

Emergent Church Movement

What does the Emergent Church movement believe about the glory of God?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

As we continue our series, we examine the movement's "new Reformation" in the light of the fifth rallying cry of the 16th century Protestant Reformation: *Soli Deo Gloria* – the glory belongs to God alone.

Once again, we shall let Emergent spokesmen answer for themselves.

This article is part four. Read [part three](#).

The Emergent Church movement is all about the pride and glory of man, not the glory of God. Before we move on to consider further evidence, let us briefly review what we have already observed.

We have already seen this pride and glorification of man in place of God in the Emergents' essential approach to what they falsely call "Christianity." The central focus of the Emergent religion is not the Christ of the Bible, but an all-inclusive assembly of people from all sorts of "faith traditions." We have also seen the same pride in the reaction of Emergents who are insulted by the doctrine of salvation from sin and Hell by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. They reject such a doctrine because it means that true Christianity is an exclusive rather than an inclusive faith.

We have also seen that the Emergent Church movement is all about prideful man's embrace of mystery and paradox as the keys to "higher knowledge." The Emergent focus is not on Biblical orthodoxy, but on "a generous orthodoxy" – "orthoparadoxy". Emergent leader Rob Bell boasts, "This is not just the same old message with new methods. We're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion..."¹

Emergent Theology: Stone Soup

Emergent theology must embrace mystery and paradox because of its rush to include all ideas and perspectives in the pursuit of "higher knowledge." Emergent theology is "conversational theology." In the Emergent view, too many cooks don't spoil the soup. They enrich it and spice it up.

But the theological soup that Emergents make is actually stone soup. The recipe reads thus: Start not with God's Word but with an empty pot. Fill it not with Living Water but with the dank and putrefying fluid of broken cisterns. Throw in any old stone just as long as it is not Christ the Rock of Offence (that's the one stone the Emergents reject). Then let everyone who comes along throw in any heresy they wish, whether it's fresh from the fertile fields of the postmodern mind, or stinking and moldy from the dark cells of the Middle Ages. Stir the soup constantly and mix thoroughly. You can serve this fetid dish at any stage in the cooking process. Serve hot, cold, or lukewarm. It doesn't matter, because your fellow Emergents will say it's delicious no matter what.

Exclusionary Inclusivism

The true taste of this theological soup is bitter irony: While Emergent theology claims to be generously inclusive, it is fatally exclusive of anything that really matters. While it welcomes any and every idea the sinful mind of man can imagine, it rejects anything from the mind of God. Certain ideas are forbidden – or if they are introduced into the conversation, they will be ridiculed and quickly rejected. Those ideas are the Bible's propositional truths.

The Emergent "God" is not the God of the Bible, but whatever Emergents make him/her/it out to be (and you will find Emergents referring to "God" as any of the three).

The Bible is not the inspired, infallible, inerrant, uniquely authoritative Word of God, but a collection of literary artifacts whose value and usefulness is determined not by any objective standard, but by Emergents' subjective agendas.

"Grace" is not the gift of God that brings about salvation from sin and Hell, but Emergents' gift of inclusiveness to everyone of all religions as long as they can agree on a common socio-economic-ecological agenda.

Jesus Christ may be many things, but He is not the God of the Bible. He may be a moral example. He may be a social revolutionary. He may be a religious iconoclast. He may be a radical environmentalist.

Or "Jesus" may be other, darker things. Emergent spokeswoman Heather Kirk-Davidoff writes a chapter in *The Emergent Manifesto of Hope* called "Meeting Jesus at the Bar: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Evangelism." She begins thus:

I first began to understand "relational evangelism" the night that a woman in a bar told me that she had seen Jesus dressed as a homeless cross-dressing man in an elf costume.

I had gone to the bar after attending a workshop on GenX ministry.

Striking up a conversation with a fellow bar patron over their drinks, Kirk-Davidoff then engaged in an Emergent version of telling someone about "Jesus" –

We talked about her work, her boyfriend, the music we liked, and eventually about the musical *Rent*, which she loved. We talked about her favorite character, Angel, a drum-playing homeless gay man who spends most of the show dressed as a drag queen Santa Claus. Partway through the show Angel dies from AIDS, surrounded by an eclectic group of friends. "What's amazing to me," the woman said, "is how much power Angel's love has in the lives of the other characters in the play. And his love doesn't stop affecting them even after he dies. It's like...it's like it's made more perfect in his death.

To which Kirk-Davidoff says she responded: "You know, some people say Angel is a Christ figure...What do you think?"²

The Emergent "Jesus" can be just about anything, even an insane sexual pervert, so long as he is not God – Jesus of the Bible who is seated at the right hand of the Father in power and glory.

It's All About Them

Emergents reject the Bible as the only authoritative, propositional truth because it reins in their prideful ambitions. The Emergent Church movement is, in their own phrases, all about "our community" – "building our tradition" – "telling our story." Emergents see themselves as carrying out "God's agenda to remake and restore all of creation." And that, they say, is the "good news."³

Emergent spokesman Mark Scandrette is a self-styled "spiritual teacher" and executive director of ReIMAGINE, an organization in San Francisco that among other things sponsors a program called "The Jesus Dojo". *Dojo* is a Japanese term meaning "place of the way" and embodies meditational concepts found in Shintoism and Zen Buddhism. In a chapter called "Growing Pains: The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, Scandrette summarizes the Emergent agenda:

- significant interest in "community," communal living, and renewed monastic practices
- an open-source [inclusive] approach to community, theology, and leadership that encourages flatter structures, networks, and more personal and collective participation

- revitalized interest in the social dimensions of the gospel of Jesus, including community development, earth-keeping, global justice, and advocacy – with a particular emphasis on a relationally engaged approach to these issues
- renewed interest in contemplative and bodily spiritual formation disciplines that have, historically, been important Christian practices [e.g., Medieval Catholic meditative practices such as "centering prayer"]
- a renewed emphasis on creation theology that celebrates earth, humanity, cultures, and the sensuous and esthetic as good gifts of the Creator to be enjoyed in their proper contexts
- cultivation and appreciation of the arts, creativity, artful living, and provocative storytelling
- reexamination of vocation, livelihood, and sustainable economics⁴

That, not salvation from Hell, is the "good news" according to Scandrette and his cohorts.

Too Busy Having "Conversations" to Listen to God

Emergents are all about "conversation." Emergent cohorts (groups) meet regularly around the country to have, as their website emergentvillage.org puts it, conversations about what they think is important. There is no touch-stone, no authoritative body of proposition truth. Truth is what they make it.

Emergents are far too pridefully busy talking endlessly about being "generative" and "missional" (their two favorite words), and about remaking man and the world in their image – to simply shut up, sit down at Jesus' feet, and listen submissively to the One who made all things, sustains all things, will judge all things, and will make all things new by His glorious power.

The Proper Evangelical Response

British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones' words from the early 1960s are a timeless indictment of movements such as the Emergent Church, and a Biblical warning to Christians who claim to be true to God's Word but are merely "concerned" about the Emergent movement:

To regard a church, or a council of churches, as a forum in which fundamental matters can be debated and discussed, or as an opportunity for witness-bearing, is sheer confusion and muddled thinking. There is to be no discussion about "the foundation," as we have seen. If men do not accept that, they are not brethren and we can have no dialogue with them. We are to preach to such and to evangelize them. Discussion takes place only among brethren who share the same life and subscribe to the same essential truth. It is right and good that brethren should discuss together matters which are not essential to salvation and about which there is, and always has been, and probably always will be, legitimate difference of opinion. We can do no better at that point than quote the old adage, "In things essential unity, in things indifferent liberty, in all things charity."

Before there can be any real discussion and dialogue and exchange there must be agreement concerning primary and fundamental matters. Without the acceptance of certain axioms and propositions in geometry, for example, it is idle to attempt to solve any problem. If certain people refuse to accept the axioms, and are constantly querying and disputing them, clearly there is no point of contact between them and those who do accept them. It is precisely the same in the realm of the church. Those who question and query, let alone deny, the great cardinal truths that have been accepted throughout the centuries do not belong to the church, and to regard them as brethren is to betray the truth. As we have already reminded ourselves, the apostle Paul tells us clearly what our attitude to them should be: "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10). They are to be regarded as unbelievers who need to be called to repentance and acceptance of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. To give the impression that they are

Christians with whom other Christians disagree about certain matters is to confuse the genuine seeker and enquirer who is outside [and also, we would add, to confuse those within the church]. But such is the position prevailing today. It is based upon a failure to understand the nature of the New Testament church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). In the same way it is a sheer waste of time to discuss or debate the implications of Christianity with people who are not agreed as to what Christianity is. Failure to realize this constitutes the very essence of the modern confusion.⁵

Christ's kingdom has no place for "a generous orthodoxy."

1 Rob Bell, as quoted in "The Emergent Mystique" by Andy Crouch, *Christianity Today*, November 1, 2004, as viewed at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/november/12.36.html> in April 2009.

2 Heather Kirk-Davidoff, "Meeting Jesus at the Bar: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Evangelism" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 34-35.

3 Mark Scandrette, "Growing Pains: The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 26. The "messy and fertile" reference comes from Scandrette's comment elsewhere in the book (22): "The emerging church is like junior high students and sex – a lot of people are talking about it, but not a lot of people are actually doing it – and those that are doing it are messy – and fertile as hell."

4 Mark Scandrette, "Growing Pains: The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 34.

5 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Basis of Christian Unity," in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 162-163

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Emergents are certain of this: The Bible is not God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, uniquely authoritative Word.

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