

The Convergence Movement

"Therefore, every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." - Mat. 13:52.

This Scripture summarizes the insight and discovery which has led to a fresh stream of thought and renewal throughout the wider Body of Christ. Described as the Convergence Movement, or "Convergence of the Streams," this emerging movement appears to many, both observers and participants, to be another contemporary evidence of God's continuing activity in history to renew, replenish and unify His people in one heart and purpose in Christ. Arising out of a common desire and hunger to experience the fullness of Christian worship and spirituality, the Convergence Movement (also referred to in the remainder of this article as "CM") seeks to blend or merge the essential elements in the Christian faith represented historically in three major streams of thought and practice: the Charismatic, Evangelical/Reformed and Liturgical/Sacramental. An increasing number of local congregations and leaders from many backgrounds are finding "treasures old and new" in the spiritual heritage of the church universal.

The following graph, developed by the leadership of Hosanna Church of the King located in the Kansas City metropolitan area, illustrates the essential elements and ingredients being drawn upon by the majority of those participating in the movement at this point:

Paradigm of Ministry

Liturgical/ Sacramental	Evangelical	Charismatic
Theology	Biblical Foundation	Five-fold Ministry and Government
Orthodoxy	Personal Conversion	Power of the Spirit
Universality	Evangelism & Mission	Spiritual Gifts
Liturgical Worship	Pulpit-Centred Worship	Charismatic Worship
Social Action	Personal Holiness	Kingdom
Incarnational understanding of the Church (based on theology, history, and sacramental elements of thought)	Biblical and Reformational understanding of the Church (pragmatic and rational)	Spiritual, Organic, and functional understanding of the Church (dynamic and informal)

The blending or converging of these traditions is seen by those involved as the work of God the Holy Spirit imparting a spiritual operation of grace best captured in the vision of Psalm 46:5,6: "There is a river whose streams make

glad the city of God, the Holy Place where the Most High dwells." Thus, the "city of God" is seen as the Church, the river as the action and flow of God's Presence through His Church and the many "streams" as expressions of the one river's life that have developed or broken off from the main river through history, all of which are necessary to enrich and make glad the city with the fullness of God's life, power, purpose and Presence. These tributaries now seem to be making their way back toward the main stream. Anglican minister David Watson once remarked that, "This break with Rome (the Reformation), although probably inevitable due to the corruption of the time, unfortunately led to split after split within the Body of Christ, with the result that the mission of the Church is today seriously handicapped by the bewildering plethora of endless denominations ... a torn and divided Christianity is, nevertheless, a scandal for which all Christians need deeply to repent" (David Watson, *I Believe in the Church*). This call to be one under girds the desire of many in CM to see the streams of the Church come together. Wayne Boosahda and Randy Sly of Hosanna Church of the King, one of the key churches in the Kansas City area reflecting the impact of the movement, have expressed the conviction that, "out of the days of the Reformation, we see God's heart now moving in a kind of 'reverse reformation' or restoration, of His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (catholic, here being used to refer to the wider universal Church of Jesus Christ).

History of Emergence and Growth

The convergence movement seems to have strong antecedents in two major areas of spiritual and worship renewal affecting the Church in this century: the contemporary Charismatic worship renewal and the Liturgical Renewal Movement, both Catholic and mainline Protestant. The Charismatic Renewal, began in the early 60's primarily within mainline denominations. Those in the Renewal saw a blending of Charismatic or Pentecostal elements, such as healing, prophecy and spontaneous worship and praise, with the more traditional elements of mainline (and, eventually, Roman Catholic) liturgical and reformed practices.

What some have called the "Third Wave" or "Signs and Wonders Movement" began about 1978 with the emergence of the ministry of John Wimber and the Vineyard Churches that arose through his influence. James Robison, Jim Hylton, Ray Robinson and other Southern Baptist leaders witnessed a Third Wave explosion in the "Fullness Movement," primarily impacting the SBC. Peter Wagner and others from Fuller Theological Seminary formalized the movement through their writings and acted as a filter and focal point. The Third Wave has been described by some as an epilogue to the Charismatic Renewal, bringing together Charismatic elements of worship, experience and practice with the Evangelical tradition.

The other key influence upon CM has been the Liturgical Renewal Movement, which arose originally out of France in the Roman Catholic

Church and the Oxford or Tractarian Movement in the Church of England in the 19th century. The Liturgical Renewal caused a resurgence of interest in recapturing the essence, spirit and shape of ancient Christian worship, as practiced and understood by the early Church of the first eight centuries. Particular focus was given to the apostolic and Ante-Nicene Fathers of the ancient, undivided Church up until about 390 A.D. The discoveries and enrichment of the theology and practice of worship and ministry from that fertile era overflowed into the mainline Protestant churches and began to have major impact upon them, as well, from the 1950's, on.

A common component in the current CM, which came from these earlier movements, is a strong sense of and concern for unity in the whole of Christ's Body, the Church. While not associated with the official Ecumenical Movement of the World Council of Churches, those involved in CM seem broadly gripped by the hunger and desire to learn from traditions of worship and spirituality other than their own and to integrate these discoveries into their own practice and experience in the journey of faith. Indeed, many leaders in the fledgling movement describe their experience as a compelling "journey" or "pilgrimage." Many times, in very unsought-after ways, "sovereign" events, relationships, books or insights gave rise to an understanding of the church that was quite different from their previous perspectives and backgrounds. One case-in-point is Richard Foster, a Quaker by background, whose personal pilgrimage led him to write the classic *Celebration of Discipline*, in which he unfolds an integrated practice of spiritual disciplines drawn from five basic traditions of spirituality in the Church through history. As a result of his developing focus, Foster convened a conference called "Renovare", which gathered in Wichita, KS. in 1988. The conference and intended renewal were direct precursors to the "Convergence of Streams" concept.

Basically unheralded or openly recognized until about 1985, many in the movement have discovered others on the "journey" from various church backgrounds who had similar or identical experiences and insights. One by one congregations and leaders have found one another, underlining the sense that God is doing something on a grass roots level similar to an underground river about to break to the surface.

Key contemporary pioneers shaping the awareness and thought of the movement are men like Dr. Robert Webber, author and professor of Theology at Wheaton College; Dr. Robert Stamps, former chaplain of Oral Roberts University; Peter Gillquist, former leader with Campus Crusade for Christ and now an Eastern Orthodox priest and evangelist; Thomas Howard from St. John's Seminary; Thomas Oden, theologian and author from Drew University, Howard Snyder, theologian, author and Christian educator, Stan White, former Assembly of God pastor, now an Episcopalian priest; and others, such as the late David DuPlessis, Pentecostal minister and key instigator of the Charismatic ecumenical dialogue between Roman Catholics and

Pentecostals; current Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey; the United Methodist liturgical Order of St. Luke and Peter Hocken, Roman Catholic theologian.

These individuals range in background from Fundamentalists and Evangelicals to Anglican/Episcopalian and mainline Protestants; and Classical Pentecostals and independent Charismatics to Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Although not all those named are involved directly in the CM, all have helped shape and influence the vision and thought and developing practice of those who are.

Robert Webber has written a number of key books on the history and practice of Christian worship, such as *Worship Old and New*, *Worship Is A Verb* and *Signs of Wonder - The Phenomenon of Convergence in the Modern Liturgical and Charismatic Churches*, all of which have been highly influential on those involved in the movement. His book, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, describing a trend of Evangelical Christians moving toward liturgical churches and the reasons why, was one of the first discoveries for many who are now clearly operating in a convergence perspective.

Greater public awareness of the new movement came through Stan White, a young fourth generation Assembly of God pastor from Valdosta, Georgia, who caused a major stir when he took his entire independent Charismatic congregation into the Episcopal Church. The story was written up in *Christianity Today* in September of 1990 entitled "Why the Bishops Went to Valdosta" and *Charisma Magazine*, the major voice for the Charismatic movement, followed in April of 1991 with a similar article on White's remarkable journey toward a church that was fully Charismatic, fully Evangelical, and fully Liturgical and Sacramental.

Peter Giliquist, a former Campus Crusade for Christ leader in the 60's, left the campus movement with a number of other fellow leaders, searching for the real New Testament Church. Giliquist's book, *Becoming Orthodox - A journey to The Ancient Christian Faith*, chronicled their fascinating journey of over 15 years of seeking, studying, and researching the early church. Their discoveries led them into full reception and inclusion by the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Two thousand Evangelical/Charismatic believers from various backgrounds who made up the membership of the fifteen congregations they had founded were also received into the Antiochian branch of the Orthodox Church.

As news of these events and key materials began to circulate, others on the "journey," as many began to identify it, caught wind and took heart that God was indeed at work. Various leaders and participants were, in fact, increasingly relieved to discover they were not the only ones thinking this way or being compelled by this vision. In a quite unexpected way God seemed to be confirming His call and initiation towards a vision of unity in the Body of

Christ in conformity with the spirit of Jesus' prayer in John 17 and His statement in John 10:16, "I have many other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd". It seemed to be a unity that would not only leap boundaries, but one that would lead to an enlargement and enrichment of the faith, vision, worship and practice of the fullness of Christ in the fullness of His Church.

Common Elements of Convergence Churches

Those who are being drawn by the Lord into this convergence of streams are characterized by several common elements. While these are not exhaustive or in any order of importance, they seem to form the basis for the focus and direction of the Convergence Movement.

1. A restored commitment to the sacraments, especially The Lord's Table.

Those from the Evangelical and Charismatic streams of the church have not really emphasized the sacramental dimension of the church. In fact, for some churches, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion have been seen more as ordinances than sacraments - commands by the Lord that must be undertaken by the church, but for no other purpose than that of obedience.

From a more sacramental view, these two expressions of church life are seen as holy and sacred unto the Lord, a symbol with true spiritual meaning used as a point of contact between man and God. The Lord's presence and power is released in these acts as the worshiper encounters Him through the elements.

2. An increased appetite to know more about the early church.

For many Christians, a vacuum has existed between the pages of the New Testament and the contemporary church. This has left a disconnected Body with no historic heritage. Like a boat adrift, the church can no longer explain who she is, where she came from, or why she exists. A recent shift in perspective has sent her searching for her roots, in order to find a common connection to the greater whole in God's Kingdom.

Studying the early church has given many an opportunity to see New Testament church principles being applied by those who were discipled by the Twelve, and their subsequent followers. These writings provide a window into an earlier time, explaining how the early church approached faith and practice, how they worshipped, and how they gave leadership to a growing movement. The bloodline of the Body of Christ can be traced through succeeding generations - seeing both the successes and failure in faith.

3. A love and embrace for the whole church, and a desire to see the church as one.

The various expressions of Christianity have remained very distinct for many years through sectarianism and denominational separatism. Convergence churches are looking beyond these artificial barriers to encourage, appreciate, and learn more about the uniqueness found in the various bodies of faith. Jesus' prayer in John 17 was for the church to become one... one as the Body of Christ, not through compromise of doctrine and dogma, but unity under the person of Jesus Christ - unity among our diversity. This sense of oneness does not require any church to dismiss their unique expression as Christ's Body, but calls them to appreciate and embrace the variety and beauty of the church worldwide and throughout history.

Convergence churches seem to appreciate the investment that the various streams of the Church provide. The call of CM churches is "be one," move together in portraying a people united under Christ to reach a hurting world.

4. The blending in the practices of all three streams is evident, yet each church approaches convergence from different bases of emphasis.

A church does not necessarily have to change its identity when it becomes a part of a convergence movement. Most convergence churches have a dominant base -- one particular expression of the church that regulates the others. They can still look very Episcopalian, Orthodox, Baptist, Nazarene, independent Charismatic, etc. while expressing additional elements of worship and ministry from other streams.

With each church having a primary base, three different types of convergence churches seem to be most common today: blended churches, inclusion churches, and network churches. Blended churches have maintained their original identity, denominational connection and distinctives theologically. From this base they then are adding elements from the other two streams in their worship and ministry practices. While most common among Liturgical/Sacramental churches, blended churches are found in Evangelical and Charismatic streams as well.

Inclusion churches are those that have gone through a metamorphosis in becoming involved in the convergence. Primarily from Charismatic or Evangelical backgrounds, these churches have found themselves so closely identifying with another stream of the Church that they have re-aligned themselves and many have even become a part of Liturgical/Sacramental denominations. Church of the King, Valdosta, GA whom we mentioned earlier in the article, is probably the best known inclusion church in recent years.

Networked churches are independent churches that have become a part of the CM and have left their former associations but have chosen to remain independent. Their connections are based on strong relationships with other like-minded churches. Most of those who are networked churches have come out of the Charismatic stream.

5. An interest in integrating more structure with spontaneity in worship.

As God's Spirit continues to move powerfully in the world, new wineskins (or structure) are required to contain the power and potential of His new wine. While most Christian futurists expected these new wineskins to be composed of more open and spontaneous churches with a de-emphasized structure, the spirit of independence present, especially in North American Christians, underlines the impression that this would be like pouring wine into a fish net.

God's holy fire is now being kindled in furnaces of faith where structures such as liturgical forms are allowing power to be imparted in churches without the fear of moving into error. Liturgies are being reintroduced into the church in order to bring a balance in worship among all the elements Scripture reveals as necessary for worshipping God in spirit and truth. The word "liturgy" literally means the "work of the people." Through the implementation of liturgical elements, worship becomes the work of the body in praise, repentance, the hearing of the Word, and the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. Within these forms room can always be found for spontaneous moves of the Spirit. The historic creeds of the church - the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, etc. - are once again giving the Body of Christ the foundational roots of orthodoxy. The Book of Common Prayer and other liturgical resources are also being blended with spontaneous praise and worship in convergence churches. The Lord's Table is being celebrated with a greater understanding of the sacredness of the event, and churches are following the Christian year and church calendar more consistently as a means of taking their people on an annual journey of faith. All of these expressions give local fellowships a greater sense of connection with the church worldwide and the church through history.

6. A greater involvement of sign and symbol in worship through banners, crosses, Christian art and clerical vestments.

The contemporary church has begun to reclaim the arts for Christ. In this move, the use of sign and symbol serves as a representative of a greater truth. While banners and pageantry have found a new place in the church, other symbols are showing up as well, as contact points for bringing together two realities: the outward sign or symbol and the inward or spiritual reality. Crosses and candles now adorn processions in some churches that for years had felt pageantry would be a signature of the death of vital faith.

Some pastors are now wearing clerical collars and vestments in various services, worship settings and celebrations of the church. The collar serves as a sign of spiritual reality in being yoked with Christ, identifying with and speaking to the church as a whole, prophetically saying, "Be one!"

7. A continuing commitment to personal salvation, Biblical teaching, and to the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Some who watch this "new direction" from the Evangelical or Charismatic sidelines are still sceptical. They are concerned that convergence churches are abandoning their heritage, and that the value of Biblical infallibility and personal conversion will be lost or compromised in the pursuit of the liturgical/sacramental side of the church. Often, this concern arises out of negative prior personal experiences with certain expressions of the church or an inaccurate stereotype. Those watching from the liturgical / sacramental side are usually as concerned about their churches embracing more conservative or fundamental expressions of faith and practice.

This movement is definitely not the abandonment of a stream but a convergence. The work of God is inclusive not exclusive, bringing forth from each tributary those things which He has authenticated. Such issues as evangelism, missions, and the work of ministry by the power of the Spirit remain intact in this journey. His power continues to be released in marvellous ways in people's lives, bringing about conversion, healing, release from bondages, and life change.

The Church's rich and vital Biblical heritage in the power and primacy of the Word has been more completely under girded as churches give more time in worship to the corporate reading of the Bible. This fulfils Paul's admonition to Timothy to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and teaching." Ironically, on Sunday mornings more Scripture is usually read in a traditional liturgical service than most Evangelical or Charismatic gatherings.

Conclusion

The future of the church will be greatly impacted by the convergence movement. The walls between groups and denominations are already becoming veils which can be torn open, giving those from other branches greater opportunity to experience another's faith and practice.

As the convergence movement grows, mainline denominations will find their numbers reinforced and their churches refreshed. The huge influx of people, with various levels of contact in these churches, will bring a vitality for the ancient faith that is vibrant and strong. Their intense devotion for ancient forms will be contagious, caught by those who have lost their enthusiasm.

Formal and informal educational tracks in the various streams can become much broader in scope, addressing issues that may be found in other sections of the church, such as sacramental theology and practices, rites of initiation, the work of the Holy Spirit, etc.

The Convergence Movement will also open up greater opportunities for shared facilities and ministry since the architecture and layout of churches will be conducive to the more common worship elements of the different churches. Approaches to ministry will also become more similar, allowing a greater variety of churches to work together for evangelism, discipleship, social action, and Body life.

The final verses of the Old Testament close with a promise that the spirit of Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. While these verses have been used in recent days to characterize the need to return to family values, the hope also exists that a new spirit in the church will turn the hearts of this generation of believers back toward the apostolic fathers and others who formed and fashioned vital faith in the centuries following Christ's ascension. They had envisioned and worked for a Christianity that was orthodox and durable, generation upon generation, operating in strict adherence to the revelation of Christ for His church. The church of the twentieth century is now eagerly looking back to these fathers of faith and discovering new life in the forms and structures God built in their midst.