helseth and Taylor (2004:179-180) summarise Grenz and Franke's suggestion that the Spirit speaks through Scripture by "appropriating the biblical text." They argue that the intent of the Spirit is not necessarily tied to authorial intent. Postmoderns see the value of the Scripture in the theological method, not as a "storehouse of facts" or "propositions" (Erickson et al 2004:177). Scripture then, is not to be considered as intrinsically authoritative apart from the Spirit and the community of faith.

When postmoderns speak of Scripture's authority it is an associated authority as an instrument through which the Spirit speaks. But what does it mean? Is there propositional steadfast truth, intrinsic to the text of Scripture as God's word? Grenz and Franke are quoted, "the Spirit appropriates the text with the goal of communicating to us in *our* situation, which, while perhaps paralleling in certain respects that of the ancient community, is nevertheless unique" (Erickson et al 2004:180). The postmodern view of Scripture, that is, Grenz and Franke's view, but also representative of McLaren and Pagitt, relegates the truth of Scripture to a contemporary culture in disregard to authorial intent as deciphered by historical extra-textual referents. Pagitt (2008:67) illustrates this view of Scripture when he states that the Bible, "...held authority because it was a living, breathing symbol of God's continual activity."

This view of Scriptural authority represents a detachment from objective extra-textual reference, which postmoderns condemn as foundationalist. Though Grenz does not believe the question helpful, Carson (2005:130) sees it as essential, "Does the move to nonfoundationalism entail a final and total break with metaphysical realism?" When EC leaders approach Scripture in a communitarian way, refusing to recognise the ahistorical transcendent nature of divine revelation, so as to situate the meaning of Scripture to the current local story, they implicitly answer "yes" to the question. Postmodern amplification of local, communal, and traditional significance toward biblical authority

emasculates Scripture as God-given first-order language, thus doing damage to the view that the Bible communicates an overarching foundational story for our lives.

That EC leaders fail to use Scripture as their "norming norm" is another weakness in their approach to postmodernism (Carson 2005:139-146). This weakness is illustrated by the movement's deficiency in the use of Scripture to adjudicate in cases where disparate beliefs contradict one another. "But where Scripture is adequately clear, Scripture must adjudicate, as long as we hold Scripture to be above the creeds" (Carson 2005:141). But postmoderns do not hold Scripture above creeds, and they localise the significance of the creeds theological responses to specific issues addressed and authoritative only in the context of their contemporary theological landscape. Erickson et al (2004:188-189) argue, "their view of Scripture does not do justice to what the Bible claims for itself and, therefore, it greatly weakens the grounding for doing theology in any kind of normative fashion." It is a denial of Scripture's inherent authority and in its place, postmodernism accepts a dynamic view of the Spirit speaking through the text in different cultural contexts divorced from authorial intent. The result is hermeneutical subjectivism, where the original authorial meaning is insignificant and the text takes on a life of its own. Hence Erickson et al (2004:191) concludes,

> Instead of arguing that Scripture itself, due to its divine inspiration, gives us a first-order interpretative framework that is found *in* Scripture, and in light of which we view the world and do our theology, so that "the Spirit's creating a world, then, in not a new illocutionary act but rather the perlocutionary act of enabling readers to appropriate the illocutionary acts inscribed in the biblical text."

Thus, postmodernism's nonfoundationalist approach to Scripture disallows sola Scriptura and extra-textual realism. Stephen Wellum (Erickson et al 2004:194) encapsulates the issue in his response,

> In the current cultural climate, I am convinced that the crucial issue facing evangelical theology is the authority of Scripture and of the God who gave it. At the heart of postmodernism's problem, and the main

> reason for much of the fragmentation in contemporary theology, in an implicit denial of the God of Scripture, and thus a diminishing of the full authority of Scripture in theology and the church.

We are not saved by ideas constructed as a mosaic of beliefs in contemporary communities, we are saved by the extra-textual reality of a sovereign, loving God who actually sent His Son to the cross in our place. This reality then, is the issue which the postmodern approach to Scripture must be appropriately mitigated in their theology methodology. Presently, they have not sufficiently upheld the first-order nature of the Bible and that failure impacts also, their soteriology.

2.5.4 Soteriology

Most proponents of the EC conversation, if asked directly, would not advocate displacing the essential truths of the gospel message for something less than the good news of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. However, in reality, the movement's subjugation of gospel verities to the cultural context of postmodernism is indeed happening under the guise of contextualization. Bolt (2006:213-214) warns, "Concern about our postmodern context in order to communicate the gospel must never determine the content of the message."

Critique of the EC's soteriology is expressed most often with regard to the movement's vocality on the atonement. Having reviewed critiques about the movement's demotion of Scripture from first-order language and promotion of subjective hermeneutics within the context of the believing community, the focus now shifts to the impact that practice has on the movement's view of the atonement. When the "norming norm" is subjective, conflicting atonement theories are inevitable, but who or what determines accuracy in the face of incongruity? Mayhue (2009:143) rightly argues for the primacy of Scripture when adjudicating conflicting theories of the atonement, "In the end, however, divine revelation must be given the final say over the best of human reason when they differ from one another." But postmoderns, being incredulous toward metanarratives, reject, what they consider, a modernistic approach to Scripture as being referent to an objective, diachronic, universal, reality, namely, man's

separation from God because of sin, eternal death as the consequence of sin, the penal substitutionary death of Jesus, and the merciful salvation of believers unto eternal life. Mohler (2009§3) assesses the impact postmodernism's view of metanarratives has on the gospel,

> "The problem with this, of course, is that Christianity is meaningless apart from the gospel—which is a metanarrative. Indeed, the Christian gospel is nothing less than the *Metanarratives of all Metanarratives.*"

In apparent disregard of divine revelation, McLaren (2003:143), via Neo, expresses his view of the atonement, "For starters, if God wants to forgive us, why doesn't just do it? How does punishing an innocent person make things better? That sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse."

Pagitt (2008:97) claims he has "never felt separated from God." Rejection of the judicial sin-separation theme in Scripture leads Pagitt (2008:153) to conclude, "The story of the gospel...tells us that we are created as God's partners...sin does a lot of damage to that partnership...but it never destroys the bond that exists between God and humanity." If there is no realisation of separation, there is, most likely, a diminished or unorthodox view of atonement. Pagitt posits that sin is a "relationship problem", it irritates our partnering and connection with God. Furthermore, sin is not something that offends God's sensibilities, but God is only satisfied when we are fully integrated with Him (Pagitt 2008:159-160). True to the postmodern communal concept, Pagitt (2008:167) also suggests, "We can live our lives in a collective way, so the systems that cause disharmony with God can be changed." Sin then, is not a personal or individual issue that separates us from God for which propitiatory action must be taken, it is a "systems" problem that is resolved by harmonious collective living that gets us on the right track with God. This core belief of the EC is realised in their missional and incarnational praxology.

Henegar (2005:§4), noting the missional aspect of the EC voices concern about the movement's standard of "belonging before believing." He argues,

> "Belonging before believing" can become an excuse to be always seeking, but never finding. The call to renounce sin can devolve into a temporary truce. The peril of unbelief, including adherence to other religions, is often minimized (Henegar 2005:§4).

The EC's handling of the "belonging before believing" theory, according to Carson, has not been biblically faithful. He argues "the emerging folk have reversed the order" (Carson 2005:146). The Bible teaches a distinct and separate Christian community, entered into by the regenerating work of the Spirit who baptizes us into one body. There is however, pragmatic coherence to the movement's soteriological perspective of belonging before becoming. Without original sin causing eternal separation from God, there is no need for substitutionary atonement and forgiveness, hence, it is not illogical that a religion of personal development, where simple engagement with fellow humans in a passionate quest to achieve harmonious connection with God, will also be relativistic and pluralistic. Communication of a belief standard is secondary and possibly even unnecessary. Though pragmatically coherent, it stands objectively outside the realm of divine revelation, thus when biblical verification is called for, clarity is elusive. Carson critiques their method,

> The tendency of some emerging writers, whenever a truth question comes up, is to move away from the content of Scripture and to Jesus as the *personal* Word of God (John 1:1), as the *personal* truth of God (John 14:6). This is right in what it affirms, but wrong in the antithesis.

Carson clearly identifies the fallacy of postmodern epistemic uncertainty, locative communal meaning, and rejection of Scripture as first-order language inspired by God with transcendent diachronic truth and authority.

EC leaders, in an effort to cultivate harmony with evangelicals, who they hope will emerge to become new kinds of Christians, do not completely reject the biblical teaching of atonement, rather, they expand their view of atonement, affirming it in ways more externally acceptable to the Christian community at large. The result is an unclear expansion of the meaning of atonement beyond penal substitutionary atonement, giving special attention to the expanded

elements, which are para-biblical at best. Woodbridge's (2007:§4) insight to the EC's expanded view of atonement is helpful,

> While it can certainly be argued that there is more to the atonement than substitution, it could equally be argued that penal substitution is the heart of the atonement. If we lose Christ's work of substitution and propitiation, we lose the gospel and are left with a theory of the atonement, which is completely untrue.

Smith (2005:146) argues that the crucifixion is an objective reality in which Jesus actually bore our sins. As such, it is not subject to language or subjective communal hermeneutics. When one devalues penal substitutionary atonement, as many postmodern participants of the EC do, there is no theological conflict preventing one from adopting a pluralistic stance toward other religions. It is, after all, the work of Christ on the cross that distinguishes Christianity from religions which promote personal development and global consciousness as the avenue by which they seek to join God's programme. But the postmodern concept of joining God's programme is not biblical soteriology.

2.6 Conclusion

It has been the attempt of this researcher to consider the literary framework out of which the investigation of the EC's epistemology will proceed.

Philosophical postmodernism encompasses a range of beliefs that are not on the critical radar of either the average participant, or of the leading EC theorists. While some EC participants are more critical than others, and some embrace postmodernism more closely than others, it is from this nebula of semi-philosophical, reactive, pragmatic beliefs that a unique EC epistemology may emerge. The EC, often mimicking postmodernism, is not exclusively postmodern, nor is it absolutely evangelical; it is neither consistently confessional nor is it purely unorthodox. The EC resists macro-critiques which do not take into account the breadth of paradoxical realities within the movement. Postmodern relativism informs the fluidity of philosophical

boundaries, but historical evangelicalism serves to create a sense of disquiet at the prospect of completely supplanting orthodox Christianity. As with any movement, time produces more literature, more critiques, more responses to critiques, hence more revisions of though, which theoretically leads to more clarity. Though largely indefinable because of its conversational emergence, guided in part by the fluidity of postmodernist epistemology, biblical illiteracy and the pressure of social constructs it is the view of this researcher that the movement's epistemic basics will come into view.

Intelligibility is the goal of this project. It is an attempt to remove some of the ambiguity attached to this movement and bring the first-order language of divine revelation to corroborate or rebuff the EC's theory of knowledge.

Chapter 3
Relevant Epistemic Definitions

3.1 Introduction

The task of clarifying the EC's epistemic framework must, in the viewpoint of this researcher, be approached from a position of knowledge about general categorical elements encompassed in the philosophical discipline of epistemology.

At this stage one must exercise discipline while navigating the flurry of epistemic deliberations so as not to descend into an intellectual cyclone formed by arguments for the justifiability of having any certain knowledge even regarding epistemology itself.

Consequently, the scope of this analysis will be limited to the relevant concepts related to the field of epistemology and how it intersects with the EC's approach to knowledge. The EC does not probe deeply into philosophical deliberation, rather interacts with broad philosophic concepts in an almost idiosyncratic manner. Where necessity dictates however, I will provisionally expand the epistemic analysis to include elements which may appear to have dubious relevancy to the EC's epistemology, but ultimately will be helpful to the overall objective of this research project.

Correspondingly, the scope of epistemic concepts and theories considered in this section will be limited to general definitions of principal characteristics rather

than protracted arguments for or against a given epistemic theory or its alternatives.

Though the definition of epistemology is universally agreed upon, the definition of knowledge remains a point of contention among philosophical and religious thinkers. It is therefore necessary to assign some attention to defining knowledge while maintaining a certain level of detachment from the minutiae of various arguments that may leave us with distracting vagaries that divert from the veritable purpose of this research project.

3.2 What is knowledge?

As Pritchard (2006:§185) notes, there are many different types of knowledge. For the purpose of this project, this researcher will focus on propositional knowledge as the most relevant exacting association to the epistemology of the EC. For one to have knowledge of a proposition there must be justified true belief. That is to say one must believe that the proposition is true combined with appropriate and adequate justification for an accreditation of truth to the proposition.

Sufficient treatment of EC's epistemology necessitates deliberation on the reliability of claims to have true knowledge of biblical propositions. Such claims to know or not know have undeniable effect as to the orthodoxy of the EC's theology.

Pritchard (2006§202) asserts that "a prerequisite for possessing knowledge is that one has a belief in the relevant proposition and that that belief must be true." He further suggests the inclusion of justification which must be part of the formula for knowledge; "it is at least plausible to suppose that justification is necessary for knowledge" (Pritchard 2006:§837).

Edmund Gettier (1963:¶7), in, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" suggests that the formula (knowledge is justified true belief) is false "in that the conditions stated therein do not constitute a sufficient condition for the truth of the proposition that S knows that P." Gettier (1963:¶9) submits cases in which the

formulaic conditions by which a person believes a proposition to be true, may at the same time be false. Pritchard (2006:ch 3) suggests a scenario in which a student observes the clock tower on campus, notes the time and based on the historical maintenance and accuracy of the clock forms a justified belief about the time. However, the student was unaware that the clock was not working. Because the clock was historically accurate, the student was justified in his belief about the time, but his justified belief was ultimately false. Such scenarios are referred to as the "Gettier Problem."

Gettier's contribution to the justification conundrum has elicited volumes of epistemic theories related to knowledge and adequate justification for supposed knowledge of a proposition. The subsequent explanations regarding acceptable conditions of knowledge justification will serve to elucidate the fundamental epistemic paradigm from which examination of the EC's epistemology will develop.

3.3 Theories of knowledge and justification

3.3.1 A priori and a posteriori

A primary consideration for the basis by which a proposition is known entails *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *a priori* knowledge is that knowledge which can be known independent from any experience on the part of the knower beyond learning the language in which the proposition is expressed. Pritchard (2006:§2,204) suggests that knowledge is *a priori* if it was gained independently of any investigation. Conversely, *a posteriori* knowledge requires investigation and is achieved by effort and experience. *A priori* knowledge could be illustrated by the statement, "all bachelors are unmarried men." *A posteriori* knowledge is expressed by the statement, "it is raining outside." By definition, all bachelors are unmarried men. This knowledge does not require research beyond understanding the definition of the words used. On the other hand, to state the

proposition, "it is raining outside," requires the experience and investigation of the knower.

At this point, Audi's (1998:ch 4) insight is valuable for elucidating "strict" and "loose" *a priori* knowledge. He suggests that the strict sense of *a priori* is knowledge of an indirectly or directly self-evident proposition which is constituted by *a priori* justification in the strict sense (based on an adequate understanding of a self-evident proposition). He further differentiates loose *a priori* as knowledge of a proposition which is not directly or indirectly self-evident but is provable by progressive, self-evident propositions and is established by belief originated in sufficient comprehension of that proof. Audi's basic classifications proffer distinct departure points from which many epistemic notions of knowledge and justification extend.

The epistemic theories of rationalism and empiricism express their views in the lexes of internal *a priori* and external *a posteriori* knowledge. Rationalistic thought asserts that there are times when our conceptual belief about knowledge supersedes the empirical information provided by our sense experience (Markie 2004:§1). The presumption of knowledge independent of empirical research categorically qualifies as a priori. Empiricism, rationalism's antithetical kinsman, maintains that it is sensory experience which provides the core information cited by the rationalists. Further, reason is an inadequate source of concepts or knowledge (Markie 2004:¶2). Many empiricists would opt for scepticism before accepting the rationalists' ontological foundation for knowledge.

Pritchard (2006:§2,233) observes an interdependence between a priori and a posteriori knowledge (justification) when he suggests that, "knowledge which is explicitly empirical, makes use of further knowledge which is both empirical and a priori." The interdependence of these epistemic categories, though perhaps limited only to a phenomenological extent, is nevertheless germane to further definitions of justification theories.

The epistemology of the seventeenth century Dutch philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza, suggests a reflexive nature of epistemic knowledge justification.

Spinoza's epistemic theory is called perspectivism, from the Latin "sub specie," which means "under the species or aspect of" or "from the perspective of." This view suggests that each perspective of knowledge is one of many ways of knowing and that each way of knowing is a perspective on just one substance (Spinoza 2005:§2).

Objectivism is the philosophical meridian between rationalism and empiricism. Rand (1962:§1), a proponent and arguably one of the pioneers of objectivism, holds that reality is absolute, independent of man's consciousness; and reason is man's only source of knowledge about absolute reality. Peikoff (1997:¶8) quotes Rand's definition of reason as "the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses." Consequently, man's sensory acuity networks with corporeality forming an integrated translation of sensory input which results in, according to Rand, reason. Objectivism however, seems more keenly connected to empiricism than to the pure thought of rationalism, though in the opinion of this researcher, one would find it problematic to absolutely detach rationality from any prefatory intimations from external reality.

Moreover, it may be observed that the following definitions of epistemic concepts which, for the purpose of this project, have special relevancy to an understanding of the EC's epistemology will manifest a connecting filament of thinking either as a footing upon which an expanded theory is constructed or an access point from which an antithetical theory emerges.

3.3.2 Foundationalism

Erickson (2001:20) points out that foundationalism characterises one of the major differences between modernism and postmodernism. Where modernists make a strong appeal to it, postmodernists are almost unanimously repelled by it.

Newman (2010:§2) defines foundationalism as "a system of justified beliefs… organized by two analogous features: a foundation of unshakable first principles, and a superstructure of further propositions anchored to the foundation via unshakable inference." Pritchard (2006:§969) agrees, and

paraphrasing Descartes he proposes that foundations for our knowledge are immune to doubt because they are undeniable and self-evidently true. Correspondingly, Fumerton (2000:¶2) suggests that these first principles become our foundations only because we end a regressive quest for justification of our beliefs with propositions that are noninferential and self-evident. Audi (1998:§4,565) further asserts that the construct of knowledge is of a foundational nature. Thus, "classical foundationalism is the contention that in the knowing process, there are certain unshakeable starting points that are not justified by any other propositions" (Erickson 2001:20).

Therefore, knowledge, from a foundationalist's assessment, depends on indubitable and incorrigible beliefs. Indubitable beliefs are self-evident, like the mathematical statement, 2+2=4, or definitional statements like, all cows are mammals. Incorrigible refers to beliefs about which it is impossible to be wrong, thus evident to the senses.

Nevertheless, foundationalism leaves an open door concerning the content, degree, and sort of propositions considered suitable as foundational beliefs. Audi (1998:§4,911) rightfully indicates that one typically discontinues presenting justification when he reaches one or more foundational direct sources.

One renowned exemplification of foundational thinking is epitomised by Descartes' statement, *"Cogito ergo sum"* (I think, therefore I am). Descartes' statement is indubitable and incorrigible, thus qualifying as the palpable substance upon which basic knowledge of one's existence rests. In the epistemology of evangelical religionists, theistic foundationalism serves as a precondition for certain theological beliefs. Moreover, it would seem, to this researcher, essential for the EC to interface with foundationalism on some level if they are to retain even a fragment of a theistic substructure on which evangelicalism is constructed.

3.3.3 Coherentism

Coherentism, as an anti-foundationalist theory of justification, asserts that no propositions subsist independently or foundationally (Evans 2002:24). Young

(2008:¶1) defines coherentism thus, "the truth of any (true) proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions." Therefore, if a stated proposition possesses uniform characteristics with other believed-to-be-true propositions, the coherentist holds that proposition to be justifiable as well. The theory is supported by Tomoji Shogenji (Gahde and Hartmann 2005:§332) who suggests that "other things being equal, a higher degree of coherence among the content propositions makes it more likely that they are true."

Accordingly, coherentism does acknowledge psychological foundationalism, which asserts that if we have any beliefs at all, some of those beliefs will be direct ones; but denies epistemological foundationalism which assumes that any knowledge we have is epistemically direct (Audi 1998:§4,582).

Empirical substantiation is not the primal tenet of coherentism. Rather, the quintessential truth test for any proposition is based on the amalgamation of associated theses to form lucid arguments for the justifiability of what the coherentist already believes to be true. Of particular relevance for the EC's epistemology is Boghossian's (2006:§1,484) perspective from which he suggests that coherentism as a system designed to identify what we have reason to believe, considers incoherence in any epistemological scheme more of a vice rather than a virtue.

3.3.4 Pragmatism

Though many variations of pragmatism exist, for the purpose of the current project this researcher will employ its fundamental maxim. Hookway (2008:§3), contends that pragmatism's axiom serves as "a rule for clarifying the contents of hypotheses by tracing their 'practical consequences'."

Pragmatism expresses itself with somewhat convoluted logic as van Wyk (2004:§586) demonstrates, "The pragmatists accept the necessity of a priori theory, but assert that to verify a priori theories, certain facts much be known, and to answer questions of fact, theoretical questions must be answered." He further asserts that "inquiry is a means of obtaining objectives and theories and observations are instruments, not answers" (van Wyk 2004:§592). The

relativistic physiognomies of the pragmatic maxim manifest themselves by denying the existence of objective knowledge. Any claim to knowledge can only exist insofar as it serves a social purpose.

That pragmatism shares a theoretical connection with relativism is clear, however there is also a link with pluralism. Simply defined, philosophical pluralism is a theory or system that recognises more than one fundamental principle. Epistemic pluralism asserts, "There are many fundamentally different, genuinely alternative epistemic systems, but no facts by virtue of which one of these systems is more correct than any of the others" (Boghossian 2006:§1,372). Basinger (2004:§1) suggests, in pluralism "there exist significant differences of opinion among individuals who seem to be equally knowledgeable and sincere." The implication being that equally knowledgeable individuals have equally valid opinions, discrepancies notwithstanding.

Therefore relativistic pluralism as well as pragmatism necessitates noetic forbearance expressed by acceptance of all religious belief systems which demonstrate social efficacy. The repercussions of this theory for religious epistemology become immediately apparent. Wells (1993:§999) opines, "The kind of pluralism that is necessary to eliminate antagonisms among the competing views has the effect of reducing each inhabitant to the lowest common denominator." If a religious proposition is believed primarily on the basis of its social or pragmatic effectiveness, there can be no fastidious orthodoxy by which one will be able to construct religious understanding or expectation.

3.3.5 Reductionism and credulism

A common tactic for validating knowledge is to offer various levels of testimony from others who supposedly convey an adequate measure of expertise to proposition being justified. Pritchard (2006:§3,842) suggests that reductionism is the epistemic view which accepts as valid only that testimony which offers independent grounds in support of its belief which are not themselves testimony-based beliefs. If one's testimony-based belief in the truth of a proposition is justifiable, it is not enough to base that belief on testimony alone,

even if the corroborator has a historical record of accuracy. What is required for justifiable belief is non-testimonial evidence which effectively reduces testimonial validation to non-testimonial authentication. Adler (2006:§1) adds, "…a testimonial charge of knowledge must eventuate in a speaker who knows directly by, say, perception." In this, the reductionist's predilection for a posteriori knowledge is anti-rationalistic in his handling of testimony-based justification.

Conversely, credulism suggests that one is justified in his belief of a proposition based on testimony alone, even if one lacks independent grounds of substantiation (Pritchard 2006:§3,616). For example, when being confronted with a propositional statement about God creating the world in seven days, a credulist may consider his belief in creationism justified based on the testimony of Scripture alone. However the reductionist will likely consider belief in the proposition valid only if independent evidence is offered as corroboration. This epistemic perspective may lead the reductionist to certain theistic evolutionary beliefs about creation to the extent that scientific evidence affirms the witness of Scripture.

3.3.6 Reliabilism, infallibilism, and fallibilism

"Reliabilism is a general approach to epistemology that emphasizes the truth-conduciveness of a belief-forming process, method, or other epistemologically relevant factor" (Goldman 2008:¶1). In basic terms, Pritchard (2006:§1,630) defines reliabilism as a theory which "holds that knowledge is reliably formed true belief." This broad identifier may be used to refer to a notion of knowledge itself or of justification thus emphasizing characteristics of the process employed in the acquisition of truth. Audi (1998§7,455) suggests that one must know the processes which tend to produce true belief as opposed to false belief. Hence, one may have knowledge of a proposition if it is believed, true, and acquired by a dependable process.

Similarly, infallibilism according to Pritchard (2006:§3,742), alleges that "in order to have knowledge one must have a belief which is infallible." Likewise, the concept of an infallible belief resonates with the foundationalists' desire to attain

noninferential indubitable belief. Antagonistically, fallibilism stands in opposition, asserting that no belief "can ever be rationally supported or justified in a conclusive way" (Fallibilism 2005:§1). The reverberations of such epistemic theories impact the EC's ideological attitude and their assessment of verity in respect of biblical propositions.

3.3.7 Contextualism

Of special relevance for the EC is the epistemic position held by contextualism. Contextualism states that "the proposition expressed by a given knowledge sentence (*'S* knows that *p'*, *'S*, doesn't know that *p'*) depends upon the context in which it is uttered…as a result of such context-dependence, utterances of a given such sentence, made in different contexts, may differ in truth value" (Rysiew 2007:§1). Pritchard (2006:§3,096) states that contextualism is the view which holds "that knowledge is a highly context-sensitive notion." Further, Black (2006:§1), expressing the relativistic propensity of contextualism, laconically states that knowledge is "relative to context." He also suggests that contextualism denies any epistemic status for a proposition which is held independent of divergent contextual factors (Black 2006§6).

Consequently, contextualism's synchronicity implies that the verity of a proposition can only be established by importation to the identical context in which the proposition was initially uttered. Such exacting qualifications are at best difficult and some would suggest impossible to achieve. Contextualism's demotion of diachronically independent propositions subsequently applied to biblical propositions would, in like manner, argue that the truth of that proposition is subject to current situational influences and would result in porous foundational truth statements upon which the construct of evangelicalism is built. Furthermore, the repercussions of contextualism for biblical hermeneutics make an acutely distinct impression on the propositions which the Church has embraced for centuries and the EC's orthodox fidelity to the same.

3.3.8 Scepticism

The natural cognitive terminus for many epistemologists is scepticism. Sinnot-Armstrong (2001:¶1), suggests there is a moral and epistemological category of scepticism. Both classifications possess in common, the conviction that doubts or denies that anyone ever knows or can possibly know anything. Philosophers differ as to the scope of their scepticism. Of special interest to sceptics are beliefs about the past, which they argue "are not justified, or are not rational, or cannot consititute knowledge" (Contemporary skepticism 2004:§1).

From an external analysis, it may appear that scepticism's potential significance for the EC is minor. To be sure, radical scepticism may not be manifested in the leaders of a movement which claims to be Christian. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of this researcher that even a placid form of scepticism is explicitly relevant to the EC's epistemic position.

3.3.9 Particularism

Pritchard (2006:§3,801) offers a primary sense of objectivism stating that it asserts the prospect of ascertaining occurrences of knowledge without first recognising that which constitutes knowledge. It follows that according to this definition, one may have a justified true belief before one even knows how belief may be justified. Therefore, it is correct to classify epistemic particularism as fundamentally anti-sceptical.

Andler (2003:349) proposes two fundamental norms in this regard, "it is subject to both rational principles and to some 'sense of the situation', akin to prudence or good sense." His assertion that particularism is a "middle path between hyperrationalistic and an intuitionistic or antirationalistic concept of knowledge" (Andler 2003:349), suggests at least partial congruency with the middle ground occupied by Rand's scheme of objectivism.

Particularist thinking applied in the ethical realm manifests another aspect of this theory by asserting that moral conduct cannot rely on principles for direction, sometimes referred to as "situationism" (Andler 2003:362). Thus, according to this view, the motivating consideration for one's behaviour is based on an immediate appraisal of the present situation rather than diachronic

principles. To which Wilson (2009:13) rightly asserts, "The cost of this position is that it requires one to adopt a kind of particularism about knowledge, which defines formal codification or definition, and is therefore an 'open concept'."

Particularism then may be an initial dismissal of copious substantiation of enduring principles, consequently resulting in epistemic and ethical relativism; a position of explicit concern for not only the EC but for all evangelicalism.

3.3.10 Structuralism and post-structuralism

Although structuralism's customary context is scientific, given McLaren's (2003:¶3) endorsement of post-structuralism it seems advisable to devote some thought to the definition of these concepts with respect to epistemic theory.

Structuralism as a system consists of ideas which emphasise the importance of the basic structures and relationships of a specific subject. Concerning literary theory, structuralism devotes its "attention to matters of literary form (i.e. structure) rather than social or historical content" (Literary theory 2005:§5). The result is that literary structural analysis is synchronic as opposed to diachronic.

Glazer (1994:¶1) suggests that one problem with the term structure has been its "concreteness." Though the ideas held by structuralists are not grounded in the sciences and are therefore not considered to be concrete, structuralists do seek to apprehend the integration of dissimilar components to assist them in explicating an overall concrete system of which the components are a part.

Glazer (1994:¶3) identifies a distinction between "surface structure" and "deep structure." Surface structure is the apparent conscious superstructure that may be observed empirically, while deep structure relates to infrastructural elements of a system which would be categorically unconscious.

Under the theory of post-structuralism one will find literary approaches such as reader-response and deconstructionism. According to Kaiser and Silva (2007:§523), the reader-response approach to hermeneutics allows "the reader and interpreter of a text to determine what the text now means-mostly in new, different, and in partially conflicting ways." Deconstruction argues for an

"endless deferral of meaning" (Literary theory 2005:§5). In this theory, literary units have no final concrete reality to which others could look for consistent meaning. Arguably, the most important deconstruction theorist, Jacques Derrida asserts the impossibility of getting outside the text, thus rendering the structuralist idea of a stable meaning in a concrete reality impossible.

Denial of structuralism has led many post-structuralists to jettison concrete reality as the referent in propositons thus embracing a class of diachronically interpreted relativism which ultimately eliminates certain or transcendent truth. Consequently, post-structuralism's affinity for literary deconstruction suspends confidence in the apprehension of particular propositions and defies a greater connection within the context of a metanarrative. The implications that such a position has in relationship to biblical propositions are far-reaching.

3.4 Conclusion

Theories about what constitutes epistemic verity abound. Most are not relevant to the scope of this research project. Consequently a discussion of all epistemic theories and concomitant problems is not germane to this project as it would lead to a philosophical quagmire of problems, potential solutions and alternatives. Moreover it is the opinion of this researcher that the EC is not attempting to define the epistemic requisites associated with a move to a new kind of Christian. Their encounter with epistemology is arguably an unintentional consequence of their proclivity toward postmodern cultural ideologies.

Although the EC's relationship with epistemic theories may be inadvertent, it is now the task of this project to consider how the literary transmissions from selected EC leaders align with the relevant epistemological positions.

Chapter 4
Emerging Church Epistemology

4.1 Introduction

Having defined epistemic concepts in the previous section, it is now my task to engage the literary corpus of selected EC leaders in an attempt to discern the epistemological moorings of the EC movement. Though not always distinct due to the EC's affinity for narratives, I will attempt to find within their texts, associated features which reveal epistemic inclinations.

Each EC leader will be considered separately. Once summarised, the epistemic perspective of the three selected leaders will be amalgamated to form a picture of the EC's epistemology. Recognising that the EC is more diverse in its beliefs than is represented by the leaders considered in this project, it is acknowledged that these leaders wield substantial influence within the movement and as such their views are significant and influential.

4.2 Dan Kimball

Discerning Kimball's epistemology presents a challenge because he does not overtly express an epistemic position. Driscoll rightly concludes that Kimball

offers a "middle way" between theological certainty and uncertainty (Webber 2007:106). Having adopted the "middle way," Kimball seems to vacillate between modern-sounding foundationalism and postmodern anti-propositionalism. Though not explicitly articulated, Kimball's epistemic position is illustrated, providing essential insight to his epistemology.

As an important prelude to summarisation of Kimball's epistemology, it is crucial to understand the depth of impact proposed by his ideas. Kimball's writings are more than a set of practical ideas on how to revamp church methods for the purpose of appealing to the emerging generations. He reveals a more extensive aim when he suggests that EC leaders must, "change how we think of the church, rather than merely change our forms of ministry" (Kimball 2007:15). He (2007:15) further suggests that the EC "must not try to simply replace the outer wrappings of our ministries. We must look at the inner core with a new mindset." While attempting to disarm potential detractors, Kimball (2007:55-56) assures his readers that his suggestions are not intended to be theological,

> In this book, I don't intend to get into a theological discussion of who Jesus is, since there are volumes of scripturally based books that do that. The point of this book is to examine what others think of Jesus and the church so that we can think like missionaries, understanding emerging generations better and speaking more effectively with them about the gospel.

Educating ourselves to be effective missionaries to the emerging generations sounds like a universally acceptable endeavour, especially given the *quid pro quo* about avoiding delicate theological issues which would most definitely cause objections to much of Kimball's content. Nevertheless, Kimball does not believe you can separate orthodoxy (theology) from praxis. Articulating his thoughts about the concept of "emerging," Kimball asserts, "I also never thought of it to be a specific theology (although the roots of all we do in church are theologically based)" (Webber 2007:84). He also suggests,

> If we merely tweak the surface level of things, we are missing the whole point of cultural change and what the emerging church is about. That is only a re-fluffing of the pillows. I believe true emerging

> churches must go deep within, and from the inside
> out, rethink, reshape, and revalue how we go about
> everything as culture changes…This includes our
> local ecclesiological expression and ethos, as well as
> our mind-set about theology (Webber 2007:86).

Once again, Kimball (Webber 2007:103) stresses, "Anything your church does has a theological backdrop to it…Absolutely everything we do in church is a reflection of what we believe theologically, whether we are consciously aware of it or not." Hence, whatever the appearance of Kimball's pragmatic suggestions implies, there is a deeper provocation which is inextricably tethered to his theological outlook.

Kimball's primary epistemic perspective is pragmatism. It is expressed by his pressing concern over the fact that "there is a diminishing number of people from younger generations in our churches" (Kimball 2003:§233), and further articulated in his alarm over the "drastic dropout rate of younger people" as well as a "lack of people from emerging generations coming" into Evangelical churches (Kimball 2007:14).

Kimball's trepidation motivates him to make inquiries of the emerging (postmodern) generation, from which he proposes extensive changes in the mind-set and practice of evangelical churches. His research methodologies (interview and inquiry) as well as the content of his recommendations (based on the opinions of observers) reveal certain epistemological proclivities which will now be summarised.

4.2.1 Scepticism

Although Kimball manifests a mild or placid form of scepticism, he clearly demonstrates characteristics specific to a sceptical epistemology; namely he embraces mystery and generally disavows certainty of some knowledge. Kimball claims to embrace the core content of the Nicene Creed, while at the same time expressing his desire for mystery and uncertainty when moving beyond such beliefs (Webber 2007:40-41).

Kimball's scepticism is revealed in the following statement;

> It seemed that maybe we as human beings ended up coming up with a lot of very concise theological answers about things that maybe we just can't be quite certain of…Perhaps we are supposed to approach theology more with a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery than like trying to solve a mathematical puzzle (Webber 2007:91).

Kimball's expressed certainty with regard to the core content of the Nicene Creed does not cohere with his aversion to concise theological answers. The participants of the Council at Nicaea (A.D. 325) and later at the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) do not appeared to be concerned with wonder or mystery; rather their main concern is to elucidate, with theological precision, the hypostatic union of Christ.   The creed serves to eradicate mystery and confusion,

> 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 God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory 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 worshiped 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. Amen (The Nicene Creed n.d.).

Kimball's suspicion is that theological beliefs which stand beyond the core beliefs of the Nicene Creed are not actually reached through the application of sound hermeneutic principles to the exegetical process but from our own

conclusions, reached on the basis of personality and temperament (Webber 2007:92). Kimball's confidence in the biblical nature of the Nicene Creed's core content is perplexing in light of his ambivalence with regard to other, clearly demonstrated, biblical themes (Kimball 2007:91). Possible insight to this conundrum may be derived from Kimball's method for making theological determinations, revealed in his response to a fellow EC leader's view on communal theology. Kimball resonates with her acknowledgement of mystery in the Bible and "the importance of community and relationships determining theology" (Webber 2007:190).

4.2.2 Coherentism

As an anti-foundational epistemology, coherentism asserts the absence of an independent foundational proposition. While not overtly expressing a coherentist epistemology, Kimball presents selected testimonials as an orchestra of uniform theses from the emerging generation, received as a response to his queries about the church. By interviewing the emerging generation, Kimball (2003:27) was seeking "what emerging generations are finding attractive (and not so attractive) about the Christian faith and today's church." Kimball wants us to know that there is broad-based contingent of those who feel the need for change; a sentiment confirmed as he assures us, "This book is not just my opinions…but it is based on real people and their opinions and stories" (Kimball 2007:17-19).

Throughout his writing, Kimball attempts to demonstrate a high degree of coherence dispersed throughout the opinions of his interviewees. Consequently concluding that the way we look at Christianity and the church must be renovated. Kimball considers the opinions gleaned from his interviews as valid recommendations about the church. One wonders if they are only valid because they are consistent with his own, incubated by his own experience in one church (Webber 2007:87-90) and extrapolated into a broad-based remedy for all ineffective evangelical churches. He may have betrayed a bias when he admits that he "probably wouldn't like Christians" if he weren't one (Kimball 2007:ch 1).

Though not overly negative toward the church, Kimball does exhibit an ardour for bolstering his claims through testimony. In his fervour Kimball is selective of those interviewed, but not selective concerning qualifications that would foster the credibility of his sources. His inclination toward epistemic credulism is manifested by the acceptance of testimony from those who can offer no independent grounds of validation. Not only are those interviewed not experts, by Kimball's (2007:58) own admission they, "aren't part of a church." He demonstrates his credulistic tendencies by confirming that their views are "misconceptions of the church" (Kimball 2007:69), while at the same time accepting them as a basis for the necessary renovation of the church.

Consequently, Kimball's epistemology influences his appraisal of misconceived testimony from a selected target group which happens to cohere with his own views. On that basis, he proposes extensive reconstruction in evangelical theology and ecclesiology.

4.2.3 Fallibilism

It would be inaccurate to imply without qualification that Kimball asserts, no belief can ever be rationally supported or justified in a conclusive way, it is therefore appropriate to qualify his epistemic position as selective fallibilism. That Kimball believes the core content of the Nicene Creed with certitude has been stated (Webber 2007:92).

This creed forms the foundation for Kimball's Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, he reveals an integrated form of fallibilism, scepticism and pragmatism toward biblical content which, in his opinion, stands outside the scope of the Nicene Creed. One such issue is the Egalitarian/Complementarian debate. The question of women's roles in the church has been discussed for many years with strong and persuasive arguments presented on both sides of the issue. It is not my intention to pass judgement on Kimball's position in this regard, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, consideration of the impetus for Kimball's re-evaluation of his position on the issue brings his epistemic moorings to the fore. His own words are most appropriate here,

> Let me take a rather hot issue as an example. I was in a church many years ago that very strongly stated that women should never be pastors…I heard some of the verses about why women shouldn't be pastors, and these people taught with great authority and confidence…But then I met a female pastor, which forced me to think about this more deeply…Why can't she teach? She taught better than most men…There are really strong arguments on both sides. Who is right and who is wrong?...You both pray and ask the Spirit of God to lead you to truth, but this is an issue that seems to be less of an absolute in our human ability to know for sure (Webber 2007:92).

Though Kimball's epistemology does not jettison the idea of certified truth altogether, the conclusion a true fallibilist might embrace, one cannot deny fallibilist tendencies when the impetus for reconsidering his position on female pastors was meeting a female pastor who taught better than most men pastors. His appraisal that the issue is beyond our human ability to know though some EC leaders would call it epistemic humility, it is epistemic fallibilism.

Kimball's selective fallibilism is clearly illustrated by his approach to essential core teachings of the Bible. He (2007:205) urges his readers to avoid conflict with those who have differing opinions on non-core issues. Kimball clarifies that he is referring to Christians who battle and point fingers about "Calvinism vs. Arminianism, or a literal six-day creation, or end-times views." It appears that anything outside of his ten core beliefs (Webber 2007:94) is relegated to be categorically uncertain and even unknowable until that day when we "will know all truth" (Kimball 2007:205).

4.3 Brian McLaren

Of the three EC leaders considered in this research project, McLaren's writing is the most allegorical; but he is also the most prolific and with each subsequent literary product his epistemological construct materialises. McLaren's (2001:§124-129) views were born out of a personal and ministerial crisis which provided him the impetus to conclude that everything must change and he also

needed to become a new kind of Christian. For him, becoming a new kind of Christian was not just a practical change in the way he lived; rather it was the reconsideration of an old insupportable paradigm and the design of a new one to replace the old (McLaren 2001:§158).

McLaren's (2001:§181) data source for his paradigm shift is his unsatisfactory experiences which provoke a reaction against all he perceives to be part of his past Christian experience. The old has become for McLaren a culprit that must be replaced by something "radically new" (McLaren 2001:§240). The epistemic nub of this new paradigm is expressed in McLaren's (2001:240) either/or solution, "Either Christianity itself is flawed, failing, untrue, or our modern, Western, commercialized, industrial-strength version of it is in need of a fresh look, a serious revision."

It is modernity to which McLaren (2001:§181) refers and reacts against. With uncharacteristic clarity he asserts, "Before we set ourselves to re-boot the new church on the other side, we must be sure to de-bug it of the viruses it picked up during modernity" (McLaren 1998:189). Modernity, in McLaren's (2001:§635-693) description is about conquest, control, rational analysis, secular science, absolute objectivity, a critical age of dialectic, institutional religion, and consumerism. Furthermore, modern Christianity, in McLaren's (2004:§2,214) view, is a theological approach that reduces revealed truth to propositions and outlined in a way to serve as a vehicle for arriving at truth. In McLaren's (2001:§84) estimation ethical and political issues are epistemological. McLaren (2004:§345) also embraces a generous orthodoxy which disagrees with views of certainty and knowledge which are generated by modernist assumptions. Therefore, McLaren's reaction against modernity in favour of a radically generous and postmodern paradigm represents a wholesale epistemic overhaul.

But there is no perspicuous classification for McLaren's epistemic moorings. McLaren (2004:ch 19) describes himself as "emergent." He goes on to characterise emergents as living in different worlds simultaneously. The subtitle (Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist

+ Anabaptist/Anglican + Methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished Christian) of *Generous Orthodoxy* illustrates McLaren's enigmatic epistemic tendencies. But it is more than just a catchy subtitle, it is McLaren's expressed notional impulse, "Emergent thinking has been an unspoken assumption behind all my previous books" (McLaren 2004:§4,112). But even more than a consequential characteristic of postmodernity, "maximizing discontinuity" (McLaren 1998:19) is one of his expressed strategies for ushering in the EC on the other side of modernity.

McLaren's epistemological position emerges, albeit with a higher degree of variance than one would prefer, through expressions of divergent epistemic substructures. Having already seen McLaren's desire to move from what he considers a modernistic Christianity to an emerging postmodern generous orthodoxy, consideration will now be given to other epistemic inclinations.

4.3.1 Post-structuralism

By his own admission, McLaren (2004:157) does not hold an earned theological degree. Rather his graduate education lies in the realm of literature. His transition to post-structuralism occurred in the 1970's during a teaching fellowship while in graduate school. His description is enlightening,

> …it was the moment I "got it" regarding a strange new school of literary theory, then associated with the terms "post-structuralism" and "deconstruction." A chill ran up my neck, and two thoughts seized me:
>
> 1. *If this way of thinking catches on, the whole world will change.*
>
> 2. *If this way of thinking catches on, the Christian faith as we know it is in a heap of trouble.* (McLaren 2003:¶2)

McLaren's works are rife with examples of post-structuralist epistemology. Characteristic of his post-structuralism is an affinity for a reader-response hermeneutic which allows for divergent interpretations, deferral of textual meaning subject to deconstruction, rejection of any possible transcendent

meaning outside of the text itself and a dubious approach toward propositions which has been euphemistically called epistemic humility. I will attempt to illustrate each characteristic.

4.3.1.1 Reader-response

According to Kaiser and Silva (2007:§523), the reader-response hermeneutic is a reaction against abuses of historical-critical methods of interpretation. Ancillary consequences of this view include the "loss of authorial intention" and a legitimate apparatus for testing the veracity of any given interpretation (Kaiser and Silva 2007:§538-552). In the realm of reader-response hermeneutics, all meanings have equal footing. One can no longer rank or determine which meaning is correct or to be preferred among countless, even conflicting meanings (Kaiser and Silva 2007:552). Thus, in the relative milieu of reader-response hermeneutics, interpretive limitations provided by the rules of historical-critical methods no longer impose restraint on attempts to reinterpret biblical texts.

It is within this context that McLaren demonstrates a disregard for historical-grammatical hermeneutics as well as a low view of authoritative biblical propositions as the divine informant for theology. McLaren however does not state this belief in a propositional way. His complete view of Scripture is apprehended through a series of evocative communiqués which, when taken as a whole, portray the basis of his reader-response approach.

McLaren (1998:65) describes the efforts of those in the new church (the church on the other side) as those who will "try harder to remember that God is God and we are mere creatures, and that our attempts to understand and articulate his message and truth are always approximations." As an isolated statement, there is a measure of reasonability to it. Furthermore, his epistemic humility (scepticism) reveals itself in the following, "At some level of profundity and accuracy, we are bound to be inadequate or incomplete all the time, in almost anything we say or think, considering our human limitations, including language, and God's infinite greatness" (McLaren 1998:65).

In the first book of his *New kind of Christian* trilogy, McLaren, having already stated the need to make a transition from a modern Christian to a new kind of Christian, strikes a more direct blow at the foundation of biblical authority. In a journal entry, McLaren (2001:§759) implies that when believers feel the need to place *sola* in front of Scripture, it demonstrates that "the way they follow the New Testament may possibly themselves be modern…" He continues to express his aversion to schematic outlines of theology with topical ideas like omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, soteriology, hamartiology and eschatology. These, in McLaren's (2001:§805) view, are expressions of systematic theologies which are imposed on Scripture as a modern phenomenon.

"I try to explain that the problem isn't the Bible," says McLaren (2004:166), "but our modern assumptions about the Bible and our modern interpretive approaches." Thus he is not advocating abandoning the Bible completely; rather he is demonstrating a need to approach the Bible from a completely different perspective, opening the door to a reader-response hermeneutic devoid of systematic, critical, analytical research and validation. He urges that we need to, "Keep going back to the Bible, but not with the standard interpretations blinding you to new interpretations" (McLaren 2001:§1,100).   Literal interpretation of Scripture does not fit in McLaren's post-structural epistemology and therefore is the subject of criticism by associating literal interpretation with cases of aggression, mutilation and slavery (McLaren 2001:§1,236).

Having created some level of scepticism about current method of biblical interpretation namely, literal biblical interpretation, McLaren's next step toward encouraging an unfettered, unaccountable approach to Scripture involves a change of focus from the text of the Bible to the authority behind the text (McLaren 2001:§1,266). Through the voice of Neo (a fictional character in three of McLaren's books), McLaren (2001:§1,277) asserts that the issue of authority is not the text but the authority of God, "What if the issue isn't a book that we can misinterpret with amazing creativity but rather the will of God, the intent of God, the desire of God, the wisdom of God…?" McLaren (2001:§1,346), through Neo, suggests that the Bible should not be viewed as our one

foundation, rather as one of our foundations like a spider's web. When faith is constructed with multiple foundation points, it is flexible.

Flexibility is a key element in a post-structural, reader-response interpretation. McLaren (2004:166) declares, "We need to reclaim the Bible as narrative." Reader-response thrives on the malleability of narrative texts interpreted in a narrative context. Without the propositional construct of Biblical truth, discerned through a disciplined application of valid, literal, historical, hermeneutic principles, one may impose multiple, even conflicting meanings on the corpus of Scripture.

McLaren reacts to literal interpretation of Scripture. It is, in his mind, a modern construct which influences all those who systematise biblical theology. When considering McLaren's statements from a modular perspective one may not see his progressive dismantling of transcendent propositional biblical truth, but an examination of his aggregate views yields a post-structural, reader-response, interpretive grid that precipitates a dearth of binding meaning for the church.

4.3.1.2 Deconstruction

McLaren's destabilisation of biblical authority along with his scepticism of ever arriving at the true meaning of the text, naturally leads to a deconstructive approach toward transcendent concrete meaning. McLaren's (2005:xxvi) ardent support of deconstruction is more than inference, "Deconstruction is not destruction; it is hope." He further asserts that "undeconstructed words get in the way of communication" (McLaren 2005:xxvi). For him, deconstruction is seen as "the search for God and God's mysteries when human constructions may be obscuring them" (McLaren 2005:xxvii).

Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, regarded by many as the founder of deconstructionism (Evans 2002:33), made the assertion that there is nothing outside the text; it is that assertion which informs McLaren's post-structural deconstructionism. Smith's (2006:ch 2) clear summary of Derrida's declaration provides cogent insight to the logical ramifications of Derrida's claim. He suggests that Derrida is not a linguistic idealist who might contend that there is

no real world which exists outside of the text (Smith 2006:§263); rather, the world is interpreted through language, that is to say, nothing stands beyond the realm of textual interpretation (Smith 2006:§310).   Moreover, because we can never get outside of language we can never get outside of the need for interpretation.   Consequently one may never get to the way things really exist, because everything is an interpretation.

Additionally, Smith (2006:§335) points out that when we interpret the text, we bring to it our current context, experiences and presuppositions.   It is this characteristic philosophical viewpoint that initiates epistemic deconstructionism; an approach to the text which results in an "endless deferral of meaning" (Literary theory 2005:§5).

Examples of McLaren's deconstruction are ubiquitous.   Therefore, I will not attempt a copious documentation of each incident of deconstruction; rather my aim is to sufficiently demonstrate this theory as an epistemic stronghold in McLaren's thinking.   The first example reveals McLaren (2004:§1,143-1,161) deconstructing the idea of Lordship. He first re-characterises the term *Lord*, by critiquing away the transcendent characteristics in the divine nature of Christ, and through deconstruction, he weakens the dominion associated with Christ as Lord. That the term "Lord" suggests authority or kingship is for McLaren (2004:§1,143), merely theistic determinism which speaks about God as an all-powerful, all-controlling King, which to McLaren's thinking is not good news at all.   He further opines that this view of God reduces us to pieces on a chess board, or puppets on strings.

McLaren (2004:1,161) then reconstructs an alternative idea of good news as it relates to lordship by suggesting,

> *Good* news under these circumstances would be a leader who liberated us from all determinisms, who deconstructed oppressive authority and the self-interest of leaders and nations, who destabilized the status quo and made way for a better day, who delivered us not only from corrupt power, but also from the whole approach to power that is so corruptible…

He further states that, "Jesus comes as a liberating, revolutionary leader, freeing us from the dehumanization and oppression that come from all 'the powers that be' in our world (including religious powers)" (McLaren 2004:§1,180). Biblical references to the sovereign authority of God notwithstanding, McLaren sees the text of Scripture as something to be deconstructed and interpreted in light of his negative personal experiences. He thus extrapolates his own experiences with oppressive absolute authority to the Lordship of Jesus, consequently emasculating the transcendence of Christ's authority from diachronic application.

Another example of deconstructive reinterpretation is evidenced by the way McLaren approaches the inspiration of Scripture. "What is meant by *Godbreathed* or *inspired?* God's breath is associated, from the first verses of the Bible, with creativity and life-giving vitality…To say that Scripture is Godbreathed is, then, to elicit this primal language of creation" (McLaren 2004:§2,349). Given McLaren's post-structural epistemology, his practice of deconstructing biblical inspiration permits him to say anything without the need to substantiate his conclusion. He provides no exegetical bulwark for his claims only experiential analogies. Everything is up for interpretation because there is nothing outside the text. Even the text of Scripture itself is under scrutiny as McLaren (2004:§2,386) objects to the use of descriptive words like, *authority, inerrancy, infallibility, revelation, objective, absolute,* and *literal* with reference to the Bible. Subsequently, by eliminating such words from the vocabulary of his Bibliology, McLaren in effect removes the boundaries which regulate one's approach to Scripture, thus saving it from uninhibited interpretive imaginings emerging out of postmodern deconstruction imposed upon biblical-theological themes.

Moreover, it is McLaren's (2005:xxvii) ambition to "deconstruct our conventional concepts of hell in the sincere hope that a better vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ will appear." Hence the product of McLaren's (2005:86) deconstruction is realised in his reconstructed belief that the Pharisees used the ancient non-Jewish concept of hell as a tool to threaten sinners. According to McLaren,

Jesus, the first biblical character to mention hell, actually deconstructs the Pharisees' idea of hell and reverses the argument back onto them.

McLaren applies deconstruction to the entire message of Jesus. Evangelicals, in McLaren's (2004:ch 4) view, have erroneously defined terms related to saviour and salvation. Consequently, if the church's orthodoxy is to be *generous*, believers must deconstruct what they think they know and reconstruct it in the context of our postmodern, post-Christian, post-secular world (McLaren 2004:92). Again, he recommends that reformed Christians reconstruct their faith in ways that are fitting for postmodern times. Thus, orthodoxy continues to be an ongoing construct in McLaren's mind with each version becoming more generous (which for McLaren means postmodern) than the previous version (McLaren 2004:189).

The most extensive example of McLaren's deconstruction is found in *The secret message of Jesus.* McLaren (2006:ix) clearly states, "The goal of my exploration is to understand Jesus-and, in particular, his message." McLaren therefore proceeds to deconstruct Jesus' message from a cultural, historical, economic, social and political perspective. Detached from authorial intent, McLaren is free to reconstruct the very purpose of Jesus' message. He even suggests that Jesus "was intentionally keeping his message of the kingdom a secret so that it wasn't obvious, wasn't easy to grasp, wasn't like a simple mathematical formula that can quickly be learned and repeated" (McLaren 2006:34).

McLaren believes that for centuries, without the benefit of post-structural literary analysis, Christians have missed the secret message of Jesus. Contributing to the lack of discernment was the mind-set of earlier Christian thinkers which, according to McLaren (2006:212) predisposed them to interpret Jesus' message as a "set of timeless abstractions and miss the historically particular references to contemporary political realities and social movement."

From the epistemic literary approach of deconstructionism, everything is an interpretation. Concession of transcendent reality notwithstanding, the meaning of that reality cannot be apprehended without employing deconstruction and

subsequent reconstruction within a contemporary context. Nonetheless, skilled application of deconstruction does not mitigate scepticism regarding one's ability to ascertain the true meaning of reality. If one extrapolates this view to future cultural turns, logical integrity must acknowledge the necessity of infinite deferrals of meaning. Hence one may observe apparent relative contradictions within postmodern orthodoxy.

4.3.1.3 Anti-propositional

The epistemic scope of this research project, as previously stated, is propositional knowledge. One who possesses adequate validation for the verity of a proposition can be said to have knowledge. Pritchard (2006:§198) defines a proposition as a statement which makes an assertion. It is a "meaningful, logical statement (or assertion) that can be confirmed in some manner, such as by sensory observation, and so can be subjected to scientific inquiry" (Grenz, Guretzki and Nordling 1999:96). Groothuis (2000:87) clarifies, "Questions, imperatives, exclamations and entreaties are not expressed in declarative or descriptive sentences, and so do not express propositions." He further points out that propositions make truth claims which are connected to reality linguistically (Groothuis 2000:88).

Being subject to the principle of non-contradiction, a proposition cannot declare that something is and is not at in the same way, in the same sense and at the same time. It cannot be true that there both is and is not a white car in my garage. Hence, Groothuis (2000:166) rightly concludes, "Any truth claim negates every proposition that denies it."

It is therefore expedient to observe statements made by McLaren which implicate an aversion to propositions. Though McLaren's relationship to the Bible's propositional content is of great interest to this researcher, it is beyond the scope of this project to critique his theological viewpoints. Attention will be limited to his appraisal of the propositional framework as the inaugural basis for theological content.

McLaren's post-structuralism is not compatible with propositionalism. The former thrives in an environment where deconstruction and reader-response hermeneutics minimize the antagonism of contradictory conclusions, while the latter makes declarations which allow for no middle ground. They must be either true or untrue. Contradictions are unacceptable in a propositional environment. Therefore, McLaren's first strategic assault on biblical propositions is to disparage the case for biblical propositions themselves. McLaren (2001:§804) exposes his distaste for propositions as he suggests that the Bible, "preoccupies itself with earthy stories rather than airy abstractions, wild poetry rather than tidy systems, personal and contextual letters rather than timeless, absolute pronouncements or propositions." McLaren's aversive sentiments toward propositions also radiate from his choice of adjectives as he characterises them as "sterile propositions and sharp-edged principles" (McLaren 2001:§3,436).

McLaren (2004:165) suggests that being "propositional" is foreign to the vocabulary of the Bible. He also concludes that those who build "conceptual cathedrals of proposition and argument" are "modern Christians" guilty of "arrogant intellectualizing" (McLaren 2004:151). McLaren makes no secret of the fact that, in his assessment, the problems with evangelicalism lie in its foundational modernism. By associating modernism with propositionalism, he is communicating his reaction against declarative statements in Scripture.

McLaren (2004:159-160) further expresses his clean break from viewing the Bible as a book of answers providing guidance. He informs his readers that his first step toward contextualising the gospel for a modern culture was the need to be "depropositionalized" (Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer 2003:198). Furthermore he asserts, "We need to reclaim the Bible as narrative" (McLaren 2004:166). McLaren's departure from the Bible as a book which holds answers for life decries his passion for post-structural fluidity. To view the Bible as a narrative to the exclusion of its propositional content precludes any answers at all. One cannot get an answer to a question without proposition. The answer may or may not be true, but for an answer to adequately respond to an inquiry that response must be formed as a proposition.

But McLaren (2005:21) has rediscovered faith, "not as a set of doctrines or an outline of propositions but rather as a story…" He has abandoned the "Easter egg hunt for propositions" (McLaren 2005:139) and has embraced a fully postmodern literary approach to the Bible and Christianity.

4.3.2 Contextualism

According to Black (2006:§1) contextualism asserts that "knowledge is relative to context." Any proposition which is disconnected from original contextual factors is denied epistemic status. Accordingly, truth value is context-dependent (Rysiew 2007:§1). Different contexts yield different truths from the same proposition.

In his explanation of why he is biblical, McLaren (2004:ch 10) reminds us that the Bible is a story subject to historical contextual realities. It is for this reason that Scripture is *timely* not *timeless.* Moreover, the emergent approach is contextual (McLaren 2001:152-153).

McLaren's view that truth is synchronic rather than diachronic can be seen throughout *The secret message of Jesus*. McLaren deconstructs the message of Jesus, which, he believes, has been lost for generations because of interpretive pressure applied by modernity. He asks concerning Jesus' purpose for coming, "What if he didn't come to start a new religion-but rather came to start a political, social, religious, artistic, economic, intellectual, and spiritual revolution that would give birth to a new world" (McLaren 2006:4)? McLaren proceeds to reconsider Jesus' message from a political, cultural, historical, economic and social context. The message of Jesus has not been understood for all these decades because it is contextual not transcendent, it is not rooted in the text of the gospels (McLaren 2006:210). Hence the mind-set of earlier believers made them susceptible to interpreting Jesus' message as a set of diachronic intellections rather than "historically particular references to contemporary political realities and social movements."

4.3.3 Scepticism

The logical consequences of unregulated hermeneutic analysis are relativistic and even contradictory interpretations without solid footing upon which validation may rest. Having no epistemic framework whereby one may validate knowledge tends to precipitate a form of epistemic scepticism. Rodney Clapp expresses McLaren's perspective thus, "But I think foundationalists need to admit that there is no such thing as safely and absolutely secured knowledge. Knowledge is particular and perspectival, and as such is always contestable" (Sweet et al 2003:130).

McLaren (2004:133) demonstrates a form of scepticism with respect to one's inability to properly interpret Scripture,

> How do "I" know the Bible is always right? And if "I" am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation…What makes "good" interpretation good?...Who sets the standard? Whose common sense? Which scholars and why? Don't all these appeals to authorities and principles outside of the Bible actually undermine the claim of ultimate biblical authority?

McLaren's (2004:24) version of generous orthodoxy disagrees with views of certainty, which he believes are modernist assumptions, held in common by both liberals and evangelicals. Certainty is an unrealistic fragment of modernity. According to McLaren (2001:§666), it was a time when that which was still unknown was knowable. There was an absolute certainty about knowledge which resulted in rebuffing anyone who saw things differently. Thus, as a reaction against modernity, postmodernism embraces a form of scepticism which impacts the goal of hermeneutics and interacts with post-structuralism to create a relativistic, sceptical, unsettled approach to biblical theology.

4.3.4 Pluralism

Pluralism approaches all epistemic systems as being equally valid, presented by equally knowledgeable and sincere individuals. The consequence of existing in such an environment of parity is that all systems share a collegiate relationship in which no system nullifies the validity of another; hence didactic

collaboration devoid of any judicious verity assessment is the custom. McLaren (2004:§722), through one of his fictitious characters, suggests that "postmodern philosophy itself may be a pluralistic umbrella making room for many diverse philosophical voices within it." This postmodern non-critical environment, in which a cross-pollination of ideas exists without judicious evaluation of truth-value, seems to be more than philosophical; rather it appears to be McLaren's dream for the EC. "The Christian faith, I am proposing, should become (in the name of Jesus Christ) a welcome friend to other religions of the world, not a threat" (McLaren 2004:254).

McLaren (2004:286-287) often over-defines and dramatizes modernity thus eliciting repulsion of anything associated with a "modern, exclusivist, absolutist, colonial version of Christianity." Though he denies any notion of being "for" pluralistic relativism, McLaren does see it as a "kind of needed chemotherapy." McLaren's (2001:§1,463) medicinal balm of pluralism is not about being right or wrong, notions which are not relevant for the EC; rather the priority aim is being good. Corresponding to this sentiment, McLaren (204:111) endorses one of his mentor's views, "Remember, in a pluralistic world, a religion is valued based on the benefits it brings to its nonadherents."

McLaren (2004:287) admits that he wants something beyond pluralism, but it actually appears to be more an issue of co-operative semantics rather than genuine desire. He suggests that pluralistic relativism is a chemotherapy that must be applied to the stage four cancer of modern Christianity; but his suggestion does not include a terminus, he suggests no signs that would indicate the completion of treatment. Indeed, McLaren (2004:285) even suggests that his vision of a generous orthodoxy will never be complete until we are in our eternal home with God. In this light, pluralistic relativism is more than treatment for a temporary condition; it is a proposal for the new norm.

Wells (1993:§1,713) astutely suggests that "pluralism is providing insulation from criticism and reality." McLaren's post-structural affinity for reader-response hermeneutics and deconstructionism coheres nicely with the epistemic notion of pluralism, all of which defer firm meaning and in so doing redirect critical analysis away from questions of truth, to questions of culturally relevant

goodness. Moreover, when divergent views are given epistemic equality they promote an indefinable notion that is postmodernism. It is the norm in a post-Christian society and the EC.

4.3.5 Pragmatism

Though McLaren advocates substantial changes in the evangelical church on the basis of more effective interaction with the postmodern culture, surprisingly pragmatism is not McLaren's primary epistemic position; rather it is a corollary to destabilised confidence in the apprehension of knowledge, pluralistic relativism as a solution to evangelicalism's woes, and contextual volatility as the routine informant of his ideas. McLaren consistently, though writing a book about generous orthodoxy, revisits the motivating influence of experience. Hence, "…I have become convinced that a generous orthodoxy appropriate for our postmodern world will have to grow out of the experience of the post-Christian, post-secular people of the cities of the twenty-first century" (McLaren 2004:92).

An appropriate summary of McLaren's (2003:263-269) epistemic perspective is aptly illustrated by his own words,

> But in the emerging culture, we see the motley patchwork form of the Bible itself as one of its most important messages: that God comes to us not as a subject to objects, nor yet as an object under study yielding to us as studying subjects, but rather that God comes to us in inter-subjectivity, in relationship, in history, in an environment, in the stuff of our day to day lives…How was the Bible generally studied in the modern era, if not as a dissected rat or frog (that is, an object) in a laboratory (or classroom), by people who denied their subjectivity (scholars), in an attempt to salvage the abstract principles from any context (like an objective scientific principle) so they could be applied (that is, used, as a technique or scientific formula) to any situation (regardless of its subjective, personal, relational context)?...We must admit that our quest for ultimate and absolute truth is impossible, if not for the reasons postmodern philosophers raise, then for this reason: the ultimate truth is not an objective concept, not an objective principle, but rather a Person….

4.4 Doug Pagitt

Pagitt's epistemology is more clearly discernable than either Kimball or McLaren. Though the implications of his perspective are many and varied, the expression of his primary epistemic position is not multi-dimensional. Simply stated, the theoretical footing upon which Pagitt constructs his ideal Christianity is most obviously expressed in his 2008 book *A Christianity Worth Believing*. For Pagitt (2008:xi) the book represents his "theological treatise," but more importantly, it also serves as a testimonial for Pagitt's epistemic contextualism.

Pagitt (2007:123-124) makes an unambiguous assertion that theology is always contextual and, "All theology has developed in a context, and those contexts are tenuous at best, so theology must always be developing." The immediate topic of Pagitt's comments notwithstanding, the principle of his approach is pure contextualism. The changing face of theological truth is predicated upon the changing face of cultural context, thus linking post-structural, deconstructive, reader-response, and at times intra-oppositional relativism to Pagitt's nonspecific epistemic proclamations.

All of Pagitt's (2008:9) deliberations about a worthy Christianity are contextual. Hence his perception of Christianity fluctuates with an arrhythmic dissonance driven by postmodern speculations. The content of Pagitt's (2008:59) assertion gives testimony, "The context and culture of the community has everything to do with what's written in the Bible and how we read it and live it." For Pagitt, the Bible does not speak for itself with textual meaning driven by authorial intent or apprehended by principles of literal interpretation. Correspondingly, Pagitt (2007:44) expresses his aversion to this concept in his response to Mark Driscoll's Biblicist theology,

> …he suggests that any cultural influence on our understanding of the Bible is akin to the "serpent…up to his old tricks…once again seeking to change the meaning of God's Word through a complicated philosophical grid of rules for textual interpretation." This seems to me to suggest a "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it" approach. I think such a view denies the reality of the development of language and the pressures of culture. I am not

> advocating a postmodern reading of the Bible for
> everyone (unless that is your culture and then there
> is nothing more one can do)…I understand that the
> "Read the Bible and get the meaning" approach is
> part of Mark's own personal history of faith, but that
> does not give it credibility as a theological system.

He further states that because the Bible was written to a particular people in a particular cultural circumstance there is more than one version of the story about Jesus (Pagitt 2008:29). As one might conclude, if the Bible is contextual in authorial intent and development, it stands to reason that the ultimate import of its message is fixed to the original culture thus diminishing the meaning in subsequent and different contexts. In Pagitt's (2008:35) own words, "Whether we know it or not, the dogmas and doctrines of God, of humanity, of Jesus, of sin, of salvation that many of us were taught are so firmly embedded in the cultural context of another time that they have become almost meaningless in ours."

On this point, Pagitt is not to be misunderstood. It is one of the hallmark characteristics of his thinking. He illustrates his thinking again with regard to Augustine's (and others) complex theologies by stating, "Their theological explanations are brilliant for their situation, but they are just that-situational explanations…Every theology is grounded in a culture and a set of culturally based assumptions and concerns…But to hold to those same conclusions today, when the worldview that demanded them has expired, is simply foolish" (Pagitt 2008:48). He further asserts that those theologies are "contextual explanations of various aspects of faith" and "aren't meant to stand in for truth or our common story" but are "explanation of the story for a given place and time" (Pagitt 2008:127-128). And finally, he suggests that it is impossible for theology and even Scripture to not be conformed to culture (Pagitt 2007:77). It is a proposal which implies that the truth-value of biblical propositions are, either embedded in a particular culture, or the authorial intent is altered, possibly eliminated by culture, thus terminating any real expectation of finding certain meaning even within the context of the source culture.

As a logical consequence of Pagitt's epistemic contextualism, other epistemic positions, though not expressed, are implied. Certain epistemological footings

such as anti-foundationalism, deconstructionism, post-structuralism, mild scepticism and perspectivism seem to be required informants to Pagitt's views, but the evidence of those ideas, as obvious as they may be, have not left a literary footprint that may be used as a platform to formally evaluate his noetic adherence.

4.5 Conclusion

Admittedly, the epistemic character of Kimball, McLaren and Pagitt illustrate that one will not find a solid broad-based consistency across the spectrum of theological conclusions held by members of EC leadership. Nevertheless, postmodernism's epistemic soul traverses the theological landscape of individual leaders and stamps its philosophical trademark upon the foundations upon which EC epistemology is built. Given the EC's predilection to resist foundationalism and metanarratives which seek to categorise or conceptualise the movement in terms of static definitions, the epistemic ideas articulated by Kimball, McLaren and Pagitt serve as a catalyst for the ECs reaction to evangelicalism, re-imagining theological conclusions and shaping new communities where belonging precedes believing.

At the heart of the EC's epistemology, as expressed by select leaders, there exists pragmatic discontent with status quo Christianity. Whether it is resistance to the gospel or emerging generations leaving the church, it culminated in an evaluation of the entire evangelical package informed by perception of the church's efficacy within current cultural realities. But pragmatism alone may lead one to change the method of doing church, but it does not imply the jettison of the church's message. Hence pragmatically they listened to those who were leaving or not interested in the church; interaction with the emerging culture, whether the initial orientation be practical (Kimball) academic (McLaren) or relational (Pagitt), served as a bridge from practical concern about ineffectual evangelical churches to a conviction that the church required a comprehensive overhaul of her orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

To achieve a transition from modern to postmodern Christianity, it seems apparent that epistemological considerations are judicious and even compulsory. This notion is confirmed by Carson's (2005:27) declaration that, "the fundamental issue in the move from modernism to postmodernism is *epistemology*-i.e., how we know things, or think we know things." Correspondingly, postmodern modification of evangelical Christianity (which is passionate about promoting propositional truth claims) cannot be accomplished from the outside in (changing the methods); rather the change must come from the inside out (a change in ideology). Hence, it may be noted that the genesis of Kimball's pragmatic sensitivities quickly transforms to epistemic pragmatism, thus he asserts that the EC "must not try to simply replace the outer wrappings of our ministries. We must look at the inner core with a new mindset" (Kimball 2007:15). McLaren's transition is evidenced by his stiff reaction against current Christianity which he believes must be debugged of its modern influences. "Emergent thinking" (McLaren 2004:§4,112) provides the notional impetus for his proposed postmodern transformation of the church. Similarly, having been taught that "truth was absolute-not relative, not contextual, not experiential, but settled and unshakable" (Pagitt 2008:29), Pagitt, while in seminary, experienced a complete renovation of his epistemic posture.

It is not obligatory for the EC to confess that epistemology is the fulcrum of the postmodern transformation; nevertheless it persists to be the fertile soil in which the seeds of an emerging church on the other side have been planted. The EC visionaries, via copious literary contributions to the conversation, attempt to paint a picture of what they believe a non-offensive, relevant, communal, post-structural, tolerant, generous, and contextual Christianity looks like; a Christianity, in their judgement, worth believing.

Consequently, Kimball, McLaren, and Pagitt, are obligated to give substantive testimony to the movement's epistemology. Their passion for the transition gives them no other suitable environment from which to find acceptance of contrary anchor points for the criss-crossing strands of their fallacious logic. A logically anchored literary hermeneutic is incongruous with reader-response and deconstructive approaches to biblical theology. Modernism's academic

approach to theology would not suffice. Therefore, the chosen method of presentation is the imprecise and even ambiguous mechanism of narrative and testimonial.

Proliferation, in the case of the EC, facilitates understanding. As more literary content has become available for examination, the EC's epistemic substructure has emerged with greater clarity. It possesses a profile which closely conforms to the contours of "soft postmodernism" (Carson 2005:106) though not in every detail. If one sees an animal walking along the road, but has no name for that animal, he may begin identification by describing different features of that animal. The description may proceed as follows: the animal has feathers, it waddles when it walks, has a semi-long rounded beak, two legs and webbed feet. Another man, upon hearing the description of the animal may proclaim it to be a duck. It follows that a title or name is not necessary to identify the animal. So it is with the EC's epistemology. Each revelation of the EC's epistemic thinking adds contour to the picture. When the individual sketches are merged the global picture comes into focus, without the necessity of a title.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of this researcher that the individual epistemic physiognomies of the EC, once amalgamated, closely depict a soft form of postmodern epistemology. Being sceptical about ascertaining certain truth, the EC consigns belief to a community-oriented product. Epistemic coherentism is the EC's designator of truth-value, in spite of the fact that within their own belief system they accept contradictory and divergent views with alacrity and tolerance. But tolerance is one of the by-products of relativistic pluralism, which evaluates all truth claims with uncritical collegiality. Resulting from the notion that truth is contextually synchronic and therefore comprehension must be considered in light of contemporary cultural influences, the EC adheres to a post-structural view of truth unhinged from diachronic meaning and thus granting it an unfettered array of potential meanings through reader-response hermeneutics and deconstruction.

Going back to the description of the duck, the EC appears to possess the characteristics of postmodern epistemology, in spite of their aversion to

embrace that label. "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and sounds like a duck, no matter what you are willing to call it, it is most likely a duck."

Appraisal of the EC's epistemology is forthcoming; intermediately however, consideration must be given to biblical epistemology. This is the matter that will concern this researcher in the following chapter.

Chapter 5
Biblical Epistemology

5.1 Introduction

In his book, *What is this Thing Called Knowledge?* Pritchard (2006:§762) rightly asserts that "one of the central tasks in epistemology is to offer a definition of knowledge." Given the universality of Pritchard's assertion, it seems appropriate to presume that a discussion of epistemology will inevitably advance a hypothesis as to what constitutes knowledge. Though there is overall acceptance of the definition that knowledge is justified true belief, there exists a plethora of notions and disagreements concerning the criteria by which one may consider a belief as true and justified. Evan's (2002:66) words are accurate and germane,

> …mere true belief that is the result of luck or guessing does not appear to constitute knowledge either. Most philosophers therefore agree that knowledge requires a true belief that is justified or warranted or that has been acquired through a reliable process, though there is great disagreement as to what it is that warrants or justifies a belief.

Given the multiplicity of theories addressing legitimate and adequate justification, epistemic deliberations reflect extensive variability, even contradiction regarding propositional veracity. The matter of justification of propositional knowledge has been the seedbed from which the epistemic concepts summarising the EC's epistemology have emerged.

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The epistemological footing of the EC is often illustrated via their relationship with the literary content of the Bible. Adequate evaluation of their attempt to conflate postmodern ethos and evangelical Christianity necessitates comparison of the epistemic underpinnings which inform the EC's obfuscation and ambition. For any evangelical who is passionate about living life in adherence to revealed biblical truth, acceptable evaluation of the EC's epistemology necessitates legitimate consideration of the epistemic posture of Scripture.

Summarising the Bible's epistemology presents a particular set of challenges which require a few preliminary clarifications. Firstly, I believe the Bible, that is the original autographa, is the inspired, infallible, inerrant and true word of God. Henceforth, all references to the Bible, its message, inspiration, infallibility or inerrancy, have only the original autographa in view, not translations, either ancient or contemporary. Although acceptance of this view is not universal[1], a protracted discussion comprising argumentation and substantiation will lead to apologetic entanglement which is beyond the scope of this chapter and project. Nevertheless, more should be said in order to illuminate the substantive grounds which define the margins of this discussion. The following statements from *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* sufficiently elucidate these footings:

> God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself…Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches…the Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning…Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states…the authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a

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[1] One such theologian is Karl Barth (1936:125-127) who asserts that the Bible is not "itself and in itself" the Word of God. He further suggests that the Bible becomes the word of God when it serves as attestation to previous general revelation.

> view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such
> lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and
> the Church (Grudem 1994:1205).

Groothuis (2000:66) suggests, "Language is God's vehicle for conveying truth, although it may be clouded in much of our experience (as evidenced by…much postmodernist writing)." Though many postmodernists assert the inadequacies of biblical revelation because its' communication medium is human language, I agree with the Chicago statement which denies that "human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation" (Grudem 1994:1206).

The existence of biblical revelation infers two basic assumptions: God exists (as the One who reveals truth to us) and God has spoken (He has spoken to us through language by the written word). Hence the introduction of divine inspiration into the consideration of biblical epistemology necessarily shapes the character of the discussion. If one seeks to apprehend biblical epistemology, comprehension requires that the investigation extends beyond redaction of human writers as the sole source of biblical literary substance. Divine inspiration presupposes that the terminus of authorial intent is located in God Himself who is the ultimate and divine Author of Scripture.

The second notion warranting comment is the use of the phrase *biblical epistemology*. In the usual philosophical sense epistemic theories deal with hypotheses, argumentation, problems and solutions. One might conclude that the branch of philosophy which deals with the theory of knowledge is therefore a work in progress. But the Bible is not a work in progress. It is a completed revelation of God and He has not chosen to include argumentation about the nature of knowledge, truth, belief or its justification. A fact to which Groothuis (2000:60) testifies when he concludes that, "the Bible does not present a carefully nuanced philosophical discussion of the nature of truth." Groothuis is not alone in his assessment, "It's certainly true that the Bible doesn't set forth an epistemology in the traditional sense. It doesn't seek to address questions like, 'What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for S's knowing that p?'" (A biblical epistemology, 2009:¶2).

However, one would be mistaken to conclude that the Bible does not address the issues of knowledge, truth, belief, or its justification or that its message lacks clarity in this regard. As to the perspicuity of Scripture MacArthur (2006:¶18) states, "That the Word of God was revealed in an understandable way, that its central message is clear, and that (because it is clear) all men are fully accountable to its message." Grudem (1994:105) echoes this sentiment, "But it would be a mistake to think that most of Scripture or Scripture in general is difficult to understand." More specifically, Moreland (2003:¶1) points out that the "Bible implicitly and explicitly teaches a particular theory of truth." These ideas are summed up and applied nicely by the following statement, "Nevertheless, it is flat-out false to claim that the Bible contains little of interest to epistemologists. Scripture has plenty to say about the subjects, objects, nature, and scope of human knowledge. Much of what it teaches bears significantly on the sort of issues debated by epistemologists" (A biblical epistemology, 2009:¶3).

The foundational stratum of biblical epistemology is the nature and character of God, the ultimate Author and Source of all general and special revelation. Though language, in its contemporary postmodern milieu, is considered to be an inadequate signifier of reality, I suggest that God is not postmodern. He chose language to reveal Himself to the world and therefore transcends philosophical vagaries. Hence, He presents epistemic concepts from an enlightened and exhaustive understanding of truth. Therefore, presentation of epistemic concepts such as knowledge, truth and justifications for belief are bereft of philosophical argumentation. Nevertheless, Scripture does provide sufficient handles by which one may comprehend the Bible's epistemic composition.

Finally, a prepatory word about approach is in order. Because epistemology concerns itself with the question of knowledge as justified, true belief, the following summary of biblical epistemology will attempt to encapsulate the biblical position regarding knowledge, truth and belief. In the course of these discussions, certain epistemic concepts will be illustrated biblically not philosophically. At times, it will be necessary to define certain aspects of an

epistemic concept beyond the definition which has already appeared in this project, though that definition will still fall short of philosophical argumentation. Apologetics will be avoided as it leads beyond the objective of this chapter. Specific exegetical details will be offered where it is necessary for understanding. All biblical quotations will be taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 update, unless otherwise stated.

5.2 Knowledge in the Bible

As a prerequisite to comprehending the Bible's epistemic position, one must seek to define the biblical words for knowledge. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* the primary Hebrew root word for knowledge is the verb יָדַע (*yadaʿ*)[2]. It is used 944 times in every stem and expresses many nuances of meaning (Harris, Harris, Archer and Waltke 1980:366-367). The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* suggests that in the Hebrew conception of man, the heart, soul, and mind are so interrelated that they cannot be separated. So "to know" involves the complete being. Hence knowledge, in the Hebrew way of thinking, is not only the product of rational deliberation; it is equally the outcome of experience and relationship (Elwell and Comfort 2001:789). *Harper's Bible Dictionary* adds the dimension of "involvement and commitment" as essential means for the acquisition of knowledge (Achtemeier, Harper & Row, and Society of biblical literature 1985:533).

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Harris et al 1980:367) further contends that יָדַע (*yadaʿ*) is also used to express knowledge gained in various ways by the senses. Within the semantic domain of יָדַע, the word דַּעַת (*daʿat*) is used to express moral cognition (Gen 2:9, 17), technical knowledge or a skill (Exod 31:3, 35:31), God's knowledge of man's ways (Psa 1:6; 139:1-3; Isa 48:8), learning (Isa 29:11-13), to distinguish (Jonah 4:11), and intimacy (Gen 4:1; Num 31:17; Deut 34:10). These illustrate that יָדַע is not quarantined to intellect, but involves humans comprehensively.

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[2] The Hebrew transliterations are based on the Michigan-Claremont encoding scheme.

In Greek, the primary words for knowledge are γνῶσις (*gnōsis*) and ἐπίγνωσις (*ĕpignōsis*). γνῶσις, according to Kittel (1964:689-692), the word group refers to intelligent comprehension of an object or matter, denoting knowledge of what really exists. γνῶσις, being based on one's own observation, the knower and his knowledge is therefore objective, though limited. Though γνῶσις is weighted more heavily on "intelligent apprehension" it also includes OT connotations (Achtemeier et al 1985:533).

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich (1958:203-204), offer the following three nuances of meaning for γνῶσις:

1. Comprehension or intellectual grasp of something. The knowledge may be possessed by God (Rom 11:33), humans (1 Cor 8:1, 7, 10), or may refer to knowledge that has not been grasped (Luke 11:52).

2. The content of what is known. Romans 2:20 states, "…having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth." Louw and Nida (1989:335) agree asserting that γνῶσις is, "the content of what is known."

3. A dissident variety of knowledge. Paul addresses this in 1 Timothy 6:20, "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge.'" The lack of knowledge about a clearly definable system of belief suggests that Paul intentionally leaves the definition of γνῶσις intentionally general for this passage.

ἐπίγνωσις refers to possession of information about something to such a degree of thoroughness and competence that one may claim to have full or definite knowledge (Louw and Nida 1989:333-334). ἐπίγνωσις implies a more intimate way of knowing which is more profound and comprehensive than one-dimensional intellectual apprehension of perceived reality.

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[3] The Greek transliteration is based on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae encoding scheme.

Much more could be said to explore the depths of both the OT and NT words, but depth of definition is not compulsory for elucidation of biblical epistemology. I believe the simple definitions offered are sufficient to appreciate that the words used for knowledge in both testaments reflect non-compartmentalised knowledge that is not relegated or isolated; but instead is characteristically inclusive. Thus to know is to reason, reflect, observe, relate to, feel and experience the thing or person being known. Although beneficial in certain respects, unaccompanied definitions do not satisfy objective of this chapter; they must be complemented by biblical teaching about knowledge and the ways it may be acquired.

5.3 Biblical Teaching about Knowledge

The mass of biblical passages which make reference to knowledge and the spatial limits of this project prohibit exhaustive analysis of each Scripture. Therefore, my approach will be to suggest a précis of various biblical statements on knowledge and subsequently provide an illustrative extract of the biblical content related to that statement.

5.3.1 Acquisition of knowledge is made possible by God

The Bible declares God as ontologically preeminent. He is the first cause, the source of all things. Consider Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The phrase translated "the beginning" is from the Hebrew רֵאשִׁית (*rēʾšît*), which means "the initiation of an action, process, or state of being" (Swanson 1997:§8040). Romans 11:36 also declares God's prominence as the divine initiator of all things; "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." The apostle Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things…" It is clear from the biblical testimony that God possesses the prominent status of the fundamental and primary cause of all things which exist.

It is reasonable to postulate that the original conception of knowledge is also dependent upon God as its source. Man has been uniquely made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). It is self-evident that part of God's image is that of rationality. It would be superfluous to participate in a discussion about God's rationality other than to make the self-evident assertion that God is a rational God. Therefore, the rational mind of God provides a framework for the rationality of man. This is implied in the fact that God declares that man is made in His own image. This fact denotes that human beings, who have been made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27), are inherently rational beings because God is a rational being. God breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living being (Gen 2:7). By this act God separated humans from all other creatures thus endowing them with reason, conscience and will.

Early existence and interaction with humans illustrate their God-given rationality. Genesis 2:16-17 indicates that God gave Adam the choice to eat of any tree in the garden with the exception of one tree. Choice illustrates rationality. Also in Genesis 2:19, Adam was given the task of naming the animals, His ability to reason is illustrated by observing and naming the animals. Again in Genesis 3:8, after committing sin Adam and Eve were rationally aware of their sin and the immediate consequence it had on their modesty, thus reflecting rationality. Furthermore, they demonstrated rational intellect by deciding to hide from God when they recognized His presence in the garden.

The Bible also declares that God has been communicating with humans throughout history (Heb 1:1-2). Therefore one would assume that God's speaking to humans only makes sense if He first created them with the necessary rational capabilities to understand His communication.

One may rightly question the effect which the fall had on man's ability to comprehend God's communication. The Bible is clear that the heart of man is sick and deceptive (Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9), but this wasting of the mind does not preclude man's rational capabilities to apprehend truth. Communication with God and other mankind continues throughout the Bible. The fact that there were men of God who heard the word of the Lord and followed it faithfully to the satisfaction of God (Gen 6:22; Exod 12:28; 1 Kgs 15:11; 17:5; Psa 119:106;

Matt 1:24; Heb 11:8), substantiates retention of human's rational capabilities. Romans 1:18-28 indicates that knowledge of God is not the point of failure in man; rather suppression or denial of that knowledge is what brings God's wrath. Those who claim faith in Christ have apprehended the propositional truths of the gospel, yet the manifestation of Christianity in its local expression is varied and often contradictory. It is a reflection of man's deceptive heart. Paul explains the problem in Romans 7; though he wanted to follow God completely, he often found himself doing the very thing he didn't want to do. Humans, though redeemed by the blood of Jesus (Eph 1:7), still dwell in their bodies of death (Rom 7:24), which subjects them to the possibility of biased, selfish and sometimes ideological interpretations of God's revealed truth. Nevertheless, man is capable of arriving at truth by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:3).

That man has been enabled rationally to apprehend knowledge is also seen in the exchange between God and Abram as he seeks justified true belief. In Genesis 15:2-3 Abram voices concern over the fact that he still has no child and the heir of his house will be Eliezer rather than a son of his own. God reiterates His promise of descendents and possession of "this" land (vv. 4-7), to which Abram asks in vs. 8, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" God's response to Abram's question is to initiate a unilateral covenant with Abram. In the middle of the process of cutting the covenant, God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (Gen 15:13-14). Two observations are worth noting:

1. Abram demonstrates the difference between statement and knowledge. The word of God's promise, which to that time had not been fulfilled, even with Abram's belief, was not considered to be knowledge without verification, thus Abram's question in verse 8. The distinction between belief and knowledge is evidence of rationality.

2. God's statement in vs. 13, "know for certain," presumes the capacity to analyse the situation and have confidence in the veracity of God's word.

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The exhortation for Abram to "know for certain," was spoken by God who was intimately acquainted with the rational capability of Abram. The implication of His covenant upon the veracity of His word, in Abram's mind, was a significant testimony to God's provision for man's rational apprehension of justified true belief.

But it is not enough to attribute the concept of knowledge or the potential for having knowledge to the creative design of God. If knowledge is acquirable as the normal matter of course for rational beings, one would expect that the Bible would show evidence which presumes the procurement of knowledge by man. This expectation is fulfilled on numerous occasions throughout Scripture as many make claims to the acquisition of knowledge; a few examples follow.

Moses, in his commissioning of Joshua before his own death asserts, "I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you…" (Deut 31:29). One may be justifiably sceptical about Moses' unqualified claim to have knowledge about the state of Israel's affairs after his death. The claim, "I know" is made without qualification. Moses is not making a prediction; it is an expression of his justified true belief and it is based on the words of God in Deuteronomy 31:16-17,

> The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. The My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us'"?

Moses intellectually apprehended the message from God, formed a belief in the veracity of the statement as a revelation from God, and deemed the source to be adequate justification to consider it knowledge.

The psalmist makes a similar unqualified claim to knowledge in Psalm 135:5, "For I know that the Lord is great and that our Lord is above all gods." It has

been suggested that the literal Hebrew rendering of "For I know" is "I, for my part, know indeed" (Carson, France, Motyer and Wenham 1994). Whatever the psalmist considered adequate justification for his claim, he makes the claim with confidence.

The gospel of John offers us a most interesting example of certain knowledge about another's possession of knowledge. John 7:28, "Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, 'You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know." οἴδατε is the Greek word translated "know" connoting perception, realisation, and experience; in *Koine* Greek its meaning is indistinguishable from γνῶσις (Kittel et al 1964:116). In this text Jesus' proclamation arose out of a conundrum caused by the Jew's common supposition that the Messiah's coming would be secret and the fact that Jesus' origins were known to the religious authorities (Carson et al 1994). The content of His pronouncement points to the fact that the religious authorities possessed knowledge albeit not to the extent they supposed. The significance of Jesus' assertion is found in the extent of His own knowledge. The Bible testifies to the fact that Jesus possessed supernatural knowledge (Matt 9:4; 12:25; John 2:24-25). Because He is God (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9), Jesus' supernatural knowledge about man's knowledge is epistemically authoritative and certifies man's inherent ability to acquire knowledge even in his sinful condition.

One final aspect of God enabling knowledge may be observed by the expressions such as, "you shall know," "that they may know," "the earth may know," "make them know" and the like. Scripture is replete with passages reflecting definite knowledge as a result of the providence of God (Exod 6:7; 7:5; Lev 23:42-43; Deut 4:35; 1 Sam 17:46-47; Psa 24:14; Isa 52:6; Ezek 5:13; Hos 2:20; Joel 2:20; Matt 9:5-6; 1 Cor 2:12; 1 John 5:13, 20). These Scriptures attest to God's providential interaction with humans for the purpose of their apprehension of knowledge. Given that God's purposes are always accomplished (Job 42:1-2; Pss 115:3; 135:6; Isa 55:11), it is biblically faithful to embrace the conclusion that humans may indeed acquire knowledge.

5.3.2 Human beings are held accountable for knowing

The viability of knowledge acquisition is predicated on the distinctive attribute of rationality which man possesses as a corollary of having been created in the image of God. But the biblical perception of knowledge encompasses more than mere potentiality; it also reveals an expectation of knowledge for which humans are held accountable.

God proclaims the testimony of His glory through David in Psalm 19:1-2, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge." The word David uses to express the result of this general revelation is the word דַּעַת (da'at). Revelation of the knowledge of God does not cease either by day or night. God expects that the product of revelation is knowledge. Paul expresses both the expectation that knowledge has been acquired via God's general revelation and man's accountability as the consequence of such revelation;

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Rom 1:18-20).

Paul's main thrust in this passage is communicated by the clause, "For the wrath of God is revealed" (vs. 18). Two prepositional phrases serve as adverbial modifiers of the revelation of God's wrath. First the wrath will be revealed "from heaven" and also "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (vs. 18). Of particular interest is the relative clause τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων, (the ones suppressing the truth in unrighteousness). The focus of God's wrath is humankind (ἀνθρώπων) modified by the adjectival phrase describing the offence for which spiritual judgement will be revealed. The transgression committed is expressed in the participle κατεχόντων. This compound word speaks of preventing, hindering or restraining (Bauer et al 1979:532). Luke uses κατέχω to describe the people who "tried to keep Him

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from going away from them" (Luke 4:42), and again the word appears two times in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, where it is translated "restrains". The object of the finite verb, κατέχω is "truth" (ἀλήθειαν). Robertson (1931:ch 6), breaks the word down to its component parts and suggests that λήθω or λανθάνω means "to conceal," but with the addition of the α privative, its meaning is "to bring out in the open." Hence, the attempted goal of wicked men is to put the revealed truth of God into a box.

Morris (1988:77) asserts, "The truth here is the general truth that is open to all people, not the truth God has revealed in Christ and the gospel. People are guilty because they sin against the truth they have, not the truth they do not have." Walvoord et al (1983:442) agree, "People had God's truth but suppressed it, refusing to heed it."

Having linked God's wrath to the unrighteous suppression of truth, Paul obliges himself to establish well-defined human culpability thus removing any avenue by which man could be excused by claiming no knowledge. Verse 19 is a continuation of the sentence originating in vs. 18. Paul makes the transition from the proposition about the revelation of God's wrath upon unrighteous people who suppress the truth to the reason for that wrath, with the subordinating conjunction διότι (because). As the head word of the subordinate clause which forms vs. 19, it expresses the basis or grounds of an action. διότι is a "marker of a causal connection between two statements" (Bauer et al 1979:251).

Man is held accountable for proper response to truth because (διότι) "that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Rom 1:19). The word "evident" translates the Greek word φανερός which occurs twice in this verse; the first form is an adjective (φανερόν) and the second is an aorist active verb (ἐπανέρωσεν). The word pertains to something as readily known, visible, clear, plainly to be seen and in the open (Bauer et al 1979:1047). Paul's contention is that which is known (γνωστὸν) of God is plain to see among the unrighteous who are suppressing it, because God has made

it evident to them. Consequently, they are accountable for the knowledge God has made available to them.

Verse 20 delineates how God revealed Himself as well as the knowable content from that revelation. While not communicating specific knowledge about the Trinity or salvation, this verse does eradicate ambiguity about the existence of God and certain of His attributes; "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Man has no excuse available that would mitigate God's revelation of wrath. God's disclosures of His attributes, power and nature "have been clearly seen" and are "being understood". "Have been clearly seen" translates καθορᾶται, which denotes acquisition of definite information (Louw and Nida 1996:325). "Being understood" comes from the verb meaning to grasp, to comprehend, to perceive or have insight (Bauer et al 1979:674). Both words appear in the passive voice describing knowledge that has been revealed and made known to them. God, who created us with the ability to ascertain knowledge of Him through general revelation, has made Himself known to mankind to such a degree that rebuttal is not possible. Bauer et al (1979:493) captures the essence of this sentiment by suggesting that a literal translation of the phrase, "τὰ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ τ. ποιήμασι νοούμενα καθορᾶται would be, God's invisible attributes are perceived with the eye of reason in the things that have been made."

ἀναπολογήτος (without excuse) is the α privative form of ἀπολογίαν (Acts 22:1; Phil 1:7, 16; 1 Pet 3:15). Vincent (1886:653) submits that the literal meaning of the word is apology but "not in the popular sense of excuse, but in the more radical sense of defence." Given the α privative, the word would connote an inability to defend, or defenceless. Louw and Nida (1996:437) agree defining this word as "not being able to defend oneself or to justify one's actions."

Accountability for knowing may be summarised accordingly; God, having revealed Himself to mankind in such an irrefutable way as to precipitate an

expression of His wrath toward those who unrighteously suppress the truth, leaves them in a position without defence.

5.3.3 Knowledge may be held with certainty though it is partial or incomplete

Biblical examples of knowledge held with certitude are exceedingly abundant, necessitating an archetypal approach to the enumeration of Scriptural substantiation. The Bible reveals diverse propositions that are, can, and should be known while also illustrating many varied avenues through which knowledge may be acquired. Some relevant passages:

- Moses, speaking to Pharaoh, reflected justified true belief about the condition of Pharaoh's heart toward God (Exod 9:30).
- Jethro demonstrates knowledge about God in Exodus 18:11, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods…"
- God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, proclaims His intentions to make Himself known resulting in knowledge (Ezek 38:23).
- Luke pronounces positive knowledge as the purpose for writing his gospel to Theophilus; "so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4).
- In John's writings we see many examples of confident knowledge (John 3:1-2; 4:25; 9:20; 1 Jn 5:13-15).
- Peter affirms Israel's knowledge of Jesus (Acts 2:22).
- Paul also claims certain knowledge (Rom 7:14; 1 Cor 8:4).

These representative passages make clear that from a biblical perspective, knowledge may be held with certainty. Nevertheless, certain knowledge does not necessitate complete knowledge. Mankind is finite in nature and his epistemological capacity is therefore finite. Thus, man is incapable of fully comprehending the thoughts of God, a fact God Himself asserts in Isaiah 55:8-9, This truth is made more precise by Paul's statement in Romans 11:33. Hence, we may possess certain knowledge of God; for it is the purpose of His revelation. But we do not, nor are we able to know Him fully, a fact about which the Bible testifies clearly (Job 36:26; 1 Cor 13:9, 12).

5.3.4 The Bible illustrates that knowledge is propositional in nature

The South African Oxford Dictionary (2006:716) defines a proposition as, "a statement expressing a judgement or opinion." For example, "this chain is made of pure gold" expresses a proposition. It makes a judgement about the precious metal from which the chain has been made. A proposition is a statement in which the subject is affirmed or denied by the predicate. In this form the subject of sample proposition is "chain," and the predicate with its modifier, "is made of pure gold"; as a propositional statement it expresses a truth or falsity. Peltz (2010§40) rightly observes that the copiousness of true or false statements imply that much of our communication is propositional. Correspondingly, Phillips (2006:§950-951) suggests, "The gospels are followed by long doctrinal letters that teach basic truths about God and his salvation, and it is characteristic of these letters to give us truth in the form of propositions." He further quotes Martin Luther as having said, "There is no Christianity where there are no assertions" (Phillips 2006:§952).

Even interrogatives expect propositional responses. Hence, if I ask you, "How do you feel today?" I expect you to respond by expressing a judgement or opinion about your current feelings. The reply may be, "I feel well today." The subject of this proposition is confirmed or denied by the predicate. "I" either truly or falsely "feel well".

The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to humankind. Revelation, by definition, is propositional because it articulates views about the nature and character of God, which may be true or false. The predicators contained in the special revelation of Scripture affirm or deny God as He is in actuality.

The most common form of communication in Scripture is propositional and therefore necessitates management as to the extent of illustrative material utilised to verify the assertion of the propositional nature of Scripture. Of special significance are the propositions of which the gospel of Jesus Christ is comprised (John 1:1, 14; 3:16; 6:44; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16; 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor 15:3-5; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:4-5; 2:1, 8-9; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 2:4; 5:12). The distinctive characteristic of these gospel passages is assertion. They are not

narratives inferring some moral application guided by a relativistic reader-response relationship with the text; rather they are assertions describing metaphysical realities which are true or false, and which impact one's ultimate eternal state of existence.

5.3.5 Biblical knowledge implies metaphysical realism

Realism is the belief that entities actually exist independently of human knowers (Evans 2002:99). Also, according to Evans (2002:74), metaphysics "is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of reality…'beyond' or 'after' physics." The term is also used as a synonym for ontology, which comes from the Greek word ὀντός, having to do with a study of being or existence. Metaphysical realism asserts the independent existence of reality apart from knowledge.

Metaphysical realism, although not technically epistemological, is a foundational concept which forms a basis for biblical epistemology. The Bible assumes that God exists apart from anyone knowing about His existence (Gen 1:1). Belief in the existence of God is compulsory for relationship with Him (Heb 11:6). In John 4:24 Jesus declares that, "God is spirit..." By being a spirit, God is outside of the physical realm, yet His metaphysical reality is never questioned in Scripture. That God exists ontologically independent of our mental perceptions, linguistic attempts to describe Him and even our beliefs, promotes acceptance of other metaphysical actualities.

5.3.6 Biblical knowledge is foundational

Biblical epistemology may also be described as a foundational metanarrative. Lyotard (2006:¶3) once defined postmodernism as, "incredulity toward metanarratives." His problem was any grand narrative or story that purported to be a comprehensive and true explanation of historical experience or knowledge. This is precisely what the Bible contends. God is the Source and Sustainer of all things (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16-17); thus God's view of the world exhibits His metanarrative, His grand story from start to finish. It was set in motion by Him before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4; 2:10; 2 Thes 2:13); He

determines the means by which men will be saved (Rom 10:17; Eph 2:8-9); and He determines the timing of the end (Matt 24:36; Acts 1:6-7).

Newman (2010:§2) states that foundationalism is "a system of justified belief…organized by two analogous features: a foundation of unshakable first principles, and a superstructure of further propositions anchored to the foundation via unshakable inference." Similarly, Scriptural implication of knowledge as foundational may be summarised accordingly:

1) Knowledge is defined as justified true belief.
2) A belief is an intentional mental state whose object is either:
     a) An object in the external world.
     b) A specific proposition (of such an object).
3) Belief may be categorised as true or false.
4) A belief may be said to be true or false in a derivative sense depending upon the truth or falsity of the propositional content determined by its correspondence to objective reality.
5) Beliefs typically have grounds; that is to say that belief typically depends upon, arises from, or is supported by something.
6) Accidently true beliefs are not knowledge because they are not justified or warranted.
7) Beliefs have a positive epistemic status if they have the right kind of grounds.
8) Foundationalism refers to the kinds of grounds which constitute justification of belief.
9) The Bible teaches that God exists with certain attributes which qualify Him as an indubitable basis to guarantee the truth of His revelation. He represents Newman's (2010:§2) "unshakable first principle."

5.3.7 Biblical knowledge and truth are inextricable

Propositions by nature make assertions about reality that are either true or false. Penner (2005:45) concludes that, "knowledge is a belief that enjoys the dual status of being true and being adequately grounded or justified." The truth requirement of knowledge is particularly germane to biblical propositions.

"Scripture is full of theological propositions-unchanging truths of the Christian faith" (Phillips 2006:§954). The Bible consistently discriminates between truth and error. The truth of a doctrine propositionally expressed in Scripture necessarily excludes everything that is contrary to it. In Galatians 1:8-9 the apostle Paul is particularly fervid in his assertion of this point,

> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Francis Schaeffer (1982:32) echoes this sentiment, "We must act upon, witness, and preach this fact, what is contrary to God's revealed propositional truth is not true." Propositional truth exclusivity implies a specific characterisation of truth. J. P. Moreland (2008:¶1) expresses it thus, "the Bible implicitly and explicitly teaches a particular theory of truth." Erickson et al (2004:65) admits that the Bible does not relate a technical view of truth, "but it does implicitly and consistently advance the correspondence view in both testaments."

Particularly, the correspondence theory of truth is indicated by Peltz's (2010:§26) definition of truth as "conformity with fact, agreement with reality, the real state of affairs." Wells (2008:§947) points out that in the Middle Ages truth was defined as "the correspondence between an object and our knowledge of it." Truth, according to the correspondence theory is relational, describing collocation of the mental idea and the actual thing, expressing a consistent agreement with knowledge and the reality of the thing known (Peltz 2010:§2203). Thus a statement of truth consists of its correlation to reality. Peltz (2010:§2208) further suggests that correspondence is characterised by three elements:

1) The mental assertion or proposition which says something about the world.
2) The object that the mental element is describing in some way.

3) The connector which gives confidence when the content of the mental assertion accurately describes the object.

Accordingly, truth exists in a relationship where propositional content conforms to the reality of the thing about which the assertion has been made. Wells (2008:§947) maintains that the correspondence view of truth did not come out of a vacuum but was "picking up on something essential to the biblical understanding of truth." One of the plainest expressions of the correspondence theory of truth may be seen in the criteria for discerning the veracity of prophetic messages. Deuteronomy 18:18-22 says,

> I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever does not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

The Psalmist described the Lord as a "God of truth" (Psa 31:5). Being a God of truth, all His utterances must therefore be true; a fact testified to by Samuel (2 Sam 7:28). God makes the claim that His own utterances are truth (Isa 45:19), a fact also confirmed by Jesus (John 17:17). The Psalmist agreed with these truth claims (Psa 119:142, 151, 160).

Correspondingly, if the words of a prophet are genuinely from God, they must bear the same truth characteristics as God (Deut 18:20-22). The criterion for confirmation of a prophet's verity is conformity of his prophetic assertions to the real world. If the prophet says something will happen, his words are considered to be truthful and from God only when the real state of things are actually the same as spoken by the prophet. One may therefore conclude that, in the

prophetic realm, subsequent events may serve as external substantiation of truth (meaning God has spoken through the prophet) when those events demonstrate equivalence between assertion and the way things really are.

The correspondence view of truth may also be understood outside the prophetic domain. The ninth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exod 20:16), implies the correspondence theory of truth. Hence Geisler (2002:115) suggests that the commandment is ineffective if the theory of truth is not based on correspondence. In the gospel of Matthew, John's disciples came to Jesus asking if He was the Expected One, Jesus' reply (Matt 11:4-5) demonstrates the correspondence theory of truth. Jesus' identity as the Messiah was verified by the conformity of His message and actions with those predicted in Scripture as belonging to the Messiah. The truth of Jesus' claims found substantiation in their correspondence to events and words which could be attested to by their senses.   The apostle Peter summarises this correspondence in Acts 2:22, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know." Here, the verity of Jesus' identity as "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36) is based upon the correspondence between the proposition that Jesus is Lord and Christ and the attesting miracles, wonders and signs.   The consequence of that agreement is expressed by the words, "…just as you yourselves know" (vs. 22).

Correspondence stabilises truth and gives it a quality of transcendence. It is not relative but objective, anchored by a reality that is not undone by progressive modernism or postmodernism. If, at 09h00 in the town of Waterfall, on 23-March-2010, I assert that "It is raining outside." That assertion is true only if it is actually raining outside on 23-March-2010 at 09h00 in Waterfall. If someone in Waterfall, walks outside on 23-March-2010 at 09h00 and finds my claim to correspond to reality, thus making it true, that truth is transcendently true. My assertion remains transcendently stable even if someone in Waterfall walks outside at 09h00 on 23-March-2011 and the sun is shining. Time and culture do not destabilise truth of proposition made on 23-March-2010 at 09h00. In the

same way, the Bible makes truth claims that are also transcendently and eternally true because they correspond to metaphysical realities.

For one to claim knowledge of metaphysical realities requires them to have a justified true belief, but belief does not make something true or false. The truth or falsity of an object is not subject to the one beholding or one's acceptance of that which is true. Scripture makes truth claims which are metaphysically true though not accepted by all as evidentially true (John 1:9, 14; 14:6, 17; 15:1, 26; 1 John 5:6). It is unfeasible to expect that one may find specific empirical verification for truth claims such as these. This does not however, decimate apprehension of justified true belief. Propositions which declare that God is true, Jesus Christ is the truth and the Holy Spirit is truth, secure substantiation internally by divine attributes. Knowledge does not always require external verification. Peltz (2010:1) suggests that in some cases "we do not need anything else in order to know" truth. Self-evident truths are apparent because of the inherent attribute of a proposition's object. It leads to the automatic recognition of truth which would be as simple as recognising the colour orange. If some truths are self-evident, then nothing outside of the given truth should be required in order to know it, eliminating the need for external support or corollary of any kind. I suggest that propositions by God about Himself are assertions of truth appropriately categorised as self-evident.

5.3.8 Apprehension of knowledge is multi-faceted

The final aspect of biblical epistemology to be discussed focuses on what the Bible says about apprehending truth. Scripture indicates a diversity of acceptable means by which knowledge may be acquired.

5.3.8.1 Knowledge may be apprehended by means of general revelation

General revelation refers to God manifesting Himself to us by means of physical nature, human nature and history (Geisler 2002:65). The Bible declares that knowledge of God may be acquired by the birds, and fish (Job 12:7-9), the expansive heavens (Pss 19:1; 97:6), His providential provision of rains and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:15-17), and creation in general (Rom 1:19-20).

5.3.8.2 Knowledge may be apprehended by means of rational observation

Observation is another acceptable way that knowledge of God may be ascertained. General revelation implies observation; but there are other passages which indicate knowledge apprehension by means of intentional examination. The prophet Jeremiah urges Israel to reflect on their ways that they may return to the Lord (Lam 3:40). Additionally, the apostle Paul exhorts examination of self and doctrine (2 Cor 13:5; 1 Thes 5:21).

Each of the aforementioned passages call for action based on knowledge apprehended through observation of the way things really are and rational analysis of the facts observed.

5.3.8.3 Knowledge may be apprehended by means of special revelation

Special revelation refers to the revelation of God through His word and through His Son, Jesus Christ. The witness of Scripture about the import of special revelation is unambiguous. The special revelation of the Scriptures testifies about Jesus (John 5:39; Acts 18:28; Heb 1:1-2) and forms the basis for the gospel (Acts 8:35; 1 Cor 15:3-4). It is also noteworthy to observe that the Bereans considered special revelation not only an adequate source of truth, but also a standard by which Paul's propositions about Jesus might be confirmed.

5.3.8.4 Knowledge may be apprehended by means of personal experience

We have noted that human beings have the capacity to acquire knowledge and although that knowledge is partial in nature, it is knowledge all the same. Man's sinfulness makes him an unreliable regulator of what is true or false (cf. Prov 14:12; Jer 17:9-10). Limitations notwithstanding, we have seen that inherent in the definition of knowledge both in the Hebrew and Greek words, there is an aperture allowing for experience as an auxiliary means of ascertaining knowledge. Knowledge is not exclusively rational; rather it is experiential as well. Peltz (2010:28) suggests that one's experience is what validates perceptions. When we see a tree in the path, we rely on historical experience to know that we must deviate from our present course if we desire to continue progressing toward our desired outcome. A clear example of experience as the

gateway for knowledge is seen in the story of the man born blind in the gospel of John chapter nine. Jesus approaches the man and applied clay (a combination of dirt and Jesus' spittle) to the blinded man's eyes, along with instructions to wash in the pool of Siloam (vv. 6-7). Having observed the miraculous event, the Pharisees began to question the man because his healing took place on the Sabbath (vv. 13-15). A second time, the Pharisees called the man in for questioning. His reply is recorded in vs. 25, "He then answered, 'Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'" It is significant that the man could not make a claim of knowledge about things he could not confirm, but he maintained with confidence, knowledge about that which he himself experienced.

In introductory verses of his first letter, the apostle John says,

> What was from the beginning, what we have heard, 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—what we have seen and hear we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

John's experience with the Father and the Son, through the primary avenues of hearing, seeing and touching, provide testimony to the proficiency of knowledge apprehension through experience.

5.3.8.5 Knowledge may be apprehended by means of faith

Peltz (2010:21) suggests that faith is "the firm belief in the accuracy of a given assertion for otherwise unspecific and undefinable reasons." Propositions accepted on the basis of faith are usually not fully substantiated by other forms of confirmation. The status of faith in Scripture is expressed by the propositional statement in Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him..." St. Augustine in *Tractate 29* expresses the significance of faith, "Therefore do

not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand" (Knight 2007:¶6).

Hebrews 11 is replete with examples of men and women who acquired knowledge of God by faith, because they had no other means of substantiation available to them. The following passages provide further clarification.

- In response to Jesus' question about the disciples leaving Him as the multitudes had done, Peter offers this demonstration of faith in reply, "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69).
- Hebrews 11:3 exemplifies faith in something that lacks external substantiation; that is the creation of the world by the word of God.
- According to 1 John 5:13 it is by belief that we have certain knowledge of eternal life in Christ.

5.4 Conclusion

Although the Bible does not offer a philosophical exposition of epistemology complete with alternative logical syllogisms and argumentation, Scripture does render a particular view of truth and knowledge. Elucidating biblical epistemology is necessarily bound to the nature of God and His revelation. In what appears to be a circular argument, our information about God comes from the Bible whose truth is predicated on the nature of God Himself. The Bible declares God's omniscience (Psa 139:1-4; Isa 46:10), as well as His honesty, in which it is impossible for God to intentionally mislead anyone (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18). These qualities are reflected in His revelation in the sense that God cannot accidentally communicate error because His knowledge is exhaustive, nor will He communicate error deliberately, because it is impossible for Him to lie. One may ask, "How do you know that God possesses omniscience and inherent honesty?" The only possible answer is, "The Bible declares these things to be part of God's character." The conundrum of possible circular argumentation is thus exposed. Because this research project is not focused on a detailed discussion of biblical inerrancy or the attributes of God, the essential

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attributes of God and His revelation serve as essential theological footings from which one may observe and comprehend the Bible's epistemic disposition.

Knowledge, from a biblical perspective is propositional. In a contemporary philosophical environment that is often hostile toward propositions, the Bible is replete with assertions. If one eliminates propositional content from the Bible, we have no information about the creation of the world, the existence of God, the sinfulness of humankind, the coming of Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross, His subsequent resurrection from the dead, salvation by grace, the necessity of faith, our security in Christ, or the ultimate and imminent return of Jesus. Without biblical propositions, one does not have evangelicalism; indeed one loses Christianity.

Propositions are statements about the way things are. They represent truth or falsity. Truth has been defined as the correspondence of an assertion to reality. Reality, being stable and transcendent of belief, provides a stable criterion by which one may judge truth. Therefore, biblically speaking, truth is not determined by culture, future deconstruction, or linguistic variables determined by the reader's response; rather, truth is established and ascertained by its conformity to independent reality. Biblical statements condemning error and falsities cohere with a correspondence view of truth.

God's word is truth, not only because it corresponds to reality, but also because God controls reality as well as propositions divulged through inspired special revelation. Consequently, any true proposition correspondent to objective reality is equally transcendent as the reality to which it corresponds. Hence, the propositions of the gospel are equally true and binding across every generation.

Ultimately, the Bible is unambiguous about truth. Truth may be known with certainty irrespective of the limitation of human finitude. Certitude may be understood in terms of God's inspired revelation. He is Lord of creation and culture, unfettered by the limitations of linguistic fragilities or cultural variations. The Bible communicates God's expectation that man understands the essential elements of His message to them and He holds man accountable. The link between transmitter and receptor is divinely coordinated by God Himself by

means of the agency of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Because the process of knowledge-transmission is choreographed and managed by a sovereign immutable God, it is not subject to scepticism or relativism; it is not a matter of communal group thinking or even one's own interpretation; it is not synchronically contextual or subject to coherentism as the key designator of truth. Biblical truth may not be considered tolerant, communal or generous, and not everyone will consider it to teach a Christianity worth believing; but it is God who inspired its content, superintended its transmission and structured it in such a way that mortal human beings are able to know and respond to its truth.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1   Introduction

From the inception of this research project, the stated objective has been to conduct a biblical-theological critique of three EC leaders' epistemology. Execution of that critique necessitated examination of the epistemic position held by the selected EC leaders as well as an analysis of biblical epistemology. Given the broad scope of philosophical epistemology, limits were imposed to avoid endless argumentation and to focus on the indicative epistemological proclivities of Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, and the Bible. A précis of the EC leader's epistemic leanings comprised the subject matter of chapter four; biblical epistemology was the concentration of chapter five.

The focus of this chapter is to make a comparison between EC leaders' epistemology and biblical epistemology; I will then draw conclusions indicated by the strength of a correspondent or adversative relationship between them. Where disagreement occurs, deference will be given to the divine revelation of Scripture. Subsequent to presenting conclusions, I will put forward recommended responses which, if taken seriously, will prayerfully bring truth to bear on biblical deviations found within the EC for the glory of God and the strength of His church.

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Concern over the EC's epistemology surrounds their incongruity with the essential tenets of Christianity. Because I believe the Bible makes emphatically clear the fact that saving faith must embrace certain essential propositions, it is mandatory to factor them into conclusions and recommendations. It was for this purpose that John wrote his gospel, "…that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). The apostle Paul spoke about the belief requirement in Romans 10:9, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." More specifically, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul clarified the content of essential belief as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ which, he adds, is all according to the Scriptures. Hence, belief in the atoning, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24) and His subsequent resurrection (cf. Rom 4:25) constitutes the biblical substance of our faith which leads to salvation.

It is not my desire to make a claim about the efficacy or extent Christ's saving work in the hearts of EC leaders, but it is incumbent upon any sober-minded believer to, "…examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thes 5:21-22). Each of the leaders considered in this project claim to have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Salvation testimony notwithstanding, one cannot ignore the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." So then, if these men having embraced the truth of the gospel are disseminating philosophies contrary to the truth claims of the Bible, it is obligatory for their heterodoxies to be exposed.

6.2   Conclusions

As formerly indicated, the apparent *modus operandi* of the EC is to evade definition and avoid scrutiny. EC beliefs such as tempered-scepticism, deconstructionism, and reader-response hermeneutics promote ambiguity, thus making it difficult to find a landing zone on their theological terra firma. Grenz (1996:40) suggests that the nature of postmodernism defies definition. This

sentiment is echoed by McLaren (2003:283) who suggests that postmodernism is impossible to define at this stage in history. The reason for indefinability, put forth by Condor (2005:21) is that, "…much of the emerging church's identity is creatively generative." Consequently, apprehension of the EC's identity is like a raft moving in the current of cultural nuances complicated by an epistemology which values mystery above clarity, hence preventing solid moorage on the beachhead of truth.

As one who admittedly favours the certainty of knowledge apprehension which is characteristic of modernity, examination of the EC's unanchored epistemology can be exasperating, inviting criticism on many levels. But it has been the aim of this project to evaluate the EC's epistemology from a biblical-theological perspective, not a personal one. Therefore, in my conclusions I will attempt to avoid personal appraisal; rather I will seek to answer the question, "When compared to the content of divine revelation, is the epistemology of the EC consistent with Scripture?" In other words, does the EC's view of epistemology share a relationship of correspondence to the way God assesses knowledge and truth in the Bible.

As summarised in chapter four, EC epistemology favours postmodernism, a fact that is initially camouflaged by virtue of their divergent origins; philosophical postmodernism eschews congruence with Christianity, while the EC purports to interact with postmoderns from within Christianity. Kimball, McLaren and Pagitt's aforementioned disenchantment with their evangelical roots, has led them to recommend what they believe is a superior, more generous orthodoxy apposite practically and philosophically with the emergent cultural trend of postmodernism. But is their proposed new kind of Christianity adequate, biblical and helpful? In the following paragraphs I will contend that EC epistemology, when compared to biblical epistemology, is inadequate, unbiblical and destructive.

6.2.1 EC epistemology is inadequate

The inadequacy of EC epistemic thinking is seated in their attempts to merge postmodern theory with Christianity. The difficulty arises in that postmodernism

is sceptical toward metanarratives which claim to truthfully explain the way things are apart from the prison of language and culture. McLaren expresses it like this, "At some level of profundity and accuracy, we are bound to be inadequate or incomplete all the time, in almost anything we say or think, considering our human limitations, including language, and God's infinite greatness" (McLaren 1998:65). As a compensation for their scepticism the EC has become infatuated with mystery. To this point Groothuis (2000:126) cautions, "The invocation of the category of 'mystery'…must be done with great care, and only after intense intellectual scrutiny. A logical contradiction is not a mystery; it is a falsehood." The EC's enigmatic relationship with truth is bolstered by deconstructionism and reader-response hermeneutics, which eliminate referential and diachronic meaning by denying metaphysical realism and locating relativistic meaning within the synchronic limitations of culturally specific communities. Consequently, reader-response hermeneutics locates the EC's epistemology firmly within the orbit of pluralism, hence giving all interpretations of a text equal footing. Therefore, no unwavering standard is embraced by which one may qualify a correct or preferred meaning, even among conflicting interpretations.

It is evident that postmodern thinking permeates much of the emerging generation occupying the new millennium. Its characteristic pragmatism is a key criterion in the evaluation of this latest cultural turn. However, my concern is not piqued as a result of philosophical musings offered by those with no interest in overhauling the biblical orthodoxy of Christianity; rather I am most apprehensive about those EC leaders who proclaim, on the basis of postmodernism, that everything must change. It is therefore my conclusion, to the extent that the EC has mimicked postmodern philosophy and are seeking to subtly impose that epistemic ethos upon believers, the EC's epistemology is inadequate to accomplish the biblical purposes of the Church in the world. It is inadequate in at least three ways: logically, intrinsically and personally.

6.2.1.1 EC epistemology is inadequate logically

The EC's epistemic pluralism is self-contradictory and therefore logically inadequate. Nearly a century ago, Machen (1923:18) astutely declares, "If all

creeds are equally true, then since they are contradictory to one another, they are equally false…" Pluralism is incapable of establishing one system of belief and eliminating all contrary systems because there is no stable referent to truth claims by which one may establish correspondence between claim and reality. Consequently, all claims have equal standing.

In the "unreal" world of EC thinkers, it is considered sagacious to amalgamate scepticism, which doubts confident knowability of truth; pluralism, which tolerates even conflicting systems of beliefs; anti-propositionalism, which relegates assertions made in Scripture to mere white noise while promoting narrative as the genre of the Bible; pragmatism, which evaluates the epistemic value of a claim on the basis of its utilitarian efficacy toward accomplishment of a desired outcome; contextualism, which considers meaning to be synchronic and limited to its source context alone; and incredulity toward metanarratives, which are grand narrative explanations about knowledge and experience.

However, on the basis of scepticism alone, I conclude that EC epistemology is self-defeating. The belief that truth cannot be known with certainty precipitates suspension of judgement about truth claims. However, the claim that certain truth is unknowable is itself confidently presented by the EC leaders as the truth; hence their claim is logically self-refuting because inherent in the claim that definite truth is unknowable resides confidence in the truth of that claim. It is also rather incongruous that they state position about knowability in such a modern way (propositionally) given the EC's aversion to modernity and its affinity for postmodernism which is "strongly opposed to propositional truth" (Phillips 2006:§944).

On another stratum, one may rightly question how the EC deals with moral knowledge? Epistemology addresses how we know things. It deals with more than just religious knowledge and whatever one's epistemic position, it carries with it significant consequences. These consequences must be considered when mitigating the plethora of conflicting viewpoints. For coherence to be a legitimate standard of truth and meaning, it must reach beyond an unfocused physiognomy. One must not be allowed, without contestation, to selectively espouse moral relativity and pluralism. In an environment of pluralistic

tolerance, it is self-contradictory for the EC to denounce any moral choice. Practically and rightly they would denounce murder and rape as morally reprehensible. But is the reality of murder and rape subject to contextual considerations? Does any position for or against either have greater epistemic value than its counterparts? Is there ever a context in which murder and rape would be considered right? Can we even know what right and wrong are? These are real questions with real consequences precipitated by the logical conundrum that is EC epistemology.

Note the clarity of Romans 2:14-16,

> For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternatively accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Paul's message in this passage contains three important ideas: (1) the Gentiles did not have the written Law which outlines God's moral code, nevertheless, there were times when they instinctively did things consistent with the Law, thus their own thinking became a law unto themselves, (2) the source of their moral instinct was God, who etched a sense of morality on their hearts and fitted them with a conscience which bears witness to violation of, or adherence to their hard-wired moral impulse, (3) the voice of moral oughtness embedded in their hearts by God, communicates with sufficient clarity so as to defend or accuse them in the face of ultimate accountability when God will judge what they know secretly to be true. The morality of any act is not based on cultural context, but on God's standard, written on hearts, the conscience bearing witness to violation or adherence. Therefore, moral knowledge is not unknowable, but made known by God, and it is not pluralistic, but established by a standard that is as unchanging as its divine author.

Consider, with regard to propositions, the notions of truth and falsity. "A sentence, in order to have truth potential, must assert something" (Peltz 2010:111). Assertion is the essence of a proposition; it makes a statement

about the way things are. If truth is possible, it must be correspondent to the way its referent is in actuality. The correspondence view of truth is abjured by EC leadership, in favour of contextual, relative meaning. Nevertheless, EC leaders make assertions which they believe correspond to objective reality about evangelicals' deception by modernity. They cannot have it both ways. In spite of a most charitable assessment, it is logically fallacious to embrace anti-propositionalism while simultaneously asserting vituperations about the evangelical condition and the need for a new kind of Christianity, together with the expectation of acceptance and acquiescence to wholesale recommendations.

The logical incongruencies of EC epistemology show indifference toward the principle of noncontradiction. In the logic of truth, Groothuis (2000:76) offers a summary thus, "Nothing can both be and not be at the same time in the same respect. Nothing can possess incompatible properties; that is, nothing can be what it is not." Similarly, Groothuis (2000:78) also indicates that "any factual statement and its denial cannot both be true." One cannot claim to be and not be at the same time and in the same way. Hence, the EC leaders cannot support pluralistic deference to competing religious systems concurrent with their intolerance of modernity altered evangelicalism. Logically, the EC cannot be tolerant and intolerant simultaneously; coherence does not allow such an internal antithesis.

This principle is aptly illustrated by Paul's assertion that a "different gospel" is not really a gospel at all (Gal 1:6-7). The gospel propositions are true; distortion or anything not consistent with the gospel, though it claims gospel status is not the gospel at all. Either Jesus is the only way to salvation (cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12) or He is not. Both claims cannot be true. Logical dissonance however, is acceptable in EC epistemology. McLaren (1998:19) announces, "maximizing discontinuity" as his strategic approach for bringing the church to the other side of modernity and into postmodernity. Maximising the sharp difference of characteristics between the parts of EC's subversive version of the "church on the other side" stands in utter opposition to the lucid consistency of Christianity's systematic and unified message. The gospel is true because it

conforms to reality. Its message cannot simultaneously be true and untrue at the same time. Comparably, that which is not in conformity with the gospel cannot also be said to obtain truth.

Strangely, EC leaders view other conflicting religious systems as collegial partners and even collaborators (McLaren 2004:35). This can only be done in the anti-critical environment of the EC which seeks to be "collaborative and assimilationist rather than polemic" (Sweet et al 2003:242). Assimilation of truth with falsity does not result in tolerant truth; rather it destroys the correspondent relationship of truth to reality and is therefore untrue. Hence, I conclude that it is logically untenable to propose an amalgamated Christianity as a result of collaboration and assimilation with heterodox systems of belief.

6.2.1.2 EC epistemology is inadequate intrinsically

One philosophical postmodernist proposition which is interwoven into the EC's epistemology is Derrida's claim that, "there is nothing outside the text" (Smith 2006:§263). It is the basis of deconstructionism, an epistemic idea that informs the EC's epistemology. Deconstructionism asserts that everything is an interpretation. Nothing exists outside the text because everything is subject to language and interpretation. Interpreting a text necessitates insertion into contemporary context, experience and presuppositions. Therefore, no one truly knows the way things truly exist because every interpretation is relative to the interpreter's contemporary state of affairs. It is one of the reasons why McLaren claims to present us with the secret message of Jesus after generations of analysis and interpretation. The cultural and philosophical failures of modernity have blinded Christians to what Jesus was really trying to communicate. Only now, as a result of the postmodern turn, are we able to see truly.

But I wonder how, even now, am I able to see the true message of Jesus when it is still being communicated through language. Even more curious is the proposition, "there is nothing outside the text." This proposition must be either true or false; either there is or there is not anything outside of the text. Derrida, and the EC leaders, want me to accept this proposition as a statement which reflects reality. But, Derrida first wrote this statement in 1967 (Smith 2006:263),

in a completely different cultural situation, with vastly different experiences and presuppositions. On what basis am I to accept his assertion as true, when acceptance of its truth obligates me to reject the reality of its universal assertion? To this point, Groothuis (2002:¶4) suggests,

> If all language fails to describe objective conditions, because of its embeddedness in various cultures, then any language used to describe this universal embeddedness would be subject to the limitations of its context, and so fail to describe the universal limitations of all languages.

The Bible supports transcendent reality unfettered from language, indeed before language was invented, "In the beginning, God…" (Gen 1:1). Epistemically, deconstructionism would urge us to accept that God does not exist outside the text of Scripture; rather God exists as our interpretation of the text. The language of Genesis 1:1 supports metaphysical realism. That is, God exists ontologically independent of conceptual schemes, linguistic practices, or beliefs.

Consequently, acceptance of EC epistemology necessitates acquiescence of two opposite and mutually exclusive concepts. The EC asserts quite confidently that reality does not exist outside the text, that is, independent of one's biased interpretation of the actual language of an assertion about reality. But the EC expects that I not only comprehend, but also believe the independent truth of that proposition, unbiased by my interpretation. At best, it is intrinsically inadequate; at worst, it is insulting.

6.2.1.3 EC epistemology is inadequate personally

Oakland (2007:18) aptly summarises the personal inadequacy of EC epistemology,

> The *salvation* message of the emerging church is not found in doctrine but in dialogue, not in truth but in discussion. In this sense, always searching but never finding is a trademark of the emerging church, because in the endless dialogue (conversation), the truth is never found.

Deconstructive deferral of meaning, which functions as the fulcrum of the EC's unending conversation, is antithetic to the Lord's expressed desire for all to "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Conversely, the EC's epistemology is more congruent with Paul's description of the "difficult times" to come in the last days. The description describes the men who populate this time as, "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth…so these men oppose the truth, men of depraved mind" (2 Tim 3:7-8).

The gospel is the good news. It offers hope to the hopeless and light to those who walk in darkness. Without the clear and sure word of God spreading news of His grace and offer of eternal life, there is little hope. The EC's postmodern epistemic revised version of the gospel is unclear, unsure and inadequate on a personal and eternal level.

6.2.2 EC epistemology is unbiblical

Scripture must serve as the stabilising norm for all doctrine and practice. Apart from biblical truth one has no solid footing upon which to base faith and be comforted by the knowledge that he is "protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5).

The issue at hand in this section is one of congruence. Does the epistemology of the EC (summarised in chapter four) conform to the epistemic position revealed in the Bible (summarised in chapter five)? If one is to accept the EC's recommendations for wholesale transformation of evangelical Christianity, of first importance is to evaluate the orthodoxy of the EC's position. Carson (2004:193) points out that, "If the emerging church movement, or conversation, wishes to remain faithful to Scripture, it must speak of truth and our ability to know it as sweepingly and confidently as Scripture does. If it does not, its underlying assumptions about epistemology remain fundamentally flawed." In other words, the biblical nature of the EC will primarily be determined on the basis of its epistemology. If the EC adopts a biblical relationship to the knowability of truth, it will also acknowledge the truth of biblical propositions, the foundational nature of certain claims about God, man, sin, and salvation. Moreover, EC leaders will also embrace the diachronic relevance and stability

of divine revelation. It is my contention that the EC's epistemology is adversative to these elements of biblical epistemology.

6.2.2.1 EC epistemology is not consistent with the Bible's view of truth

"Knowledge is a belief that enjoys the dual status of being true and being adequately grounded or justified" (Penner 2005:45). Though the Bible does not put forward a technical view of truth, it does "implicitly and consistently advance the correspondence view in both testaments" (Erickson et al 2004:65). Truth exists in a relationship where the content of a proposition conforms to the reality about which the assertion is made. Correspondence stabilises truth and gives it the quality of transcendence, anchored by the way things actually exist. Truth does not demand a human knower to make it true. The propositional content of, "In the beginning God…" (Gen 1:1) is metaphysically real even though the content of the assertion implies that God alone was in existence.

The EC's epistemology is antithetical with the correspondence view of truth. Rather than correspondence, the epistemology of the EC values coherence, where truth is determined by a sliding-scale comparison with other acknowledged views. Contextual synchronic theology established in a relational communal atmosphere forms a moving target for anyone seeking to apprehend truth. Contextualism, according to Black (2006:§1) asserts that "knowledge is relative to context." Hence truth value is context-dependent; or to say it another way, different contexts will yield a different truth, even for the same proposition. The emergent approach is contextual (McLaren 2001:152-153).

One cannot view truth as transcendently fixed and contextual simultaneously. The biblical view of truth does not subject truth to cultural context, or to reader-response viewpoints, even if they cohere with other perspectives within the emergent interpretive community. The EC is not entitled to redefine truth to suit their philosophical cogitations; rather their thoughts must be in conformity to and "acceptable" in God's sight (Psa 19:14). Moreover, the propositional content of the gospel cannot be contextual or rewritten in a contemporary cultural framework. Jesus did not die only for the sins of those in the early first century

(cf. Heb 10:12-14). Not one of the EC leaders would claim that He did; however, when you extrapolate the epistemic implications of contextualism, coherentism and reader-response hermeneutics, there is little else to conclude.

Truth, for the EC, is self-referential and the problem with this approach is observed by Groothuis (2000:106),

> …the postmodern claim about truth is merely a social construction—and nothing more. But if it is only a social construction, then the statement itself cannot accurately depict the reality it purportedly describes. Therefore it is false.

On this basis, I must conclude that the EC epistemic assessment of truth is broken and not consistent with the biblical understanding of the correspondence view.

6.2.2.2 EC epistemology is not biblical with regard to foundationalism

Propositional truth is the basis of divine revelation. The gospel, an amalgamation of biblical propositions, may be considered a foundational metanarrative. It is foundational in that it makes comprehensive indubitable assertions about reality, life and the future destiny of mankind (Gen 1:1; Rom 3:23; 6:23; John 3:16; etc.).

Antithetically, the EC is antipathetic toward propositional, objective, overarching truth claims (metanarratives), even those built confidently upon the foundational truths communicated in Scripture. This is illustrated by McLaren (2004:¶13), who takes postmodernism's incredulity toward metanarratives another step further when he asserts that a metanarrative, "implies domination, coercion, eradication of opponents, imposition of beliefs or behaviors on minorities against their will." Further, McLaren (2001:53), via Neo, claims that the Bible never speaks of itself as the foundation. But I contend that a claim does not have to assert itself as foundational in order to function foundationally.

Ultimate reality is expressed by the divine metanarrative that is the gospel. It is a true statement about life and experience. God, as the creator and sustainer of life on this planet, has the authority to speak about reality in overarching terms.

The EC's efforts to contextualise Christianity for the postmodern world must not include any attempt to weaken or limit a biblical worldview. Affinity to postmodernity, to an extent that resists any global statement of reality (such as that which has been made in Scripture) is not faithful to the authority with which Scripture speaks to the whole of the human situation.

Scripture is foundational. Our knowledge of God, man, sin, Satan, the Saviour, salvation, and eternity comes from its revelatory truth. Who we are today and where we will spend eternity is expressed in terms of a propositional foundational metanarrative recorded for us in God's word (John 3:16, 36; 5:29). Colson (2003:¶8) astutely points out the implication of losing an objective, foundational, overarching story, "Since there's no such thing as truth, all principles are merely personal preferences." Consequently, an epistemic proclivity which dissociates itself from Scriptural foundations cannot, in my view, be considered biblically orthodox.

6.2.2.3 EC epistemology is not biblical with regard to diachronic relevance

Regarding universal truths, Groothuis (2000:97) critiques postmodern philosophy for their internal personal coherence, which as a construct of their experience does not necessarily conform to external reality. Their internal coherence is derived from contextual cues, deconstructive linguistic theory and reader-response hermeneutics, which imposes a synchronic limitation upon all texts. The authority of biblical theology requires it to be more than a linguistic construction; rather biblical assertions should be understood as objective, language-independent truths. The problem is manifested via the EC's incongruent philosophies: on the one hand, they claim a legitimate relationship with Christ, but their affinity with postmodern scepticism toward metanarratives stands in direct contradiction to the universal relevance of the gospel. One may rightly wonder how any postmodern can claim to be saved, if truth (specifically the gospel truth) is synchronically bound to the specific source culture? I give credit to the EC for contextualisation of narratives, but with Groothuis (2000:115), I believe their demise is in "shrinking metanarratives to a micronarrative and then severing these stories from objective truth." Kowalski (2006:¶10) agrees, "No one who embraces this epistemology has any room for

others' proclamation of ahistorical, objective, universally authoritative meaning of a scriptural text."

The propositional truth of divine revelation is referent to transcendent reality and exists diachronically. Pagitt (2008:48) disagrees with diachronic meaning stating, "Every theology is grounded in a culture and a set of culturally based assumptions and concerns…but to hold to those same conclusions today, when the worldview that demanded them has expired, is simply foolish." Reducing the overarching application of biblical content to a small group of people in an ancient culture emasculates the salvific (Rom 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor 1:21; Jas 1:18-21; 1 Pet 1:20-23) and sanctifying efficacy of God's word (John 17:17; 1 Thes 2:13; Heb 4:12). Such diminution does not, in my view, conform to orthodox Christianity expressed in the diachronic revelation of Scripture.

6.2.3 EC epistemology is destructive

As a consequence of the EC's divergence from the epistemic posture indicated in the Bible, I have deemed that their epistemic position is inadequate and unbiblical. I also conclude that EC epistemology is destructive. But I am not alone in my assessment. Wells (2007:60) states his concern thus, "What makes for a bond with culture makes for a rupture, I will argue, with the ways of God." Oakland (2007:16) also calls the EC's fascination with postmodern philosophy "rebellion" and "embracing ideas and philosophies of man rather than the inspired Word of God." Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, James (4:4) speaks with characteristic relevance, "…do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

The work of God in the life of the believer is transformation from, and conformation to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). The partners in this work of transformation are disciplined believers (Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:7) and the God, who works in us (Phil 2:13) by means of His word (John 17:17; 1 Thes 2:13). Transformation as the consequential impact of the living word (Heb 4:12) is ordained by God and should not be denigrated by philosophical, philological, or cultural enchantments venerated above the

biblical doctrines of inspiration and authority. Let us consider that God's attribute of holiness has been defined by God, communicated via divine revelation, which He gave by means of inspiration, through the instrumentality of human language. Its definition is a consistent and unchanging standard toward which God expects us to strive (1 Pet 1:16). Holiness, as with all of God's attributes, is not subject to change (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17). It is inflexible because assertions about God's holiness conveyed by human language are referent to a transcendent language-independent reality. Holiness is not a socially or linguistically constructed concept; and to view it as such is to depart from orthodoxy at one's own peril (Gal 1:8-9).

But this is what the EC is doing. They are propagating speculative notions raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5). Hence, so long as they continue they are a distraction from truth and are drawing away disciples unto themselves. A similar concern occupied Paul's mind and motivated his warning to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:27-30).

The EC's epistemology is also destructive because it promotes ambiguity. It leads people to view the once clear propositions of biblical truth through an opaque shroud of cultural-linguistic theory, hence concealing moral and theological guidelines which, if seen and followed, would promote confidence, courage and evangelistic zeal. It relegates the once clear clarion call of the gospel, to an uncertain invitation to an ongoing almost directionless conversation. Seekers are invited to embrace uncertain mysteries and abandon the hope of apprehending truth; having relinquished these aspirations, they are praised for their epistemic humility.

But there is nothing praiseworthy about leading or being led away from the true word of life (John 6:63; 17:17). There is no eternal value in embracing a distorted gospel, which Paul says is really no gospel at all (Gal 1:7). Satan will disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13-15) and his programme is not one of holy submission to God, but one of community, self-referential, esteem-oriented, and tolerant pluralism, where the distinctive biblical message fades into the historical morass of contextually relegated irrelevance, in favour of the

new message tailored for the contemporary cultural turn of postmodernism; and this destructive message is being proliferated by the EC.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Take a stand and stand firm on God's word

I recommend that believers, who are seeking to respond appropriately to the EC, firstly take a stand and stand firm on God's word. The EC's epistemic trajectory ostensibly leads away from biblical orthodoxy. But the engaging narrative and self-effacing demeanour the EC's leaders create an atmosphere of congeniality which often disarms the judicious prudence of unaware, well-meaning believers who want to be liked. They mistakenly equate presence in the church building with salvation. Hence, the EC's passionate desire to reach the emerging postmodern generation resonates with their heart. It is their heart, not their mind that responds to pleas for a total revamp of Christianity, to become a new kind of Christian with a generous orthodoxy, and an overhauled church that comes out on the other side as a place of comfortable acceptance and collaboration for all beliefs.

Taking a philosophical stand against the erroneous beliefs of the EC will not suffice. Though epistemology is a branch of philosophy, a philosophical approach, in my view, is not the answer. Despite a plethora of philosophies seeking answers to the ultimate questions of life, the result of endless philosophical argumentation has not proved satiating. I have learned through this research project that an entire lifetime is insufficient to exhaustively research every philosophical point and counter-point. It is, to echo Solomon, "striving after wind" (Eccl 1:17). Rather, the end of everything is to "fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Eccl 12:13). That God wants us to know Him has been made abundantly clear by divine revelation. The footing upon which we stand is the essential nature of God's word as inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, true, transcendent, universal, established and sufficient.

It is through God's word that we gain knowledge of Him (John 5:39); indeed it has been seen that God's purpose of divinely inspired revelation was that we might know Him. Proverbs 9:10 aptly makes the point, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Moreover, one's understanding of God does not come through acceptance of the EC's tempered sceptical epistemology; rather, it will come from God's own revelation. It is therefore incumbent upon those who are true seekers of God to conjoin with divine truth by taking a stand and standing firm on biblical distillations of valid epistemic substances. This, I believe, is the preeminent response upon which all others rely.

6.3.2 Examine everything carefully

Not all teachings or beliefs of the EC should be considered as erroneous. Their call for Christians to be missional in their world and actually reach out to those who do not know Jesus is admirable, biblical and necessary. If everything in the EC was amiss, a response would be clear and simple; reject everything they offer. In my view, this is not the right approach.

A proper response should be measured not excessive. The directives given by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 are appropriate and relevant, "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." Carson et al (1994:709) rightly explains that the Thessalonians were squelching all prophecies rather than practicing discernment to determine what was true or false. Hence, Paul instructed them to examine everything, discern what is good (cf. 1 Cor 14:29) and hold to it, but avoid all specious utterances.

I suggest two necessities emerging from Paul's exhortations: (1) examination of everything requires a standard against which utterances may be assessed; (2) one must have knowledge of the standard in order to make an accurate assessment.

6.3.2.1 The Bible is the standard for assessment

The word of God is truth (Psa 119:142, 151, 160; John 17:17). It comprises the "faith" (Acts 16:5; 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 4:13; 1 Tim 6:10; Jude 3) and its content must be embraced, taught and defended (Titus 1:9). Paul also urged Titus, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). The standard for sound doctrine is the inspired truth. To wander away and teach content different from the disseminated truth of the gospel brought curses upon oneself (Gal 1:6-9). For Paul to write such things indicates confidence that the standard of sound doctrine was clearly communicated and available.

Today, the Bible is readily available to the EC leaders as it is to those they are attempting to influence. Philosophical or linguistic gymnastics must not be the source of criteria for examination of their message; preferably, the theological norms informing assessment parameters must be the divine revelation of Scripture.

6.3.2.2 One must have knowledge of the Bible

The existence of divine revelation as a standard is not enough. Knowledge of the Bible is an indispensible precondition for discerning the truth or error of EC communications. Comprehension of biblical truth is the result of diligent study (2 Tim 2:15) in cooperation with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). The consistency of the Holy Spirit's illumination is an immutable constant available to every believer in whom He has taken up residence (Eph 1:13-14).

But the philosophical environment of postmodernism poses a special problem which is mitigated by passionate adherence to my first recommendation. The implications of God's inspired, inerrant, sufficient and authoritative word are: (1) God's word is true and only true; (2) God's word is transcendent and relevant for every generation and culture; (3) God's word is referent to a reality that is not subject to personal ideological hermeneutics; (4) God's word stands above any human conventions or attempts to reduce its status as a metanarrative to synchronically determined stories. Given these implications, one must "be diligent" to seek the biblical authors' intent. Then, having discovered the intended meaning, one must make application to contemporary culture and

recognise biblical authority by reverence for its unchanging truth and obedience to its commands. This cooperative accomplishment equips the believer to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thes 5:21-22).

6.3.3 Persevere

Debate with an EC leader can be a frustrating venture. Their deconstructionism and pluralistic tolerance embraces everything and everyone except evangelicals who support Scripture as propositional, referential, realist, and correspondent. Many have disengaged from the conversation, rather opting for "guerrilla warfare" and sniping at the EC's worldly proclivities. It is tempting to take this approach, especially in such a target rich environment provided by the EC. But I do not believe this is the biblical approach.

Some participants in the EC conversation are rebels with little or no concern for their spiritually digressive wanderings, but others are ignorant to its errors. Many undiscerning conversationalists are enamoured by mystery and caught up in the passion to be relevant. These need to be confronted with the truth and nurtured toward a biblical epistemology. Scripture is informative in this regard. "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal 6:1).

The call of God to us is restoration, an ongoing persistent pursuit aimed at applying the salve of God's transcendent truth to the twisted unset brokenness that is the generous orthodoxy of the EC. The medicinal ointment of truth will not always be well-received. To be sure there will be a sting in its application, an air of tender rebuke for the carelessness that precipitated the condition. Some will repel the sound of it, others will run from it, but in the end, our responsibility is to persevere, to be faithful, gentle, loving but firm.

To the extent that we stand on truth, accurately interpreted and humbly presented, we may have confidence that our efforts are joined by the Holy Spirit whose work of conviction (John 16:8-10) is active, to the end that sinners will be

turned back from the error of their ways, they will be saved from death, and a multitude of sins will be covered by grace. To this researcher's way of thinking, that would be the personification of true generous orthodoxy.

6.4 A final thought

At the embarkation of this research project I hypothesised that the EC's epistemic moorings were a syncretisation of philosophical postmodernism and biblical theology. I believe the research has shown the hypothesis to be true. Furthermore the EC, as I expected, denies the perspicuity of Scripture, embracing mystery and a mild scepticism combined with aversion to propositions. This incongruity manifests itself in the EC leaders who claim to be saved, while all the while not supportive of the correspondent view of truth, which would seem a necessary reality if the gospel is indeed good news. The biblical proposition, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24), is only good news if it corresponds to reality.

I do not know how long the EC will have influence in evangelical Christianity. I do not know what turns their epistemology with take. At the end of this research project I am able to say: (1) I am more committed than ever to study God's word, stand on its truth, be transformed by its power, submit to its authority, and proclaim its message without shame or compromise; (2) I will continue to examine everything carefully; I will embrace truth and repel error; (3) I will strive to be humbly generous, staunchly biblical, courageously uncompromising, and annoyingly vocal, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

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