

The Real Roots of the Emergent Church Documentary

by Elliott Nesch

Elliott Nesch explores the complexities and implications of the emergent church movement in contemporary Christianity.

Duration: 2:01:45

Scripture: Isaiah 43:19, Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Colossians 2:8, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 4:1, Jude 1:3-4

Topics: "Emergent Church", "Post Modern Theology"

Description

This sermon discusses the concept of the emergent church, likening it to the emergent growth in forestry or agriculture, symbolizing a small beginning with potential for significant growth. It explores the emergence of a new breed of churches challenging traditional approaches and addressing cultural conflicts. The sermon delves into interpretations of hell, emphasizing disconnection from God over eternal damnation, and questions the exclusivity of heaven. It also touches on the dangers of post-modern thinking and the need to defend the foundational faith amidst evolving ideologies.

Transcript

The word emergent, the part of it that I liked most was that it's used in forestry, where it's the emergent growth or in agriculture, it's the pre-emergent growth. It's the growth that's just down right at the surface and it's just broken through and it's small. So we said, what we are is like this small little thing that's just broken through.

But down the road, this very well could, this growth will grow up and will become the tree tops. Churches are always looking for novel approaches to bring young people into the fold. But a brand new breed of church is pushing the envelope in a whole new way.

The emergent church, a loosely connected group of Christian churches rebelling against the cultural war going on in this country when it comes to religion. It's a confession that while I'm a Christian, church planting, Jesus loving, evangelizing kind of Christian, I have a problem. One that's only gotten worse, frankly, in my years of being a Christian.

And that is that I just don't believe in Christianity anymore. So the emerging church to me seems to be the implication or the play out or the ramifications of emergence happening inside the church. But one of the movement's leaders says, together as a whole, this new generation of churches has the power to change the way Christianity is practiced.

I look at us as an R&D department of people who are trying to innovate and experiment, make a lot of mistakes, I'm sure, but hopefully we'll discover things that can serve the church at large and be of use to the church. Solomon's Porch is an emerging church that began six years ago in Minneapolis. Its pastor, Doug Padgett, was one of the early emergent leaders.

The church meets in the round and has couches and recliners instead of pews. The setting resembles a coffeehouse more than a church. Take one.

I don't know if you've seen one of these Jesus bobbleheads, but Jesus is becoming pretty popular out there in our culture and world, kind of as an icon today. Notions and ideas of this grand emergence that's happening in culture, that there's a great cultural shift that's going on, probably developing over the last 500 years, that that kind of shift has ramifications in ecclesiological structures or what would churches look like. The emerging church is a place of conversation and dialogue and movement.

Where that's going to go, we don't know. We're figuring this out together. We don't have an agenda of what it looks like at the end of the road.

We just want to gather up people on this road who want to go together on it. He's coming at it from a different angle and I think that's revolutionary. My name is Rob Bell.

I'm a pastor in Grand Rapids, Michigan, not that far away from you. Some have called it a conversation. These are people who are wrestling with what, if it's a tag that refers to those who are serious about what I would argue is central to the Christian faith, which is the endless hard questioning of what does it mean to be the people of Jesus.

But now we're at the point where there's too many people in too many places that are fully engaging in this that no one organization could capture all of it. I was asked my perspective on what are the real roots of the emerging church. Well, there's several roots.

There's a whole root system and there's many tap roots. The emerging church movement has triggered much excitement and controversy because of its growing popularity and influence in Christianity. Who are the leaders and what are they teaching? Because diversity characterizes the emerging church movement, it is difficult to paint all of its leaders with a broad brush.

Well, the emerging church movement today has really changed actually in the last several years because there's been a lot of changes going on. Matter of fact, the word emerging is not being used as much as it used to be. And so we have to kind of define our terms.

Some have observed that defining the emerging church is like nailing Jell-O to a wall. Many people have struggled to define the emerging church. A lot of people have defined it as or have explained it as being like nailing Jell-O to a wall.

This is because the emerging church is a lot of moving pieces. They're constantly redefining themselves. They're very hard to pin down on a doctrine.

In fact, that's part of what they pride themselves in is mushiness and undefinability. Emergent leaders say because the spectrum of their beliefs is so diverse, it's impossible to make sweeping judgments. Tony Jones, Emergent's new national coordinator, is not concerned by charges of theological sloppiness.

Is it more sloppy than what a systematic theology professor does? Sitting in his tenured chair, typing up a book on the doctrine of the atonement? Yeah, it's messier than that. But that's, I think, theology as it works itself out in the lives of human beings who are kind of scratching and clawing their way to try to follow Jesus on a daily basis. It's a messy endeavor, and I embrace that messiness.

It is a movement that crosses a number of theological boundaries. Proponents of the emerging church emphasize its developing nature, vast range of beliefs, and its commitment to conversation. I have a friend who suggests that rather than calling it the emerging church, we ought to call it the church emerging.

I think it's good because the people who are involved in this conversation, the people who are involved in what people refer to as this movement, come from a wide background, Protestants and Catholics. And in the Protestant field, it involves people who are Methodist and Presbyterian and Mennonite, a whole stream of Anabaptists, a whole stream of Reformers, people that come from contemporary churches and traditional churches. It's not one little sliver of people.

It seems to be people coming out of a whole variety of backgrounds who are having a common conversation about the goodness of the Gospel in our world and what that can mean in our world. The emerging church movement began several years ago as a conversation among evangelical Gen-X leaders who were alarmed at church dropout rates among 20s and 30s. About the same time, a pastor from Maryland, Brian McLaren, began writing about what he saw as a growing disillusionment with the way evangelical Christianity was being practiced.

All participants agree on their disillusionment with the institutional church, but do not all agree on where the church is destined to go from here. A group of individuals who are really kind of frustrated with what they were seeing in the church, with the hypocrisy, with the religiosity of a lot of the present church. They share a common concern with many evangelicals over the state of the modern church, especially the megachurch phenomenon and seeker-friendly churches.

With my emergent friends, emergent pastors that I know, and we've had debates and disagreements obviously over the years, there's one thing we do agree on, and that is the church does need to change. For this reason, many evangelicals who observe the emerging church are fascinated by it, drawn to its creative approaches to worship, genuineness of many of the leaders, and the desire to reach Generation X. Kind of the emerging church, which is sort of a catch-all phrase for those younger churches and pastors that are trying to figure out how to do church in a postmodern world. So I like to distinguish between the emergent movement and the emerging movement.

Emergent liberals, the lane that I was somewhat connected to and left, and I would say my problem with this team is not that they're trying to find innovative ways to do church, but they're also calling into question many Christian doctrines that should not be questioned, particularly by those who claim to be pastors. So to include Brian McLaren, Doug Padgett, and Rob Bell, who also has a church called Mars Hill in no way affiliated with us. The emerging movement, that's emergent movement, the emerging movement would, in many cases, like Driscoll for example, believe in strong doctrinal core, and they would teach the gospel, they would believe in the fundamentals of the faith.

These are people who believe all of the evangelical distinctives and are trying to find a way to make the church more relevant, accessible, culturally connected. But they are willing to change certain methodologies in order to reach the postmodern young person. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not so good, but that's the emerging movement.

My bigger concern is the emergent movement. Some people say emerging is one thing, emergent is something else. It doesn't matter, they're all the same.

When we were at that conference with their 250 leaders, they alternately called their movement emerging, emergent, they use it synonymously. Call it what you want, the emerging church is having a big impact across denominational lines, but there are no easy labels. Participants have called themselves postmodern, post-conservative, post-liberal, post-evangelical, and post-Protestant.

Brian McLaren is the closest thing to a spokesperson for the movement. He recently appeared in Time Magazine's list of the 25 most influential evangelicals. A few years ago, when Time Magazine decided to include me in its list of the top 25 evangelicals, a lot of evangelicals were very sure this was a mistake.

First, that I would be included in the term evangelical at all, and second, that I would be considered influential in any way. But I think my inclusion was an attempt to redress the problem that we're talking about today, the need to break media stereotypes that equate religious with conservative. I do come from an evangelical background, and perhaps of all backgrounds, it is the most deserving of being associated with a conservative stereotype.

But I am an example of a growing shift from the monopoly of the religious right on a conservative ethos. In fact, I think I'm an example that that monologue and domination by the religious right is actually becoming a fact of history rather than contemporary news. There's a character, his name is Rob Bell, and he's very popular in evangelical Christianity right now, mainly because of his NUMA videos.

So he's gained a lot of credibility within the evangelical circles, because a lot of pastors use them and show these videos. They're about 10 minutes long. A lot of youth pastors use them.

So his name has gained a great deal of credibility. And he has about a 10,000-person church near Grand Rapids. Bell is insidious.

He's probably the best communicator they have in the entire religious movement. He's brilliant. He's articulate.

He's interesting. He can communicate. And he just draws these people in.

Be careful. Be careful of people who grab a line from an interview with me and wave that one line around. What about this? He said this.

People can write anything they want, and they can be as unbelievably hurtful because the Internet is a safe, anonymous place for cowards. Some religious historians believe the emerging churches represent the next wave of evangelical worship after the boom in megachurches in the 1980s and 1990s. In all honesty, I think most of those in the emerging movement, whether it's Bell or McClain or Tony Jones, are probably really nice people.

I believe they're sincere. I have friends in the movement that are sincere. So my intention in addressing these things is to expose not personally attack them, but to expose the things that they are believing and the things that they are teaching.

And the reason that I have such a passion and I'm zealous for this is because eternity is at stake. So they have candles and colleges. What do we care? They're brainwashing their kids into believing a worldview that's not a Christian worldview.

It's a pagan worldview. If this can happen at my old church, Johnson's Ferry Baptist Church, now called Johnson's Ferry, but Bryant Wright, my old pastor, has been the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest denomination other than Catholic. The largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

It can happen to any church anywhere. At the heart of the emerging reformation is a perception of major changes in contemporary culture. Most emerging pleas for reformation in Christendom are rooted in their understandings of postmodernism.

Those within the movement generally believe that the modern church cannot connect with the postmodern mind and culture. So the emerging church conversation responds to the perceived influence of modernism in Western Christianity. When we talk about the emerging church, we're talking about a group of people who are trying to meld syncretistically postmodern thought with Christianity.

Stan Granz writes, We ought to commend the postmodern questioning of the Enlightenment assumption that knowledge is objective and hence dispassionate. Brian McLaren states, Arguments that pit absolutism versus relativism and objectivism versus subjectivism prove meaningless or absurd to postmodern people. Just a few years ago I was asked if I would write an emerging book and why.

I remember even my answer back was do you know who you're asking that question to? In other words, it's basically the framework of postmodernism but the publishing industry has been has seen the success of these books I mean it's massively successful the best selling books in Christianity today would be termed by myself as emerging. Some of them are now not wanting that term but they still are. Is Mars Hill the church that you pastor, is that an emerging church? We don't ever use that word because in our particular context unnecessarily creating labels that are you in, are you out are you one of them or not seems to work against the spirit of Jesus.

A lot of times what the appeal is when someone is talking from a postmodern mindset is they say well what we have is postmodernism and we have modernism modernism meaning just sort of a calcification of thought, everything has to be logical and everything is reasonable but it doesn't have any spirit it doesn't have any of the mystical dimensions of God it's all Gnosticism well yeah I would disagree with that too Christianity isn't Gnosticism but it's also not whatever this new fangled thing is which is postmodern Emergent leaders addressed the issue of truth in their official response to critics saying we would like to clarify contrary to statements and inferences made by some that yes we truly believe there is such a thing as truth and truth matters if we did not believe this we would have no good reason to write or speak. No we are not moral or epistemological relativists any more than anyone or any community is who takes hermeneutical positions we believe that radical relativism is absurd and dangerous as is arrogant absolutism on one hand the emergent church will affirm truth but in their truth claims they deny absolute truth the number one virtue in postmodernism is tolerance or having an open mind it's true for you but not true for me so that's not compatible with Christianity that says Jesus is the way the truth and the life the

postmodern young person did not grow up with a sense of truth as an absolute and therefore when it comes to the gospel where Jesus claims to be the way the truth and the life in John 14 then how do we reach such a person with the gospel when they've actually rejected truth to the postmodern truth is subjective and therefore relative a postmodern mind can allow for contradictory ideas to remain. Buddha is valid Mohammed is valid and Jesus is the only way how does that work? What it leads to is mush that's what it is.

There's nothing solid and concrete. The rock is removed and what is ironic about that is error like cancer always wins over white blood cells in other words you can have the health there it can come in but as long as cancer remains unabated and untended and unfought it ultimately rots the body and that's what happens in the soul of a man who does not take Jesus as the exclusive truth and allow it to push out all that's erroneous and so postmodernism is a bait for the church to say no you can be a buddhist and a christian as well McLaren has actually made that as a very clear statement you don't have to call yourself a christian but you could be a buddhist who has some kind of relationship with Jesus Christ and so it's not mutually exclusive it's postmodern which allows us to have error and truth cohabitate under the banner of truth so I see the emergent church as this movement that is undermining the fundamentals of the faith in an attempt to reach a generation, a postmodern generation but in doing so they are removing the core of truth the core of the gospel and replacing it with mystery and ultimately mysticism and we'll talk about mysticism a little later on in his book Velvet Elvis, Rob Bell quotes the Hollywood actor Sean Penn and calls him one of the greatest theologians of our time who says the mystery is the truth Doug Padgett says mystery is not the enemy to be conquered nor a problem to be solved but rather the partner with whom we dance and dance we must the call for the post-evangelical community is to dance and play the music. We are also called to show each other the way into mystery.

We would certainly be under providing if we didn't offer new ways to enter and live in mystery. So across the board the emergent church embraces mystery and ambiguity over clarity this is the funny thing that's happened in Christianity and that's why I call it in my book Bravehearted Gospel I call it Vogue Doubt hip doubt. It's actually cool to show doubt towards scripture questioning and doubt become the highest form of knowing when the bible says without faith it's impossible to please God for me it's a daily daily I wonder if this whole thing is a total crime.

Daily I think is there really a God? Is my whole life based on a hoax? Everyday I make a decision to go one day more. I mean really I'm agnostic in that sense in that I everyday I don't know so do I believe in God? Most of the time I don't believe in God. I want to they advocate wrestling with traditional understandings of the faith rather than accepting pat answers.

It's more important for us to feel like we are representing a beautiful expression of our life with God than it is to be right about everything. Many of these emergent voices are less certain of their theological ideas and this appeals to a generation that is given to dialogue and to discussion and to conversation and not making firm judgements about people in some cases McKnight says they are challenging deeply held views. They are asking questions about how we should understand our relationship to scripture is it inherent? Is it true? They are asking questions about what we should believe about the afterlife.

Where I would compliment the emergent church with what they are doing as far as asking good questions. They are really good questions but they are not going to the word of God to find their answers and so that would be my concern with it. However they are bringing up good issues for the modern church to begin to wrestle with.

Emergent leaders want to affirm the supremacy of the bible for instance McLaren says that the generous orthodoxy affirms that scripture itself remains above creeds and that the holy spirit may use scripture to tweak creedal understandings and emphasis from time to time. One of the unique features of the emergent church is their view of scripture. Scripture is something we embrace, we love as a people of God.

The people in the emergent movement would not deny scripture. They would use scripture in their books, they would talk about scripture but they give different twists to it that are very important for example Bell says in reaction to abuses by the church a group of believers during the time called the reformation claimed that we only need the authority of the bible. But the problem is that we got the bible from the church voting on what the bible even is.

That kind of shows the lack of respect for the scriptures. His idea is that, you know, we got this bible here, we'll study it, we'll find principles in it, but the authority of scripture and even the inspiration of scripture is often called under attack by these folks and they question it quite often. Rob Bell in the Velvet Elvis says this Is the bible the best that God can do? With God being so massive and awe inspiring and full of truth, why is this book capable of so much confusion? In fact on pages 28 and 29 right around there in Bell's book The Velvet Elvis it kind of gives not only just his view on the weakness on his conviction on who Jesus is but also it is revealing as to how he views scripture.

After reading what he said in his Velvet Elvis book that if they found that Jesus had an earthly human father named Larry that that was Jesus' biological father that it wouldn't affect his faith whatsoever. He says basically that Christians ought to be ready to find things out like maybe Jesus really wasn't the son of God maybe he was the son of a man named Larry, he just wasn't virgin born, he was not really the son of God. We find this out from like DNA evidence and we find out that you know he's basically the product of Christians snatching mythologies from the Dionysian and Mithraic cults and what have you.

Luke was just fudging to compete with Mithraism or some other pagan deities and the origins thereof you know by fudging on the virgin birth and Mary that it wouldn't bother him. When you hear someone talk like that and you realize that they could hold their faith so called if those things aren't true you start to see what their faith is really made of it's not built upon Jesus Christ as the you know God in the flesh, the God man. They obviously aren't holding to the authority of scripture.

Byron McLaren makes the pitch that the Bible is a narrative and it's one of his classic words and that it is written by men and it's like yeah it's true and he says oh so Eric are you actually saying that the Bible wasn't written by men you're saying it's the word of God no it is written by men I agree with that Brian and then he's saying okay well what's the discussion then it's written by men it's a book written by men and it's a good book Eric it's a good book it's a good book of morals and ideals God endorses it no God writes and carries along these writers by his spirit to write precisely what is on his heart we believe that the Bible is written by men but 100% God. Now a Christian who has studied good theology and has built a framework of who Jesus Christ is should see us a tandem there. We believe that it is written by men but 100% God who is Jesus? We believe that he was 100% man.

However he was 100% God he's the word of God made flesh the same mystery of the word of God is revealed in him and so when you begin to break that apart and you begin to separate the divinity from Jesus Christ now you just have a mere man who is a good prophet a good moral teacher you lose the substance of the victory of the cross you can't touch that you can't touch his virgin birth. Why?

Because not only would it defeat his credibility as the Messiah because he had to be born of a virgin which is huge but then it removes his divinity he was conceived of by the Holy Spirit this is no accident this is no small thing that the liberal church will come after so if you begin to trounce upon the divinity of the word of God suddenly you can do whatever you want with it Rob Bell explains how communities can make new interpretations of the Bible he comments notice what Jesus says in the book of Matthew I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven what he is doing here is significant he is giving his followers the authority to make new interpretations of the Bible he is

giving them permission to say hey we think we missed it before on that verse and we've recently come to the conclusion that this is what it actually means if we take Jesus seriously and actually see it as our responsibility to bind and loose the implications are endless serious and exhilarating the Bible is a communal book we have what he terms the keys to the kingdom to stick into truth and turn it and unlock a new definition in our day and age am I the only one that's uncomfortable with this this is something that Jesus said to the apostles the Greek form of the verbs for bound and loosed is helpful it's in the perfect passive participle which should read whatsoever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven whatsoever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven so it's

not that new generations can make new interpretations of the Bible rather the apostles bound on earth what was already bound in heaven through the writing of scripture it says the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone so we don't have the authority to make new interpretations of the Bible the scripture is the authority from generation to generation you know Christians have had problems with popery you know Catholic popery because the pope is above the word of God this is the reason why protestant Christians throughout the ages have had a problem with Catholicism is hey the pope needs to submit to the word of God someone has to be the canon has to be the defining measure and rule and it can't be a man it must be

the word of God and so when we see the pope above the word of God it creates an outcry well guess what's happened post modern Christianity the emergent movement is putting men and women above the word of God saying we have a key and at any point in time we can inject into the word of God and make it say whatever we want it to say what you're left with is truth that can only be experienced emotionally and mystically as you are in unity in community in Rob Bell's bullhorn video if you've seen it in the beginning of the video he's talking about going out with some friends and they hear this guy on a bullhorn and he's talking about sin and hell and judgment and if I die, if I die tonight I might go to hell and then he talks about Jesus so I'm going to see a band with my friends and we're

walking into the venue and up ahead on the sidewalk out front is this guy he's got one of those bullhorns and he's yelling all this stuff and at first I can't hear what he's saying but as I get closer I hear the word sin and burn and hell and repent and then I hear the word Jesus and he's got all these pamphlets and he's quoting these bible verses about the anger and wrath of God and how if I don't repent I'm going to pay for it for eternity and how I might die I might die tonight, this might be my only chance and then I might spend forever in misery as I burn in hell Bell kind of makes this equation that sin and hell and judgment should not be associated with Jesus and I find that amazing because just if you look in the gospels alone there's over 46 references or 46 verses where Jesus

himself talks about hell and warns of hell and refers to hell I don't think it's what Jesus had in mind and see bullhorn guy it's confusing for my friends and I because some are Christians and some aren't but we just

don't get it we just don't understand what all the condemning and the converting we don't understand what it has to do with Jesus' message matter of fact if you took everyone in the scripture and put them together on what they said about hell Jesus said more than all those put together in an interview with Todd Freel on Way of the Master Radio emerging leader Doug Padgett tells listeners his position on hell Do you think there's an eternal damnation for people who are not Christians?

Yeah, well I think that there's all kinds of I mean the damnation would sort of be that there's parts of life and creation that seem to be counter to what God is doing and those are the things that are eliminated removed and done away with and so I think that's what damnation is and so there's people who want to live out that kind of, want to have that good judgment, the judgment of God in their life judgment in a biblical sense that God remakes the world Doug, hold on a second I have no idea what you just said here's what I think hell is eternal damnation, God sends lawbreakers to a place where there's weeping, there's gnashing of teeth a lake of sulfur, the worm never dies eternal conscious torment agree or disagree?

Disagree What do you think hell is? I think hell is disconnection and disintegration with God. I agree with that also I have no idea what you mean you know what those those sound much more like metaphors than they do like actuality, but I don't know Well those are the words that Jesus used to describe hell Oh I know, oh yeah I know Yes I know He just didn't use them in a string like that so you just pulled a bunch of words from Jesus strung them together in your own way It's called systematic theology Doug, I'm a good Buddhist, do I get to go to heaven or hell?

Doug, I'm a good Buddhist where do I go when I die? Are you suggesting to me that heaven is actually a place? When you say where do I go you're suggesting to me that the reign of God that the place of God is an individual place that you go? Is that what you're suggesting? Yes Where is that place? It's called heaven Where is it? We don't know where it is exactly right now Then why would you ask a question where do I go? Just because I don't know where it is doesn't mean it doesn't exist Then why did you ask where?

This is the core of Christianity This is no brainer land, sir It doesn't take a rocket scientist Christian to look at scripture and know that there's a place called hell It's a place and it's called hell You have someone like Doug Padgett He gets up in arms at the notion of it being called a place It's a concept And even that, everything he says it's not a place or a destination It's the undiscomfort that we may feel in not being loving here on earth And so we feel hell It is so bizarre and so utterly ridiculous but what it does is it takes the word of God and literally spits on it Because it's saying you cannot be understood, word of God You are confusing and we want to take from this what we feel would define our reality We don't want there to be a place called hell It is not no brainer land, it's a non-sequitur I'm a good Muslim Where do you think I go, pastor?

Where do I go? See, here we go again Now you're talking about a place What happens to my soul when I die?

In a podcast interview with Leif Hansen Brian McLaren presents what he calls one of the huge problems with the traditional understanding of hell He questions the idea of God sending his son to die on the cross calling it false advertising and divine child abuse This is one of the huge problems with the traditional understanding of hell Because if the cross is in line with Jesus' teaching then I won't say the only and I certainly won't say the or even the primary but a primary meaning of the cross is that the kingdom of God

doesn't come like the kingdoms of this world by inflicting violence and coercing people but that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and willing, voluntary sacrifice But in an ironic way the doctrine of hell basically says no but that's not really true At the

end, God gets his way through coercion and violence and intimidation and domination just like every other kingdom does The cross isn't the center then The cross is almost a distraction and false advertising for God Brian McLaren is one who has made statements about you know not being really a literal hell One of the things he said was this in an interview with him and he was referring to Tony Campolo he said this Tony Campolo and I might disagree on the details but I think we are both trying to find an alternative to both traditional universalism in other words when everybody is saved and the narrow exclusivist understanding of hell that unless you explicitly accept and follow Jesus, you are excluded from eternal life with God and destined for hell Brian McLaren says we should consider

the possibility that many and perhaps even all of Jesus' hellfire and end of the universe statements refer not to post-mortem judgment but to the very historic consequences of rejecting his kingdom message of reconciliation and peacemaking The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 67-70 seems to many people to fulfill much of what we have traditionally understood as hell Rob Bell makes similar statements in his books about hell and by doing so the emergents dismiss all the passages on hell and suggest that hell or Gehenna the valley of Hinnom was merely this garbage dump outside of Jerusalem that bodies were thrown into in the Roman siege against Jerusalem but that doesn't account for Jesus speaking of hell as being everlasting, eternal post-mortem even he said that do not fear them that after

killing the body have no more they can do but fear him who after having killed can cast into hell this is speaking of post-mortem judgment and cannot refer merely to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 Rob Bell in his book Sex God which the title in and of itself is I find pretty disturbing but even within his book there he talks about heaven and hell and the way he explains it is this when I do good to you I'm bringing heaven to earth when I do bad to you then I'm bringing hell to earth Will only a few select people make it to heaven and will billions and billions of people burn forever in hell and if that's the case how do you become one of the few is it what you believe or what you say or what you do or who you know or something that happens in your heart or you need to be initiated

or baptized or take a class or converted or being born again how does one become one of these few Now Rob Bell in his most recent book Love Wins deals with this and the issue of universalism and hell let me quote him in that particular book he says Jesus' story has been hijacked by other stories that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful joyous place called heaven while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance of anything better this is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear It's amazing though because you know where would Christians get the notion where would have hundreds of millions of Christians

through the last 2,000 years almost all Christians receive the viewpoint that only a few would enter into the kingdom of God from Jesus Christ of course repeatedly in Luke chapter 13 Jesus was asked the question is it true that only a few will be saved and he stated emphatically he said make sure you do everything or you make every effort agonizomai is the Greek word make every effort to enter in the narrow gate he says for many will try and will not be able to do so and then in the sermon of the mount it's one of the couple verses or few verses that emergents hate to quote from the sermon of the mount in Matthew chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 Jesus commanded enter the straight gate for broad and spacious is the way that leads

to destruction and many go that way but straight and narrow is the

way that leads to life and few are those who find it and so we have Jesus repeatedly in two different contexts as far as settings go teaching that their way is narrow and that only few enter into the kingdom of God and teaching that many go to the way of destruction and when we look at this and we see what Jesus is saying here it becomes very very alarming when the next verses that follow that in the sermon of the mount are warnings about false prophets the good news is that love wins Rob Bell says that ultimately all people will be saved even those who have rejected the claims of Christianity he argues people will eventually be persuaded by God's love I would hope that all Christians would be able to see the interview with Martin Bashir on MSNBC with Rob Bell because it was there that

you saw what happens when you have those who don't adhere to take a stand a strong stand on what truth is with a journalist who is looking for truth God's love will eventually melt hearts that's what you say in the book it was actually quite embarrassing for Rob Bell and many people their eyes were opened toward the fact that the emergent church and what it has to offer is spiritually bankrupt without standing on what the word of God firmly says one of the problems with this book which is in a sense you're creating a Christian message that's warm kind and popular for contemporary culture but it's frankly according to this critic unbiblical and historically unreliable, that's true isn't it what you've done is you're amending the gospel, the Christian message so that it's palatable to

contemporary people who find for example the idea of hell and heaven very difficult to stomach, so here comes Rob Bell he's made a Christian gospel for you and it's perfectly palatable it's much easier to swallow, that's what you've done haven't you?

No I haven't, there's actually an entire chapter in the book on hell and there's an, I mean throughout the book over and over again, our choices matter the decisions we make about whether we extend love to others or not, the ways in which we resist or we open ourselves to God's love, these are incredibly important there's not a shred of evidence, there's not any indication in scripture that you get a second chance after you're dead and buried you can end up going to heaven it's an evil, evil thing to teach because it gives people a false hope and I'm afraid Rob Bell is going to have a lot of people pointing at him on judgment day he's going to have a lot of blood on his hands for leading people to believe that I mean can you imagine Judas being told that I mean the scriptures tell us that it was better that Judas was never born, obviously he's not one of these people that end up having universal salvation because Jesus said it was better that he never had been born and Jesus in regard to the ten virgins when he talked to in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew chapter 25 he talks about how the door will be shut on five of these virgins which represent people and they knock and they want to get in it's too late but they knock and they plead and he says the door's shut and he says it's too late, even though they had a change of heart a change of mind, he didn't allow them into the kingdom my huge concern is is that tens of thousands of young people older people will fall hook, line and sinker for his version of hell and universal salvation and feel no need to embrace Jesus Christ but the Bible says today is the day of salvation, now is the time and if people don't turn now in this lifetime, there'll be no turning later.

The problem is the place like hell is what gives the cross its merit for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son why? why would he do this? because there is a place called hell and God does care, it is a defense of God's love it is not the opposite people always feel like they need to come up with some excuse and explain away these things, it is a justification of the cross, the cross makes sense when we believe the word of God and when we allow hell to be a very real place emerging church leaders offer a

wise precaution about demonizing homosexuals however, when it comes to taking a biblical stance on the issue many of the emergent leaders have been evasive they speak very ambiguously because often if they would just be outright with what they believe or they want to teach because they're pushing the envelope, Brian McLaren has said that he's purposely mischievous in his writing Brian McLaren has been especially provocative when we make it sound like we have all the bolts screwed down tight, all the nails hammered in and everything is all boxed up and we've got it all figured out at that moment, I think we have stopped being faithful he also states in another interview, I believe this was on a website out of Ur where he talks about how the issue of homosexuality really needs to be reexamined and to see if it's really a sin, if it's really wrong, what the church needs to do is take a five year moratorium, reexamine it and see where we come to and then if we're still not sure then take even more time to determine is homosexuality wrong or not emergents have been criticized for not properly dealing with bible verses declaring that homosexuality is a sin and an abomination as Leviticus chapter 18 and 20 that homosexuals will not enter the kingdom of God as 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and the first chapter of Romans which says women exchange the natural use for what is against nature likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the woman burned in their lust for one another men with men committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due when you read Romans 1 it makes it very very clear that homosexuality is part of the judgment of God when one engages in that lifestyle how much more when one can do that and then claim that this is in the name of Christ those who make it such a strong issue over the fact that in Romans the first chapter we have these very forceful words prohibiting gay and lesbian erotic behavior I said that nicely I have to be aware of the fact that Jesus never addresses this issue directly now one can say indirectly he talks about sexual sin but he never addresses homosexuality per se not that he didn't know about it in Leviticus and Deuteronomy he knew the Hebrew Bible well but he never addresses this as one of the big sins.

Tony Jones who is also very influential in the Emergent Church Hey Tony Jones here one of the things he has come out to say is this and yet all the time I could feel myself drifting towards acceptance that gay persons are fully human persons and should be afforded all the cultural and ecclesial benefits that I am. Aha my critics will laugh.

I knew he and his ilk were on a continuous leftward slide.

In any case I now believe that the GLBTQ can live lives in accord with Biblical Christianity at least as much as many of us can and that their monogamy can and should be sanctioned and blessed by the church and state Tony Jones if he's of that persuasion and he's with Doug Padgett I think that pretty much shows that that's where that church stands on the issue of homosexuality a lot of people a lot of the comments have been people shocked and horrified that I asked that the six verses in the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures, the New Testament not be considered when arguing for or against particularly I suppose against whether practicing gay and lesbian persons can be full fledged members of the Church of Jesus Christ Homosexuality is an issue that the

emergent church has chosen to deviate off of the Biblical line to more of making a cultural appeal which is what they do, it's the bleeding heart, anything that would show sensitivity to those around you and I have to admit it is politically correct to stand for homosexuality and that's where humanism sets in because you're more concerned about that individual their feelings their struggles and their plight rather than what God says and God always has to be first Jesus said that narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it so on this narrow path Christians can fall to the right in a pit or fall to the left and we can think for instance of Westboro Baptist Church who displays provoking signs like God hates fags and this is

unloving God hates fags and they fall into a

pit but equally unloving and hateful is the emergent church though they display compassion and love toward homosexuals they're not aligning themselves with the scriptures truth without love is a killer but love without the truth is a liar the Bible commands us to have both it says to speak the truth in love you know if we think of the two greatest commandments love the Lord thy God with all thy heart soul mind and strength is the greatest commandment and the second love thy neighbor as thyself those are real close together those are essential for our Christianity but you can't you've got to keep that line of distinction and what happens I think in the emergent is the second commandment begins to oversee the first and it sounds good and it looks good and hey we just need to love but not at

the expense of the truth and so the challenge for a Christian is what do they do with this well we have to stand with the word of God the word of God is true it is accurate it is in fact and indeed the word of God it's not the words of men one of the most popular postmodern tendencies is deconstruction a type of literary criticism that demonstrates multiple readings of a text in this case the Bible deconstruction what's that okay how do you understand deconstruction so I'm reading this book that I quoted my book called Aeos for Obductives the book that I read this is Brian McLaren and Leonard Swede and another guy and they're talking about deconstruction and they said well if you want to understand deconstruction rather than reading this entry in this book watch one of the movies either

the Truman Show or the Matrix that's what they said have you ever had a dream that you were so sure was real what if you were unable to wake from that dream how would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world the Matrix I'd only see a little part of it I'd go ugh I can't watch this thing it's crazy so I went and watched the Truman Show with Jim Carrey and they said then you'll understand deconstruction well you watch the Truman Show and here's this guy who'd been raised on a TV set but he didn't know it okay and everybody else around him is an actor and he thinks he's living a real life okay and so he's going through this life and everybody's an actor and everybody's watching him on TV to see what he does and one day he's standing out in his front yard and one of

these lights like we got here these big spotlights falls into the yard and he looks up there what in the world a spotlight falling out of the sky what's this all about well he comes to find out he's not in the real world he's on a TV set and somebody else is manipulating everything that's going on with him and so at the very end of the movie the main character played by Jim Carrey comes to the edge of the set and kind of goes through the cuts it apart and goes on up but what they never tell you is whether the next world he goes into is any more real than what he used to be okay so here's deconstruction and this is an emerging concept everybody history is determined by men in power white euro males okay and they're defining your reality for you and those people defining your reality have

bad motives and if you read their documents like the U.S.

Constitution the Declaration of Independence any one of these things you can't believe what it says because behind the document is somebody with bad motives trying to manipulate you to think that this is reality but it really isn't so what you've got to do is go back and find out what their bad motives were and deconstruct them and then you reconstruct your reality in some better way as you see fit in fact Brian McLaren and Leonard Sweet in their book A is for Obductive the language of the emerging church they state that deconstruction is one of the most important philosophical interpretive concepts of post-modernity they say that deconstruction begins by questioning many of the assumptions of traditional

interpretation traditional modern interpretation then is fond of finding the one

true meaning in a text while deconstructionists do not give any one reading privilege status but rather are interested in hearing the interplay of many interpretations that arise from within many different interpretive communities Martin Heidegger was the guy who created this deconstructionism and this idea that a text can have an infinite number of different ways in which it's interpreted Martin Heidegger it came out in the early 1990s of his involvement in the Nazi party Martin Heidegger when Hitler rose to power he jubilantly and quickly joined the Nazi party because he, and this is his own words the Nazis were the physical embodiment of his philosophy he was disciplined for a short amount of time because of his involvement in the Nazi party but then went back into academia and

continued being a professor and his ideas continued to be taught Heidegger is the exact philosopher that men like Leonard Sweet, they go to and he was the one who influenced Derrida, Falkhall Richard Rorty the guys who were the major deconstructionists in the post-modern movement that the emergents are hanging on to One Nazi fascist who was who worked for a Nazi newspaper in Holland, his name was Paul de Man he went into academia as well and became a well-known academic literary critic and he used fascist language deconstruction in the world of literary criticism and began to popularize it and had an influence on Michel Foucault and on Jacques Derrida and Derrida being probably the most famous of the deconstructionists the guy who could play word games like you wouldn't believe he learned

how to engage in post-modern language deconstruction from a man who learned it from the Nazis directly and Jacques Derrida was the man who Doug Padgett learned language deconstruction from what's interesting is that Brian McLaren himself, he learns post-modern deconstruction in the form of literary criticism as well and so they pick up on this tactic this part of this fascist worldview where all authority is rejected and truth itself is denied by attacking language one of the reasons that we have such a chronic argument about the issues of heaven and hell is that we don't have a very effective way or set of language by which we can talk about these issues and we can only have the existing language which is faulting, inadequate to describe this big topic so you're always going to be

frustrated because the language doesn't allow us to convey a solution to the problem that our language creates they're taking these truths of scripture and changing all of them deconstructing them in order to accommodate or make it palatable to a post-modern generation the first deconstructionist was the serpent in Genesis 3.1 it says the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made and he said to the woman yea half God said the same radical questioning of God's word that we see in the emerging church first appeared in the garden of Eden with the serpent in one sense the real root of the emerging church is the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were tempted and it's really the property of the tree that they were forbidden from eating the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil and they could eat everything else and much of the emerging church has decided that we can tap into that knowledge that that tree is acceptable.

I would say the original root of the emerging church is the original lie that Satan told in the garden it echoes for Eden you know half God said you know that's how Satan worked from the very beginning to confuse Eve to cause doubt regarding God's word emergence you know do the same thing emergent leaders with emergence it's a lot of dispersion sometimes like you know Bell will say things like you know he views it more as a human product than a divine product but Jesus said you know thy word is truth John 17:17 at the heart of the emergent movement is mysticism.

More and more Christians say the usual ways of doing church no longer resonate in contemporary postmodern culture. Seeking to fill the gap a growing movement called the emerging church is developing new forms of worship and theological questioning for a new cultural context. Spirituality and styles of worship practiced by the emerging church are taken from a wide variety of traditions among these are influences inspired by the Catholic church Celtic Christianity Anglican and Orthodox churches customs and practices embraced by the emerging church include liturgy, prayer beads, icons, incense, candles, robes, labyrinth and contemplative prayer.

Almost without exception leaders of the emergent movement embrace various forms of mysticism but it's saying I want to experience God I'm interested in coming into an experience here. I like your emphasis right there on experience not just of the other but what you called before a practice a certain practice. You know now this will appeal to Catholics because we have such an emphasis upon sacraments, rosaries, contemplative prayer so I've got a certain foot in the door with Catholics they know they were taught this that practices are important not just believing doctrines.

They needed a turnkey solution they can go to and popularize it in product form and that's what they've done. Peter Rowlands is in charge of an emergent church in Northern Ireland and very influential in this movement his church is called Icon and he says this this kind of encompasses what we want to say he says we at Icon are developing a theology which derives from the mystics a theology without theology to complement our religion with our religion. So he sees really no substance to their faith it's just mystery and they're deriving all this from the mystics mainly the Roman Catholic mystics is what he's talking about.

While some view the embrace of these various traditions as a shift from religion to spirituality others believe there are dangerous implications involved in these practices. There has definitely been a mystical paradigm shift in the United States and the Western world in general. Lettard Sweet who's a theologian that's highly regarded in contemplative circles makes the following prediction which I believe is coming true mysticism once cast to the sidelines of the Christian tradition is now situated in post modernist culture near the center.

It seems like every form of mysticism whether it's Jewish Kabbalah whether it's Eastern mysticism such as Hinduism and Buddhism whether it's Christian forms of mysticism whatever it might be they all have three stages that they're searching after trying to accomplish. The first stage is called detachment or purgation in which our minds and our feelings and so forth are emptied out so that we can become blank tablets. The second stage is illumination in which supposedly this blank tablet is now being filled up with information and illumination and words coming from a deity and that should lead to union and union is this mystical experience with God or whatever deity you believe in.

It's inexplicable but it is the goal of all mystics probably the key means of achieving mystical union with God. The key ingredient the key tool is contemplative prayer. What we're dealing with here is a phenomenon called contemplative prayer.

Now that term put me off for like 10 years. I thought the word contemplative meant to contemplate in other words to think deeply while you're praying which you know most people do when they engage in very serious prayer. Then I found out the word actually meant the opposite of what the term normally means and it means to empty the mind through repetition.

In a book called *The Sacred Way* by Tony Jones he wrote about the cloud of unknowing which is what contemplative prayer is based on. It was written I think by an anonymous source in the 1300's or 1400's

somewhere like that and this is what Tony Jones says of the cloud of unknowing. He says the basic method promoted in the cloud is to move beyond thinking to a place of utter stillness with the Lord.

The believer must first achieve a state of silence and contemplation and then God works in the believer's heart. Now the problem is how do you empty your mind? Have you ever tried to stop thinking? Well the key to that is what some call a mantra. In which a person would repeat a word over and over and over for 20 minutes perhaps until the mind tends to go blank.

Emerging leaders will have their followers encourage them to say words over and over and over again in their prayer life. Contradicting what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus said not to be like the pagans who say the same things over and over again thinking that they'll be heard of God.

Not to be repetitious Jesus said in your prayer life. And so it's incredibly heartbreaking that you have them taking a word or two words. They'll say oh well a lot of times it's the Bible.

It's a couple words from the Bible. But it's disassociated from its context. Meditating on the Bible is what is God saying to me? What's your will father? How do I please you and glorify you? And you begin to pray and talk to him about his word.

Real biblical meditation. Lord give me strength to obey you and obey your word. And it's a joyous encounter with God when you truly seek the Lord through his word.

And like that. But when you take a word or two you start repeating it because you feel like you're going to get some kind of spiritual effect. You're doing exactly what Jesus said not to do.

And you're opening yourself up to these other forces. And you have this supposed illumination that allows you to believe in a way that God is speaking to you in a mystical way. Well this is exactly what the New Agers practice in Transcendental Meditation.

It's called Monkey Mind Meditation. In fact I have audio of Shane Hipps who is the co-pastor with Rob Bell of Mars Hill Church in Grand Rapids. Teaching people.

Guiding them through a monkey mind meditative practice so that they can have an experience of the divine. In the form of this mysticism. You know it's totally maddening to try and just stop thinking.

Right? And because we all know that's pretty much impossible because the mind is like a frantic monkey bouncing around inside your brain. And trying to calm that is crazy. The practice the actual way to do this best is just to learn to watch your thoughts.

Don't try and control them. Don't try and contain them. Don't resist them and don't retain them.

Welcome them and watch them. And then wave goodbye. Sounds really strange.

I'll tell you why it's important though. Remember I said that discipleship is about the mind and the body. And enlightenment is experienced in the spirit.

This is a practice that gives you distance from the mind. Rob Bell also leading youth leading many many Christians into mystical practices. Into different forms of mysticism and different forms of contemplative prayer.

Different forms of eastern meditation. Central to the Christian tradition for thousands of years have been disciplines of meditation reflection silence and breathing. The Bible says nothing about breath prayers in attempt to pray all the time.

It does say to pray without ceasing. It's more so to pray through. To be persistent in our prayers.

But not literally to pray every moment of the day. Jesus did not do this. It says in Luke 11:1 it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place when he ceased so Jesus ceased praying.

It continues one of his disciples said to him Lord teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples and he said unto them when you pray, say and then he began with the Lord's prayer. So the Bible says nothing about these silent prayers. Jesus instructed the disciples to say, to talk to God when they pray.

Not to be in silence. Silent prayer is when you go to a silent place and then you quiet the mind. And you don't say anything to God.

You just be. Princess Belle, he leads his audience and says put one hand on your belly put another hand on your chest take a deep breath and breathe slowly and then he simulates it. Take one hand, place it upon your belly take one hand, place it upon your chest let's breathe for a moment shall we? And he's leading them into eastern mysticism and then he tells them that the breath that's coming in and out in another place another time is actually God.

Take a moment as you breathe deeply to invite the God who made the universe into your breath. Where did this come from? Where exactly did this practice originate? Well it originated with a group of monks out in the deserts of North Africa in the Middle East, now known as the Desert Fathers. They like to make their followers feel they're going back to the early church fathers and they're not.

The earliest church fathers in the first three centuries weren't into this mysticism. In fact the emerging church would be considered outright heretical in the first three centuries of church history. They go back to the Roman Catholic Desert Fathers that came post early church.

These Desert Fathers picked up on a lot of the practices of the mystery religions, the pagans, the Buddhists and what have you with regard to contemplative prayer and emptying your mind and these things. Many of them had gone out into the desert they lived like hermits, they supposedly had great visions from God. And I would mention this that if you go out into the desert with very little provisions, don't eat very much, don't sleep very much, lay out in the elements for a long period of time you'll have a vision almost certainly.

So this isn't something that comes from the Bible, this isn't something where you can point to and say well you know here the Apostle Paul is saying you have to stop thinking at the time of prayer or whatever. This originated with several hundred years, three hundred years after Christ by monks who were experimenting with different ways of reaching God. So this can't be this can't be considered a Biblical practice.

Contemplative prayer is not a prayer that's ever defined in the Bible and that's important to note. You'll never go to the Bible and have this outlined in Scripture here is how you practice contemplative prayer. It's not drawn from Scripture.

Very important to note that. In the Christianity Today article called The Emergent Mystique Brian McLaren named Richard Foster as one of the key mentors for the emerging church. Quaker Richard Foster is one

theologian advocating contemplative prayer also known as centering prayer or listening prayer.

But Richard Foster wrote a book called Celebration of Discipline and in that book he introduced to evangelicals who really had little knowledge of them a vast variety of Roman Catholic mystics and some Quaker mystics and some others as well. That book by Richard Foster and his influence kind of lay somewhat dormant for a number of years picking up a little steam here and there until more modern times and then there has been this massive explosion of mysticism and what I call classic mysticism of these varieties. Today it's hard to pick up an evangelical book even by people that are fairly solid that do not quote Roman Catholic mystics and Quaker mystics and Foster Dallas Willard and these different ones that promote this.

Richard Foster and Dallas Willard these guys are basically modern purveyors and John Ortberg has picked up on all of this too. They are modern purveyors in what is centuries old. As more and more churches are exposed to and enveloped in contemplative spirituality many ancient practices such as walking the labyrinth are being implemented in the worship services of many evangelical churches originating in early pagan societies.

The labyrinth is a maze like structure with one path in which a participant walks through to the center during times of contemplative prayer. Often these contemplative prayer stations are included in the labyrinth with candles, icons, pictures, etc. My teacher and mentor Dr. William Lane Craig he came back from a Christian book sellers convention and he was warning us about this emergent church movement and the Zonderbaun publishing was going to be promoting and pushing emergent church books and emergent church leaders.

There are now whole arms of publishing houses that are publishing mysticism type books. For example Thomas Nelson is putting out a 7 volume series I believe or 8 volume series called the Ancient Practice series. The first book was written by Brian McLaren and each of the other books will deal with certain so called spiritual disciplines that they consider very important.

Some have argued that the spiritual implications of embracing mysticism is interspirituality. In the big book of Christian mysticism the following is stated. It's important to note that throughout the history of Christianity Christian mystics that Christian mystics have displayed an unusual openness to the wisdom of non-Christian philosophy and religion.

In other words, Christian mysticism seems from the beginning to have had an intuitive recognition of the way in which mysticism is a form of unity that transcends religious difference. The 20th century may go down in history as the great age of inter-religious spirituality and many others expressing their Christian faith in ways that reveal the influence of wisdom traditions such as Sufism, Vedanta, or Zen. Now Sufism that's the mysticism of Islam.

Vedanta is the mysticism of Hinduism and of course Zen is the mysticism of Buddhism. So he's saying that these mystics, these people that we're dealing with here, the contemplative prayer movement in other words, express their Christian faith in ways that reveal the influence of non-Christian religions. So you may ask yourself, well how is that possible? Well it isn't possible.

You can't have the preaching of the cross mixed in with religions that reject the preaching of the cross and say that man is God. It just can't be done. Brian McLaren endorses the big book of Christian mysticism and this is what he says, Before I heard about the big book of Christian mysticism, I had been thinking

about how such a book has been needed for a long time.

Now having read it, I'm glad we waited for Carl McCullin to come along to write it. It's accessible, human, well informed, balanced, broad, just what we needed. Brian McLaren read that part about the unity of Christian mystics with non-Christian mystics and it made him like the book.

If you really believe in the Great Commission, if you really believe that a Christian should go out and preach the gospel to every creature like Jesus said, when you read something like that you would find it unacceptable. But Brian McLaren found it to be not only acceptable, but exemplary. Tony Campolo says, A theology of mysticism provides some hope for common ground between Christianity and Islam.

Both religions have within their histories examples of ecstatic union with God, which seem to be at odds with their own spiritual traditions, but have much in common with each other. I do not know what to make of the Muslim mystics, especially those who have come to be known as the Sufis. What do they experience in their mystical experience? Could they have encountered the same God we do in our Christian mysticism? No! The Bible says that whoever does not have the Son as the religion of Islam, does not have the Father.

So, if these mystics are encountering the same spiritual being, it's not God. I'm not convinced that Jesus only lives in Christians. There's the difference.

But you've got to have Jesus. Jesus is my Savior. Brian McLaren says, during his lifetime, Abraham, like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, had an encounter with God that distinguished him from his contemporaries and propelled him into a mission, introducing a new way of life that changed the world.

How appropriate that the three Abrahamic religions begin with a journey into the unknown. He celebrates Ramadan because he wants to celebrate Muhammad's reception of the Quran. Does Brian McLaren really believe that? I have to ask that because Muhammad felt that he was possessed by a demon when he received the Quran, when he was receiving these revelations.

They'd cover him up. He would stand on a cliff, wanted to commit suicide. He felt that he was possessed by a demon.

He would be on the ground, would be frothing up the mouth. Many Islamic scholars point out that he felt he was possessed by a demon. He was convinced by his wife that, no, you're probably hearing from the angel Gabriel.

He begins to write the very things that the scriptures tell us are the doctrines of demons. The Quran denies the deity of Jesus Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, whereas the Bible says that Jesus is both God and man, and says there is no salvation apart from the cross. He wrote about over and over again, Jesus, you know, is not God, that he wasn't crucified for our sins, and claimed this came from Gabriel.

And throughout the Quran you read that Jesus isn't the son of God and he didn't die for our sins. I find that interesting that this supposedly came from Gabriel when we only have two revelations from Gabriel, one in Daniel chapter 9 and one in the first couple chapters of Luke. And in the two revelations we have from the angel Gabriel, he teaches in Daniel 9 that the Messiah will be cut off, not for himself, but for our sins.

Jesus, he gives the very year of Christ's crucifixion, hundreds of years before it takes place, Daniel chapter 9. And when you read the early chapters of Luke and you read what happened with regard to the celebration of the incarnation, Gabriel reveals that, to Mary, that she will bear a son and he will be the son of the Most High God. So here Gabriel tells us that Jesus will be the son of the Most High God and that he will atone for our sins on the cross. The Quran is inspired by a spirit and it's written like a war manual against Jews and Christians and against Christians in regard to their holding to Jesus being the Son of God and dying for our sins.

And yet Brian McLaren is celebrating the reception of that book and in the scripture it's identified in 1 John chapter 2 verse 22 that whoever denies the Father and the Son, that relationship with the Father and the Son, that that is Antichrist. Leonard Sweet is a Methodist and he thinks Muhammad was this great light and he writes the union of the human with the divine, which is the center feature of all the world's religions. He says it was experienced by Muhammad, Moses, Krishna, some of the new light leaders he calls them.

Here Leonard Sweet writes, one can be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ without denying the flickers of the sacred in the followers of Yahweh, Kali, or Krishna. So we have not only Islam integrated in emerging, we've got Hinduism. Probably everybody has seen that on television where people sit around in a position that's outlined by yoga, there usually is a hands raised up in receptivity that's also taught in contemplative prayer in which hopefully you just simply go blank.

And then in yoga, you're meeting up with a Hindu deity. In Christianity supposedly you're meeting up with Christ. And so these mystical practices have much overlap.

The key is they're never taught in scripture. In yoga, one of the central tenets of yoga is your breath needs to remain the same. It's not how flexible you are.

It's not whether you can do the poses. It's not how much you can bend yourself. It's can you keep your breath consistent through whatever you're doing.

And the yoga masters say this is how it is when you follow Jesus and surrender to God. It's your breath being consistent. It's your connection with God regardless of the pose you find yourself in.

That's integrating the divine into the daily. On a CNN segment called, Does God Approve of Yoga? John MacArthur and Doug Padgett debated about whether or not yoga was dangerous for the Christian faith. Why would Christians want to borrow an expression from a false religion, from pantheism.

God is everything. You're God. Everything is God.

When we believe there's only one true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, why would we need to import that? If you want to exercise, exercise. But why borrow a term that has been part of a false religion for centuries? Doug Padgett, let's get you in on this. And as we do, I want to read the definition from Webster's on yoga.

It says it's a Hindu theistic philosophy teaching the suppression of all activity of body, mind and will in order that the self may realize its distinction from man and attain liberation. On a spiritual front for a Christian, that does not sound like Christ-centered faith to me. On the surface of that definition, what's going on here? Help us out.

Well, for people who perform yoga, what they're normally trying to do is to find a whole and complete and healed life. So when people participate in yoga, most of them aren't on some kind of a yoga agenda. What they're trying to do is use whatever practices they can find that would help them have a whole and complete life.

And for a Christian, that's certainly what we're after. The Jesus agenda is a whole life, is a complete life, is a healed life. So when people use it to relieve stress, to be healthy in their relationships, to feel good in their body, that's a really good thing.

Is all yoga bad yoga for the Christian? Well, let me just respond to what I've been hearing. That doesn't sound anything like Christianity. If you want a whole life, if you want your life to be what it should be, you don't put yourself in some weird physical position, empty your mind, center on yourself and try to relieve your stress.

You go to the word of God, to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You embrace in faith the sacrifice of Christ and his death and resurrection as your savior and redeemer. God comes, regenerates you, transforms your life, makes you a new creation and you're saved and you're on your way to heaven and you can live a life of peace and joy.

That's the promise of the gospel. There is no contribution made to that by any physical position or any kind of meditation. The idea of Christianity is to fill your mind with biblical truth and focus on the God who is above you.

That's Christian worship. The idea of yoga is to fill your mind with nothing except to focus on yourself and try to find the God that is inside of you. From a Christian viewpoint, that's a false religion.

Gentlemen, exercise is a different issue. Gentlemen, we're going to have to leave it there. Pastor Doug Padgett and John McArthur, we appreciate your time, both of you.

Thank you very much. What are you playing? I'm just kind of messing around, improvising really. That reminds me a little bit of chapter 8, the future question.

Yeah, that's right. It's a chapter about eschatology, our understanding of the future. For a lot of people it means, do we believe the Bible predicts the future, that kind of a thing.

And you're right, it is a little bit similar to a song because for a lot of people, to believe in God means to believe that history is like a song that's already composed, already written, and the notes are just playing. Whereas I'm proposing something kind of different in the chapter. Brian McLaren says that if Jesus Christ comes back in the second coming with his mighty angels and flaming fire to judge the wicked that, well, you know, then he's a jihadist Jesus.

He believes that traditional eschatology, that the Lord is going to return to the earth, is pretty skewed. That really, this isn't going to happen at all. He says the world, it will get worse and worse, and finally this jihadist Jesus will return and use force, domination, violence, and even torture, the ultimate imperial tools to vanquish evil and bring peace.

He says such a view is not only ignorant and wrong, but dangerous and immoral. So he believes anybody that believes Jesus is going to return and set up a new heaven and a new earth, they're not only wrong, they're dangerous and immoral. The scriptures are clear, he is coming back with his mighty angels and

flaming fire to judge the wicked.

So he doesn't believe in the Lord returning in judgment. As a matter of fact, judgment is pretty much airbrushed out of the whole system. This is what Jesus said would happen.

Jesus said things would get worse and worse. The apostle Paul said things would get worse as well. Second Timothy chapter 3, he said, you know this, that latter days or the last days, terrible or perilous times would come.

Men would be lovers of self, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers. He said disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection. Storgy is a Greek word there, without family love, without natural affection, truth breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, i.e. so much of the emergent church, but denying the power thereof from such turn away.

Then he goes on to say in verse 12, a little bit later, he says and all those who will have godly in Christ Jesus, really seek to follow the Lord and follow his word, they will suffer persecution. But he goes on to say in verse 13, the very next verse, but evil men and imposters will wax worse and worse. That's not an interpretation, that's just what he says, that's what Jesus said.

I think what's unique about the book I wrote is that I actually find where this all came from. Okay, it's pretty rare that somebody just all of a sudden shows up with a brand new idea nobody else had. It does happen.

But I just didn't believe that these guys all came up with a new idea. I believed it came from somewhere. Brian McLaren noted in a 2004 article called *The Emergent Matrix, A New Kind of Church* We realized very early on that we weren't going to find the intellectual resources we needed in the evangelical world.

So we were either going to have to create them or borrow them. It turned out that a lot of us were reading the same people who were more respected in the mainline world, such as Walter Brueggemann, Jürgen Moltmann, and Stanley Hierwas. What happened is we started to identify ourselves as post-conservative, and then we found out that there was an almost parallel movement going on in the post-liberal world, and the affinities that we had were very, very strong.

There's a theological source for the Emergent Church is a German theologian by the name of Jürgen Moltmann. I actually have to thank Tony Jones, who's one of the Emergent leaders, for helping me because I had a meeting with Tony. We were going to talk about doing another debate.

I debated Doug Padgett back in 2006, and we had a meeting to see if maybe we could arrange another debate, but Tony wasn't interested in that. But Tony says, you just ask me and I'll tell you. Whatever you want to know about Emergent, you ask me and I'll tell you.

So I asked him about Jürgen Moltmann, and he said, well, I'm a student of one of his disciples. Tony Jones just finished his doctorate under Miroslav Volf from Princeton. But Miroslav Volf is his mentor, and Volf's mentor is a Nazi POW turned theologian named Jürgen Moltmann.

Jürgen Moltmann, a German reformed theologian, was born in 1926 in Hamburg. He was drafted into German military service in 1944. He recalls reading the works of Nietzsche during the miseries of war.

In 1945, he surrendered to the British and was held as a prisoner of war for the next three years. It turns out last fall, I went to Chicago at my own expense in order to listen to a conference with 250 emergent leaders, and the keynote speaker was Jürgen Moltmann. The kind of Christian he became was really shaped by his theological education in German.

And so he went to the German theological schools, which were extremely liberal. After being released to his hometown at age 22, Moltmann began his work in theology, attempting to reach the survivors of his generation. The eschatological orientation of Marxist philosopher Ernest Bloch was the inspiration for his first major work, *Theology of Hope*.

He's known for his eschatology of hope, which is really kind of a ponderous and very difficult thing to get your head around. And so what he decided to do was to create a theology where everything's going to get better. There's no future judgment.

History is heading toward paradise, not toward destruction. And everybody's going to be reconciled to God, so he's a universalist, which he confirmed when I heard him speaking. He's a universalist.

God may be a universalist because he had created them and would certainly like to see them again. Universalism is not only to speak about all human beings. It's about to speak about the universe, the stars and the moon and the sun and the whole cosmos.

And this is always misunderstood by these fundamentalists who want to have a dual end. The one go to heaven, the other go to hell, and the earth will be burned in fire. This is anti-creation.

Moltmann also developed an interest in Luther and Hegel, who is referenced more times than any other author in his book, *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann, as I looked through the index of his book, his number one source was a guy by the name of Hegel, who was a German philosopher from real, real early in the 19th century, right around the turn of that century. And Hegel had a philosophy that you could call spiritual evolution.

And Hegel was teaching spiritual evolution long before biological evolution was ever proposed. Okay, so the idea is that God is infused into everything and God is emerging from within everything. And therefore everything is going to get better because God is still creating the world.

The total unity of community is ultimately achieved eschatologically. And the eschatological community unity is the embracing of one global community. There is nothing but hope and nothing but a bright, beautiful, beautiful future.

Let me get to the heart of the matter. The last chapter of my book is about Ken Wilber who is a pantheistic Buddhist philosopher who even Brian McLaren claims it was his inspiration. So I'm not making this up.

Ken Wilber is an American author and philosopher who has written about adult development, developmental psychology, philosophy, and ecology. He has been greatly impacted by and practices Buddhist meditation methods. Wilber has been categorized as a notable New Ager due to his emphasis on transpersonal view.

Unlike the biblical Christian worldview, the New Age movement teaches that man is inherently divine, that all things are divine, that all is one, and all is God. One of Wilber's main interests is neo-perennial philosophy, a combination derived from Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo's cosmic evolution account with

Aldous Huxley's mystic view in his book *The Perennial Philosophy*. Brian McLaren devoted an entire chapter to emergent thinking and a generous orthodoxy.

In *Why Am I Emergent*, Chapter 19, Brian McLaren says, I'm trying, with Ken Wilber's help, to make clear that I believe there is something above and beyond the current alternatives of modern fundamentalism slash absolutism and pluralistic relativism. This above and beyond is, I believe, the way of Jesus, which is the way of love and embrace. It integrates what has gone before so that something new can emerge.

One of the things that makes it incredibly clear that Rob Bell is a New Ager, he's in the New Age spot, and his view of God is not the biblical view of God even though he sometimes and often talks, especially from the pulpit, as though he's referencing and speaking of the God of the Bible. It's his endorsement of Ken Wilber. On page 192 anyway, of my edition of the *Velvet Elvis*, his book *Velvet Elvis*, he encourages for a mind-blowing introduction into emergent thinking, you know, and divine creativity.

He advises his audience to spend three months at the feet of Ken Wilber. When you realize that Ken Wilber is a full-blown New Ager, he's a Buddhist, he teaches the lie that we recognize our own Godhood, that we are God, through contemplative prayer. So what I'm going to do is basically go into a series of meditative states here, and the first state that I'm going to try to enter is a type of Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

It's not a classic Nirvikalpa, but I'm going to try to basically suspend all mental activity, with the exception of that witnessing delta state. So what you should see if this works is virtually all of those lights should go to zero. He teaches the lie of cosmic evolution, that what starts at matter eventually progresses to a realization of divinity, that we are God.

You want to try to get a sense of I am-ness stripped of objects, and realize that if all objects are gone, there is still I am-ness. Now usually the way this happens is a difficult process of training where you actually for two or three years have to learn to get into meditative states where you suspend all objects, either by concentrative modes or modes of insight awareness that go actually into the unmanifest. So you are in an unmanifest state of vast consciousness with no objects arising, and there's still I am-ness, radiant, open, empty, I am-ness.

McLaren got the idea of immersion from Ken Wilber, a Buddhist. What does immersion actually mean? What are we talking about? What's emerging? Well, in philosophy there's this concept called panentheism. Panentheism means God is in everything.

It's just like a baby step away from pantheism. Pantheism says God is everything. Panentheism says, well, God is a little bit different than everything, but he's in everything.

New Age is panentheistic. Well, Wilber is pantheist, and I would say that Boltman is panentheist. Immersion is really panentheist.

They would believe God is in everything. Since God is in everything, now he's trying to emerge from it. So what's emerging is God.

It says God is in everything, and God is emerging. The future has to be bright. Everything's going to get better.

Ken Wilber writes in *A Brief History of Everything*, the very book that Rob Bell is encouraging Christians to read, about a cosmic consciousness that is spirit awakened to its own true nature. And he capitalizes spirit

there, because he's talking about, you know, we would reference the spirit with a capital S, because he's the Holy Spirit, but he's speaking of the Spirit of God, as he understands it. But he's saying that as we travel through this cosmic evolution from matter to spirit, we become aware of our own spirit, that we are a spirit, and that's our nature, capital S, that we are God.

He made no bones about, you know, that we are becoming gods, and that's what Rob Bell is pushing on his followers in Velvet Elvis. Your body's an object. Your feelings are objects.

Your thoughts are objects. You can feel the self-contraction. That's an object.

What's aware of that? I Amness. Pure self. So, what was present five years ago? I Amness.

What was present 50 years ago? What was present five centuries ago? Show me your original face. The face you had before your parents were born. No objects at all.

Fundamental, ongoing, I Amness. What was present five millennia ago? Yeah. Before Abraham was, I Am.

Christians laughed at the new age. Shirley MacLaine and her crystals, standing on the beach shouting, I am God. But right now, you've got Brian McLaren and Rob Bell telling people to read Ken Wilber, who's saying the same thing that Shirley MacLaine said 25 years ago.

You know, that I am God. In his book, Partly Right, Campolo makes another incredible statement. He says this, We affirm our divinity by doing what is worthy of gods.

He says that Robert Schuller affirms our divinity. It does not deny our humanity. Isn't that what the gospel is? Well, anybody who knows the gospel knows that that's not the gospel.

It's a different gospel. And of course, he's quoting Robert Schuller as well. And you're going back even further now, because Robert Schuller brought a lot of these concepts in as well.

In fact, Campolo goes on to say in that same quotation from Partly Right, he goes on to say this, The hymn writer who taught us to sing Amazing Grace was all too ready to call himself a wretch, forgetting our divinity. And he quotes Eric Fromm, the godless atheist. He says that Fromm recognized the diabolical social consequences that can come about when a person loses sight of his or her own divinity.

Now, that was Satan's lie in the garden. You know, you shall be as God. The King James, ye shall be as God.

In fact, I quote the King James there because Eric Fromm, one of the titles of one of his books was just that, ye shall be as God. He took the serpent's lie and titled his book that way. And Sweet says humanity needs to learn the truth of Merton's words.

We are already one. You have the new age that say that we are one already. Episcopalian Bishop Alan Jones has written a book called Reimagining Christianity in which he has the following scenario.

He talks about contemplative prayer as having this role. The silence at the heart of mysticism is not only the meeting point of the great traditions, but also where all hearts might meet. In other words, not only all the world's religions are going to be united by the silence, but all humanity will be united by the silence.

At the cathedral we break the bread for those who follow the path of the Buddha and walk the way of the Hindus. So the idea is not to convert Buddhists or Hindus to Christianity or especially to be born again and trust Jesus for their salvation, but that all religions are valid at their mystical level. Brian McLaren heartily endorses Alan Jones' views and says It used to be that Christian institutions and systems of dogma sustained the spiritual life of Christians.

In other words, it used to be doctrine is what Christianity was all about. Increasingly, spirituality itself is what sustains everything else. In other words, it's spirituality which is in this case produced through contemplative prayer.

Alan Jones is a pioneer in reimagining a Christian faith that emerges from authentic spirituality. In other words, this idea that all religions are equally valid and that God is within every person and that's how you realize your inner divinity is through going into the silence and meeting your inner divine self. Brian McLaren, he'll take the book of Revelation and for instance his book *The Secret Message of Jesus*.

See, he knows the secret message and really what it says in the book of Revelation isn't really what has to happen. In fact, he states in that book that the book of Revelation is a book of possibilities. There can be an alternative ending.

It's a conditional book, you see. Because if we do this, this is how it can turn out. The serpent said he shall not surely die to the woman.

Contradicting God's word. They're offering an alternative eschatology. The future is open and that's really what I believe we need to consider now.

Not that all of history is a done deal. It's already determined. But that we're actually participating with God in the writing of the psalm.

This is a pretty strong point because it seems to contradict so much of the eschatology that's out there now. Mirrors the work of Barbara Marks Hubbard who's one of the leading New Agers who also, she has a commentary in the book of Revelation that was dictated to her by her demon spirit guide. And the spirit guide told her and showed her that there could be an alternative ending and what have you.

Brian McLaren has spoken some of the things I just mentioned before a bunch of New Age mentalities over at the World Future Society. And the World Future Society was founded, co-founded by Barbara Marks Hubbard. She to this day is still a board member and these are people who have very New Age ideas about what the future should be.

If we activate that which is emergent in us, we will see right now the outlines of a global, co-creative, indeed universal humanity. A lot of these views are similar to those of Eckhart Tolles who was promoted a lot by Oprah Winfrey, an occultist, a medium who channels spirits who believes in this coming new world or this new heavenly world that we're going to usher in even as a book by that title. Jurgen Moltmann mentioned by Campolo and McLaren and other emergents universalists, you know, he claims that every action on the principle of hope, every action that we do helps bring about this new earth.

So what happens is ultimately it becomes man becoming the savior. Where all the emerging church is leading, where it's pointing is a pluralistic, post-modern, relativistic, global religion. The universal spirituality in which all the world's religions will manifest the divinity of man.

According to critics, perhaps the greatest problem within the emerging church movement is their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Is the emergent church preaching the everlasting gospel or another gospel altogether? So does I hear Brian McLaren preaching the gospel that I'll change my opinion but I haven't heard it yet. And I haven't found it in any of these books that I've read in several of them.

The emergent church is definitely, many of them are preaching a different gospel. It's an eclectic movement but if you look at their leaders you often get very clearly a different gospel. It's a different Jesus than Paul preached.

Paul preached Christ crucified, the son of God. Not a good moral teacher. Not a man who did wonderful works of service.

But the divine son of God is whom you worship. It's corrupted. You've corrupted the word of God.

You've corrupted Christianity. And that's why we're imploring people to take a look at this. Is this really true? Is this really of God? We can see in Rob Bell's Bullhorn video and in the writings of the emergent church leaders that they want to do away with preaching.

In fact Doug Paget says, I'm writing with the assumption that most of you who are reading this book have concluded what I have. Preaching doesn't work. Preaching as we know it is a tragically broken endeavor.

The value of our practices including preaching ought to be judged by their effects on our communities and the ways in which they help us move toward life with God. In 1 Corinthians 1 it says that God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. So, it doesn't matter if we see the effects or not of preaching the gospel.

This is the method that God has chosen to save those that believe. It says the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God. How shall they hear it without a preacher? Also, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Peter says that we are born again by the word of God. It's a bullhorn guy. I'm asking you in love, on behalf of all of us, please put the bullhorn down.

I'm tired of it. We're all tired of it. I think Jesus is tired of it.

But Paul said in Philippians 1 that even if some preach the gospel out of strife and envy, supposing to add affliction to his bonds in contention, he praised God that the gospel was preached. This is a far different attitude than that of Rob Bell in the bullhorn video. Paul said as long as the gospel is being preached, he rejoiced.

Well, that's all well and good when it's the gospel. But when it's another gospel, Paul wasn't too accepting of that. Matter of fact, in Galatians he says that if anyone comes and preaches another gospel, let him be accursed.

He said even if an angel came, let him be accursed. For an example of that, Rob Bell did an interview with Christianity Today and they asked him if you were to Twitter the gospel, what would you say? I think Twitter gives you a maximum of 140 characters that you can use. But here is his response.

I would say that history is headed somewhere. The thousands of little ways in which you are tempted to believe that hope might actually be a legitimate response to the insanity of the world actually can be

trusted. And the Christian story is that of a tomb that is empty and a movement that has actually begun and has been present in a sense all along in creation.

And all those times when your cynicism was at odds with an impulse within you that said that this little thing might be about something bigger those tiny little slivers may in fact be connected to something really really big. Where's the gospel? Alright, we're up to question number 5. The gospel question. What is the gospel? The emergent church's idea of the gospel of the kingdom is that the kingdom of God includes everybody.

That nobody is out. The gospel is the message of the kingdom of God. And the message of the kingdom of God is a message of reconciliation.

Calling all people together into one unified new humanity. I think I've already mentioned that Brian McLaren in his gospel presentation believes that we're already part of the kingdom, most of us. Let me quote him.

He says maybe God's plan is an opt-out plan not an opt-in one. If you want to stay out of the party, you can. So he believes that since we're already in the kingdom of God that salvation isn't the big issue.

We don't need to worry about who's in the kingdom of God, who's out of the kingdom. We're all in the kingdom of God. Jesus was through his teaching making clear distinction of those who are in the kingdom and those who are out of the kingdom.

But the emergent church would not want to make those distinctions and would lean toward everybody being in rather than anybody being out. Not everyone that saith to me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.

There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Colossians 1.13 says that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. So in order for one to enter into the kingdom they have to be born again.

Jesus said you can't see the kingdom of God except you be born again. But the emergent church wants to include everybody in the kingdom of God. You start reading this stuff and you start to wonder, do these guys even understand what the gospel is? Of course, Brian McLaren says we really don't know what the gospel is.

Well, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul spells it out for us. He says I declare unto you the gospel which I preached to you unless you perceive it in vain that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried and rose again according to the scriptures.

He rose on the third day according to the scriptures. He says this is the gospel. That's the good news.

Yet that's not the good news that you hear emergent leaders often preach. The gospel for most Christians is simply Jesus died and his blood was shed and it was efficacious for our sins but he was the atoning sacrifice, the propitiation for our sins and God was satisfied and appeased because the wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus instead of us. And so as we turn to Jesus we are saved and we get to have eternity in heaven.

McLaren says this about the substitutionary atonement. He says that sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse, you know.

He's characterized Jesus in a couple of his books as being a, you know, if Jesus died in our place on the cross for us, then God the Father is a cosmic child abuser. That's blasphemy. While the emerging movement is often associated with Brian McLaren in the United States, Steve Chalk is leading this conversation in the United Kingdom.

Steve Chalk in his book, *The Lost Message of Jesus* also describes penal substitutionary atonement as cosmic child abuse. A vengeful father punishing his son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably both people inside and outside of the church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith.

Why did Christ die on the cross? McLaren and Bell and all these others would say he went there as an example of love for us. And I have to agree that that is one of the reasons Christ went to the cross. It is an example.

The ultimate sacrifice for people that didn't even care for him. People that hated him. But that is not the primary reason Christ went to the cross.

Christ went to the cross to die in our place so that our sins will not be held against us in judgment for eternity. The Lord took our sins upon him in order that the Father could save us from our sins and we would no longer be alienated from the Father. But since McLaren and Bell and these others don't believe that, they have come up with a different definition of the atonement.

For example we believe that Christ died in our place. That is often called the substitutionary atonement of Christ or the penal substitutionary atonement. I heard one well-known Christian leader who I won't mention his name just to protect his reputation because some people would use this against him.

But I heard him say it like this. The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something God is incapable of himself. God asks us to forgive people.

But God is incapable of forgiving. God can't forgive unless he punishes somebody in place of the person he is going to forgive. God doesn't say to you forgive your wife and then go kick the dog to vent your anger.

God asks you to actually forgive. There is a certain sense that a common understanding of the atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving unless he kicks somebody else. This is not just heresy.

This is blasphemy at the greatest levels. This is the stuff that makes all the apostles turn in graves. This is serious stuff.

To say that the father abused his son and to say if we believe that the father abused his son to die in our place is cosmic or divine child abuse. There is something seriously wrong with that kind of idea. But that's what McLaren would say.

Because he doesn't see a need to either satisfy the righteous wrath of God against sin or against he doesn't see the need for us to be forgiven of our sins by Christ dying in our place. To him the substitutionary atonement is not important at all. The scriptures are clear that he became cursed for us.

Upon him he fell what was due us the scriptures say. He became sin for us. All of us like sheep have gone astray.

But the Lord has laid the iniquities all upon him. I mean one of the clearest things in scripture is that Jesus died in our place to take our penalty. The emergent gospel is essentially a gospel void of the idea of sin and judgment and hell which is completely contrasted by the book of Romans.

As a matter of fact Paul spends the first three chapters addressing the utter sinfulness the utter depravity of man before he gets to the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. He makes it very very clear that both the Jew and Gentile are under sin. But it's not just the penalty of sin that God has dealt with.

It's the problem of sin. He has unlocked that prison cell. So any gospel that keeps a man within the prison cell is still a false one.

Even if it's unintentional it's still like the act of omission. It's not giving the greater picture of what Paul describes in Romans 6, half of Romans 7 and in Romans 8. It is literally triumph. That's what God has called us to.

Not just the penalty and not just the problem. But he's also invited us in to the very near presence of God. But then the capstone to it all is that he doesn't just send us out to die.

He doesn't just send us out as sheep among wolves to just get eaten alive. Because that's the way it would be. He calls us out as victors and he fills us with himself.

He gives us literally the indwelling life of Christ to empower us to take these hands and make them his hands. Take these feet and make them his feet. Take these mouths and make them his mouth.

We become his. Holy and completely. We're on a commission.

We are called and commissioned forward. And in the process we are given all that is needed for life and godliness in Christ Jesus. Some emergents are saying, hey you can be saved in other religions.

You can be saved in Buddhism. You can be saved in Islam. But the scriptures are clear.

Jesus said that I am the door. If you seek to go up another way, the same as a thief and a liar. John chapter 10, verse 1 verse 9. John 14, 6 Jesus said, I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father but through me. First Timothy 2, 5. Paul says there's only one mediator between God and man. The man Christ Jesus.

Acts 4, 12. Peter says there's salvation is found in no other name but the name of Jesus Christ. Let's be truthful.

If we follow Jesus and we love him and we embrace him let's preach Jesus. Let's be truthful and faithful to his word. If we are not really followers of Christ and following the historical Jesus of scripture, let's not pretend to be followers of Jesus and deceive mass people who think that you are.

The scariest thing about the emerging gospel is it's a gospel that's more of a social gospel. It's a gospel that's not focused on changing your beliefs but it's focused on changing your behavior. They're looking for a church that basically is wrapped around fixing the social problems of the planet.

To help the poor people, to help those that are illiterate, to help the ecology and so forth. That's what the church ought to be about. We should marshal all of our efforts, not to win souls to the Lord but to fix this planet, save this planet from self-destruction.

Brian McLaren will make great cases for the fact that we are all stuck on issues of holiness and not having sex before marriage and not doing all these things. He said we should be saving whales and we should be preserving the integrity of the homosexual community. And I will say straight up that isn't the priority of the Bible.

That isn't what God commissions us as Christians to be doing with our time. He does give us very specific battles of our individual soul with sin that we do not allow the slight hand of Satan to come in and devour us as Christians and thusly the church of Jesus Christ. We stand in purity, we walk in holiness and we do this by the enabling power of Jesus Christ.

But there's a complete shift where suddenly we're environmentalists and that's the priority of God to save the earth. That's what Brian McLaren is proposing. And when you do that suddenly, as we were talking before, hell becomes this weird visage of a thought of someone who's unloving and intolerant in this age towards homosexuals.

They're in hell. It's bizarre. It is crazy.

It has no basis in any logic and for some reason when people read these books, they buy it. They actually are agreeing with this stuff. Serious stuff though.

And it's very dangerous and we need to stand up in this generation and deal with it. Young people are being indoctrinated into post-modern thinking within Christian and secular universities. Ideas have consequences.

Many Christians have demonstrated how the ideology of the emerging church will prove to be spiritually fatal to Christendom. It is time for all Christians to join the worldwide conversation of the emerging church and earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, before it is too late.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/ITH11vdJJNw.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/elliott-nesch/the-real-roots-of-the-emergent-church-documentary/>

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