

The tomb of the emergent Christian

By [David Williams](#)

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I'm a sentinel of sorts, now, standing vigil over one of the last markers of a movement that flickered and died.

After a brief conversation, Presbymergent shut down its Facebook presence many moons ago. As the remnant of folks left as admins all wanted to keep the page up as an archive of sorts, I volunteered to serve that end. For a page to exist, there has to be at least one admin, and so that's what I've become.

[I am the last Presbymergent on Facebook.](#)

Emergence was a thing, for a while, a decade ago. It rose out of two simultaneous threads.

In the oldline denominations, emergence was a reaction to the stultifying institutional inertia that can make denominational ministry such an awkward, lumbering, graceless thing. Be open to the new! Don't crush everything under the weight of bureaucratic anxiety management processes and protocols!

For those who'd been brought up in the corporate dynamics of the megachurch world, emergence was a reaction to the synthetic falseness of business-model Christianity. Be flexible! Be organic! Be less like a JeezMart, and more like a gathering of creative friends!

The spur to emergence in both of these milieu was the advent of new and dynamic media, which seemed to offer the promise of communities dynamically being amazing on the interwebs together. It had the potential to stir the oldlines to new life, and bring authenticity to the group speak of evangelicalese.

And it didn't work.

Just didn't take. The reasons were varied and complex. Emergent folk weren't really ... um ... how to put this ... "organizational" people. Efforts to fuse the ethos of generative entropy with articles of incorporation and denominational schtuff proved untenable. I know. I was on that committee.

That, and we manifested the counterintuitive tendency of anarchists to over-organize, creating such complex structures to ensure that every voice is heard that no decision can ever possibly be made.

There were other things.

There was a whole bunch of deconstruction, but not much construction or permission-giving to simply create together. As the winds tousled our hair, we talked about how to make a sail, and lamented the incompetence and abusiveness of other sail-makers, and dreamed about new ways to harness the wind.

But we did not, in all of that, get around to making a sail.

And so the energy dispersed, like winds uncaught.

What I find fascinating, honestly, is that people still come by on social media. For a while, folks would post stuff ... political links, self-serving links. Those, I deleted, and shut down unmoderated posting permissions.

Such is the task of a sentinel.

But other people still come and leave their "likes," expressing approval, one or so every week. I love those little moments.

It's like the roses and cognac, left by masked visitors on [Poe's grave](#), to honor what was. Or those leavings on [the grave of F. Scott and Zelda](#), little trinkets, wine and beads, tokens of respect.

Oh, this was a lovely thing, those likes seem to be saying. What it could have been...

So it goes, when you stand vigil at the grave of a movement.

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