

# The Emerging Church and Postmodern Mysticism

by Bob DeWaay  
Gospel of Grace Fellowship

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**Christianity Undefined**

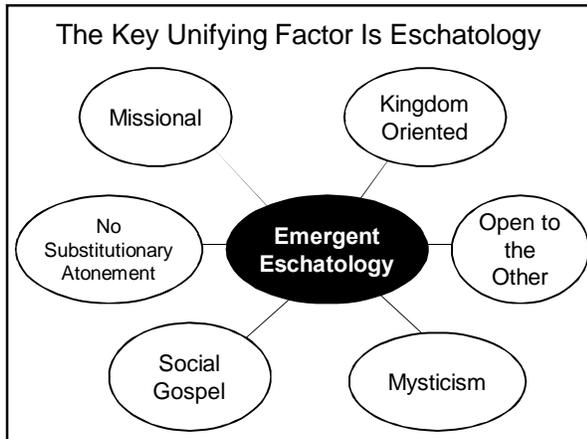
Originally presented by  
Bob DeWaay

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### The Emerging Church Rejects the Message of Coming Judgment

**Tony Jones:** "And if there's one core conviction I can put my finger on, it's an *eschatology of hope*. What I mean is that the folks who hang around the emerging church tend to see goodness and light in God's future, not darkness and gnashing of teeth."

(Jones and Pagitt, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* p.130)



### The Emerging Church Rejects the Message of Coming Judgment

- When Doug Pagitt was asked if he believed in God's future judgment of the world, he refused to answer and said judgment happens now in history
- Emergent Church leaders teach that the world will progressively become a better place because God is still creating it.

### Rob Bell on Heaven and Hell

"Heaven is full of forgiven people. Hell is full of forgiven people. Heaven is full of people God loves, whom Jesus died for. Hell is full of forgiven people God loves, whom Jesus died for. The difference is how we choose to live, which story we choose to live in, which version of reality we trust." + *Velvet Elvis* 146

### Rob Bell on Heaven and Hell

- "For Jesus, heaven and hell were present realities. Ways of living we can enter into here and now. . . . For Jesus, the question wasn't, how do I get into heaven? But how do I bring heaven here." + *Velvet Elvis* 147
- "There is this place, this realm, heaven, where things are as God desires them to be. As we live this way heaven comes here." + *Velvet Elvis* 147

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## Rob Bell: Heaven on Earth

- A Christian is not someone who expects to spend forever in heaven there. A Christian is someone who anticipates spending forever here, in a new heaven that comes to earth+ *Velvet Elvis* 150
- The goal isn't escaping this world but making this world the kind of place God can come to.+ *Velvet Elvis* 147

## The Emerging Church Naively Thinks The World Is Getting Better

Emergence theory incorporates into an intellectual and spiritual framework ancient and recent arguments of intelligent design . . . with certain aspects of evolution. . . . In this view, part of the goodness of Creation is an inherent potential to generate new possibilities so that more and more goodness can emerge+ (*The Language of the Emerging Church*, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 108, 109)

## Emergence Theory

Rob Bell: For a mind-blowing introduction to emergence theory and divine creativity, set aside three months and read Ken Wilber's "A Brief History of Everything" *Velvet Elvis* 192

Not only are we connected with creation, but creation is going to move forward. It can't help it. It is loaded with energy. It's going to grow and produce and change and morph+ *Velvet Elvis* 158

## Doug Pagitt on Re-creating the World

- God is constantly creating anew. And God also, invites us to be re-created and to join the work of God as co-(re)creators.+
- Imagine the Kingdom of God as the creative process of God reengaging in all that we know and experience.+
- When we employ creativity to make this world better, we participate with God in the re-creation of the world.+ (from *Church Re-Imagined*; 185)

## The Emergent World Is Supposedly Getting Closer to God; But Not Judgment

The end of entropy+--

In the postmodern matrix there is a good chance that the world will reverse its chronological polarity for us. Instead of being bound to the past by chains of cause and effect, we will feel ourselves being pulled into the future by the magnet of God's will, God's dream, God's desire.+

(*Language*, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 113)

## Emergent Prophets Declare: Peace, Peace+

This new vision sees the universe as only partially created, an unfinished symphony, a masterpiece in progress. In this eschatology we are invited to be part of God's creative team working to see God's dream for the universe come true . . . +

(*Language*, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 113)



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## Rejecting Judgment: The Imaginary Emergent World Is Being Recreated With Our Help

In this way our relationship with God is more than interactive; it is collaborative. It is more than just a matter of God interacting with us; it is a matter of God inviting us to be creative partners in the construction of a world as it could be from the world as it is so far.

(Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 113, 114)

## Rejecting Judgment: The Emergent World Is Drawn to an Imagined Better Place

In the new eschatology, modern charts, bizarre predictions. . . will be *left behind*. As people who are being pulled toward an all things new world to come, we bear the fresh scent of the approaching spring, not the stale cologne of the fading winter.

(Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 114)

## Emergent Hope Is Not the Blessed Hope

Tony Jones: And if there is one core conviction I can put my finger on, it is an *eschatology of hope*. What I mean is that the folks who hang around the emerging church tend to see goodness and light in God's future, not darkness and gnashing of teeth.

(Jones and Pagitt, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* 130)

## Emergent Hope Is Not the Blessed Hope

Tony Jones: The evangelical psyche has been shaped by Frank Peretti, Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Jenkins into thinking that it is not getting better and better, it is getting worse and worse. When things *down here* become bad enough, Jesus will return in glory. But those of us represented in this book take the contrary view. . . We are caught in a tractor beam of redemption and recreation.

(Jones and Pagitt, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* 130)

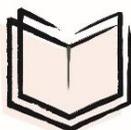
## The Traditional, Christian View Is That History Is Linear

- Begins with God's Act of Creation
- Ends With God's Act of Judgment

## Rejecting linear history: Emergent thinking asserts a new view that is a combination of linear and circular time: a helix.

In spiral dynamics, each level of the past remains curled up inside us . . . A spiraling faith is one of timelessness within time, one in which the past is embedded in the future.

(Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 143)



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## Defining the Undefined

The Emerging Church does not like to be defined, because definitions create boundaries and they do not like boundaries because boundaries would limit their practice and mission.

## Not a Message but a Mission

- The mission is chosen based on the needs and priorities of a given culture.
- The target culture, in America, is that of young postmoderns who reject organized religion and are looking for an authentic religious experience in a community setting.

## What the Emerging Church Means by Missional

One of the key features of the *Generous* orthodoxy, promoted in McLaren's book, is that practice must precede theology. This means, rather than going to a people group with a fixed set of theological beliefs about God, man, the world, Christ, salvation, justification, the Holy Spirit, and other important Biblical matters, one goes to the people first and finds a practice that fits their needs and priorities.

## Salvation in Emergent Thinking

I am a Christian because I believe that, in all these ways, Jesus is saving the world. By ~~the~~ world ~~of~~ mean planet Earth and all life on it, because left to ourselves, un-judged, unforgiven, and un-taught, we will certainly destroy this planet and its residents. And by ~~the~~ world ~~of~~ specifically mean human history, because again, it was and is in danger, grave danger, ultimate danger, self-imposed danger, and I don't believe anyone else can rescue it.

(McLaren, *Generous* 97)

## In Emergent Thinking, One's Mission Determines One's Theology

- Theology is the church on a mission reflecting on its message, its identity, its meaning.
- (McLaren, *Generous* 105)
- But How do we know what the church is?
  - But How do we know what the Mission is?

## The Mission: Liberation Theology

Oppressed people would be free. Poor people would be liberated from poverty. Minorities would be treated with respect. Sinners would be loved, not resented. Industrialists would realize that God cares for sparrows and wildflowers- so their industries should respect, not rape, the environment. . . . The kingdom of God would come- not everywhere at once, not suddenly, but gradually, like a seed growing in a field, like yeast spreading in a lump of bread dough, like light spreading across the sky at dawn.

(McLaren, *Generous* 111)



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## The Missionally Determined Message

- The idea that the Christian message is universally good news for Christians and non-Christians alike is, to some, unheard of, strange, and perhaps heretical. To me, it has become natural and obvious. (McLaren, *Generous* 110)
- For many pastors, statements of faith set the boundaries for the sermon. The problem is that statements of faith usually serve to keep people away from the church more than they draw them in. (Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, 132)

## Emergent Boundaries: Contradictory and Paradoxical

So what is a church to hold if it isn't a classic statement of faith? I suggest holding to all the church has held to throughout its history. If a belief is in harmony with historical Christianity, then it should be seen as a valid position. **This means people will often hold contradictory positions, but this is a good thing.** (Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined*; 133)

## Rejection of Systematic Theology

At the heart of the theological project in the late modern world was the assumption that one could and should reduce all revealed truth into propositions and organize those propositions into an outline. (McLaren, *Generous*, 152)

## Rejection of Systematic Theology

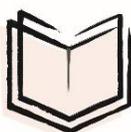
- Barth anticipated the day when the common sort of systematic theology would become a historical artifact. Prose abstractions just don't contain or convey God's truth as well as we thought they did. (McLaren, *Generous* 152)
- We think the job of the preacher is to make truth claims that secure the beliefs people already have or to present truth claims to non-truth holders so they will accept them, we have a problem. (Pagitt, *preaching*, 137)

## Deconstruction and Re-imagining

The implications of deconstruction are staggering for Christians doing ministry in the emerging culture. . . By driving for the one true interpretation, for example, they disenfranchise postmodern reader for whom deconstruction is as much the mother tongue as traditional interpretation is for modern people. (Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 89)

## Deconstruction and Re-imagining

Readers will probably learn more about deconstruction through a single thoughtful viewing of the movies *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show* than through re-reading this entry a hundred times. (Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 90)



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## Re-imagining; Not Propositional Revelation

This full, radiant, glorious experience of God in Jesus Christ eventually revolutionized the whole concept of God, so that the word *God* itself was reimagined through the experience of encountering Jesus, seeing him act, hearing him speak, watching him relate, and reflecting on his whole career. (McLaren, *Generous*, 73)

## Re-imagining God and the World Based on Personal Preference

Think of the kind of universe you would expect if *God A* created it: a universe of dominance, control, limitation, submission, uniformity, coercion. Think of the kind of universe you would expect if *God B* created it: a universe of interdependence, relationship, possibility, responsibility, becoming, novelty, mutuality, freedom. I find myself in universe B getting to know *God B*. (McLaren, *Generous*, 76)

## Perpetual Doubt . Rejecting the Reformation View of Scripture

How do I know the Bible is always right? And if I am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation, I also ask how I know which school, method, or technique of biblical interpretation is right. . . .

(McLaren, *Generous*, 133)

## Perpetual Doubt . Rejecting the Reformation View of Scripture

What makes a good interpretation good? And if an appeal is made to a written standard (book, doctrinal statement, etc.) or to common sense or to scholarly principles of interpretation, the same pesky I who liberated us from the authority of the church will ask, Who sets the standard? . . .

(McLaren, *Generous*, 133)

## Perpetual Doubt . Rejecting the Reformation View of Scripture

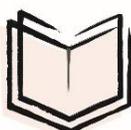
Whose common sense? Which scholars and why? Don't all these appeals to authorities and principles outside the Bible actually undermine the claim of ultimate biblical authority? Aren't they just the new pope?+

(McLaren, *Generous*, 133)

## Emergent Thinking Loathes the Propositional

"The purpose of Scripture is to equip God's People for good works. Shouldn't a simple statement like this be far more important than statements with words foreign to the Bible's vocabulary about itself (inerrant, authoritative, literal, revelatory, objective, absolute, propositional, etc)?+

(McLaren, *Generous*, 165)



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## Religious Symbols, Stories, Mystical Experiences, Icons, etc. Replace Proclamation of Truth

Do not go abductive, get rid of your inductive/deductive outlines and points and make your sermons pointless!...Instead of asking yourself before creating a sermon "What is my point?" ask yourself, "What is my image?"

(Language, Sweet, McLaren, Haselmayer, 31, 32)

## We Were Warned About This

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. . . . holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:1, 5, 7)

## The False Peace of the Emergent Church

- They are clinging to the false hope that God is still creating and that with our help the world is going to solve its problems
- This is like going to the dentist with an abscessed tooth, getting a shot of Novocain, and going home happy because the pain is gone.

## Conclusion: Distinguishing Description from Prescription

The whole Emerging Church Movement is predicated on the idea that relativistic, postmodern young people cannot be expected to embrace the gospel in terms of it being an absolute truth claim. Therefore it, they say, it cannot be presented that way.

## Conclusion: Distinguishing Description From Prescription

- That many people in our culture are relativistic is descriptively true.
- It does not follow, however, that the gospel or Christianity must be changed to make it attractive to such people.

## The Gospel Is the Same for All

- Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

