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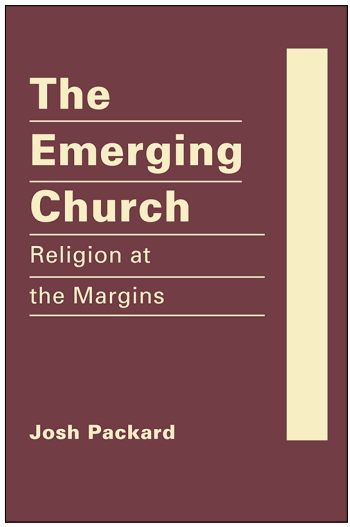
The Emerging Church: Religion at the Margins

Josh Packard



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Resisting Success

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to spend a week with a group of people who were trying to rethink what religious training might look like in a relatively new kind of church called the Emerging Church. The group of 25 practitioners and thinkers that I was with was committed to avoiding an overly programmatic approach to ministerial training and education. They came from traditional church backgrounds, and for a variety of reasons they had each grown distasteful of the rigidity of those traditions. It is not, I admit, an uncommon story in the history of religion. How many religious movements have been borne out of a dislike of traditions which failed to reflect the desires of a changing society? The history of the Christian church is littered with attempts of varying success to reform and reshape existing church models with the Reformation standing as the most notable attempt in this direction. What marked this particular effort as unique, however, was that the group viewed the source of their frustration not with the particular traditions themselves, but with the way those traditions were maintained.

On the very first day of the meetings Mary, a member of an Emerging Church in England, pointed out that "[t]here are two dangers. One is institutionalism and the other is success because that will push it toward institutionalism, and this will cause us to support things just to keep them going. All of the sudden you find yourself doing things that aren't tied to your vision at all." The group was very cognizant of how institutionalization, or the development of taken for granted routines, processes and ideologies, limits opportunities for diversity in personal expression. They had all witnessed firsthand religious organizations that did things just because that was the way things had always been done. Damian, a pastor, pointed out that at his old church, "we didn't know why we were doing half of the things we did, other than that we had just always done them that way." With these sentiments as a backdrop, the rest of the week was spent in an attempt to figure out how to structure

opportunities for people to have access to extant knowledge and skill sets without becoming overly programmatic and institutionalized.

Frequently, individuals in the group would engage me in one on one conversation about this dilemma, seeking my opinion as a sociologist interested in formal organizations and religion. At the time, however, I could offer very little in the way of help. There simply was not much scholarship about organizations which wanted to avoid institutionalization. In fact, in one of the more comprehensive attempts to understand the intersection between religion and formal organization Neil Demerath had written that "[l]ike all efficient collectivities, churches require a modicum of unquestioning loyalty, unswerving commitment, and unstinting support" (Demerath 1995:460). In other words, not only was there a lack of research about exactly how to avoid institutionalization, but there was some evidence which suggested that conformity was absolutely necessary for any sustained effort at organized religion. In my moment to justify my attendance at the conference as more than simply a gawker or curious scientist, I fell woefully short. In the end, there was a call for more conversation but no agreement about how training opportunities could be widespread and available without being regimented.

The dilemma posed by this group raised interesting questions about institutionalization and organizations that stuck with me long after the end of the weekend. Namely, is it possible to resist the forces compelling an organization to adopt the same or similar policies and practices to other organizations in their field? Can an organization, in this case a religious organization, avoid implementing the practices and belief systems that dominate their field and continue to thrive? What would that look like? How would such an organization operate? Would outsiders take them seriously? If an organization resisted institutionalization, what would hold it together? These questions spawned a study that lasted more than two years, involving countless conversations and observations about the nature of organizational resistance as practiced in the Emerging Church. The Emerging Church movement is an ideal location for examining these questions because the movement is well established with a distinct identity and approach to organizing. Although there is no dominant or overarching organizational structure, the principles of individual organizations is strikingly cohesive. In the pages of this text, I draw on interview and ethnographic data from organizations within the Emerging Church movement in order to examine how organizational structures, processes and ideologies might avoid the danger of institutionalism that Mary pointed out above.

The result is the general beginnings of how such resistant organizations operate.

Religion and Organizations

Paul DiMaggio, one of the most prominent organizational scholars of our time, explains that there is much to be gained by bringing together organizational studies and the sociology of religion:

> Because much religious activity is institutionalized and carried out through formal organizations (e.g., churches, religiously affiliated charities, religious presses, and broadcasters), students of religion may have something to learn from the experience of their colleagues in the organizations field. Because the world of religious organizations is so diverse and because many religious organizations pursue goals and employ structures quite unlike those the firms, service organizations, and public agencies on which most organizational research has focused, it is equally likely that organizational behaviorists have much to learn from students of organized religion (DiMaggio 1998:7).

Patricia Chang (2003:130-131) echoes this sentiment, noting that religious scholars are drawn to institutional theories and analysis in part because they are among the few "organizational perspectives that pay attention to the role of cultural and symbolic processes relative to organizations." In other words, the field of religion in contemporary U.S. society is an ideal setting for exploring the competing forces of institutionalization as religious organizations are subject to pressures from a variety of sources.

Rational choice theorists taking a market approach to religion (Iannacone 1997; Stark 1997; Stark and Bainbridge 1996) have demonstrated that religion in the U.S. is, to some extent, a marketplace where organizations compete with one another for resources (i.e., money, people, time, power). At the same time, Wuthnow (1987, 1988) and others (Berger 1990 [1967], Berger and Luckman 1967 [1966]) have shown that environmental forces work to constrain choice and action while allowing for survival and persistence of some organizations. Indeed, it is easy to characterize religious organizations as among the most institutionalized organizations in our society. Many, if not most, religious services follow a set script that varies little from week to week or even from year to year. The same service is performed regardless of who shows up to "participate" in the worship. Similarly, identification with one religion or denomination is often indicative of a corresponding belief system. Even groups which vary on important theological matters

still retain organizational structures (e.g., denominations and congregations) and practices (e.g., annual meetings, the calling of pastors), which are extremely similar.

This similarity, say organizational theorists, is due to the powers of isomorphism which compel organizations to become structurally homogenous. Isomorphism refers to the process whereby organizations adopt similar practices and structures over time resulting in a dominant organizational form both within and across fields. Scholars generally agree on four types of isomorphic pressure: competitive, coercive, normative, and mimetic (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Conformity through competition arises as organizations increasingly adopt the practices and structures which were the most efficient and have the greatest technical benefit. Coercive forces are due to external regulatory agencies (e.g., governments) which impose structures and rules on organizations in an increasingly rationalized modern world. Similarly, normative pressures associated with professionalization provide this same function. Finally, theorists recognize that much conformity is the result of the intentional mimicry of practices from other organizations in an attempt to reduce uncertainty.

The development of standard practices through isomorphic forces is seen as crucial for the survival of any organization in a particular field, but especially for new organizations. The traditional model depicts the forces of isomorphism as irresistible, requiring compliance in exchange for survival (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Oliver 1991). Orru et al. (1991:362) remark that "maverick organizations that fail to conform may risk survival as surely as an inefficient firm" as a way of explaining why there is so little sustained organizational variation in a particular field. This general sentiment is reflected in DiMaggio and Powell's (1991:74) conceptualization of institutionalization as something which is inevitable, noting that, of those organizations which manage to survive and thrive, some "respond to external pressures quickly; others change only after a long period of resistance."

For all of its explanatory power, this model of organizational stasis and homogeneity is flawed, of course. Explaining the social world of organizations, particularly with regard to religion, does not mean accounting for developments which occur only in the long run or are reified to a totalizing force. The most common outcome for an organization is demise, regardless of the adoption of dominant practices and structures. Sociologists studying the historical development of religion in the relatively open religious marketplace that exists in the United States have shown that organizational form is only one of a

number of pertinent variables which determine success (Finke and Stark 1992).

It is my contention that in any organizational field, there exist organizations, even if only for a relatively short period of time, that reside beyond the boundaries of isomorphic pressure. These organizations typically garner very little attention and are treated as outliers if they are treated at all (Chang 2003; Oliver 1991). However, they are worth examining, and the field of religion offers a good setting to begin systematically exploring those organizational activities, ideologies and structures which resist institutionalization.

Thus, the purpose of this book is not simply an exposition of the Emerging Church as a type of Christianity, or as a religious movement, or as a type of theology. Those things have been handled adequately elsewhere by Marti (2005), Bielo (2009, 2011), and Edson (2006) and Moody (2010) respectively among others. Certainly I will be drawing from all of those sources as necessary, but what this book is mostly concerned with is the intentional organizational strategies implemented by the people in the Emerging Church as a way to resist the most dominant institutional forces of our time. So while this study is about the Emerging Church, it is, to be more specific, about the way the Emerging Church organizes itself. After extensive observation and analysis, I have come to the conclusion that the strategies implemented by the people in the Emerging Church offer at least the beginnings of how to think about organizational resistance to institutional pressures. As organizational scholars are probably well aware, this is an understudied and inadequately theorized part of the organizational landscape.

I do not suspect that everything the people in the Emerging Church does "works" to resist institutional forces, nor do I think this is the only organization in the field of religion or otherwise that attempts this kind of organizational resistance. I endeavor, in the course, of the text to examine these issues critically, but the focus here is not on a complete exposition of the various dynamics within the Emerging Church. Ultimately, the Emerging Church here serves as a case for helping to think through what principles and strategies might be implemented in order for an organization to avoid or resist institutional forces.

It is not my position that the Emerging Church is always what it claims to be even with regards to its anti-institutional response. Rather, I think that the Emerging Church is one of the most explicit and intentional attempts in this direction. As a starting place for theorizing about the ways organizations might strategically avoid what many have posited as the unavoidable iron cage of rationalization and isomorphic pressures, a researcher could hardly ask for a better group. All of which

is the long way of saying that I do not suspect that this text will be the last word on organizational resistance, but it is my sincere hope that it gets the conversation started.

Case Description

The Emerging Church has its foundations with the publication of *The Emerging Church* by Larson and Osborne in 1970. This text offers not only a spirit or ethos which is still found in the Emerging Church today, but also many of the particular principles that are found and discussed in the chapters below. For example, the use and defense of the present participle "emerging" as the designation for their understanding of church remains the dominant way of referring to this particular group of Christians. It is important because it emphasizes that people in the Emerging Church advocate neither a return to some idyllic golden age of the church or any particular "right" conception of how church should be in the future, but rather that "the Church is in a process, moving toward a fulfillment of its calling" (Larson and Osborne 1970:11). Such an understanding inherently guards against static statements or arrangements of church. In other words, their insistence on the present participle is really a call to resist institutionalization and is at the very core of their conception of church.

Also, the juxtaposing of the Emerging Church as an alternative to the institutional church is firmly established in this text as Larson and Osborne's vision is explicitly contrasted with their previous experiences in traditional churches. From the beginning the spirit of the movement has been in opposition to dominant, mainstream religious practices. For people in the Emerging Church, as I will demonstrate below, there is very little difference between the various denominations and versions within mainstream Christianity. Although beliefs may differ, the way those beliefs are expressed are, to them, strikingly similar. They believe the Emerging Church offers a different way of doing church, not a different theological system or set of beliefs.

Finally, a reliance on integration as opposed to differentiation is laid out by Larson and Osborne in language which is common in both my interviews and the blogs and books about the Emerging Church today: "Whereas the heady polarities of our day seek to divide us into an either-or camp, the mark of the Emerging Church will be its emphasis on both-and" (Larson and Osborne 1970:10). This last phrase in particular, "both-and," came up throughout my time in the field as a way for my respondents to explain how they made decisions. Their choices were frequently guided by an attempt to incorporate both choices rather than

choose one over another. Although it would not be until the 1990s that the movement would take off, many of the founding ideas and concepts, such as the emphasis on active participation over passive consumption, and equality and ability over training and credentials, were present in the early 1970s.[1]

The Emerging Church, as it exists today, is a series of grassroots groups connected via the web in a global network. It arose in the late 20th century as both a response to and continuation of the "seeker" movement which produced so many of the successful megachurches which currently abound. The Emerging Church could best be described as a loosely coupled organization with no distinct leader, vision, or mission. Although the Emerging Church is international in scope, its focus is primarily in the United States and UK as a collection of congregations operating in the evangelical Christian tradition (Bielo 2011; Drane 2006). The general consensus on a goal is to create and sustain an open conversation about faith and spirituality in a Christian context with all who desire to participate. Emerging church texts (e.g, Jones 2011; Pagitt and Jones 2008) and congregants frequently refer to the notion of friendship as the primary principle upon which all interactions are based, associating them quite explicitly with the Quakers (Packard 2008).

Boundaries, especially with regard to membership, are mediated with as little formal organization and bureaucracy as possible (Chia 2011). Authority arising from formal training is deemphasized and more importance is placed on lay leadership (Gibbs and Bolger 2005; Packard 2011). Additionally, Emerging Church congregations actively seek to be engaged with the surrounding culture. Rather than avoiding popular culture or attempting to make secular society conform to religious ideals, people in the Emerging Church embrace technology and modernity (or postmodernity) (Chia 2011; Drane 2006; Ganiel 2006).

Emerging Churches can also be identified by their organizational structure, mode of worship and their theological beliefs, each of which arises as a reaction to mainline evangelical denominations and serve to reinforce one another (Bielo 2011; Packard 2011). Their organizing ethos is adopted in direct opposition to the institutional church as exemplified by the automatically bureaucratic, unabashedly market-driven mega-church movement (Bielo 2011).

Concurrent with this organizational structure is a belief system which emphasizes ancient Christian tradition and practices, the need for an ecumenical, catholic Church, and a Christ centered reading of the Bible (Bielo 2009; Gibbs and Bolger 2005). Drane (2006:8) notes that any particular Emerging Church congregation is "either emerging from a

positive relationship with the ancient tradition, or from a negative reaction against the historically more recent tradition of Protestant fundamentalism," a notion that anthropologist James Bielo (2009) captures as the "Ancient-Future" stance of the Emerging Church.

Additionally, the Emerging Church, while sustaining broad appeal, is most often characterized as being a home for the "dechurched" rather than the "unchurched" (Packard 2011). Rather than trying to attract people who have never been to church, the unchurched, the Emerging Church often appeals to people who have had negative experiences with institutional religion. Many of the people described in the pages below fit this profile of people who desired a connection with a collective religious experience, but had left mainstream Christianity due to what they perceived as the stifling conditions in their previous church homes.

While the Emerging Church strikes most as being a "liberal" religious group, this is only true in the broadest sense of the word, meaning that they endeavor to be open and not restrictive. While the movement tends to attract people who share the same basic demographics as those who are politically liberal (i.e., young, well-educated), and certainly individuals have their own politics, there is no sense from my field work that there is a common political agenda for the Emerging Church as a whole.

Rather, the common refrain from my time in the field was of a group of people concerned with their local communities. My experiences echoed what nearly all academic treatments of the movement have suggested. As Bader-Saye points out, this stands in direct opposition to more mainstream and popular forms of religion when he notes that "[u]nlike the megachurch that seeks to centralise and Christianise cultural activity by building its own schools, gyms, bookstores and coffee shops on the church 'campus,' Emerging Christians tend to prefer bringing the church into the world" (Bader-Saye 2006:20). This commitment to their immediate context along with the emphasis on being in conversation practically mitigates against the kind of divisive rhetoric which makes up so much political debate in modern America.

Determining the scope of a movement which intentionally resists traditional categorization and studiously avoids tacking on to larger organizational structures is a tenuous exercise at best. There is, clearly, no central clearing house or anything approximating a denominational structure which keeps tabs on the number of Emerging Church congregations and indeed individual congregations, for reasons explained below, are loathe to even keep track of the number of people

attending worship services in a given week. Further complicating the matter is the lack of scholarly work done in this area.

Many of the numbers which are passed around come from people who are intrinsically tied up in the movement and as such cannot be treated as fully reliable. For example, the Emerging Church offshoot in the United Kingdom known as Fresh Expressions is said to number several thousand, but this was reported by Graham Cray, an Anglican Bishop who was responsible for spearheading the development of Fresh Expressions as a response to dwindling membership in traditional churches across England (Southam 2009), and the validity of this number has not been verified by independent sources. Similarly, Tony Jones, in a book based on his dissertation research from Princeton Theological Seminary, argues without giving concrete numbers that the Emerging Church is large enough to be classified as a social movement (Jones 2011). However, Mr. Jones is an admitted longtime Emerging Church insider who at one time served as the spokesperson for Emergent Village, the largest parachurch organization in the Emerging Church.

Regardless, there are a couple of indicators of the reach of the movement. First, Emergent Village sponsors cohorts in cities around the world where people gather to discuss issues of life and faith relevant to people in the Emerging Church. Cohorts exist in over 60 cities in the U.S. and around the world in Japan, Ghana and South Africa (Emergent Village Cohorts 2011). Similarly, www.ginkworld.net maintains a voluntary database of self-identified Emerging Church congregations and lists over 300 in 39 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., 6 Canadian provinces, and 10 European countries along with New Zealand and Australia (Ginkworld 2010).

It is almost certainly the case, however, that the Emerging Church attracts more attention than its membership rolls, if they existed, would lead one to believe that it should. As I discuss below, the Emerging Church often becomes a foil for fundamentalists and others who decry the intentionally difficult to pin down beliefs of the people in the Emerging Church as heretical and blasphemous. This attention has led to profiles of the movement and key leaders in many prominent publications throughout the first decade of the 2000s (see below). More anecdotally, I can say that in my years of studying religion as sociologist, taking students into congregations for classes, and serving as a consultant for pastors and leadership teams, I have yet to come across anyone involved with a mainstream congregation who was not aware of the Emerging Church in at least a very general way. In other words, the Emerging Church certainly has penetrated the common consciousness within religious circles even if their overall numbers do nothing to

threaten the viability of more established congregations and denominations.

Contradictions and Criticisms

There exists no Emerging Church in the world that conforms to all aspects of the description above or to the organizational principles identified below. However, while people within the Emerging Church are often quick to point out their commitment to, and celebration of, diversity, this happens much less often in practice. In fact, there are enough commonalities within the movement not only to piece together the description above from academic sources but also to be stereotyped by its own critics (and adherents). Blogger Marc Heinrich (2005) and co-authors Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck separately produced lists entitled "You might be Emerging if…" The two lists are extensive and contain many of the stereotypes of the Emerging Church crowd and a number of similarities. The DeYoung and Kluck (2008) list is here:

> You might be an emergent Christian: if you listen to U2, Moby, and Johnny Cash's Hurt (sometimes in church), use sermon illustrations from The Sopranos, drink lattes in the afternoon and Guinness in the evenings, and always use a Mac; if your reading list consists primarily of Stanley Hauerwas, Henri Nouwen, N. T. Wright, Stan Grenz, Dallas Willard, Brennan Manning, Jim Wallis, Frederick Buechner, David Bosch, John Howard Yoder, Wendell Berry, Nancy Murphy, John Frank, Walter Winks, and Lesslie Newbigin (not to mention McLaren, Pagitt, Bell, etc.) and your sparring partners include D. A. Carson, John Calvin, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and Wayne Grudem;...
>
> if your idea of quintessential Christian discipleship is Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, or Desmond Tutu; if you don't like George W. Bush or institutions or big business or capitalism or Left Behind Christianity; if your political concerns are poverty, AIDS, imperialism, war-mongering, CEO salaries, consumerism, global warming, racism, and oppression and not so much abortion and gay marriage; if you are into bohemian, goth, rave, or indie; if you talk about the myth of redemptive violence and the myth of certainty; if you lie awake at night having nightmares about all the ways modernism has ruined your life; if you love the Bible as a beautiful, inspiring collection of works that lead us into the mystery of God but is not inerrant; if you search for truth but aren't sure it can be found; if you've ever been to a church with prayer labyrinths, candles, Play-Doh, chalk-drawings, couches, or beanbags (your youth group doesn't count); if you loathe words like linear, propositional, rational, machine, and hierarchy and use words like ancient-future, jazz,

> mosaic, matrix, missional, vintage, and dance; if you grew up in a very conservative Christian home that in retrospect seems legalistic, naive, and rigid; if you support women in all levels of ministry, prioritize urban over suburban, and like your theology narrative instead of systematic; if you disbelieve in any sacred-secular divide; if you want to be the church and not just go to church; if you long for a community that is relational, tribal, and primal like a river or a garden; if you believe who goes to hell is no one's business and no one may be there anyway; if you believe salvation has a little to do with atoning for guilt and a lot to do with bringing the whole creation back into shalom with its Maker; if you believe following Jesus is not believing the right things but living the right way; if it really bugs you when people talk about going to heaven instead of heaven coming to us; if you disdain monological, didactic preaching; if you use the word "story" in all your propositions about postmodernism - if all or most of this torturously long sentence describes you, then you might be an emergent Christian.

These lists generated much discussion from critics and adherents alike. Although many within the movement took issue at the profiles claiming, as the caricatured often do, that the descriptions were overly stereotypical and negative, they were also quick to admit the grains of truth contained within them.

From an outsider's standpoint the issue is not so much the response generated by the two lists but rather that they contained so much overlap. The characteristics presented thus carry more weight and do paint the Emerging Church, for all of its rhetoric and seemingly genuine desire to the contrary, to be the home of young, well-educated, suburban, white people. Although there are certainly other issues contained in the lists that are relevant, such as theological orientations, these specifics engendered far less backlash than the overall sentiment of homogeneity which people in the Emerging Church categorically reject.

This is interesting because critics of the Emerging Church have focused their energies much more heavily on the "heretical" stance of Emerging Church theology. The general resistance to metanarratives, including historical Christianity, an interpretive stance to scripture, and an embrace of doubt are among their chief concerns (Carson 2005). However, people within the Emerging Church are not bothered by these accusations. While not everyone, or even the majority of people, within the movement would claim that particular theological identity, as a group they are relatively unconcerned with defending their beliefs.[2]

The result is that the Emerging Church and its critics often end up talking past one another and instead speaking only back to their

constituents as they are unwilling or unable to engage each other on common ground. This dynamic is articulated well in Bielo's (2009:222-224) account of an exchange between Emerging Church pastor Doug Pagitt and conservative radio talk show host Todd Friehl on Friehl's show, *The Way of the Master*. As Bielo astutely points out, the conversation is contentious with very little room for compromise even though both are relying on the same source of authority, Biblical scripture, to make their arguments. Pagitt, a savvy veteran and longtime voice within the Emerging Church, knows full well that he is not going to change Todd Friehl's mind, and Mr. Friehl, who gets paid to articulate his position on his own radio show, is certainly aware that Doug Pagitt is not going to have a conversion to his line of thought. In essence, both parties are reinforcing their positions for the audience. For Mr. Friehl, that audience consists largely of the people listening to his show and for Mr. Pagitt, that audience is comprised mostly of bloggers and others within the Emerging Church circle. While Doug Pagitt certainly does not seem to agree with Mr. Friehl's line of argument, he in no way addresses, and seems completely unbothered by, the central criticism of Todd's argument which is, basically, that the Emerging Church utilizes a relativistic theological approach.

On the other hand, the actual, or perceived, lack of diversity within the Emerging Church goes largely uncommented on by critics, and this is the real concern of people inside the movement. The most dominant response to the "You might be emergent if…" stereotypes was a conversation, largely though not exclusively online, about whether the people in the movement could rightly be stereotyped. The conclusion from my respondents was typically an affirmation that while the people are fairly homogenous, it was not the desired state of affairs. As one worship leader told me half-jokingly, "We're a very diverse congregation. We've got every kind of white guy you can imagine in here." When I asked him why it had occurred to him to pay attention to the diversity of the congregation he said that "it's one of the things that we say we're about, diversity and openness, and I truly believe we are, but we just aren't very good at it yet." This general profile of the Emerging Church as a group that desires a diversity it is not able to achieve was, for the most part, confirmed in the course of my research. Although it was not the focus of my observations, it was difficult to escape at times. This lack of diversity is potentially critical for an organization and movement built around difference and conversation as I describe below. Homogeneity within the ranks only serves to limit the fuel necessary to sustain such organizations.

Organizational Culture

The Emerging Church can be further described in comparison to both the dominant organizational model in the field and the alternative organizational forms which arose as a response. The qualities of the dominant organizational form have been covered extensively, but it is worth spending a little time here reviewing the characteristics of the dominant mode of organizing in the field of religion. The rational bureaucracy is currently the only model in the field of religion which allows for rapid, widespread growth and legitimacy. This model is an institutionalized form of organization relying on specific routines and predictable patterns or scripts for carrying out everyday activities. There is very little question about who is responsible for a particular sector of the ministry or how he/she is supposed to go about running said ministry. This highly rationalized system has been adopted and imposed, sometimes wholesale, from the business world, frequently making large churches indistinguishable from large corporations (Thumma 1996). Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear pastors openly admit to viewing themselves as the CEO of the church.

As an attempt to move away from bureaucratic governance, many smaller religious organizations such as house churches rely on collective decision making through democratic or consensual method, with an explicitly non-hierarchical stance promoting an egalitarian organizational structure with minimal division of labor. These efforts fall broadly under the classification of alternative organizations (Ferree and Martin 1995; Rothschild-Whitt 1979, Rothschild and Whitt 1986). These churches typically trade size for ideological control, sacrificing growth potential for a self-determined belief system. This has historically provided the range of opportunities for responses to the dominant paradigm.

The Emerging Church, however, offers another way of coordinating organizational activity. As I demonstrate in the chapters below, they neither embrace or reject the principles of the dominant organizational form (i.e., bureaucracy) or those espoused by alternative organizations (e.g., rotating leadership, feminist organizations). Instead, they endeavor to organize in a way that avoids adherence to any particular form of organizational behavior, recalling the both/and spirit laid out by Larson and Osborn in their foundational text discussed above. To put it in the terms Mary used at the conference I described in the opening, the people in the Emerging Church seek to intentionally resist institutionalized organizational procedures of all kinds, whether dominant or alternative, bureaucratic and hierarchical or democratic and consensual.

Organizational Events

Worship services are perhaps where the differences between the Emerging Church and the institutional church are felt most. In general, the Emerging Church has become known for a "coffee shop" feel at worship services. This basically means that services are more casual than in traditional churches and people are welcome to engage in conversations or activities which are not necessarily planned ahead of time (e.g., dancing, painting, reading, etc.). Scott Bader-Saye, in his article "Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation," notes that

> [t]he Emerging Church movement embraces worship that is multisensory, multi-layered and multi-media in contrast to the modernist emphasis on a word-centered, rational worship that contains the body in the pew so that the mind can do all the work…emerging worship reclaims all the accoutrements of piety – candles, icons, incense, kneeling and chanting – alongside the projection screens, electric guitars and televisions rolling looped images. The technological elements are intentionally subdued, made subservient to personal connection and spiritual reflection. (Bader-Saye 2006:19)

A common form of worship involves "stations" where congregants worship asynchronously, but collectively, spending as much or as little time as they wish at each of the various stations set up around the room. For example, I visited one service at a congregation in Ft. Worth, TX where there were stations for the administration of communion, artistic expression of a particular section of scripture, individual conversations with the pastor(s) and a place for quiet meditation. The worship time was scheduled for two hours and people came and went freely, cycling through some or all of the stations at their own pace. Occasionally, someone from the worship team would get up and play a song, prompting some people to sing along before returning to the rotation of stations.

The worship style of the congregations in this study are difficult to generalize, and no individual congregation stands out because of a particularly distinctive liturgy. Every congregation in this study utilized different worship styles including elements of traditional and mainstream liturgies which had the effect of connecting the congregation to a larger, already legitimated, faith tradition. The worship service on a given week at any of the Emerging Churches in this study might not be all that different from mainstream worship services. However, from week to week the service is likely to change

Table 1.1: Worship Elements

	Congregation					
	Crossroads	Faith	Calvary	Fellowship	Incarnate Word	Living Word
Communion	✓	✓	✓			✓
Nontraditional Seating[a]	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Band	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Liturgy[b]			✓			✓
Creative Worship[c]	✓	✓			✓	
Creeds	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Sermon[d] (Traditional)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Sermon (Interactive)		✓	✓	✓		
Scripture Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offering	✓		✓		✓	✓

[a] "Traditional" seating is chairs or pews aligned in rows facing the front of the church. Among the nontraditional seating arrangements I observed were people sitting on couches and floors, sometimes laying down and frequently sitting in a circle. In order to best use their space, the seating at Crossroads is set up such that one half of the congregation cannot see the other half.

[b] I use this designation to note when a congregation uses a liturgy that is explicitly connected to another tradition. For example, Calvary, despite being a small congregation would sometimes use a Catholic mass liturgy for a period of time.

[c] Open or Creative Worship is common in many Emerging Churches and typically involves the use of stations that people are free to participate in at any time during the worship. These stations might include anything from painting and journaling to more traditional elements such as self-serve communion.

[d] Sermons were sometimes delivered in a very traditional style where one person talked and everyone else listened. At other times, however, it was much more interactive, like a conversation.

substantially. In table 1.1 I have noted the presence of worship elements that I observed. However, it is quite possible that I was not able to account for all the worship elements used. In the chapters below, I describe some of these worship practices in more detail.

Organizational Ideology

With this seeming lack of control and institutional authority, it should come as no surprise that the Emerging Church faces staunch criticism from some other religious groups. At the other end of the religious spectrum from the Emerging Church resides fundamentalism. To the extent that the Emerging Church can be said to have a religious opponent it is nearly always fundamentalists who decry Emerging Church as a relativistic, secular form of religious expression (e.g., Carson 2005). Indeed, the fundamentalist attack on Emerging Church is often so extreme as to place the former outside the bounds of the stringently ecumenical Emerging Church. Unlike most fundamentalists, the people in the Emerging Church typically, though not always embrace culture, eschew proclaiming the inerrancy of any text, and seek to become integrated into society. This is not to suggest that everyone in the Emerging Church is theologically or politically liberal. In fact, they would reject that division altogether. To truly reside at the other end of the religious spectrum from fundamentalists requires not embracing or creating a different category, but rejecting the categories themselves. As Bader-Saye (2006:17) notes, "in theological terms, Emerging Churches are seeking a third way beyond the liberal-conservative divide."

Occupying this rather unique position in the religious landscape has brought no small amount of attention to the Emerging Church. In 2005 PBS devoted two episodes of *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* to the Emerging Church movement, profiling some key leaders as well as some of the detractors and critics. In that same year, Brian McLaren, a pastor of an Emerging Church in Virginia was listed by *Time* as one of "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America." The ensuing years have seen feature stories in nearly every prominent newspaper and magazine in the country including the *New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The New York Times Magazine,* and *U.S. News and World Report*. This has made minor celebrities out of a number of Emerging Church leaders and pastors to the extent that they now frequently derive all or part of their income from speaking engagements and books. In addition to Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Doug Pagitt and Mark Driscoll have been featured in national publications. Although the popular press fascination with the movement

has died down in recent years, there is no shortage of attention being paid to the Emerging Church in religious circles. If my own Google News feed is any indication, as major media outlets have paid somewhat less attention lately, the debate and conversation on blogs and in religious publications has only ramped up.

Data

Trying to empirically examine a group like the Emerging Church presents inherent challenges as has been documented by nearly every researcher who has dealt with this movement (Bielo 2011; Chia 2010; Drane 2006). With such a disparate group of beliefs and practices, where does one even start? Who is included? What congregations and groups are left out? There is a need within the field of institutionalism for work which explains these kinds of anomalous situations as so much scholarship in the past 25 years has been conducted in the long shadow cast by DiMaggio and Powell's call for explaining why "there is such startling homogeneity of organizational forms and practices" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:148). Such a perspective misses, however, those organizational forms and practices that explicitly resist homogenization.

Ultimately, my interest in the Emerging Church as a different kind of organization steered me toward a method that would help to highlight those differences so they could investigated. The extended case method (ECM) offers one of the best ways of gathering data from such a group (Burawoy 1991, 1998a). The principles of ECM dictate that researchers enter the field with extensive knowledge of existing theories, in this instance existing institutional and organizational theory, which should be, but are not, able to explain the case at hand.

This method is particularly good at uncovering and making sense of anomalous cases that are not explained by existing theory. Rather than looking for the inherent contradictions within a particular group, ECM takes theory as the starting place and investigates the structures and processes which ought to be accounted for by those theories but which consistently do not fit into an existing framework.[3] Instead of writing these cases off as outliers in the field, the extended case method proposes investigating them as a group unto themselves in order to refine and extend existing theory.

Thus, the data contained here do not attempt a conclusive picture of the Emerging Church in the United States. There are dominant similarities and themes between the congregations which I highlight below and suspect are present throughout the movement, but this study is not an attempt to draw boundaries around the movement. In any case,

such an effort would nearly impossible due to the anti-institutional stance, lack of accounting procedures and resistance to labels contained across the vast middle of the Emerging Church spectrum. Aside from this logistical difficulty, no attempt at comprehensiveness is attempted for theoretical reasons. The goal of this study is to identify specific practices within the anti-institutional Emerging Church that allows the movement, and specific congregations and groups to resist and avoid institutional pressures. This does not require accounting for every variation within the movement, but instead, a purposeful sample is necessary (see appendix).

I conducted 59, in-depth interviews (see table 1.2) and logged over 100 hours of participant observation fieldwork guided by the reflexive principles of ECM. The fieldwork took place in 6 congregations (see table 1.3) where I attended various functions and events including strategy meetings, worship services, and Bible studies. Additionally, I participated in an international conference explicitly focused on how to do training for Emerging Church practitioners and leaders. This week-long conference developed into an ongoing working group. Interview data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide that focused on processes surrounding organizational structure, congregational leadership, and religious procedures and routines. These interviews were guided thematically, but were flexible enough to both encourage new conversations to arise and to allow for examining evolving theories and ideas produced through the continual analysis of previous experiences in the field. The interviews averaged just over one hour in length and were conducted at a time and place convenient for the participant. I made a conscious effort to interview both people in formal leadership positions as well as congregants who were not currently in leadership positions.

I paid particular attention to the procedures surrounding traditional religious routines in a Protestant setting (e.g., administration of the sacraments, pastoring, liturgy) as well as mainstream organizational routines (e.g., leadership, structure) when in the field. My focus in these observations was not so much on identifying the particular denominational strand present in each process, but rather on discovering how these easily routinized procedures were negotiated by a group of people who professed a desire to avoid routines. Fieldnotes were first analyzed immediately following the time in the field with an eye toward comparing them back to the interviews, checking for both internal consistency and theoretical contradiction.

Table 1.2: Interviewee List

Pseudonym	Participant Position	Home Church	Gender	Age
Cody	Congregant	Calvary	M	40
Jeff	Pastor	Calvary	M	31
Jeff	Pastor (follow up)	Calvary	M	31
Jessica	Congregant	Calvary	F	40
Melissa	Congregant	Calvary	F	26
David	Congregant	Calvary	M	36
Sally	Pastor	Calvary	F	30
Wade	Congregant	Calvary	M	41
Bob	Building Director	Crossroads	M	27
Brad	Former Congregant	Crossroads	M	29
Brett	Congregant	Crossroads	M	27
Chad	Congregant	Crossroads	M	26
Fred	Congregant	Crossroads	M	38
Greg	Congregant	Crossroads	M	29
Harmony	Congregant	Crossroads	F	27
Jimmy	Pastor	Crossroads	M	36
Mark	Deacon	Crossroads	M	38
Tim	Pastor	Crossroads	M	39
Abby	Congregant	Faith	F	22
Diane	Congregant	Faith	F	41
Eric	Seminary Student	Faith	M	30
Ethan	Congregant	Faith	M	19
Joe	Congregant	Faith	M	52
Fred	Congregant	Faith	M	40
Kenny	Congregant	Faith	M	32
Reggie	Congregant	Faith	M	29
Rose	Congregant	Faith	F	19
William	Pastor	Faith	M	40
Aaron	Congregant	Fellowship	M	32
Eric	Congregant	Fellowship	M	22
Harry	Congregant	Fellowship	M	24
Noah	Pastor	Fellowship	M	26
Pete	Pastor	Fellowship	M	29
Ryan	Congregant	Fellowship	M	45
Amanda	Congregant	Incarnate Word	F	25
Chris	Congregant	Incarnate Word	M	26
Clark	Congregant	Incarnate Word	M	40
Frances	Pastor	Incarnate Word	F	31
Jeremy	Worship Team	Incarnate Word	M	31
Justin	Congregant	Incarnate Word	M	22
Ricky	Pastor	Incarnate Word	M	34

Pseudonym	Participant Position	Home Church	Gender	Age
George	Music Minister	Living Word	M	32
Megan	Congregant	Living Word	F	28
Melinda	Congregant	Living Word	F	26
Ned	Intern	Living Word	M	24
Jerica	Congregant	Living Word	F	20
Ricky	Congregant	Living Word	M	29
Ronald	Pastor	Living Word	M	39
Damian	Pastor	Conference Participant	M	34
Erica	Intern	Conference Participant	F	20
Hanley	Congregant	Conference Participant	M	29
Langston	Congregant	Conference Participant	M	24
Mary	Congregant	Conference Participant	F	30
Parker	Unaffiliated	Conference Participant	M	53
Patti	Conference Leader	Conference Participant	F	48
Rob	Pastor	Conference Participant	M	26
Vance	Pastor	Conference Participant	M	42
Gary	Emergent Board Member	N/A	M	38
Tony	Seminary Student / Blogger	House Church	M	27

Congregational Characteristics

The congregations included in this study were chosen carefully to explore particular organizational elements. Existing institutional research explains that organizational size, longevity, and affiliation all affect the kinds of homogenizing forces experienced by the organization. As a way of describing the congregations that serve as the basis for this research, I break them down here by those organizational characteristics. One of the benefits of studying a group as diverse as the Emerging Church is that there is not a particular model which must be explored. Instead, variety is demanded in the search for accuracy.

Size

New institutionalism theorists have shown that large size subjects an organization to substantially more isomorphic pressures. I spent time in two congregations that would be considered large, especially by Emerging Church standards. Crossroads had around 500 worshippers per week during the time I spent with the congregation and Faith worshipped over 350 and moved to incorporate a second service shortly

Table 1.3: Congregational Characteristics

	Congregation					
	Crossroads	Faith	Calvary	Fellowship	Incarnate Word	Living Word
Seminary Trained Pastor	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Paid Pastor	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Denominational Affiliation	None	None	None	Southern Baptist	Lutheran	Lutheran
Own Building	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Size[e]	500	350	30	150	50	200
Length of Time	7 YRS	6 YRS	7 YRS	2 YRS	3 YRS	10 YRS
Leadership[f]	Elders and Deacons	Elders	Whole Group	3 Founding Pastors	Core Team	Elders
Region	Midwest	Midwest	South	Southeast	South	Midwest

after my time with them in order to accommodate the growing crowds.[4]

Crossroads is a community in a southern metropolitan area operating out of its own downtown building which consists of a coffee shop, bookstore, art gallery, recording studio, community meeting center and a weekly farmer's market. It was founded by Tim, who was one of the early founders of the Emerging Church. While Tim is well-known as a pastor, the band leader, Jacob, might be even more famous in Emerging Church circles as a musician whose songs are sung in Emerging and non-Emerging congregations across the country. Although Crossroads does not claim a denominational affiliation, the community is closely aligned, both formally and informally with Baptist traditions and institutions. For example, their relationship with a local Baptist university has resulted not only in attracting many students to the congregation but also in lectures and classroom experiences facilitated by Crossroads at the university. Additionally, the statement of common beliefs for Crossroads consists of many assertions common to the Baptist tradition such as the necessity of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ (see table 1.4).

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[e] Number of congregants are estimates based on multiple self-report and observational sources.

[f] By "Leadership" or "Governace" I mean the formally recognized decision making body for a particular congregation. Governance does not only occur in these groups, and they are certainly not the only leaders as these designations are somewhat shifting.

Table 1.4: Written Statements of Faith

Faith Statement Characteristic	Congregation					
	Crossroads	Faith	Calvary	Fellowship	Incarnate Word	Living Word
Faith Statement/ Statement of Beliefs	Yes	None[g]	Yes[h]	Yes	None	Yes
Bible as Inerrant				✓		
Forgiveness of Sin	✓		✓	✓		
Service to Community	✓	✓				✓
Jesus as the only way to Heaven			✓	✓		
Engaged with Culture		✓				✓
Inclusion		✓				✓
Love	✓		✓			
Participation/ Gifts		✓				✓
Sacraments			✓	✓		
Resurrection	✓		✓	✓		
Holism[i]		✓				✓
Return of Jesus	✓		✓	✓		

[g] Faith does not offer a formal mission statement or statement of beliefs. They do have an "About Us" document that I use for the rest of this chart. This should not be taken as merely a semantic difference, however, as the "About Us" document explicitly does not focus on beliefs.

[h] The mission statement at Calvary is comprised of the Nicene Creed and Mark 12:28-33 wherein Jesus claims that the greatest commandment is to love others as you love yourself. My interviewees told me that these passages were selected intentionally in order to avoid the often divisive conflict that surrounds the formulation of an original mission statement or statement of beliefs.

[i] Holism is a common term in the Emerging Church and is frequently used to note the interconnectedness of all parts of life. It is a way of proclaiming that there is no division between sacred and secular realms.

The paid staff at Crossroads consists of three pastors (Lead, Assistant, and Worship), and two administrative office staff whose primary function is to allocate time and space in the building, pay bills, maintain websites and answer phones. The coffee shop and other venues are operated by volunteers. In addition to tithes, operating expenses are covered by the revenue generated from the coffee shop and other events (e.g., donation boxes at art openings, book sales at coffee shop). There is also a board of elders (men only) and group of deacons who make decisions regarding the day to day activity and direction of the congregation in addition to making decisions about finances. New elders are chosen by existing elders from the deacons on an "as-needed" basis. Anyone, regardless of gender, viewed by existing elders and deacons as demonstrating leadership ability may be chosen to be a deacon, there are no official criteria. During the course of this research, the biggest issue Crossroads was facing had to do with size. They were actively trying to figure out how to manage their growth and maintain a sense of community at the same time.

Faith is another community founded by one of the early leaders in the Emerging Church, William. His early work focused on bringing together young pastors and church leaders who were concerned with "trying to figure out a different way of doing church" (William interview). Thus, Faith is largely William's vision of what church should be. This vision is also described in books authored and coauthored by William. The congregation is incorporated as a co-op with a board of directors and voting members. Decisions are made by a majority vote of members who must be members of Faith for six months or more. Membership is open to everyone and requires involvement in the life of the community of Faith. Faith is housed in an old, downtown church building formerly used by a different congregation. Notably, one of the first things the members did upon occupying this building was to take out the wooden pews and replace them with several dozen sofas and loveseats that they procured from local thrift stores and donations. The sofas are organized in a circle where parishioners face one another, thus altering the traditional worship setting where all congregants face forward toward the altar. There is no altar in Faith, only a small swivel stool in the middle of the room where the speaker sits or stands to address the congregation.

Faith retains no denominational affiliation and the official stance of the community embraces ecumenicalism. Additionally, Faith has no mission statement. Instead, they offer an extended definition of who they are. This definition proclaims Faith as a place where all facets of life are embraced and explored in an effort to better serve God as a

group of people who follow Jesus Christ and are committed to sharing life with one another. Interestingly, there is no description of exactly what it means to be a Christian or a follower of Jesus, leaving these sometimes contentious issues up for individual decision and discussion.

Longevity

The second dimension that organizational scholars have long pointed out as a primary variable important to institutionalization is time. New organizations must deal with unique challenges specific to their nascent status (Stinchcombe 1965). While mature organizations have a tendency to get stuck in routine procedures producing little innovation, new organizations often feel compelled to adopt the standard, industry-wide practices in order to increase chances of survival.

Therefore, I actively sought congregations which were either brand new or had been around for a relatively long time. Although this is not the same as longitudinal data and should not be treated as such, examining both of these kinds of congregations can shed some light on the unique challenges faced by both kinds as they seek to avoid routinization. In addition to Crossroads and Living Word, which have each been in existence for about a decade, I spent time with Calvary which existed for 15 years before dissolving during the process of this research. I was also fortunate enough to come across two newly created congregations, Fellowship Church and Incarnate Word (described in next section).

Long Time

Calvary Church is the community in this study with the longest history, stretching back to a church-within-a-church ministry in the early 1990s.[5] In the winter of 2007, Calvary held its last gathering and dissolved itself as an official organization due to a lack of meeting space and a feeling among the congregants that the church had "run its course" (Cody interview).

During those 15 years, Calvary underwent many changes, with worship numbers peaking at over 100 in the early 2000s. When I spent time with them, they were operating out of the home of one of their members and had around 20-30 people attending worship on Sunday nights and two or three small groups which met on Friday nights. Services typically included meals and lasted close to three hours. Despite the fact that they were meeting in a home, they should not be considered a house church. As a community, they had operated out of a building previously, and they viewed this move to a house as only a

temporary status. Although a husband and wife team had been designated as official pastors for the community, neither one of them was ordained or had formal seminary training. There were no paid staff and duties and responsibilities were handled by the group. All offerings gathered went to support outreach and missions agreed upon by the congregation. Although Calvary was deeply embedded in a network of other Emerging Churches and some house churches through various personal connections, they were not exclusively connected to any single denomination or organization.

Short Time

Fellowship had just celebrated its two year anniversary when I visited them in order to augment my experiences with young Emerging Churches. Led by an unordained former youth pastor and two other unpaid, but full-time, elders, Fellowship also operates a coffee and dessert shop as a ministry a few miles away from the strip center location of the church. There is one service each Sunday with approximately 150 worshippers. They raise all of their money through tithes, but affiliation is nominally maintained through the Southern Baptist Convention as each of the three men on the leadership staff came out of those congregations. It is perhaps no coincidence then, that Fellowship has a very extensive and theologically conservative set of common beliefs such as the inerrancy of the Bible and the fundamental sinfulness of all people.

Affiliation

Denominational affiliation is relatively rare among Emerging Churches. However, denominations can often provide financial and other resources that are often in short supply for new congregations. Additionally, denominational affiliation can be a source of legitimacy for some people. Paradoxically, of course, it also provides the opposite function among many emerging churchgoers (see chapter 5), putting these congregations in a precarious position. On the one hand, denominational affiliation provides undeniable benefits. On the other hand, such institutional affiliation can deter people are dissatisfied with traditional churches.

There is nothing structural or ideological that prohibits an Emerging Church from retaining denominational affiliation. Although the bulk of the congregations claim no denominational affiliation, there are some that do operate within this traditional framework. In fact, many of these congregations are not even officially “non-denominational.” Instead, the

congregants refer to themselves as "post-denominational" in order to emphasize their identity as existing outside of the traditional denominational or institutional channels (Bielo 2011). A theoretically interesting subquestion for this study then emerges, How resistant can an organization be when it is embedded in a highly institutionalized framework? While most Emerging Churches can distance themselves and their congregations from institutional forces, this is a much more difficult strategy to employ for the Emerging Church congregation operating under the cover of a traditional denomination. I spent time with two congregations operating within mainline denominational structures associated with traditional congregations.

Incarnate Word started as an offshoot of Resurrection, a highly successful suburban ministry led by a charismatic pastor. In an effort to attract and appeal to more singles and young adults, it was decided by the leadership staff at Resurrection that a separate worship community was necessary. This new ministry is located in the arts district of a major urban area and services are held on Wednesday nights in a space which serves as a community coffee shop and office space during the rest of the week. After a year-long process of meeting in people's homes once a month to "dream" about what Incarnate Word would look like, it was decided by the core team that traditional Sunday morning worship services would not be a good idea for two reasons. First, many of the initial members of the community, including the pastor, played in bands which would have gigs on Saturday nights, making Sunday morning worship attendance unlikely. Second, although Resurrection provided only minimal cover in terms of money and support, there was considerable effort made to ensure that people were not being taken away from the home or mother church. Having services on Wednesday night enabled people, theoretically, to attend both, though my interviews with congregants suggested that only rarely did Incarnate Word members attend Resurrection and Resurrection regulars virtually never set foot in Incarnate Word services.

Although Incarnate Word's budget must get approved by Resurrection's church council leadership board, they have never requested any changes or raised any serious objections according to the leadership at Incarnate Word. Incarnate Word's funding comes from offerings, coffee sales, and grants from the denominational missions department as they are considered an official mission within the larger denomination. This independence of funding is not only an important source of pride for them but provides an amount of autonomy from Resurrection. As a way of further solidifying this independence, there are not common statements of faith or belief for the community.

The leadership structure at Incarnate Word consists of only one full-time, unordained staff member who is responsible for worship coordination and pastoral care as well as administration, running the coffee shop and setting up other events (e.g., community parties, art open houses). Additionally, there is a core team which makes decisions regarding the direction of the congregation. This volunteer group is open only to those who have been invited by the current core group members (see chapter 4 for further discussion). Although there is no official membership, there are typically around 50 people worshipping each week according to my own observations and estimates from respondents.

Living Word is similar in that it is also a congregation which operates under the cover of another, more traditional, suburban, church-King's Cross. In the summer of 1995, the church council at King's Cross held a retreat to determine the future of the congregation and invited a well known professor from a local seminary to come in and guide the discussion. The result was the identification of a particular urban neighborhood as an underserved mission field. Living Word was established with funds and resources from King's Cross and currently relies on offerings for 20% of their budget with assistance from King's Cross making up the other 80%. Also, Living Word's pastor is also currently the Sr. Youth Minister at King's Cross where he spend 20% of his time but earns 80% of his salary. In other words, Living Word is not self-sufficient and would not be able to hold regular services in a building without help from King's Cross. Although most congregational activity, including worship services, are coordinated and run by volunteer teams, there is one other full-time staff member who coordinates worship teams, music groups, outreach, and handles administrative tasks. As the "flagship" model for the Emerging Church within this particular denomination, Living Word draws numerous visitors and a lot of attention which commands an increasing amount of time from the staff.[6]

Living Word is notable not only for its decade-long existence but also for the many forms and locations the congregations has occupied over the years. Although currently they offer only one service on Sunday mornings, they have, at times, held two services in order to accommodate larger crowds. Attendance fluctuates between 75-100 on a given week, but most estimates put their size around 200 total members.

Despite this size, longevity and connection to a traditional, denominational church, the mission statement is decidedly vague. Similarly, the values which underlie the mission statement focus on generic statements of faith, rather than taking a more specific stance as

King's Cross does. King's Cross proclaims to be a center of discipleship and mission for Jesus Christ in addition to a Purpose Driven Church, referencing the popular church growth model developed by Rick Warren. Although the statements of both congregations are congruent with the denomination's tenets, they demand decidedly different things of their adherents. Living Word members are under no compunction to evangelize or witness on behalf of Jesus Christ, only to love others as they have been loved. Not an easy task, for sure, but one requiring far less agreement on theological principles.

Collective Intentionality

As a sociologist I am drawn to this group precisely because their actions match their rhetoric. Often, qualitative work is about uncovering the unspoken and often contradictory dynamics among a group of people. In my experience with the Emerging Churches in this study, however, this is simply not the case when it comes to organizational strategizing. Above and in the appendix, I discuss my research methodology and sampling strategy which are both aimed at uncovering contradictions in the field, but what I found, with everyone from leaders to congregants and even among some former members, was a striking level of agreement between what was articulated publicly to outsiders, what was said to me privately in interviews and what I was able to observe in everyday practice. This confused me at first as a qualitative researcher trained on the one hand to understand critical examination primarily in the form of contradiction or the identification of opposing social forces and on the other to be driven by the empirical data.

Searching for answers, I turned to other academic treatments of the Emerging Church, Bielo (2009, 2011) most notably, to find that for the most extent they were in agreement as well. Even critics of the Emerging Church movement do not base their objections on the notion that the Emerging Church does not do as it says that it does, as we see above. Indeed, there is striking agreement between Emerging Church members and critics about the activity and beliefs of people in the Emerging Church. They simply disagree on the validity of those beliefs.

In the end, then, it is their collective intentionality that becomes the foundation for the investigation into organizational resistance. This is not to say that every congregation within the Emerging Church works in the ways described here, but rather to point out that at least for the congregations in this study, their organizational principles display a remarkable consistency with one another. Furthermore, as I argue throughout the text, these principles are centered around resisting

institutional pressures and thus result in organizational practices counter to what traditional organizational and institutional theory would suggest one would find. Whether it regards the use of professionals, organizational growth, or the articulation of organizational beliefs, I consistently found intentional strategies in place explicitly aimed at countering the rationalizing forces these congregations faced. The fact that these organizational activities matched insiders' rhetoric and outside descriptions of the group as a whole without the benefit of a central or even dominant organizing presence suggests that the movement is tapping into other kinds of social forces.

This text not only begins the process of identifying some of the core organizational values within the Emerging Church, but also works to connect the movement (and potentially others like it) to larger, structural forces that spurred the development of the Emerging Church and account for its continued persistence on the margins of the religious landscape.

Despite a history stretching back nearly thirty years and a highly active period which has brought much visibility and growth over the last decade, the Emerging Church maintains a position outside of institutionalized religion. Long after the time when most organizational theory would posit that such a collection of organizations would either succumb to institutional forces or be rendered irrelevant and obsolete, the Emerging Church has done neither. This text investigates the actions and beliefs of individuals within the movement in order to understand precisely how this tension is maintained.

Chapter Structure

Current accounts of the Emerging Church do a piecework job at best of explaining the historical development of the movement, and no current account places this development in a larger social context. Chapter 2 remedies both of those shortcomings while showing how the development of the Emerging Church at this point in history is not accidental, but rather connected to the same kinds of social forces that produced other types of religious change. In particular, this chapter explains how the Emerging Church is connected to, but distinct from, other forms of "alternative" religion such as house churches and seeker-sensitive churches while situating the rise of the Emerging Church as a distinct religious form in explicit opposition to the Megachurch movement. Ultimately this chapter shows how the same elements which produced the massive and far-reaching Megachurch also planted the

seeds for the Emerging Church as an intensely local and contextual response.

The belief system of people in the Emerging Church can hardly be classified as cohesive. However, the commitment of congregants to a spirit of sustained conversation and questioning about normally taken for granted religious elements contributes to a group ideology which refuses to be nailed down. Chapter 3 demonstrates that this commitment to maintaining what sociologist Ann Swidler refers to as "unsettled lives" is an important and intentional strategy employed by people in the Emerging Church in order to avoid dogmatization. In this way, parts of religious life that, once examined, are not typically subject to ongoing investigation in mainstream Christianity (e.g., the meaning of communion) are intentionally subjected to continuous negotiation and interpretation in the Emerging Church.

At this point in the text, questions should naturally arise about how anything actually gets done in an organization like the Emerging Church. Chapter 4 explains the strategies that particular congregations employ in order to maintain their ideals and structural position and yet still complete the necessary daily business of running a congregation. Much of this chapter revolves around the use of religious professionals and the role of authority within the organization. This chapter, along with chapter 3, is situated to demonstrate how people in the Emerging Church deliberately and intentionally implement strategies designed to support their ideological commitments outlined in chapter 2.

In a general sense, the Emerging Church can be seen as part of a larger tendency in society of some people turning away from monolithic, rationalized organizations in favor of a more contingent and contextual mentality. In chapter 5 I argue that while some people might view the lack of internal organization in the Emerging Church as a hindrance, it is clear that the movement succeeds because of this anti-institutional approach, not despite it. The rise of the Emerging Church at this particular point in history suggests that the recent interest in things like homegrown and local agriculture and the explosion of the DIY ("do-it-yourself") movement in everything from music production to computer programming should not be seen as isolated occurrences, but rather as linked activities that result when a segment of culture is dominated by a few large producers.

Chapter 6 offers an understanding of the Emerging Church that arises from previous chapters. I argue that the Emerging Church can best be understood as a type of resistance to traditional, mainstream religious organizations. While the dominant theme within organizational studies in general and religious studies in particular would have us believe that

the Emerging Church must either join the mainstream or die out, I propose that the ability of the Emerging Church to sustain life in between these two statuses calls for a reconceptualization of this model. The intentional strategies employed by the people in the Emerging Church suggest that it should be understood as a form of organizational resistance.

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[1] This text is not, however, the only or even the most widely read of what could be considered "foundational texts." See appendix for a list of popular Emerging Church texts.

[2] Even this, of course, is not true across the board. Some with higher profiles in the Emerging Church have felt the pull to at least defend their anti-dogmatic stance. For example, see the various writings of Tony Jones or, more famously, Brian McLaren's 2006 manifesto *A Generous Orthodoxy: 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*.

[3] A good example of the dominant approach to qualitative work from within the field of religion is Pitt's (2011) investigation into the ways that lay pastors retain a sense of spiritual vocation without the traditional secular markings of the profession (e.g., credentials, pay, etc.).

[4] All worship numbers are estimates as everyone I talked to indicated that there is no weekly count taken.

[5] A "church-within-a-church" refers to spin-off services and congregations from more established denominationally affiliated congregations. Typically, these are an effort to appeal to younger church goers while retaining the traditions of long-time (and more likely to tithe) parishioners

[6] When I first started working on this project, my friends and acquaintances familiar with the Emerging Church continually asked me if I was planning on visiting Living Word. Partially due to its high profile location and its longevity, it has generated a lot of interest among those people in traditional ministries. I sensed a feeling of "If Living Word can do it, then we can to," among people in the denomination when I discussed Living Word with them.