Comments on a New York Times article titled “New Churches Focus on Building a Community Life: Building Congregations Around Art Galleries and Cafes as Spirituality Wanes,” accessed on 1/3/2013 at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/us/new-churches-focus-on-building-a-community-life.html .

If I had someone who could watch the church building enough hours to do it (which I don’t), I’d be in favor of opening our fellowship hall to Caney residents wanting free wireless internet access and maybe a little coffee (but not as a coffee shop), because it would help our church make contact with more people in Caney, and there is no free wireless hotspot in Caney so far as I’m aware. I agree to a certain extent with the article that it is important to build a Christian community within the church--bonds formed through corporate worship, mutual edification in Bible teaching and study, Christian fellowship, and mutual service, and corporate gospel witness (OPC FG II.4 http://opc.org/BCO/FG.html#Chapter_II). But I don’t mean I’m on board with what the churches in the article are doing. The article’s focus on the outward ways these churches are attempting to be “relevant” or otherwise pander to what unbelievers want other than the gospel leaves me with the sense that these churches, or at least the article’s author, cares more about these outward means than about the truly effectual means of grace--the word, sacraments, and prayer (WSC 88
http://opc.org/sc.html
), used in public, family, and private worship, in preaching, catechizing, counseling, visiting, witnessing, maintained under the presbyterian form of government, and with biblical discipline (as described in the OPC Book of Church Order
http://opc.org/order.html
). These latter means are essential to the true life of the church; buildings, instruments, and lighting are circumstantial (WCF 1.6
http://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_01
, OPC DPW I.B.6.b
http://opc.org/BCO/DPW.html#Chapter_I
); coffee shops, art galleries, and business incubators are good works for Christians and Christian communities, but are not “the work of the church” (OPC FG II.4
http://opc.org/BCO/FG.html#Chapter_II
).

Doug Pagitt is one of the thought-leaders of the Emergent Church movement, which DeYoung & Kluck's book “Why We’re Not Emergent (by Two Guys Who Should Be)” (http://www.amazon.com/Why-Were-Not-Emergent-Should/dp/0802458343
) rightly labels as a new liberal theology and ecclesiology. Its difference from classical liberal theology is that it is founded on postmodern, rather than modern, philosophy. Considering this connection, I believe it is appropriate to say that this NYT article attempts to portray American churches’ decline from 1) drawing people through spiritual worship through the means of grace,

to 2) megachurches' drawing people by means of the circumstances of worship, to 3) Emergent churches drawing people by that which is not worship and not the work of the church. While the article perhaps tries not to tip its hat too far toward praising or condemning the activities of Emergent churches, yet it sounds a note of condemnation softly by including the phrase "as Spirituality Wanes" in its subtitle.