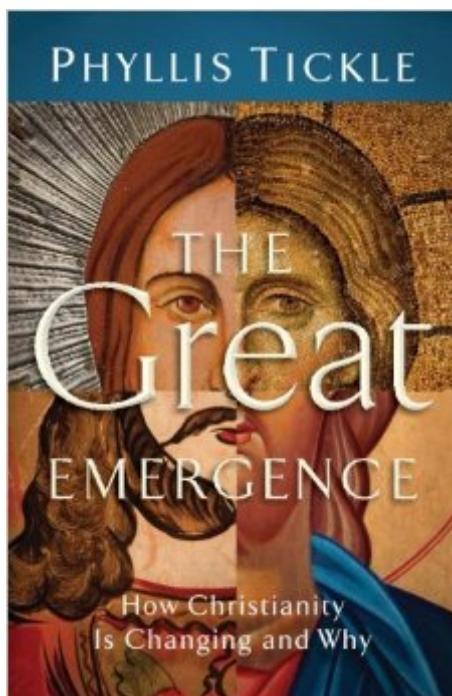


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# The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why



## **Synopsis**

Renowned religion expert Phyllis Tickle reflects on our pivotal time in Church history and describes an exciting path for the future.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Phyllis Tickle's newest book, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, arrived yesterday. At 172 pages, this small but elegant volume (aren't all Tickle's books elegant?) both informs and disappoints. Tickle takes on the daunting task of reviewing the major turning points or 'Great' events in the life of the Christian church. Her contention is that every 500 years or so the church goes through a 'great' transformation. Counting back from the present, the Great Reformation took place about 500 years ago -- 1517 to be exact. Prior to that, The Great Schism occurred when the Eastern and Western churches split over icons and statues. Five hundred years earlier, Gregory the Great blessed and encouraged the monastic orders which would preserve the Christian faith through the Dark Ages. Of course, 500 years before that, we're back in the first century and the time of the apostles. Today, Tickle contends, the church is in the throes of The Great Emergence. But, the Great Emergence is not just religious. It is also cultural, technological, and sociological. Of course, context shaped each of the other 'great' church transformations as well, and this time is no different. Tickle takes the reader on an overflight of church history, world events, and charts the shifts in the center of authority in the life of the church. In the Great Reformation, of course, the cry of authority was *sola scriptura* - only scripture. Tickle traces the diminution of the

authoritative place of scripture in culture and Christianity from its heady beginnings in the Reformation to its marginalization in the current postmodern era. The book provides thoughtful tracing of influential elements as Tickle leads the reader on a quest for a center of authority.

The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why. Phyllis Tickle. 176 pages. 2008. My wife picked this book up for at the library on a whim. It sat on the shelf for about a week before I picked it up and read it. The book is really divided into two sections. The first section is an excellent history of Christianity since about 500 AD. The history is brief, about 100 pages. The serious religious scholar will be disappointed because the focus is not on theological intricacies. The focus is on the general moves and its effects. Too often in seminaries the focus is narrowly theological and the wider context is lost. The author does a very good job of tracing out and extending the impact on society and society's reverse impact on theology. The strongest aspect here concerns the impact of sola scriptura and its reverberations. The context and effects was eye opening to me. I had not thought much of sola scriptura except in the theological bent I was trained in at seminary. The wider echoes are very thought provoking. Because the author is going through almost 2,000 years in 100 pages there are many omissions which some readers will get hung up on. The focus here is not the details and pet niches but rather a generalization ... a big picture view of movements. The focus is also not on theological intricacies. This lack of nit-picking though is a great strength of the book. The author traces various impacts of theology and society and the interplay in 500 year chunks. Sometimes these 500 year culminations make sense and a few of them seem contrived. The biggest contrivance is the current, "Great Emergence". The second part of the book is based on this notion of a Great Emergence.

It's no secret that change is in the air. The evidence is found throughout our culture, felt in our economy and experienced in technology. Some of us are struggling to keep up with these changes, as they come so fast and from so many directions. Nowhere is that more apparent than within the church. As many Christians are struggling to reconcile what they're seeing and experiencing with their faith, they are asking hard questions of what it all means and where we're headed. In the midst of so much change and the resulting angst, Phyllis Tickle offers a provocative look at where we are in history as people of faith in order to point to what's to come. As the founding editor of the Religion Department of Publishers Weekly and a respected authority on religion in America, she recently penned THE GREAT EMERGENCE: How Christianity is Changing and Why. The book offers an overview of church history in which she suggests that every 500 years, people of faith have a

rummage sale of sorts in which they reassess Christianity. She writes: "About every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutional Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur." Tickle is quick to point out that this emergence is not just religious but blends effortlessly into all aspects of society --- technological, cultural, scientific, even sociological. She points to shifts in church history, world history and technological breakthroughs as well as subtle but significant changes in the modern family to make her case.

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