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EMERGENT (USA) AND AMAHORO AFRICA:
RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO GLOBALIZATION

BY APRIL VEGA

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The demise of religion has seemed immanent to some since the time of the Enlightenment, as science came to have greater prominence in how we perceive natural phenomena and as people of different religions became more aware of each other. In the modern period, as globalization increased and brought with it a greater awareness of other cultures, scholars began to study the social functions of religion and thus predicted that if religion wasn’t going to completely die, at least it would be relegated to the private sphere as modernization spread throughout the world and religion’s utility weakened. It is true that globalization has now permeated and altered just about every aspect of life, from economics to art, from technology to environmental stability, and these forces have particularly affected religion; however, it has not disappeared nor been completely relegated to the private sphere throughout the world. Scholars have been struggling to interpret precisely how and why the function of religion is changing as societies become aware of their place in the globalized world. When the rise of fundamentalism throughout the world took everyone by surprise in the 1980s, those in the religious studies discipline began discussing not a world without religion but a world in which religion functioned in a different way. Jose Casanova uses the word “deprivatization” to describe the phenomenon of religion re-entering public discourse after being on its assumed deathbed.¹ Some initial examples of this deprivatization of religion in the US and Africa were the rise of the Religious Right and the rise of the prosperity gospel movement, respectively. However, since the inception of these movements, other forms of deprivatization have emerged as alternatives. The emerging church conversation (Emergent) and Amahoro are examples of organizations formed directly in response to

societal conditions precipitated by globalization, namely the privatization of religion, and also against some initial forms of the deprivatization of religion in their respective home societies, that is, fundamentalism or the “Religious Right” in the US and the prosperity gospel in Africa.

**Emergent**

It is difficult to give a precise chronology of the emerging church movement in the US because, as its leaders are always quick to point out, the emerging church is *not* a religious institution in the same way a denomination or independent church is, instead, the emerging church is a conversation. As such, pinpointing the precise beginning is not only impossible but also not very important. More important for the purpose of this paper is to ascertain why, with whom, and how it began, and what other forces in American religious culture necessitated the beginnings of such a conversation. And so, we may begin by asserting that there is general agreement among emerging church writers that this conversation first had its beginnings among evangelical Christians in the 1990s, many of whom were experiencing discontent with how their faith was being represented on the national stage.

The mid-1990s was an interesting, perhaps exciting, time for American evangelicals. The once-marginalized fundamentalists among them had returned to prominence in national politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, surprising not only the more moderate evangelicals, but also scholars of religion who were anticipating the

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continuing secularization of American culture. These fundamentalists, who comprised a substantial part of what would become known as the Religious Right, are an appropriate starting point when discussing the emerging church because while the emerging church coalesced in response to globalization and the Religious Right, the Religious Right itself was in fact formed in part as a reaction to an increasingly globalized American society.

While it is true that, as Walter Capps argues, that the primary motivator for the formation of the Religious Right was the desire to re-establish a moral code that they perceived to be broken due to some of the impulses of secularization and modernity, especially cultural shifts in the American landscape in the 1960s and 1970s, the nationalistic impulses that were also at the heart of the movement also betray that the movement was formed in reaction to a globalizing society in which ethnic, racial and religious minorities were seen as being granted “special” (equal) rights. The nationalistic impulses were not as apparent at the start of the movement, but became more central in the following decades.

The beginning of the Religious Right as a potent political force is generally accepted to be between 1978 and 1980, during which time three organizations were founded: The Moral Majority, The Christian Voice, and The Religious Roundtable. The formation of Religious Right was the embodiment of the fear that some Christian

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6 Ibid, 8.
8 Casanova, Public Religions, 147.
fundamentalists felt about losing their identity in a society that was becoming increasingly diverse and in which the “accepted family structure” was beginning to be redefined.9 In fact, Jose Casanova describes this fundamentalist surge into the mainstream as nothing less than a perceived matter of survival on their part.10 Fundamentalists, content and to some extent doctrinally compelled to be separate from politics for decades, decided to re-enter the national conversation as issues such as women’s rights, gay rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and voluntary prayer in schools were being, from their perspective, unsatisfactorily dealt with.11 By 1988, the movement that many had dismissed as being an anomaly had managed to put forth a semi-viable candidate (Pat Buchanan) for national office.12

And so, inasmuch as it was/is a religious movement, the Religious Right was also a nationalistic movement aiming at restoring a certain version of America.13 Capps identifies three main convictions of the movement: first, they were interested in the spiritual vitality of America; second, they believed that America was in a bad moral/spiritual state and was in need of correction; and third, that the situation must be addressed in a radical way.14 The goal for the Religious Right, then, was to re-establish their version of American Protestantism as the civil religion in America, over and against what had been called “Main-line Protestantism” for several decades,15 in order to reclaim the American identity that they felt had been lost.

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10 Casanova, Public Religions, 155.  
11 Ibid.  
13 Ibid.  
15 Casanova, Public Religions, 160.
To achieve this goal, the Religious Right utilized its impressive understanding of mass communication. Casanova rightly points out that fundamentalists, and evangelicals on the whole, have always been willing to “change the medium” for the message they wish to convey, which was traditionally the message to evangelize non-Christians; by the mid-1980s, conservative/fundamentalist Christians dominated the religious radio airwaves. This willingness and ability to change the medium served them well as they began to compete for attention in the American media. By the mid-1990s, this influx of communication from the self-perceived “silent majority” had become a dull roar, or perhaps, a deafening roar, for moderate and liberal evangelicals. Some had surmised that the so-called Religious Right movement had actually collapsed in 1989 when the organization Moral Majority dissolved, and the election of Bill Clinton, an abortion-supporting, gay-rights defending, gun-control legislating Democrat to the office of president in 1992 certainly seemed to confirm that hypothesis. His election, however, probably served to animate their troops. By 1994, the same year the Republicans regained control of both the House and the Senate, the Christian Coalition (an advocacy group founded by Pat Robertson) had over one million members, and between the years of 1992-1996, had distributed over 40 million voter guides to conservative Christian

16 Ibid., 146.
17 Ibid., 146.
churches. An editorial article in *Christianity Today*, a magazine catering to evangelical Christians, from March 1995 decries the “warfare rhetoric” that was prevalent amongst evangelical leaders on the national stage. The fundamentalist/dispensationalist literary phenomenon, the *Left Behind* series, occupied the top four slots of the *New York Times* Bestsellers lists at one point 1998. In the mid- to late-1990s, the movement was active and visible in American politics and culture. It is in reaction to this strand of loud, antagonistic, fundamentalist, reactionary form of evangelicalism that the emerging church emerged.

To define the emerging church as it is today requires looking at a complex set of actors and institutions, however, in the late 1990s, the spokespeople of what would eventually become the organization Emergent were simply meeting together in an organization that was thoroughly dedicated to the church-growth movement and helping pastors and leaders make their congregations bigger. This organization, Leadership Network, was committed to helping pastors find the best practices for their congregations; however, a group of young, like-minded individuals (all, it should be noted, well-educated white men, most under the age of 35) began to question the very premise of the idea of growing congregations. As Tony Jones and Brian McLaren, both members of this initial group, describe it, the questioning of church-growth practices led

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24 Ibid., 47.
to the questioning of theology, which ultimately led the small group to sever their relationship with Leadership Network (a move that was reciprocated by Leadership Network, as they explicitly did not endorse theological discussion as part of their purpose.) Their conversations continued and began including more people, still mostly evangelicals and still mostly white men, and still mainly talking about how to do church in America in a way that was both authentic to their understanding of the Christian message and also culturally sensitive, in order to attract the absent 18-35-year-old demographic that was largely absent in their churches. We see in the emerging church’s beginnings the strong evangelical roots that Casanova identifies – a willingness to “change the medium” in order to communicate. However, this conversation soon began to question the premise that one could indeed change the medium without changing the message; as McLaren describes it, they began not to explore how the message of Jesus could be adapted to fit a globalized, “postmodern” culture, but instead began reflecting on how the message may already have been shrunk and trimmed in order to fit into a thoroughly “modern” context. With the clanging of Religious Right cymbals ringing in their ears, a small (but growing) group of Christian evangelical leaders began to whisper about a third option. They did not want to “re-privatize” their faith, but they were not interested in the deprivatization option provided by the Religious Right, either. Tony Jones, a member of the initial Emergent group, describes the emerging church in a similar way: as a third option in the religious response to globalization, opting not to secularize

26 Ibid., 15.
27 Ibid., 16.
(to downplay differences in belief) or to fundamentalize (to make one’s religion distinct and to attempt to keep oneself “pure”) but instead to “maintain their identity and be truly open to the identity of ‘the other.’”\(^{28}\)

“The other” in the early days of the emerging church network most likely referred to others of different viewpoints or sub-cultural homes and was not explicitly a reference to a global perspective. McLaren, who became a rather reluctant national spokesperson for the conversation early in the process due to the recognition of his third book, *A New Kind of Christian*, in 2001,\(^{29}\) initially wrote books and articles that primarily dealt with theological and practical issues for American evangelicals who were feeling disaffected about the state of Christianity in America. This was a group that was quickly growing to include people beyond the walls of evangelicalism and was also beginning to split itself into two; Mark Devine, a conservative evangelical writer, tellingly divides the emerging church conversation into the “doctrine-friendly” and the “doctrine-averse.”\(^{30}\) Thus far, only people in the so-called “doctrine-averse” camp have been mentioned, but it is worth noting that among the original group of emerging leaders, some – most notably Mark Driscoll and Tim Keller – split from the group early on over theological issues and became quite vocal about their disagreements with the emerging church.\(^{31}\) These leaders may very well be accurately classified as fundamentalists or “Religious Right” adherents who learned to speak a different cultural language, but were committed spreading the core fundamentalist message of religious purity and moral absolutes. The other side of

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 49
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 8.
the conversation soon put together an organization and a website and became the organization/conversation known as Emergent Village.

   Emergent Village has had a tumultuous history, which is probably to be expected considering that as an “organization” (it is now incorporated as a 501(c)3 in the US) it is less that 10 years old. The zenith in terms of influence and public visibility for this organization thus far was between the years 2003 and 2005, during which time the youth ministry organization Youth Specialties and publisher Zondervan funded 4 national “Emergent” conventions, bringing together people who had been connecting with each other via internet for years. At the time, it may have seemed that Emergent was poised to become the next “big thing” for Christians in the US, maybe even a new denomination. However, the leaders consciously rejected that idea, and in fact several years later, in May 2009, made the final decision to abandon the idea of Emergent as an institution, dismissing their national coordinator (Tony Jones) and opting instead to remain merely as a “point of contact” for people interested in the Emergent conversation.

   Between 2004 and 2006, the main spokespeople of Emergent became more vocal and actively involved with enlarging the focus of the conversation from the American situation to the global situation, and from the focus on Christians to include those of other faiths. In 2005, Emergent leaders had their first meeting with representatives from Synagogue 3000, an organization of Jewish leaders who were of like mind in trying to push the religious dialogue in the US beyond the boundaries of right vs. left. As the

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32 Kelly Bean, Telephone interview by author, October 2, 2010.
33 Brian McLaren, Telephone interview by author, September 25, 2010.
primary spokespeople for the movement gained more recognition abroad and began to learn more about the religious and political situations in other countries, Emergent became self-consciously global in focus and developed a more radical social-justice orientation. The process was aided, no doubt, by the polarizing presidency of George W. Bush and the still-present cymbal-clanging of the Religious Right in America, who had been newly-emboldened by the events of September 11, 2001 and were beginning also to decry immigration policies in the US. The “us vs. them” fundamentalist mentality that the emerging conversation had begun in reaction to showed no signs of dissipating, and as the Religious Right became more vocal regarding Islam, Israel, and the treatment of immigrants in the US, the emerging church conversation became more radical in its approach to global matters of justice.

The four years between 2006 and the present day is the time when the possibility of “Emergent” being a true bureaucratic organization began to fade, but is also the period of time in which the connections that had been growing between people in Emergent and certain Christians in Africa (and all over the world) began to develop into something concrete. Issues involving global economic dynamics and justice for the poor began to take center-stage in their discussions, rather than the theology or church practice as had been the case. McLaren notes that his book *Everything Must Change*, published in 2007, was the culmination of his own pilgrimage from disillusionment with church, to pragmatics of church, to theology, to interpretation of Scripture, and finally to the call to

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36 Ibid., 17.
37 Ibid., 17.
live in a way that honors justice as found in Christian scripture.\textsuperscript{38} As McLaren argues, “Christians living under the aegis of a global capitalist system... need to take seriously, in both their reflection and their action, God’s call to the power-holders to do justice.”\textsuperscript{39}

Prominent members of the Emergent conversation had become aware of their privileged economic and cultural position in the world and were spreading their message. The awareness of “the other” was the necessary ingredient to sustain a movement that may have become stagnant with the loss of its institutional funding and to aid its progress from an American-church-focused movement to a globally-aware and globally-functioning conversation. Several prominent Emergent writers have argued that their own theology \textit{and} practice of the Christian faith has been irrevocably and positively influenced by their relationships with those abroad.\textsuperscript{40}

The decision of Emergent to be a conversation or network and not a bureaucratic organization was made intentionally. Currently, Emergent has seven board members and serves as a “network hub” for the emerging church conversation in America. They host a yearly national “theological conversation” to which one or several prominent theologians are invited to lecture and lead discussions, as well as several smaller gatherings throughout the year. They also keep record of “emergent cohorts,” which are small, local gatherings (usually in restaurants or bars) of people interested in meeting with others who are part of “the conversation,” although they do not take an active role in starting or

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 18. \\
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 28. \\
\textsuperscript{40} As expressed during interviews by author of Kelley Johnson, Brian McLaren, and Kelly Bean.
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ensuring the continuation of these cohorts,\textsuperscript{41} which indicates that apparently, the commitment to non-hierarchal leadership that the emerging church has typically espoused appears to also be alive and well in Emergent.\textsuperscript{42} The Board of Directors is comprised of four men and three women; five white, one Latino, and one African-American, which speaks for the desire of the organization to be inclusive (but also of its roots as a white, evangelical phenomenon.) They have an email list and a publishing partnership with Baker Books, a blog where various people are invited to submit content, a podcast, and a map and contact information for emergent cohorts all over the world. The website lists four “practices” of the conversation: commitment to God in the way of Jesus (doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with God); commitment to the Church in all of its forms (every form of church has strengths and weaknesses, and they affirm both church renewal and church planting); commitment to God’s world (the belief that we are blessed in order to be a blessing); and commitment to one another (to identify oneself as a member of the “growing, global, generative and non-exclusive” Emergent friendship.)\textsuperscript{43} The Emergent conversation has spawned several other “-mergent” conversations representing different strains of faith and denominations, such as Anglimergent, Baptimergent, Cathlimergent, Presbymergent, Emerging Pentecostal, Mormorgent, and

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\footnote{41}{Emergent Village, “Cohorts,” Emergent Village. \url{www.emergentvillage.com/cohorts/} [accessed October 10, 2010].}
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others. Phyllis Tickle describes the current situation as being one in which the members of the emerging conversation come from all quadrants of American religious life, but no longer fully inhabits any of them. Tickle goes on to claim that by definition, Emergent is a conversation, a non-hierarchical, global, egalitarian network in which no one has the whole truth, and argues that it must remain that way or it would cease to be.

As we leave our discussion of Emergent as a movement of deprivatization in response to secularization and fundamentalism and move our discussion to its sister movement, Amahoro, it seems fitting to close with a decisively non-privatized, non-exclusive description of the Christian faith from the perspective of Emergent, from McLaren:

The Christian faith isn’t all about getting into heaven. It isn’t all about the church. It isn’t all about the individual spiritual life or “personal relationship with God.” It is about all of these things, but they aren’t the whole point, or even the main point... it is about God’s Kingdom coming to earth, and it is about God’s will being done on earth as it is heaven.

AMAHORO

Amahoro is not an exact African equivalent of the US-based Emergent for many reasons, although those involved in the emerging church conversation on both continents would likely characterize it as yet another manifestation of the mindset or spirit that inspired the birth of Emergent and is incarnating across the world. Indeed, it does have many similarities to Emergent, including utilizing some of the same key people. We

45 Tickle, The Great Emergence, 148.
46 Ibid., 152.
have seen that Emergent was spawned as a double-reaction to secularization/privatization and fundamentalism in the US. Amahoro is also its own kind of double-reaction to certain trends in African religion. All of those interviewed in Amahoro cited two specific trends that necessitated the formation of Amahoro: the so-called “gospel of evacuation” and the more widely documented “prosperity gospel” that is thriving in Africa. To understand what is meant by these two terms, it is necessary to look briefly at the history of Christianity in Africa.

Christianity is, of course, an imported religion in Africa, brought over by colonial powers and their missionaries beginning as early as the 15th century. The Christianization and colonization of Africa went hand-in-hand with missionaries who typically received support and protection from colonial administrators.49 The early 19th century brought a missionary scramble to Africa that involved all major Christian denominations in Europe and America, and so by the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity was well-established in most of Africa.50

The cultures and countries of Africa never experienced the effects of the European Enlightenment in the same way that Western cultures did, so to say that the society was in the process of Western-style “secularizing” in any sense of the word would be disingenuous.51 Africa was never in danger of becoming a “disenchanted” continent. However, with the fall of colonization in Africa came a suspicion on the part of scholars that Africa would soon liberate itself from religion, in part because of the modernization

50 Ibid., 311.
that some expected to take place (bringing secularization) but mainly because

Christianity was seen as a symbol of imperialism, as a relic of the European powers that dominated the continent. In a statement issued by self-described Third World theologians convening in 1976, this perspective was articulated as follows:

Missionaries who left their countries to propagate the faith in the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America were persons generally dedicated to the spiritual welfare of humanity... All the same the missionaries could not avoid the historical ambiguities of their situation. Oftentimes and in most countries they went hand in hand with the colonizers—both traders and soldiers...

And they continue with a scathing critique of the role of the church in the colonial project:

In the early phases of western expansion the churches were allies in the colonization process. They spread under the aegis of colonial powers; they benefited from the expansion of empire. In return they rendered a special service to western imperialism by legitimizing it and accustoming their new adherents to accept compensatory expectations of an eternal reward for terrestrial misfortunes, including colonial exploitation.

Although the cultures of Africa were never seen to be secularizing in the same way that Western cultures were, the critique offered by these theologians demonstrates that they had been taught an inherently privatized religion by their colonizers, one that focused on the rewards of heaven and not necessarily on improving one’s situation in this life. This is not a modern, industrialized-society-inspired privatization as Westerners

54 Ibid., 266.
55 This does not imply that the populations of Africa willingly submitted to the religious sensibilities of the colonizers, as the many instances of African resistance prove. Here I
have experienced it, but is instead a theologically-founded kind of privatization, with roots in Christianity’s history on the continent as the religion of the colonizers. Paul Gifford points out that while Western Christianity has elevated philosophical and theological expression to highest prominence, these approaches are not as central in African religion. Power structures do affect the nature of a religion as it is transmitted from colonizers to the colonized, and the power was in the hands of the Western colonizers. And, as Gifford and the theologians in Dar Es Salaam articulate, the theological emphasis in the religion that was brought to Africa was on the joys of the “next life” as a compensation for misery in this one. This is the “gospel of evacuation” that the leaders from Amahoro speak against as they explain the need for their organization. As Sean Callaghan, one of the founders of Amahoro, described it,

The primary focus of the [established] church is evangelism in order to get people to assert belief in Jesus. The rest of their lives on earth are then taken up with avoiding certain practices (sex, alcohol, etc) and with getting as many others saved as possible, thus, the gospel is about getting into heaven... in that sense, there is much information on the evacuation gospel – but no one will call it that. They call it Christianity. 57

Whether this “theology of evacuation” is the primary cause of the decline in attendance in the mainline churches in Africa is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that the mainline churches in Africa have been facing challenges, not unlike their American counter-parts. In the 1980s, there was a huge proliferation of many types of churches in Africa, but the mainline churches are still struggling to attract new

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56 Gifford, *African Christianity*, 26
57 Sean Callaghan, email interview by author, October 5, 2010.
members.⁵⁸ These were the churches established by missionaries prior to decolonization, and so these are the churches that held the power in Africa – not unlike how the mainline Protestant denominations were at one time the dominant religion in America, before the advent of the Religious Right.

The Religious Right of American politics and religion does not have a direct corollary in the African context. As discussed previously, the Religious Right can be seen as a fundamentalist movement that came to prominence in American politics; however, in Africa, “fundamentalist” is not a helpful category. Depending on whose article one is reading, either all of African Christianity is fundamentalist because most religious groups subscribe to the idea of biblical inerrancy,⁵⁹ or there are no fundamentalist groups in Africa because the political issues that fundamentalists fight for in Africa—namely, opposition to abortion and gay rights, the subordination of women and the welfare system, among others—are non-issues in African politics because governments do not support abortion or gay rights, women are subordinate, and welfare systems are generally inadequate already.⁶⁰ Despite the divergence of the specifics of these viewpoints, however, most scholars do seem to agree that the Western category of “fundamentalist” does not function well in an African context.

If the Religious Right was one of the first (and now dominant) responses to the privatization of religion in America, then the primary response to the colonizer-based privatization of religion in Africa is the meteoric growth of the phenomenon known most

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⁶⁰ Gifford, African Christianity, 43.
commonly as the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel as it is known today entered the African mainstream in the mid-1970s, when American televangelists first began to explore the African “market” for their message. The movement took on a life of its own in the 1980s, when churches spreading this message began to grow exponentially. The message churches who espouse the prosperity gospel have varying emphases, but the main message to the individual attending is that through faith and financial sacrifice, God will bring financial and material blessings to that individual. The promises of material blessings are coherent with traditional African religion (which has historically been concerned with the issues of the here and now,) and stands in great contrast with the “theology of evacuation” of colonial African churches. As J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, a Ghanian theologian, notes, “For Africans, viable religion has always meant that which leads to power, strength, vitality and abundance. But the New Pentecostal Churches aggressively pursue what can only be called North American levels of materialism...”

The complementary nature of the Prosperity movement with traditional African spirituality, that is, their common emphasis on “this world,” is one of the reasons for its rapid growth and success in Africa. Another is the economic climate and widespread poverty in Africa, in which the prosperity gospel offers a message of hope to its victims. Another, perhaps positive cause, (which is quite necessary to mention because there is a good deal of hand-wringing over the spread of the prosperity message in

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63 Ibid, 40.
Africa) for the popularity of this movement is that in some respects, it offers an alternative form of power for its adherents. As Gifford argues, the emphasis in these churches is often on motivation and entrepreneurship, and that those who have been blessed or saved can believe that victory is their God-ordained right. The importance in these churches, according to Gifford, oscillates between personal motivation and miraculous intervention, depending on which preacher one hears. He recalls the following story:

I remember listening to a sermon broadcast in Ghana. My wife, who heard the sermon with me, observed at the end, “Did you notice that Jesus wasn’t mentioned once in that sermon, but Bill Gates was twice?” I hadn’t noticed, because in this sector of Christianity that omission is unremarkable.

The prosperity gospel, then, can be seen as coming into a culture in which the dominant religious theme was one of privatization, even if the privatization did not look the same as it did in a Western context, and was an effective force in deprivatizing the religion. The gospel of evacuation, the message that one should simply endure until heaven and not become involved in the affairs of this world, spawned the reaction of the gospel of prosperity in which needed material blessings can be immediate and life-changing. In short, the “God of Distant Heaven” became the “God of Earth, Now.” Indeed, most of the pastors or “prophets” of the prosperity movement have rags-to-riches stories to tell their congregations, with the message of “if it worked for me, it can work for you.” However, far from being a model of democracy in which all are brothers and sisters, Gifford notes, these churches are increasingly becoming “personal fiefdoms” in

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67 Ibid., 22.
which the central leader becomes rich at the expense of his tithing congregation.⁶⁹ In fact, a whole new class of religious professionals has arisen, as the church is increasingly seen as a good way to make one’s living.⁷⁰

A final, macro-level reason for the growth of these churches may be that in some ways, the prosperity churches are actually a viable way for Africa to opt-in to the global economic system that it is so often excluded from.⁷¹ The growth of African Christianity has always been tied to relationships with the wider world, but in the 1990s these financial networks became bigger and more important than ever.⁷² Ideas, power, status and resources flow in from Western denominations and agencies. Size and expansion are seen as measures of the vibrancy of a church, as can be seen in the names of so many of them, which frequently include the words “Global,” “World,” or “International.”⁷³ In addition, favor in the eyes of consular officers is increasingly listed as one of the blessings that God will bestow on followers in Prosperity-flavored churches, as securing overseas employment is one of the best ways for an African to secure wealth.⁷⁴ The gospel of prosperity, then, is also idealizing a kind of evacuation: the evacuation of the blessed from Africa.

It was from these dominant religious cultures (and it should be noted, this has been a generalized description of some religious trends in Africa—not all of African Christianity can be divided neatly, or at all, into these two groups) that Amahoro-Africa emerged. As was the case for the gospel of evacuation and the prosperity gospel,

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⁷² Ibid., 308-312.
⁷⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, “Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?” 41.
Amahoro is itself a product of globalization. Its founder, Claude Nikondeha, is a Burundian man who attended higher education in France and later married an American woman who became very active in his work in Africa, Kelley Johnson. The current Board Chair, Sean Callaghan, is a white South African who now lives in London. Amahoro was conceived, formed, and now led, then, by two Western-educated African men and an American woman who wanted to find a different way, or the third option, for Christianity in Africa. Callaghan explains that

...our Western educated backgrounds were not primary—much more primary was our African roots. This could not have been done by an American or European—it had to be done from within. I guess what our Western education brought with it was a theological framework that helped us to be a bridge for that framework into the African context.  

The Africa-centered ethos of Amahoro’s founders is complicated somewhat by the very origins of the organization. Nikondeha felt compelled to work in his native Burundi to resource Christian leaders there in some aspect, but was unable to find a method that fit his vision. In what is described as a “last-ditch effort” to ascertain if there was any way to become involved in helping the work of the church in Burundi, Nikondeha and Callaghan, who had only heard of each other through Brian McLaren, met each other to tour African cities together and gather information about the activities of Christians who were unaffiliated with organized churches. Johnson described the process in the following way,

Each city they would go to, they’d find a pastor of some mainline church, and ask, “Who are your craziest people? Who is doing something that is on the fringe?” The first person they ended up meeting was a woman in Napali [Ghana] who had moved to the red light district to start a church for prostitutes. They found people who were operating outside of traditional church structures, people who weren’t

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75 Sean Callaghan, email interview by author, October 5, 2010.
76 Kelley Johnson, telephone interview by author, October 10, 2010.
sanctioned, who weren’t waiting for permission from the church, weren’t waiting until someone gave them money... They didn’t see any transformation from within the churches, or any passion to address actual injustice, so he wanted to see what was happening on the fringe, if there was any life there.\textsuperscript{77}

Nikondeha saw a need for creating a network that would connect all of the leaders who were operating on their own, ideally so that they could provide friendship and support to one another, and possibly have an infrastructure that could support any problems that might arise.\textsuperscript{78} This desire led to the first Amahoro-Africa gathering in 2007 which took place in Mokona, Uganda. The gathering consisted of approximately 130 Africans from various countries (mainly East and South Africa) and 40 Westerners, primarily from the US and Western Europe, although there were attendees from other countries as well: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, and Eastern Orthodox were all represented. The purpose of inviting the Westerners (who were in large part from the Emergent network of leaders) as Johnson described it, was not only financially to subsidize the travel of the African attendees (Westerners were all made aware that they were charged more than their African counterparts because the Africans traveled/attended for free) but also to create a space where African leaders could share their stories and have Westerners listen. Western attendees were invited as listeners, not as speakers, and as guests who were given private group tours of churches in the areas surrounding Mokona. The purpose of the small group learning tours was to help foster true friendships between African and Western leaders who were both practicing ministry “on the fringe,” as Johnson described. The idea, she went on to explain, was that

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., October 10, 2010.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., October 10, 2010.
Westerners might provide a valid theological framework for what the practitioners were doing, and the Westerners might be inspired to see people who were doing it. They might have their imaginations activated; they might get out of the classroom and get their hands dirty... We also wanted to help the Africans unlearn the prosperity gospel, and help the Westerners un-learn giving money as the primary way to do justice work, through friendship.\textsuperscript{79}

Johnson lamented that despite the passion expressed at the gatherings, the prosperity gospel is so prevalent in Africa that at the 2010 gathering, one African participant shared that he would be going to see Benny Hinn directly after the conference was over. However, these gatherings, as shall be covered later, have had at least one success story in terms of fostering justice-oriented, trans-Atlantic approaches to ministry.

However globalized the beginning of Amahoro was, there is no doubt that at present time its leaders are seeking to place the roots directly in African soil. While incorporated in the US as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization with a Board consisting of Americans, Johnson describes its more functional, yet less official, board as a “global board” that is comprised of seven Africans and three North Americans (four women, six men) each of whom bring their connections and experience to shape the future of Amahoro. The Westerners are there, Johnson explained, primarily as listeners. While their input is often helpful, everyone understands that it is the African voices that lead the direction of Amahoro. She clarified, “There will always be Western input and presence in the Amahoro structure. Those genuine partnerships are part of the Amahoro DNA... but we do envision greater African leadership offered by Africans who know their context best.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., October 10, 2010.
\textsuperscript{80} Kelley Johnson, email interview by author, October 12, 2010.
Amahoro is committed, as Emergent is, to remaining a network and not becoming an institution or yet another NGO operating in Africa. Nikondeha envisions enough structure to host the conversations that are needed between leaders, but not enough structure that would stifle the relational aspects of the network. Currently, Amahoro hosts an annual gathering, to which Westerners are invited (the most recent gathering was the first one in which Africans were required to pay their own way, and the first in which Africans were at times funding the travel of other Africans.) At these gatherings, a prominent African theologian is invited to address the group, and sessions are held for discussing and networking amongst the attendees. The most recent theologian to address the group at the gathering in 2010 was Emmanuel Katongole, a Ugandan professor of theology at Duke University and Catholic priest. Attendance at these gatherings is by invitation only. Johnson shared that at the most recent gathering, there were some leaders who were not invited back, specifically, leaders who were unable to see the gathering as anything else but a place to either ask for money for their projects or, on the part of Westerners, as a place to “explain” to Africans instead of listen. The kind of conversation that should be happening amongst the attendees is determined, in part, by those who are invited to attend. This is how Amahoro attempts to keep the focus on intentionally egalitarian friendships.

Other functions throughout the year include regional cohorts where practitioners of the Amahoro ethos may meet to resource one another and share struggles and concerns and an annual theological intensive for a small group of African Amahoro leaders, in which a theologian addresses the group and leads discussions based on what was shared.

81 Ibid., October 12, 2010.
Amahoro may be seen as a globalized network from its founding while Emergent was a local, US-based network that grew into a globalized network. Both network-organizations, as I have argued, were formed in reaction to dynamics created by globalization in their respective societies. As we move forward, the questions are: to what extent are globalization dynamics fostering or impeding the goals of these networks as they develop, and what might the future hold for these organizations and the traditions they come from, since the world shows no sign of de-globalizing at any point in the near future? One way to gain perspective on these issues is to examine a specific example of what has taken place between these two organizations in recent years, and so, I will now examine the non-profit entity Friends of Steven.

From theory to practice: Friends of Steven

If Amahoro gatherings are held with the hope that Africans and North Americans will naturally form bonds and begin to resource one another—and Emergent has become an internationally-minded organization due to the effects of justice-minded readings of Christian scriptures—one naturally may ask if any of these efforts on part of the spokespersons and organizers have born fruit. Despite Johnson’s admission that not everyone who attends the gathering is influenced to work in the network-based, egalitarian friendships that the organization espouses, there are certainly success stories to be told. The example that will be covered here is the organization initially called “Friends of Steven,” renamed “African Road” in September 2010 in light of its legitimization as a 501(c)(3) organization in the US.

African Road was born out of friendships that were established in the first Amahoro gathering in 2007. On one of the excursions of that gathering into the
surrounding area to meet leaders in their contexts, Lori Martin, an American attendee, described meeting Steven Turikunkiko, a Rwandan genocide survivor who had taken it upon himself to adopt children from the streets:

I met Steven Turikunkiko, and along with several other Amahoroites, clicked with him. His heart and dedication moved us, as well as his long-term commitment to his community despite his own poverty. Those of us who went home to our middle class lives formed a group called "Friends of Steven" to raise money and support his projects: adopting orphans into his home, a village for many more orphans to support each other, and a cooperative for widows. We have maintained our close friendship with Steven, some of us going to visit now and then. We have sent regular financial support, helped the women start up a tailoring business by providing sewing machines, lessons, and supplies, and met emergency needs like hospitalization. 82

Friends of Steven developed into an organization in late 2007 when a few of the people who had been on the tour in Kigali, Rwanda, came back to their homes and decided that the relationship must continue. The organization now has five board members (four Americans and one South African; four female, one male) and has made inroads into creating sustainable structures for Turikunkiko’s work with orphans and looks to diversify into helping other emerging African leaders as well. While providing funding for basic needs (such as two meals a day for the children, shelter, clothing, and emergency medical supplies) is certainly among their priorities, Kelly Bean, the executive director, insists that network building and training, not funding, is the primary focus of the relationship. She described,

It’s not primarily about getting funding – he [Steven] needs a broader support network of relationships in the West and also on the ground in Africa. I help cultivate these friendships by telling others the good story of the work he is doing with orphans and widows. One of the things I’ve been doing each trip to Africa is meeting with Rwandans who do leadership training to help leaders work more collaboratively. As a friend, I am coming alongside Steven to help with as he moves from a model of working as a survivalist, to another-building for long

82 Lori Martin, email interview with author, September 23, 2010.
term sustainability. We can all use help to make big shifts in our mindset. Steven has a compelling story and is doing compelling work, but he is not a self promoter or highly educated man. Often African pastors who have achieved a level of success have been educated in the West or have a gift for PR. But that’s not who Steven is- he has a gift for pastoring and caring for very poor communities. He understands these people and they trust him. In some ways I am simply his PR person, helping to share the story as he puts a plan in place that is essentially a Rwandan effort.83

Bean and Martin (Martin now serves as a full-time, unpaid administrator for African Road) were both involved in the Emergent project in its early stages. In 2002, Martin left “organized church” in search of a different expression of spirituality, although she was a member of the church where Brian McLaren served as pastor for many years.84 Bean was involved heavily in all of the Emergent conferences, also founding an organization specifically dedicated to connecting women in the emerging church network.85 She currently leads a self-described neo-monastic community with her husband, Ken, near Portland, OR, in which the children of the community have also become involved with Turikunkiko’s work in Rwanda and have been saving their own money to travel to Rwanda to meet their “pen pals” in the next few years.86 “We do a lot of thinking about what it takes to friend and be befriended by people from a different culture in a way that is empowering to both,” explained Bean.87

While Bean does maintain a relationship with Emergent, Martin is no longer directly engaged with the organization. Bean described the process of the early days of Emergent as a “college classroom,” in which students learned about what, why and how things should be done. However, this was a place that should to be left in order that real-

83 Kelly Bean, Telephone interview by author, October 2, 2010.
84 Lori Martin, Email interview with author, September 23, 2010.
85 Kelly Bean, Telephone interview by author, October 2, 2010.
86 Ibid., October 2, 2010.
87 Ibid., October 2, 2010.
world practice could take place. As for Amahoro, neither Bean nor Martin has been back to a gathering since 2007, but Bean expressed that she intended to go to the next one, because “the relationships are just so important. The power of presence is indigenous to African thinking as well, and it is something that we as Westerners need to learn from.”

The Emergent and Amahoro networks have effectively spawned a new mini-network in African Road, one that is intertwined with the roots of both but has begun to grow in its own direction.

Conclusion

Emergent and Amahoro are both double-reactions to phenomena created by globalization. The privatization of religion was an initially predicted response on both continents as societies became more global, modernized, and de-colonized: In North America, it was assumed that religion would have a smaller and smaller place in public discourse as, among other factors, a scientific worldview permeated society; in Africa, it was assumed that the “religion of the colonizers” (which tended to teach a theology of a different kind of privatization) would fade into obscurity as Africans took hold of their governments and the colonial powers evacuated the various countries. In both contexts, the predictions proved false as deprivatization movements emerged, namely the Religious Right in the US and the prosperity gospel in Africa. Both the Religious Right and prosperity gospel movements sought to bring religion back to the center of culture, albeit in different ways. In the US, the goals of the movement were mainly political and cultural while in Africa the deprivatization was in the form of a religion that promised this-worldly rewards for strong faith and financial sacrifice, although as others have rightly

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88 Ibid., October 2, 2010.
argued, the emergence of prosperity-espousing movements has also had the effect of helping Africa to “opt-in” to the current global economy.

The rise of the Religious Right, however, with its emphasis on political power, has had societal homogenization as a goal in a much more profound way than can be claimed by the prosperity movement in Africa. If the Religious Right can be called at least a partial response to globalization, then it is a negative response in that it seeks to stop the process of the pluralization of American society and to homogenize the spirit of American Christianity and, indeed, America at large, if not the world. The prosperity gospel, for its part, does not seem to have a similar goal, which can be expected as the countries of Africa both never dealt directly with Enlightenment ideas about science and religion and have also been absorbing an influx of “immigrants,” namely, colonizers, for hundreds of years, far longer than the US. As several authors in this article have argued, the prosperity gospel is best seen as a response to a theology of disengagement that was not functioning for adherents in the traditional mission churches, to the despair of poverty, and as an alternative source of political and economic power for those who start the churches and those who embrace the motivational messages of perseverance and determination. Therefore, the prosperity movement is not a negative response to globalization in the same way that the Religious Right is, but is certainly its own kind of negative response in that it preaches a personal escape from the effects of globalization on Africa – whether from the poverty so prevalent in Africa or from Africa itself – to those who will have enough faith to sacrifice to its leaders. We must note, also, that the prosperity gospel both started and is still alive and well in the US through the works of Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes, and others. The prosperity movement is not unique to Africa.
It is also necessary to note that to portray the Religious Right as anti-global would be unfair. Indeed, as mentioned, the movement makes great use of technology that allows instantaneous worldwide communication, as is evidenced by the popularity of the TBN television network throughout Africa, among others.\textsuperscript{89} The homogenization project of the Religious Right clearly extends to Africa and beyond, as they seek to create their own networks and organizations of like-minded Christians. As Gifford argues, the situation of prosperity churches in Africa as one in which external links to international outsiders are more important than ever, as the huge buildings and sound systems for the mega-churches do not come without a price tag.\textsuperscript{90} Although these conservative evangelical organizations which finance church projects are often self-labeled as a “network of partners,” (Gifford cites the organization AD 2000 And Beyond as an example,) the key players are often Americans, and the ethos, that is, the stress on quantification, planning, publicity, reports and assessment, are clearly born from an American context.\textsuperscript{91}

In contrast to these two different and most publicly acknowledged forms of deprivatization, both the Emergent and Amahoro networks were double-reactions, formed directly against both the privatizing ethos that was first predicted (and experienced, to some degree, in each society) and the negative/escapist responses of the Religious Right and the prosperity gospel movement. Emergent and Amahoro, in different contexts, respond to globalization through direct theological, cultural, economic and occasionally political engagement (which has not been covered in this paper but has

\textsuperscript{90} Gifford, \textit{African Christianity}, 312.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 316.
been part of the history of Emergent.) The engagement is not one that seeks to escape or to fight the trends of globalized societies, but instead to dialogue with others in different cultures or religions with the goal of creating networks that would first transform the church and then the world, by addressing issues of injustice and oppression. Indeed, the movements are ones that reject both the secularization ideal that “religions don’t matter” and the fundamentalist response that “religious identity must be preserved at all costs.” As Lori Martin wrote about her work with Amahoro and African Road,

This level of community is made possible by globalization - I have friends on FB that can barely speak English and live in poverty in South Africa, Rwanda, Liberia, Burundi etc. Also, friends in the developed world in Australia, England, and all over the US. My "church" is global and committed to transforming the world.\(^{92}\)

For members of Amahoro and Emergent, the church looks different because it is non-hierarchical, instantly available (via internet), virtually personal (also via internet), thoroughly egalitarian and completely global. Members of these networks utilize the internet for virtually all of their communications\(^ {93}\) and are not unaware of the power that they have to go around larger organizations such as NGOs and religious denominational structures. For these practitioners, the freedom to work outside of traditional structures and make their own rules is part of the benefit. This ethos is not limited to Emergent/Amahoro networks, or even to religious networks, as foreign aid “do-it-yourself-ers” have been increasingly coming into public eye over the past few years.\(^ {94}\)

The internet has enabled many religious and non-religious people who wish to make a

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\(^{92}\) Lori Martin, email interview with author, September 23, 2010.

\(^{93}\) Kelly Bean, Telephone interview by author, October 2, 2010.

direct impact in the lives of others to do so. Furthermore, while the efforts of organizations such as African Road may seem so tiny as to be insignificant in the giant sea of need throughout the world, there is significant evidence that not only are these kind of organizations more effective (less overhead means more money going to those who need it) but also that people are more willing to donate to people in a one-on-one context.  

For all of their similarities, Emergent and Amahoro also have several important differences. First, Emergent is an organization that was founded by Americans, in America. While several key leaders describe learning about people engaging in similar thought and practice throughout the world at different times, Emergent as an organization is thoroughly Western and in fact, thoroughly American. It was only later in the life of Emergent that international relationships became important and central to its purpose (Emergent’s fourth “commitment,” that is, the commitment to one another, contains the clarifying sentence: “We identify ourselves as members of this growing, global, generative, and non-exclusive friendship.”)  

Amahoro, by contrast, was from its inception a global network – a network with primary African roots, certainly, but formed by people with close ties overseas to be an international bridge-builder that seeks to do its work in Africa not only by connecting Africans with each other but also with outsiders.

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Second, Emergent from its inception has had an interest in reviving the liturgical and artistic aspects of church life. This began of course as an endeavor within the Evangelical churches that were at first the center of Emergent, and so the emphasis has always been on more “high church,” traditional and contemplative elements that were seen as new and fresh by young Evangelicals raised in churches typical of the “free church” denominations or in mega-churches, both of which had adapted thoroughly modern liturgical styles. The relation of this liturgical emphasis in Emergent to the identity formation of young evangelicals is worthy of its own analysis, but for here it will suffice to only mention it as an aspect of Emergent that differs from Amahoro. For those involved in Amahoro, discussions about liturgy or church worship are moot. As Kelley Johnson described, “Africans don’t have any problem with worship. Even if we all come from different denominations in Amahoro, no one seems to have any problem just worshiping with others... it’s very high-energy.” While of course this a generalization, her comment expresses the point that the issues Africans in Amahoro were dealing with did not involve expressions of worship as it did for their American counterparts.

A third difference in the organizations involves how they have been perceived within their larger cultures. While Amahoro is of course younger than Emergent, still the amount of exposure the organization has received is much smaller. Emergent was brought to the public religious discourse initially through the success of Brian McLaren’s book, *A New Kind of Christian*, which led to a multitude of other publishing opportunities for those involved in the conversation. Later, McLaren would appear in Time Magazine, Larry King Live, and NPR, among other major media outlets. Emergent gained funding

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97 Kelley Johnson, email interview by author, October 12, 2010.
early on from publishers and even hosted several national conferences, to say nothing of the personal success that its key speakers found in addressing congregations and denominations throughout the world in the coming years. Amahoro has not had the same reception; neither Nikondeha, Johnson nor Callaghan have found the same level of fame or import within the church or their societies. Perhaps this can be blamed on the newness of the movement, but Brian McLaren also cites the comparative difficulty for Claude Nikondeha in terms of attracting the interest of a publisher: “As an American it is far easier for me to speak and be heard about justice issues... There is so much institutionalized racism that people like Claude have to work against.” 98 As a global movement, Amahoro to some extent depends on people in Emergent to get “airtime” in Africa and beyond.

Despite key differences, the most important and distinctive characteristic that Amahoro and Emergent share is a resistance to highly organized, institutional religion coupled with a strong desire to work with others across denominational, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and religious lines. Considering the important role that the internet has had in the foundation and sustenance of both networks, it is worth considering that what we see now in two small religious networks may be a glimpse of how religion functions in the coming generations. The “do-it-yourself, in community” ethos is one that embraces global networks (indeed, seeks to be as global as possible) but also holds the importance and power of individuals and local communities on equal ground. If the printing press changed not only society but also religion as it made copies of sacred texts available to all without the necessary intermediary of priests, the internet certainly has had a similar role

in religion as it connects people without the necessity of institutional organizations. The study of Amahoro and Emergent provides a glimpse of one possibility of that destiny, as the world continues to get smaller and the voices of both the disaffected and the disadvantaged are given space to tell their stories, share their resources and dream of a better, shared future together.


