

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Incredibly, the great interest many Christians have shown in emergent leaders and their churches is fueled by two myths. The first myth is that emergents are converting lost postmodern people to Jesus. Yet that is simply not the case in most emergent communities, for two reasons. First, conversion is unlikely when the gospel of our sin and Jesus' death for our sin and resurrection for our salvation is not defined clearly. Second, emergents are not generally planting churches to convert lost people; rather, they are gathering disgruntled former evangelicals to do life and talk theology together.... The second myth is that emergents are humble....<sup>1</sup>

- **Disclaimer**

My understanding of this subject is evolving, so I ask that one read this critique with an understanding that I am always learning, and willing to learn. I try to explain some aspects of this movement as much as possible; however, some of the brightest minds trying to get to the core of what this movement is have had difficulty in doing just this. For instance, this movement has been called “fluid,”<sup>2</sup> “not fully definable...,”<sup>3</sup> being, “decades away from [a] mature definition.”<sup>4</sup> All of which points to the fact that “such broad categories are not precise, and there are also variations within each broad category,”<sup>5</sup> which makes pinning this movement down a tough task.

What makes it equally difficult to approach this in a manner that makes discussion respectful is the fact that the “emergent critique of the modern church suffers from an over-population of straw men... greatly exaggerate[ing] the differences between modernism and postmodernism.”<sup>6</sup> Many of the emergent church “writers seem to be reacting against caricatures, real or imagined, of the fuller forms of evangelical Christianity.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, we seem to be talking past each other in this conversation. Another avenue that hinders serious discussion on where the emerging church is heading is all the technical jargon and concepts being born out of this conversation. Words such as, “transmodern,” a term incorporated by psychologist Paul Vitz,<sup>8</sup> or “metanarrative,”<sup>9</sup> another word packed full of

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves + Nine Other Misconceptions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 238-239.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Death By Love: Letters from the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 180.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Deyoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing, 2008), 151, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 111-112.

<sup>8</sup> Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 31

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

meaning. This particular discussion here however need not get *too* technical.

- **Defining Moments**

Again, I wish to stress that this movement is not easily defined because it is so broad and incorporates too many positions to even be considered by some a *movement* at all. For example, Russell Moore, who is Dean of the School of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Director of the Carl Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement, has this to say in regards to the “emerging church:”

There’s no such thing as the emerging church, that’s what I think. I think that after all of this time talking about the emerging church and emergent and what the emerging church means for evangelical Christianity. I do not believe there is any such thing.... If you’ve got a movement that’s so broad that you have to, every time you talk about it, say, “now... yeah you’ve got Brian McLaren who holds to some heretical views over here, you have Mark Driscoll who doesn’t hold to heretical views over here, you’ve got Dan Kimball who’s willing to stand up at Willow Creek and argue for the doctrine of hell,” you’ve got all of these differences and disagreements within this movement,’ is it really even fair to call it a movement?<sup>10</sup>

I somewhat concur. While the emerging church says it is a way of responding to modernism by incorporating some aspects of postmodernism, I have long ago come to the conclusion that postmodernism as a quantifiable philosophical model simply does not exist -- as much as I speak about it. A very powerful refutation of this supposed philosophical position can be found in Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl’s book, *Relativism: Feet Planted Firmly in Mid-Air*. In it, they make the point that due to the self-refuting nature within the premise of postmodernism, that it simply collapses into incoherence,

These assumptions presuppose the two philosophical perspectives mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: epistemological relativism and moral relativism. These views also form the philosophical basis for an intellectual movement known as postmodernism whose assumptions have been applied to questions of truth, culture, religion, and politics. Although the purpose of this book is not to analyze this recent movement, our critique, if successful, undermines the intellectual basis for it [postmodernism].<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Guest hosting the Albert Mohler Radio Program, recorded on 7-28-08.

<sup>11</sup> (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 82. See also, D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 114-115.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

I believe that critique to be successful. So where does that leave me? I cannot fully analyze a movement that technically does not exist in its most liberal form, and if it does exist, it exists in a state of *propositional*<sup>12</sup> self-refutation.<sup>13</sup> A good commentary on this idea comes from Ravi Zacharias in a forum setting that included Albert Mohler and R. C. Sproul:

**Sproul:** When Christians make confessions of faith *propositionally* and say “here we stand this is what we believe”, the emergent church was a built-in allergy to that don’t you think....

**Zacharias:** Vance Havner who had a very sharp wit with his one liners.... He made the comment years and years ago when he was around. He said “when the tide is low every shrimp has his own puddle.” This [Emergent Church] is another one of these puddles. And it makes me wonder. There is seriously... with these men and women who are the progenitors of it, were they bored with God? What brought this about? You know, what brought this methodology into a theology? When you write a book like “The Secret Message of Jesus”? [by Brian McLaren] What?!?! 2,000 years have gone by now suddenly he’s found the secret to it, we didn’t know it? This is so bizarre, but you know the problem is that we got non-critical people listening to this stuff and they absorb it. When you read Brian McLaren every chapter dies the death of a 1,000 qualifications... At the end of it you wonder what he really believes and maybe something on Monday something else on Tuesday. *He’s an anti-doctrinaire doctrinaire doctrinizing individual always postulating doctrine while he’s anti-doctrine.* These are hard words but it is pitiful to watch something like this actually gain currency...<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I would point the reader to a definition of “proposition truth” that Philosopher Harold A. Netland gave it:

...before looking at specific arguments it is necessary to clarify what is meant by propositional truth. In order to appreciate what propositional truth is we must first be clear on what is meant by "proposition." Most philosophers today make a fundamental distinction between sentences and statements or propositions. The distinction is essentially between "what is said (or written)" and "what is used to say what is said." What is said is said through a sentence or by means of a sentence, but it is not identical with the sentence. Sentences are always in a given language, such as English, German, Spanish, Hindi, etc., whereas what is expressed by the sentence is not. Significantly, the same statement can be expressed in many different languages. Indeed, the same statement can be expressed in different sentences in the same language. For this and other reasons philosophers make a distinction between sentences and statements or propositions. For our purposes we can regard "statements" and "propositions" as virtually synonymous. We can roughly define a proposition as the meaning expressed by a declarative sentence or as "what is conveyed" by a sentence which makes an implicit or explicit assertion.

*Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1991), 113-114. The reader should read this entire chapter, which is entitled “Religion and Truth” (Chpt. Four, 112-150).

<sup>13</sup> Ravi Zacharias makes a point using Aristotelian logic that while an Eastern philosopher/religious adherent may reject logic as a “Western/modernist” invention, the person rejecting logic has to incorporate it in his or her rejection of it:

As the professor waxed eloquent and expounded on the law of non-contradiction, he eventually drew his conclusion: “This [either/or logic] is a Western way of looking at reality. The real problem is that you are seeing contradictions as a Westerner when you should be approaching it as an Easterner. The both/and is the Eastern way of viewing reality.” After he belabored these two ideas on either/or and both/and for some time, I finally asked if I could interrupt his unpunctuated train of thought and raise one question. I said, “Sir, are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I either use the both/and system of logic or nothing else?” There was pin-drop silence for what seemed an eternity. I repeated my question: “Are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I either use the both/and logic or nothing else? Have I got that right?” He threw his head back and said, “The either/or does seem to emerge, doesn’t it?” “Indeed, it does emerge,” I said. “And as a matter of fact, even in India we look both ways before we cross the street - it is either the bus or me, not both of us.”

*Can Man Live Without God?* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 1994), 128-129. In similar fashion, Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent*, mention a “modernist error” committed by Brian McLaren when he insists “on either-or when a both-and” solution is warranted (39-40).

<sup>14</sup> From a forum from 2008 which can be found online. This comes from Last Row at: <http://lastrow.wordpress.com/>, the quotes and video of Zacharias can be found at a post entitled, “Zacharias, Mohler, and Sproul on the Emergent Church:” <http://lastrow.wordpress.com/2008/03/13/zacharias-mohler-and-sproul-on-the-emergent-church/> (last accessed 8-20-09). (Emphasis added)

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

It says nothing in other words; it replaces that which it denies with the denial. The incoherent nature imbued in the views expressed by these emergent authors forces people like myself to pull out portions of theology from their rantings and build up support for the classical, historical, understandings for almost two millennia of church history. I will feebly attempt as much in regards to Rob Bell,<sup>15</sup> who is the founding pastor of Mars Hill church in Grandville, Michigan.

- **Pros & Cons**

I would be remiss not to include some of the positive aspects of the movement.<sup>16</sup> David Noebel, the founder of Summit Ministries, which prepares young people to enter the world/university filled with differing worldviews, opinions, and beliefs, mentions some of the positive aspects of the movement:

(1) a critique of the negative aspects of modernism; (2) a strong emphasis on community; (3) a strong emphasis on putting one's faith into action; and (4) a reminder that not all truth is propositional -- e.g. the story of "the good Samaritan" expresses the same truth that is found within the proposition "love your neighbor."<sup>17</sup>

I go to a church that has adopted some of these positive aspects, which emphasizes community and growth rather than being a stickler on every doctrinal point.<sup>18</sup> I think we can all agree that some

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<sup>15</sup> As we discuss this matter, remember that Rob Bell is a pastor of a church and has "a greater accountability and responsibility as a dispenser of truth to which [he is] held accountable by a community of believers" -- Zacharias (This quote will be *realized* on page 7... hang in there).

<sup>16</sup> Matt Slick of Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (C.A.R.M.) says that the "Emerging Church movement is controversial and CARM does not approve or disapprove of it as a whole. There is so much diversity within it that it cannot be labeled as all good or all bad," found at: [http://www.carm.org/emerging/read\\_first.htm](http://www.carm.org/emerging/read_first.htm) (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>17</sup> David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Collision of Today's Competing Worldviews* (Manitou Springs: Summit Press, 2006), 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> I like to say, "I am a Baptist at heart, just not in dress or drink." Which is a humorous way of saying I am a product of the hippie/boomer generation while at the same time I very much enjoy doctrinal orthodoxy. Being at a church that defends the major aspects of the faith and allows at the same time the grace and space needed to grow and learn -- which often times is a lifetime -- has been a blessing. So what we defend is God the Father and the Revelation He gave us (the Bible), Jesus Christ the Son and the work he wrought on the Cross for us, and the Holy Spirit and the daily regeneration He works in us. Let me, if you will, share a response to a young man whom contacted me via email. He seemed a bit confused and almost demanded that people know and accept inerrancy before taking them as believers. Here is my response to him, it is long but still in abridged form:

I myself am still learning about theology, God, relationships in the Body, etc. What I believed about God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit 10-years ago I have matured in. Would you have run me through a list of doctrinal beliefs (10-years ago) and if we didn't agree on this list would I be your friend? Would I be allowed a place in your church to be able to hash out life issues, theology, and the like; a place where relationships can grow and spurn understanding and deeper knowledge about God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as all the dynamics (or egos) between the body of Christ? I suspect, because I am a finite being, that in 10-years from now I will have matured and reformulated peripheral beliefs about my faith as well as growing in understanding of the shared Christian's doctrinal foundations. In fact, Paul says that we look through a clouded mirror and that one day we will see as we are seen. I will not fully comprehend everything I need to until I stand before my Creator. On that day I suspect that even the knowledge of this perfect theology will give way to that relationship I was originally intended for. Dennis Prager has a neat saying, he says often to "not let the perfect get in the way of the good." That small sentence has a big meaning. When I first started going to this church 12-years ago [from the date of this writing], I tested my pastor. One of my tests I gave was this question during general conversation (thinking all-the-while that it would reveal an all-important issue that would tell me if he was

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

churches do need to *loosen up* while others need to *tighten up*. As some of these churches *loosen up* by adopting some of the positive aspects of this movement, they should not lose sight of the basis for our faith, the fundamentals. David Noebel continues his limited critique with a few points of negativity, “...several troubling traits are also emerging: (1) a denial of the Bible's inerrancy; (2) a skepticism of foundational knowledge; and (3) an orthodoxy that is perhaps too generous.”<sup>19</sup>

Noebel mentions that “although they claim to be evangelical, the jury of orthodoxy is still in deliberations.”<sup>20</sup> I disagree with this now dated summation, I will attempt to show how some of their distortions of the historic faith can affect the power to describe what was revealed to us, that is: who Jesus is and his uniqueness in history. We would not know who Christ was in an objective manner unless He (God) revealed this propositional truth to us.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, I speak here authoritatively (as any Christian can<sup>22</sup>) about the subject of Jesus’ divinity. What the emerging movement seems to be doing in contradistinction to what I just mentioned is *diminishing* God’s ability to reveal truth to us. There almost seems to be a reifying<sup>23</sup> similar to that of neo-theism, where abstracts are exchanged for human qualities and figurative portrayals turned into literal portraits.<sup>24</sup> In fact, I would point to open-theism (neo-theism) as the roots of the *emerging* tree. An over emphasis on the ineffability<sup>25</sup> and mystery of God is first found in open theism and its adherents.<sup>26</sup> While the open-theists seemed to have shrunk back from the “ugliness of their own storytelling methods not wanting to fall into the theological abyss they were creating,”<sup>27</sup> the emerging church seems to wholly embrace this abyss.<sup>28</sup>

- **Learning Curves**

Before continuing, I want to challenge the reader who has already made up their mind in regards to the emerging movement to allow me to be conversant with them. All persons in my opinion should be introduced to debate, two sides of any topic or subject. This is sometimes the best way one can come to

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<sup>19</sup> David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times*, 83.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 3:14; Proverbs 30:4; John 1:1, 14; John 8:58; Matthew 22:41-46; etc, etc.

<sup>22</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>23</sup> *Reify* - “to regard (something abstract) as a material or concrete thing,” *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc, 2003), cf. reify.

<sup>24</sup> John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Underpinning of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 153.

<sup>25</sup> *Ineffability* - “incapable of being expressed in words,” *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., cf. Ineffability.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson, eds., *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 169.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Wilson and John Armstrong, eds., *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance: Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian, Book 2* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), especially chapter 20, 140-151.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

an understanding in regards to evidence a particular subject has or lacks. This is, in fact, what the pro-life movement wants; a presentation of all the facts, confident that once viewed the young mother will choose life much more often. Debate typically sheds light on positions that often times are ignored or hard to digest. A prime example is myself.

My pre-Christ life would make the chief of sinners, Paul, wag his head (1 Tim 1:15); my post-Christ life would make Moses break the tablets a second time. During *seasons* in my life as the Holy Spirit points me towards maturity, often times dragging me kicking and screaming, I have firmly believed in an aspect of reality one way -- and then when presented evidence that is contrary to what I first believed I will often times change my position with deep contemplation or the proverbial *smack* across the back of the head. Nature, history, truth, theology, aspects of reality, etc, all these positions changed under direction of the Holy Spirit via God's Word and the Body of Christ, the book of nature, and Christian luminaries (if there is such a thing). One example I can give specifically are my positions concerning history and eschatology.<sup>29</sup>

As a renewed Christian just out of the L.A. County jail system,<sup>30</sup> I became immersed in everything to do with Jesus *Second Coming*. Often times this type of intense study will lead to the idea that there is a secret cabal pulling the strings of history behind such organizations as the Trilateral Commission, the Council of Foreign Relation, the Bilderbergers, Illuminati, Masons (Freemasons), Skull and Bones, and the like. I am sure that most reading this have seen the movie *The Da Vinci Code*, the same thinking by conspiratorial advocate, Ralph Epperson, follows:<sup>31</sup>

**The Accidental View of History:** historical events occur by accident, for no apparent reason. Rulers are powerless to intervene.

**The Conspiratorial View of History:** historical events occur by design for reasons that are not generally made known to the people.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Epperson continues by comparing two quotes with this idea in mind:

| Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor.... [wrote]: "History is much more

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<sup>29</sup> *Eschatology* - "Study of the 'last things' or the end of the world." Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), cf. *eschatology*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> I am an ex-con from 20[+] years ago... in case you didn't follow the footnotes in chapter one.

<sup>31</sup> The following book I would no longer recommend for reading, but find it useful to define this view.

<sup>32</sup> A. Ralph Epperson, *The Unseen Hand: An Introduction to the Conspiratorial View of History* (Tucson, AZ: Publius Press, 1985), 6.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

the product of chaos than of conspiracy.... increasingly, policy makers are overwhelmed by events and information.” ....Franklin D. Roosevelt who certainly saw many monumental events occur during his consecutive administrations. President Roosevelt has been quoted as saying: “In politics, nothing happens by accident. If it happens, it was planned that way.”<sup>33</sup>

This immersion eventually led me to meeting regularly with a group of John Birch Society members.<sup>34</sup> I read many books on the *New World Order*, which is intimately entwined with the conspiratorial view of history. A few years later I came across a Jewish radio talk show host who on every full moon would only allow callers who believed in this type of history. He called the show on that day the *Conspiracy Day*, and it was not until I heard debate and opposition to my view that I began to weigh the evidences for it. In the end, my interpretation of history collapsed under the weight of the evidence. I do not want this to escape the reader, *as*, this will lead to a more fruitful discussion of the topic at hand - primarily, the postmodern view of history, theology, and ultimately truth. I mentioned just a moment ago “debate.” The *American Heritage Dictionary*<sup>35</sup> defines debate as:

1. To consider something; deliberate.
2. To engage in argument by discussing opposing points.

*Black's Law Dictionary*<sup>36</sup> defines *deliberate*, a word used in the *American Heritage Dictionary* definition, as:

1. Intentional; premeditated; fully considered.
2. Unimpulsive; slow in deciding.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>34</sup> John Birch was a brash and sometimes controversial figure in history who died near the end of WWII, most would argue as a hero. The society that was founded in his name was at first concerned primarily with possible infiltration into our government by communist sympathizers. The organization metamorphosed over the years into what we find today, an organization that would posit that this infiltration is more than merely a communist infiltration, which was bore out as true (see for instance: M. Stanton Evans, *Blacklisted By History: The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy* [New York, NY: Crown Forum, 2007]). Today, however, the John Birch Society has had issues published of its monthly magazine that would take the position, for instance, that the United States Government was intimately involved in the Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Federal Building (see for instance: William F. Jasper, “Proof of Bombs and Cover-up,” *The New American* 14, no. 15 [July 1998]: 10-15.). They would believe that our government took down the Twin Towers, as would I have believed if this event took place 15-years ago. Moreover, they would posit that this infiltration and planned corruption and control of society goes back through most epochs of history to the mystery religions. The Revolutionary War, WWI, WWII, the Vietnam War, as examples, were all started by plan and years of preparation to entrench even more the power of these “controllers of history.”

<sup>35</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), cf. debate, 468.

<sup>36</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1999), cf. deliberate, 438.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

You see, it was not until I heard true debate on the topic of whether or not history was guided by an ill intentioned cabal or not that I even considered revising my position. This debate allowed me time to *deliberate* and *meditate* on the issue causing a healthier picture of history to immerge based on all -- or at least more -- of the historical information available. Pride, selfishness, shoddy thinking, presuppositions, (in other words -- our nature), will get in the way of us coming to conclusions in our life that could have saved us time, energy, feelings hurt, friends and family lost, as well as faith destroyed... ours - or others around us. Another point worth mentioning is during this time of formulation, deliberation, and reformulation -- I was still *saved* in the fullest sense of the word. Jesus and His sacrificial covering of my sins were not affected by my peripheral eschatological viewpoints; no matter how disjointed it made my life. My unhealthy view of history and my subsequent forcing of Biblical passages to fit that unhealthy view did not affect the person and deity of Christ.

- **Space to Grow**

The question becomes this: *What is the church's role in all of this?* When we are too compulsive in some areas of our life but too slow in deciding on matters that would speed up healthy living, is it the church's responsibility to fly in -- red cape and all -- and point fingers? On the other hand, should it be the church's role to provide a place where people feel safe by being loved? I believe it to be the latter. Another aspect here to keep in mind is that there are misunderstandings on what a person needs to believe, and at what time during their journey. We are not all robots made identical so that the Holy Spirit can move us along on the same path in the same time period.<sup>37</sup> Ravi again clears up this thinking

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<sup>37</sup> I wanted here to reference a beautiful story that some will recognize when they see it, as, it comes from the "king" of evidential apologetics., Josh McDowell. Josh finishes off his rational, historical, fact based argument with his most important chapter. It details the experiential impact that God had on his life, and in this presentation there is more weight to the changes wrought by Calvary than in the previous 12 fact filled chapters. In it, you can see that it took Josh almost 18 months to shake his skepticism and embrace what God had planned for him; in his Father's case it was almost instantaneous. Let's read, remember, it is Josh speaking:

I hated one man more than anyone else in the world—my father. I hated his guts. I was mortified that he was the town alcoholic. If you're from a small town and one of your parents is an alcoholic, you know what I mean. Everybody knows. My high school friends would make jokes about my father's drinking. They didn't think it bothered me because I fell in with the joking and laughed with them. I was laughing on the outside, but let me tell you, I was crying on the inside. I would go to the barn and find my mother beaten so badly she couldn't get up, lying in the manure behind the cows. When we had friends over, I would take my father out to the barn, tie him up, and park his car behind the silo. We would tell our guests he'd had to go somewhere. I don't think anyone could hate a person more than I hated my father. About five months after I made that decision for Christ, a love from God entered my life so powerfully that it took that hatred, turned it upside down, and emptied it out. I was able to look my father squarely in the eyes and say, "Dad, I love you." And I really meant it. After some of the things I'd done to him, that really shook him up. After I transferred to a private university, a serious car accident put me in the hospital. When I was moved home to recover, my father came to visit me. Remarkably, he was sober that day. But he seemed uneasy, pacing about the room. Then he blurted out, "Son, how can you love a father like me?" I answered, "Dad, six months ago I despised you." Then I shared with him the story of my research and conclusions about Jesus Christ. I told him, "I have placed my trust in Christ, received God's forgiveness, invited him into my life, and he has changed me. I can't explain it all, Dad, but God has taken away my hatred and replaced it with the capacity to love. I love you and accept you just the way you are." We talked for almost an hour, and then I received one of the greatest thrills of my life. This man who was my father, this man who knew me too well for me to pull the wool over his eyes, looked at me and said, "Son, if God can do in my life what I've seen him do in yours, then I want to give him the opportunity. I want to trust him as my Savior and Lord." I



## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

in his patented cogent way after asked a question by a student at a Q&A forum at Georgia University:

*What does it take to be a Christian?* I would tell you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that God raised him from the dead... you - with your heart and mind - trust in Jesus Christ. You are a believer. *What does it take to come and belong to your church?* If you join the church where I am a member now, there are certain doctrinal beliefs that you have to believe. For example: You cannot believe that the bible is 90% rubbish and 10% good and still be a member of the church... you can't do that. There are certain doctrines you are committed to, there is a certain code of conduct you are committed to. If you belong to a community of believers, it is not just a belief in Christ, but also a certain community expression of that belief that you are submitted to. *What does it take to teach at Whitcliff-Hall Oxford University?* Now you have to add even more than that. So with each line of affiliation you put the plus - plus - plus. Not because the second or the third make you a Christian, but it places upon you a greater accountability and responsibility as a dispenser of truth to which you are held accountable by a community of believers.<sup>38</sup>

The newer believer needs a place where the concerns of life and faith can safely be expressed and which will allow them to grow in the understanding of their faith and what God has planned for their lives, better influencing the world around them. Only as the believer is immersed in a healthy-well-balanced church and community can conversation/debate with fellow trusted believers start to zero in on certain mistruths and myths held by many in regards to our faith and history. The reason for this critique.

It is possible for a person to view the historicity of the virgin birth, for instance, with skepticism and disbelief and still be saved in the truest sense of the word, as I was in regards to my view on eschatology. However, as the believer matures in his or her understanding of faith, such an issue grows in importance. The mature believer should keep in mind that focusing in on a doctrinal issue too early in a believers walk may not create dialogue or understanding as much as tension and misunderstanding. This brings me full circle to the topic at hand, that is, as the person moves up the scale of understanding, say, to the level of a pastor, what is his level of understanding and teaching *expected to be*? Is the virgin birth an event that is key to *who* (and thusly, *what*) Christ claimed to be? Is it a doctrine we can forego in our panoply of beliefs? Is the issue and manner in which Christ was born worth defending or pronouncing as a historical fact? Is it a unique event? What about some of the other doctrines, such as the Trinity and Resurrection, how important are these? I will hope to answer some of these questions here. Before I do however, I must discuss this issue in light of who I am contrasting these views with. In

<sup>38</sup> The video of this exchange can be seen at *Video Row Blog* (posted 3-5-09): <http://videorow.blogspot.com/2009/03/ravi-zacharias-answers-question-on.html> (last accessed 8-12-09).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

this case, it is Rob Bell.

- **The “Bell” of St. Mary**

Rob is part of the aforementioned movement that has recently made headway by way of some influential acolytes within Evangelical circles. He is widely known for his Nooma videos<sup>39</sup> as well as writing a book entitled *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*,<sup>40</sup> which is used quite a bit by youth pastors. Pastor Bell in his book discusses a presentation by another Christian speaker whom he finds some issue with; let us begin here to set the stage:

Somebody recently gave me a videotape of a lecture given by a man who travels around speaking about the creation of the world. At one point in his lecture, he said if you deny that God created the world in six literal twenty-four-hour days, then you are denying that Jesus ever died on the cross. It's a bizarre Leap of logic to make, I would say.

But he was serious.

It hit me while I was watching that for him faith isn't a trampoline; it's a wall of bricks. Each of the core doctrines for him is like an individual brick that stacks on top of the others. If you pull one out, the whole wall starts to crumble. It appears quite strong and rigid, but if you begin to rethink or discuss even one brick, the whole thing is in danger. Like he said, no six-day creation equals no cross. Remove one, and the whole wall wobbles.<sup>41</sup>

The “bizarre leap of logic” (Rob’s language) is not too bizarre if one understands that in Genesis when God finished creating, he called it [His creation] “good.” All Ken Ham points out to likeminded Christians is that *if* there were death, sickness, disease found in nature prior to Adam and Eve, what did Christ come to conquer if the fall introduced *that which was already present?* i.e., death. Bones of dinosaurs, early man, and other animals that would have predated Adam and Eve’s existence had cancer, disease, killed and were killed, and the like. If animals and early man are killing each other out of some natural competition, or survival of the fittest understanding, then how could God say “good” in regards to His creation? A young earth creationist is simply saying the same thing that Richard Bozarth in the *American Atheist* magazine said:

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<sup>39</sup> These are short “devotional” type videos; see Cameron Buettel of *Once Upon a Cross* (<http://www.onceuponacross.com/>) examines one of these videos in a presentation at a church: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wSAEezBc3s> (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>40</sup> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 26.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Christianity is—must be!—totally committed to the special creation as described in Genesis, and Christianity must fight with its full might, fair or foul, against the theory of evolution.... It becomes clear now that the whole justification of Jesus' life and death is predicated on the existence of Adam and the forbidden fruit he and Eve ate. Without the original sin, who needs to be redeemed? Without Adam's fall into a life of constant sin terminated by death, what purpose is there to Christianity? What all this means is that Christianity cannot lose the Genesis account of creation like it could lose the doctrine of geocentrism and get along. The battle must be waged, for Christianity is fighting for its very life.... Christianity has fought, still fights, and will fight science<sup>42</sup> to the desperate end over evolution, because evolution destroys utterly and finally the very reason Jesus' earthly life was supposedly made necessary. Destroy Adam and Eve and the original sin, and in the rubble you will find the sorry remains of the son of god. Take away the meaning of his death. If Jesus was not the redeemer who died for our sins, and this is what evolution means, then Christianity is nothing!<sup>43</sup>

There may be a valid theological refutation of the young earth position, that is neither here nor there, and I certainly agree with Rob's idea that some positions taken by young earth creationists theologically speaking may be a bit too rigid, right or wrong. However, *calling someone's theology "bizarre" is just as rigid.*

- **What ifs**

Now that we set up Rob's understanding of what he views as rigid (people with whom he disagrees with), he continues with hypothetical's that are typically espoused by secular scholars/professors and their lemming-like followers:

**What if** tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births? But **what if** as you study the origin of the word virgin, you discover that the word virgin in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew Language at that time, the word virgin could mean several things. And **what if** you discover that in the first century being "born of a virgin" also referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first 'time she had intercourse?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Actually here I would take out "science" and insert "scientism," which is defined as "a philosophical doctrine which asserts arbitrarily that knowledge comes only through the methods of investigation available to the natural sciences," William A. Demski, ed., *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 36.

<sup>43</sup> Richard G. Bozarth, "The Meaning of Evolution," *American Atheist* (February 1978), 19, 30; found in, Henry Morris, *That Their Words May Be Used Against Them* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1997), 375.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

(Remember these “what ifs,” as I will reference them often.) This may take some time to respond to, but the reader should know that the virgin birth is essential to our understanding of Jesus’ deity. Some have challenged whether the virgin birth of Jesus is an essential doctrine of the Christian Faith. While the connection is not as explicit as are other doctrines, such as Jesus’ death and Resurrection, it is nevertheless strong. To put it bluntly, if Jesus had two biological parents like the rest of us, then He would be a sinner like the rest of us. His virgin conception enabled Him to avoid inheriting a sin nature. Hence, the virgin birth is connected with His sinlessness, which is a fundamental doctrine of the Faith.<sup>45</sup>

- **New Sheriff In Town**

As the baby Christian develops into a mature Christian leaving behind milk and replacing it with the meat of the Gospel<sup>46</sup> the story of the virgin birth begins to be deeply woven into the fabric of who Christ claimed to be and the fullness of his sacrifice. One of the founding members of this emerging movement and one who has ended up on the conservative side of this outgrowth, Mark Driscoll, and his co-author Gerry Breshaers, make apparent the importance of accepting the virgin birth:

Martin Luther deftly commented that while the virgin conception was God’s greatest miracle in Mary’s life, the fact of her faith in God was perhaps the greatest miracle of all. It is our prayer that you would, by God’s grace, follow in the wonderful example of a remarkable teenage girl who was honored by God with the birth and raising of the Lord Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, who came to save us sinners from our sins. Beautifully, our new birth through Jesus is patterned after the birth of Jesus in that both are miracles wrought entirely of God to be received by faith.<sup>47</sup>

While Rob mentions that he is “far more interested in jumping than... [he is] in arguing about whose trampoline is better,”<sup>48</sup> Jesus was able enough to say that those who preceded him were... well... I will let Jesus say it:

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. “All who came before Me

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<sup>45</sup> Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *Conviction without Compromise: Standing Strong in the Core Beliefs of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 79.

<sup>46</sup> “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,” *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Cor 3:2.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshaers, *Vintage Jesus: Timeless Answers to Timeless Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 100-101.

<sup>48</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 27.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.<sup>49</sup>

D. A. Carson says that verse eight has presented,

...difficulties if it is supposed that none who came before Jesus were anything other than thieves and robbers, which clearly would make nonsense of the [Old Testament]. Some [manuscripts] omit the words before me, but it [is] most likely that they are original. The most probable meaning is that any who came before Jesus and claimed to be the only way in were false; a reference to the many false Messiahs with whom the history of the period abounded.<sup>50</sup>

This verse is not only referencing the false messiahs and leaders that had recently risen up during Jesus’ tenure in Israel, but also the world religious leaders up to that point.<sup>51</sup> Buddha and Zoroaster are liars and thieves, *per* Jesus.

- **In Orthodoxy, Unity; In Non-Orthodoxy, Liberty...**

In a November 2004 *Christianity Today* article written by Andy Crouch, titled “Emergent Mystique,” Bell said, “We’re rediscovering Christianity as an *Eastern religion*, as a way of life” (emphasis added).

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<sup>49</sup> John 10:7-10, NASB.

<sup>50</sup> *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), John 10:7-10 (emphasis added).

<sup>51</sup> For the *exegete*:

Ver. 8.—All that came before me are thieves and robbers. Great difficulty has been felt by commentators in understanding “before me.” The words clearly gave the early Gnostic heretics a text on which they established their dualistic rejection of the old dispensation. Their absence from certain texts led Augustine and others to emphasize the word “came.” “All who came,” i.e. in their own strength or wisdom, when not “sent” or authorized by God. Other endeavours have been made (see Meyer and Lange) to give it a non-temporal meaning, such as χωρίς, “independently of me.” Wolf and Olshausen make πρὸ equivalent to ὑπὲρ, “in the place” or “in the stead of me” (so Lange, Lampe, Schleusner). De Wette and others accept the temporal meaning, “before,” i.e. in point of time, and include under it the entire corpus of Old Testament saints and teachers, and therefore regard the saying as inconsistent with the gentleness of Christ. But with ch. 5:39, 45–47, and many other passages in this Gospel, it is certain the words could not mean to denounce all who came as teachers or shepherds before him in more point of time as “thieves and robbers,” whom the sheep did not hear. Therefore the πρὸ must be to some extent modified in meaning. We agree with Westcott and Godet in limiting πρὸ ἐμοῦ, by throwing the emphasis on the “came,” and by adding, moreover, to it the essential point, “came making themselves doors of the sheep”—claiming to have the “key of knowledge,” professing vainly to open or shut the door of heaven. That is, no other has ever had the right or claim to be such “a door.” The Baptist, the prophets, one by one, Abraham and Moses, in their day made no such profession. The dignity belongs to Christ alone. The language may receive accentuation from the pressing urgency of false Christs, as well as the hopeless system of Pharisaic pride. Thoma sees here the mere dressing out of St. Paul’s language, condemnatory of false prophets and ravening wolves who would not spare the flock of Christ (Acts 20:29), and Christ’s own words in the synoptists (Matt. 7:15; 23:13, etc.). Special reference is made to the ceremonial superstitions, to “the hedge about the Law,” to the cruel slavery of modern Pharisaism, which had done what neither prophets nor priests of old had attempted. Archdeacon Watkins emphasizes the present tense, “are thieves,” etc., making Christ’s reference obvious to the lawyers and scribes of his own day, who were closing the door, and plundering those whom they kept out of the kingdom. But the sheep did not hear them. The true sheep have not been seduced by them. The teaching of these Pharisees has not prevailed over susceptible souls.

H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Hrsg.), *The Pulpit Commentary: St. John, Vol. II*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), John 10:8.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Thomas Merton, a Catholic monk, predated Bell in his popularizing of interspirituality by “[opening] the door for Christians to explore other traditions, notably Taoism (Chinese witchcraft), Hinduism and Buddhism.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, Merton said that he saw “no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity,” saying that he intended “to become as good a Buddhist as [he] can.”<sup>53, 54</sup> It seems at first glance that the emergent movement is missing a theological focal point. Unfortunately, Brian McLaren does not believe that we, as a church body politic, have even reached a consensus of what orthodoxy is.

In that same *Christianity Today* article, Brian McLaren is quoted as saying that he does not “think we’ve got the gospel right yet.... I don’t think the liberals have it right.<sup>55</sup> But I don’t think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy.”<sup>56, 57</sup> Agreeing apparently with Brian McLaren that we have yet to get the gospel right is David G. Benner, who says that the “spiritual climate is ripe... [for]... Jesus seekers across the world are being prepared to abandon the old way of the written code for the new way of the Spirit. Paul told us long ago we’ve been freed by the gospel to live a *new way, but we’ve not known what it is or how to do it.*”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 39.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Hart, ed., *Thomas Merton Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 88. Full quote: There were so many points of contact with Zen Buddhist teaching in all this that I couldn’t help asking whether he thought he could have conic to these insights if he had never come across Zen. “I’m not sure,” he answered pensively, “but I don’t think so. I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is in the Nest. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can.”

<sup>54</sup> “New Agers ‘see themselves as advanced in consciousness, rejecting Judeo-Christian values and the Bible in favor of Oriental philosophies and religion.’ *Walter Martin, The New Age Cult,*” Mark Water, *World Religions Made Simple: Tough Questions, Clear Answers* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 173.

<sup>55</sup> While these authors and pastors try not to be labeled as “liberal,” that is exactly what they are. In an interview with Rob Bell (audio of which can be found at Fighting for the Faith... right around forty minutes into the program) where he is praising the TNIV -- a gender neutered Bible -- Rob himself says he is in the middle of the progressive movement: “My name is Rob Bell, I’m a pastor in Grand Rapids Michigan, the epicenter of progressive culture.”

- <http://www.fightingforthefaith.com/2009/09/what-is-rob-bell-going-to-do-now-that-the-tniv-is-going-to-be-discontinued.html>

This can also be found as well under iTunes free podcasts under *Fighting for the Faith*, dated at 9-1-09, the podcast is titled, “What is Rob Bell Going To Do Now That The TNIV is Going to Be Discontinued?” One of the founders of the emergent movement, Mark Driscoll notes as much as well:

Emergent liberals range from those on the theological fringe of orthodoxy to those caught up in heresy that critiques key evangelical doctrines, such as the Bible as authoritative divine revelation; God as Trinity; the sinfulness of human nature; the deity of Jesus Christ; Jesus’ death in our place to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross; the exclusivity of Jesus for salvation; the sinfulness of homosexuality and other sex outside of heterosexual marriage; and the conscious, eternal torments of hell. Some emerging house churches are also emergent liberal in their doctrine. Emergent liberals are networked by organizations such as the Emergent Village, which is led by author and theologian **Tony Jones** (Jones is no longer a youth pastor but is involved at **Doug Pagitt’s** church), along with other prominent emergent leaders such as Pagitt, **Karen Ward**, and **Tim Keel**. The most visible emergent liberal leaders are Brian McLaren and Rob Bell. Emergent liberals are commonly critiqued as those who are merely recycling the liberal doctrinal debates of a previous generation without seeing significant conversion growth; they are merely gathering disgruntled Christians and people intrigued by false doctrine. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers this critique:

- When it comes to issues such as the exclusivity of the gospel, the identity of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, the authoritative character of Scripture as written revelation, and the clear teachings of Scripture concerning issues such as homosexuality, this [emergent liberal] movement simply refuses to answer the questions.”

*Religion Saves + Nine Other Misconceptions*, 217.

<sup>56</sup> Andy Crouch, “Emergent Mystique,” 37-38.

<sup>57</sup> A caveat here: if he does not think liberals have it right, and then says he does not have it right either... is he then saying he is on the conservative side of the issue? If he is on the right, then where does that leave people like D. A. Carson, Millard Erickson, or myself? I guess I do not fit within what he considers orthodox... maybe we’re “fascists” of sorts?

<sup>58</sup> David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 9 (emphasis

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

McLaren says we do not have the Gospel right yet... Benner says we do not have it right either, yet, we should look to Eastern mysticism to get it *correct*? I don't think so. Not only do these authors deny that the Gospel *has been known or lived* in the past, they teach that orthodoxy has yet to be formulated. Yet in a self-refuting manner they seem to accept universalism as an orthodox doctrine. Universalism is the idea that every "act of worship is accepted by the divine regardless of the theological cloak in which it is hidden[,] since all persons possess divinity within, all deserve the love of the Supreme."<sup>59</sup> This universalism is pointed out in an excellent book entitled, *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*:<sup>60</sup>

The gospel, according to the emergent thinkers, is not about individual conversation. It is not about how people get "in." It is about "how the world will be saved from human sin and all that goes with it...."<sup>61</sup> This sounds close to the mark until we examine more thoroughly what is meant by the terminology. Their concept of "world" does not simply involve humans who don't believe in Christ. The emergent gospel is not just bringing unbelievers to the Savior for the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of God's righteousness. There is more, as Rob Bell informs us:

- Salvation is the entire universe being brought back into harmony with its maker. This has huge implications for how people present the message of Jesus. Yes, Jesus can come into our hearts. But we can join a movement that is as wide and as big as the universe itself. Rocks and trees and birds and swamps and ecosystems. God's desire is to restore all of it.<sup>62, [63]</sup>

McLaren continues the thought: "Is getting individual souls into heaven the focal point of the gospel?" I'd have to say no, for any number of reasons. Don't you think that God is concerned about saving the whole world?... It is the redemption of the world, the stars, the animals, the planets, the whole show."<sup>64</sup> According to McLaren, "The church exists for the world - to be God's catalyst so that the world can receive and enter God's kingdom more and more."<sup>65</sup>

When asked to define the gospel, Neo (the main philosophical character in McLaren's novels) replies that it could not be reduced to a little formula, other than "the Kingdom of God is at hand."<sup>66</sup> Narrowing this

<sup>59</sup> David K. Clark and Norman L. Geisler, *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 70-71.

<sup>60</sup> Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 285.

<sup>61</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Last Word After That: A Tale of Faith, Doubt, and a New Kind of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 69.

<sup>62</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 109-110.

<sup>63</sup> A humorous aside: could you imagine bickering back-and-forth with God if Job co-opted everything God created? As God would point out how small Job was in comparison to His creation, Job would respond, "no, I am part of this wide and big universe, I am not tiny! I am bigger, in fact, than that Behemoth you just showed me."

<sup>64</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 184.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

definition is not easy, but McLaren gives some insight when he writes,

- I am a Christian because I believe that, in all these ways, Jesus is saving the world. By the “world” I mean planet Earth and all life on it, because left to ourselves, un-judged, un-forgiven, and un-taught, we will certainly destroy this planet and its residents.<sup>67</sup>

In Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones’ book, *The Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, we find an emphasis on this universalism:

In summary, we give the following statement of our understanding about the widening scope of salvation:

Not only soul, whole body!

Not only whole body, all of the faithful community!

Not only all of the faithful community, *all of humanity!*

Not only all of humanity, *all of God's creation!*<sup>68</sup>

In order to accomplish their understanding of the above, much must change in Christian theology, are these emergent leaders up for the task? It seems so:

And as a part of this tradition, I embrace the need to keep painting, to keep reforming. *By this I do not mean cosmetic, superficial changes like better lights and music, sharper graphics, and new methods with easy-to-follow steps. I mean theology: the beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, the future.* We must keep reforming the way the Christian faith is defined, lived, and explained.<sup>69</sup>

Brian McLaren declares his allegiance to this change as well:

...believing that our *message* and methodology have changed, do change, and must change if we are faithful to the ongoing and unchanging mission of Jesus Christ. In other words, I believe that we must be always

<sup>67</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 106.

<sup>68</sup> Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 82-83 (emphasis added).

<sup>69</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 12 (emphasis added).



## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

reforming, not because we've got it wrong and we're closer and closer to finally “getting it right,” but because our mission is ongoing and our context is dynamic. From this viewpoint “getting it right” is beside the point; the point is “being and doing good” as followers of Jesus in our unique time and place, fitting in with the ongoing story of God's saving love for planet Earth.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, at a 2004 seminar entitled, “A New Theology for a New World,” at the Emergent Convention in San Diego, Tony Jones said:

We do not think this is about changing your worship service. We do not think this is about... how you structure your church staff. *This is actually about changing theology.* This is about our belief that theology changes. It's not just the method that changes.<sup>71</sup>

- **Guiding Lights**

This non-operating trampoline that Rob and the others seem to be jumping on shows its effects on their theology when we consider their treatment of the virgin birth and its supposed similarities with stories from religious figures prior to Jesus birth. To quote again Rob Bell: is it possible that the “Gospel writers threw in [the Virgin birth] to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births?”<sup>72</sup>

The short answer is “no,” and, “no they didn't.”

Saying that the Greeks and other mystery religions had stories about virgin births is a historical inaccuracy. Typically these myths are used as examples of Christianity borrowing earlier stories from other religions to show that there is nothing really new in our faith. The person's making such claims are made by those who tend towards naturalistic explanations of reality, *automatically* relegating the miraculous to natural effects. Ronald H. Nash makes the point that the “reader should be constantly on the watch for ways in which the skeptic's faulty evidence and reasoning are buttressed by his one controlling presupposition, that is, that orthodox Christianity is not true.”<sup>73</sup> He continues:

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<sup>70</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 214. I should point out that we can never really *be good*, this humanistic goal is not Biblical.

<sup>71</sup> Charlie H. Campbell, *The Emerging Church & the Battle for Truth*, DVD (can be found at: [www.alwaysbeready.com](http://www.alwaysbeready.com)), 26:50 into the presentation.

<sup>72</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 26.

<sup>73</sup> *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 14.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

For those with a skeptical approach to the facts, it is a simple matter to see dependence and influence where, in fact, none exists. For example, one frequently encounters in the literature a tendency to dismiss any disliked portion of the Gospels on the ground that it results from a Hellenistic influence on the Gospel writer. Thus, if one approaches the New Testament convinced of the impossibility of miracles, the presence of a miracle in the text can easily be disposed of as Hellenistic. If one is repelled by the New Testament doctrine of the atonement, charge it off as another intrusion of Hellenistic influence into the biblical text. A similar motivation can easily support the search for parallels for the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus. Many of the[se] claims... are by no means inferences that objective scholars have been logically compelled to draw from indisputable evidence. [Instead] [w]e will find many instances where scholars “found” exactly what they were seeking. Their research and their reasoning were controlled by a prior commitment to what could and could not be true.<sup>74</sup>

*Philosophical naturalism* is the idea that “reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical entities that we can investigate in the natural sciences.”<sup>75</sup> In nonprofessional terms, it is “the atheistic view that nature is all there is.”<sup>76</sup> Norman Geisler makes the point that if the naturalist were to concede on the virgin birth, then the naturalists entire case would collapse.<sup>77</sup> Speaking of which, there is a collection of scholars who analyzes the Bible using the metaphysical position of naturalism just discussed; collectively they are known as the *Jesus Seminar*. The authors of *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* comment on the “scientism”<sup>78</sup> displayed by quoting from *Jesus Seminar’s* Fellow, Robert Funk’s, *Five Gospels*. They then highlight Funk’s beginning point that drives his conclusions:

- “The contemporary religious controversy... turns on whether the worldview reflected in the Bible can be carried forward into the scientific age and retained as an article of faith.... The Christ of creed and dogma... can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens through Galileo’s telescope.”

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 8.

<sup>76</sup> Tom Morris, *Philosophy for Dummies* (Foster City, CA: IDG Books; 1999), 238.

<sup>77</sup> *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), cf. Virgin Birth of Christ, 759:

The virgin birth of Christ is the perennial target of naturalistic bible critics, who tend to regard it as the result of pagan influence on Christian writers of the second century. These Christians developed the myth in an emulation of stories from Greek mythology .... One reason for the vehemence of these pronouncements is that, if true, the virgin birth establishes beyond question the life of Jesus as a supernatural intervention of god. If antisupernaturalists concede at this point, *they have no case left*.

<sup>78</sup> See footnote 42.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

This statement expresses scientific naturalism, which holds that a supernaturalist worldview is unattainable in light of the advance of modern science. To the Jesus Seminar, the historical Jesus of Nazerath by definition must be a nonsupernatural Jesus. Tracing modern biblical criticism back through D. F. Strauss, the Introduction correctly notes:

- *“Strauss distinguishes what he called the ‘mythical’ (defined by him as anything legendary or supernatural) in the gospels from the historical... The choice Strauss posed in his assessment of the gospels was between the supernatural Jesus -- the Christ of Faith -- and the historical Jesus.”*

The Jesus Seminar Fellows have clearly aligned themselves with Strauss: “the distinction between the historical Jesus... and the Christ of faith” is deemed the first pillar of “scholarly wisdom” and “modern biblical criticism.” For them, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is not a live option even to be considered as a possible explanation... a naturalistic explanation... will always be preferred.<sup>79</sup>

- **Integration Station**

For persons who are inclined to believe the naturalist position, the virgin birth *must be* an addition by the gospel writers; this seems to be what Bell and Funk are hinting at. One of Rob Bells compatriots, Brian McLaren, even recommends a book by John Dominic Crossan, a Fellow at the *Jesus Seminar* and a person who denies the resurrection of Christ. In fact, Brian McLaren has joined Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan of *Jesus Seminar* fame at the *Center for Spiritual Development* in Portland, Oregon. Again, both Crossan and Borg deny the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 144-145.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Driscoll discusses this a bit in his new book, *Religion Saves + Nine Other Misconceptions*, on pages 220-221: Speaking of his influences, McLaren said:

- I really like [Jesus Seminar fellows] Marcus Borg and John Dominic [Crossan; they] have a new book coming out called *The Last Week* [that] follows ... what we call passion week, or holy week. It is really a great book.... Evangelicals tend to think that they're the only people who take the Bible seriously. I am so impressed with how seriously these guys take the Gospel of Mark, really the last week of Jesus. It's really stunning.

Marcus Borg is an avowed pantheist and John Dominic Crossan, cochair of the Jesus Seminar, told Time magazine that after the crucifixion, “Jesus' corpse went the way of all abandoned criminals' bodies: it was probably barely covered with dirt, vulnerable to the wild dogs that roamed the wasteland of the execution grounds.” The subsequent “tales” of Jesus' entombment and resurrection, he says, were merely the result of “wishful thinking.” McLaren appears to be influenced by other questionable works as well, which is another issue of concern. The fact that he recommends and endorses books filled with false teaching is also very concerning. McLaren repeatedly has endorsed the book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, which says that the biblical categories for the explanation of Jesus' death were taken from paganism. The authors of the book go on to reason that we likewise should take present-day paganism, such as feminism and Marxism, as the categories by which we interpret the death of Jesus. In this book, the idea that Jesus died as a substitute in our place to pay our penalty for our sins (penal substitutionary atonement) is explained in this horrid manner: “God takes on the role of the sadist inflicting punishment, while Jesus, in his role as masochist, readily embraces suffering.” The authors say that penal substitution “has been understood in ways that have proven detrimental to the witness of the church.” They conclude that “it will not do, therefore, to characterize the

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

On a page from the *Center for Spiritual Development's* website<sup>81</sup> it is clear that there is a compatriot feeling going on versus the debate atmosphere that Marcus Borg and William Lane Craig had.<sup>82</sup> This center, to no surprise, promotes New Age<sup>83</sup>/occult<sup>84</sup> practices such as Yoga, Sufism, Tai Chi, Enneagram, and Reiki. The closeness of Rob Bell and Brian McLaren as well as the promotion of similar “hypothetical’s” about the Bible being extant of anything miraculous are worrisome, *to say the least*. Just as telling are authors whom Rob Bell and Brian McLaren recommend to Christian readers. On the back of the book *Reimagining Christianity*, Brian McLaren says this:

It used to be that Christian institutions and systems of dogma sustained the spiritual life of Christians. Increasingly, spirituality itself is what sustains everything else. Alan Jones is a pioneer in reimagining a Christian faith that emerges from authentic spirituality. His work stimulates and encourages me deeply.<sup>85</sup>

The following quote from is from a book that I had read some quotes from in other works and I just couldn't believe what I was reading, so I bought it to see for myself. Here is what I found:

### Who's Included?

Imagine a great cathedral in Western Australia packed for the celebration of Commonwealth Day. There's been a lot of preparation for the service, and tough questions were asked about what “commonwealth” might mean in such a multicultural society. Who should be included and how should the Church celebrate the present reality that is Australia? What's the relationship of Christianity to the other faiths represented in the Commonwealth?

<sup>81</sup> Found on *The Center for Spiritual Development's* site (<http://www.center-for-spiritual-development.org/index.html>), see: [http://www.center-for-spiritual-development.org/Summer\\_Seminar\\_at\\_The\\_Center\\_2009.html](http://www.center-for-spiritual-development.org/Summer_Seminar_at_The_Center_2009.html) <http://www.center-for-spiritual-development.org/DVDCatalog.html> (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>82</sup> DVD debate entitled, *Did Jesus Physically Rise from the Dead? William Lane Craig vs. Marcus Borg* (La Mirada, CA: Biola University), product code: WLC-DEB2V.

<sup>83</sup> “A cultural movement combining beliefs in various eclectic, Pagan and Eastern religions or philosophies,” Mark Water, ed., *AMG's Encyclopedia of World Religions, Cults & the Occult* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 780; “...New Age doctrine [includes] mind-science 'healing' and the Hinduistic doctrine of Monism—that we are one in substance with the universe,” William M. Alnor, *Heaven Can't Wait: A Survey of Alleged Trips to the Other Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Academic, 1996), 65.

<sup>84</sup> Again, William Alnor has a good definition of *occult*:

The word occult literally means “things hidden or secret.” Biblically, to dabble in the occult is strictly forbidden by God in his Word. Occult practices include astrology, dowsing, tarot cards, fire walking, witch craft, fortune-telling, palm reading, magical arts, Ouija boards, parapsychology and ESP, numerology, cabala, pyramidology, crystal ball reading, spiritism, mediumship and channeling, and a host of other practices. The New Age movement is a quasi-Hinduistic movement whose practitioners often engage in many of these occult practices. Trafficking with spirits, whether they be supposed space aliens, ghosts, disembodied spirits, deceased ancestors, or unknown voices or influences in the cosmos, is called necromancy. In God's Word it is also known as witchcraft or sorcery.

*Heaven Can't Wait*, 76.

<sup>85</sup> Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit without Disconnecting Your Mind* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), back cover.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

John Shepherd, the dean of St. George's Cathedral in Perth, Western Australia, invited the abbot of the Bodhinyana Buddhist Monastery to preach at the service, which was a Eucharist -- the central Christian sacrament. The abbot accepted in full knowledge of this. Aboriginal dancers led the procession into the cathedral and later led the offertory procession to the altar. During communion, representatives of the Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Baha'i faiths read passages from their sacred writings, and after communion an Aboriginal reader offered a dream-time reflection. Was this Christian? The answer, as far as I'm concerned, is "Of course."

For others, however, the service was an act of betrayal. Outside the cathedral two people stood in protest, holding placards bearing biblical texts. One protester briefly interrupted the abbot's address with a cry that they were all heading for hell. The two lone objectors believed that the Christian witness was being compromised. And from their point of view, they were right. Either Christianity is true or it isn't. If it is, the other religions, however well meaning their adherents are, must be false. Right? And it's hypocritical to think and act otherwise.

But another ancient strand of Christianity teaches that we are all caught up in the Divine Mystery we call God, that the Spirit is in everyone, and that there are depths of interpretation yet to be plumbed. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of *all people*" [John 1:1-18; italics mine].<sup>86</sup>

I believe this idea of integrating faith is self-explanatory. However, in case you missed it, at the end of the quote Alan Jones inserted an Eastern pantheistic worldview into the Gospel of John. In other words, in order to validate his point, Jones practiced *eisegesis*. ("*Exegesis* is 'letting the text speak for itself rather than reading into the text what isn't there,' which is *eisegesis*."<sup>87</sup> Emergent authors Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger give a glowing example of just how much integration actually is taking place within the emergent movement:

Spencer Burke's community (Newport Beach, CA) visits different Christian traditions every few weeks. "We're in and out, so we honor everyone. Yes, we lead from a particular story. I think the difference is that even though we are looking at church, we hold true to the Christian tradition. However, the Christian tradition could hold to an inclusive model, not an exclusive one. We have a community hermeneutic. We read other sacred writings, then get back to Scripture and decide together how to interpret what we have read from the literature that other religions hold to be sacred."

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 88-89

<sup>87</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 47.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Burke's community is prepared to learn from faith traditions outside the Christian fold. There is a Buddhist family in their church. As a community, the church visited a Buddhist temple. They participated in a guided meditation with this family. Burke celebrates the many ways God is revealed. He recognizes that the Spirit has been with these people all along. The community celebrates other traditions. They reach out to other traditions, and they see them as beloved children of God.

With a focus on kingdom rather than on church, people find that their relationship with other faiths changes. "As someone who was a Buddhist for twenty years, I have a deep respect for other people's faiths," says Dave Sutton (New Duffryn Community Church, Newport, U.K.). "My understanding is that if the kingdom is what God is about, then God might be involved in other faiths.... We very much see our work in relation to the unique person and work of Christ. If other religions are involved in that work, that is fine."

Because emerging churches believe the presence of the reign of God is beyond the church, they are accepting of other faith communities. Ben Edson (Sanctus 1, Manchester, U.K.) reports, "We had a guy from the Manchester Buddhist center come to Sanctusl a couple weeks ago and talk about Buddhist approaches to prayer. We didn't talk about the differences between our faiths. We didn't try to convert him. He was welcomed and fully included and was really pleased to have been invited. We gave him a positive experience of a Christian community, which is in itself an important act of mission." The underlying values that determine their relationships with sincere adherents of other faiths are respect, humility, and inclusivity. Emerging churches are prepared to engage in an open interchange and to leave the outcome in God's hands. The underlying principle is inclusivity. Therefore, all are welcome, and this is reflected in people's everyday lives as well.<sup>88</sup>

Proselytizing is a foregone conclusion in emergent churches. They seem to believe that "all rationality is dependent on particular traditions, for there is no rationality-as-such."<sup>89</sup> Propositional truths are merely a seventeenth-century invention of modernism is what Scott Smith is really saying.<sup>90</sup> Why bother with even witnessing to other faiths, all truths are cultural anyways. Ultimately, in the larger scheme of things, it would not matter if an emergent author like Erwin McManus said that his "goal is to destroy Christianity as a world religion,"<sup>91</sup> we are all going to end up in the same place anyway.

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<sup>88</sup> *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 132-133.

<sup>89</sup> R. Scott Smith, *Truth & the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 86.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone: The Emerging Church... A New Reformation or an End-Time Deception* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails, 2007), 166. The full quote found in Oakland's book is as follows: "My goal is to destroy Christianity as a world religion and be a recatalyst for the movement of Jesus Christ.... Some people are upset with me because it sounds like I'm anti-Christian. I think they might be right." Sounds almost socialistic.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

- **Some Major Players - Roots**

As already mentioned, many of these emergent acolytes inform their fellow Christians about some author that influenced them and that they should read. I wanted to focus on three acolytes that are looked to in this “Emerging” movement. The first will be Henry Nouwen, the second will be Richard Foster, and the third is someone who is a bit newer within Evangelical circles than the other two, Rick Warren.

### Henry Nouwen

David Cloud’s book, *Contemplative Mysticism: A Powerful Ecumenical Bond*, is one I highly recommend for a thorough scouring of this movement and from whom will I liberally quote from:<sup>92</sup>

Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996) was a Roman Catholic priest who taught at Harvard, Yale, and the University of Notre Dame. Nouwen has had a vast influence within the emerging church and evangelicalism at large through his writings, and he has been an influential voice within the contemplative movement. A *Christian Century* magazine survey conducted in 2003 found that Nouwen's writings were a first choice for Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy....

Nouwen did not instruct his readers that one must be born again through repentance and personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to commune with God. The book *With Open Hands*, for example, instructs readers to open themselves up to God and surrender to the flow of life, believing that God loves them unconditionally and is leading them. This is blind faith.

- “When we pray, we are standing with our hands open to the world. We know that God will become known to us in the nature around us, in people we meet, and in situations we run into. We trust that the world holds God's secret within and we expect that secret to be shown to us” (*With Open Hands*, 2006, p. 47).

Nouwen did not instruct his readers to beware of false spirits and to test everything by the Scriptures. He taught them, rather, to trust that God is leading in and through all things and that they should “test” things by their own “vision.” Nouwen claimed that contemplative meditation is necessary for an intimacy with God:

- “I do not believe anyone can ever become a deep person without stillness and silence” (quoted by Chuck Swindoll, *So You Want to Be Like Christ*, p. 65).

He taught that the use of a mantra could take the practitioner into God’s presence.

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<sup>92</sup> (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2008), 317-321 (emphasis in the original).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

- “The quiet repetition of a single word can help us to descend with the mind into the heart ... This way of simple prayer ... opens us to God's active presence” (*The Way of the Heart*, p. 81).

He said that mysticism and contemplative prayer can create ecumenical unity because Christian leaders learn to hear “the voice of love”:

- “Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen to the voice of love. ... For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required” (*In the Name of Jesus*, pp. 6, 31, 32).

In fact, if Christians are listening to the voice of the true and living God, they will learn that love is obedience to the Scriptures. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

Nouwen, like Thomas Merton and many other Catholic contemplatives, combined the teaching of eastern gurus with ancient Catholic practices. In his book *Pray to Live* Nouwen describes approvingly Merton's heavy involvement with Hindu monks (pp. 19-28).

In his foreword to Thomas Ryan's book *Disciplines for Christian Living*, Nouwen says:

- “[T]he author shows a wonderful openness to the gifts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Moslem religion. He discovers their great wisdom for the spiritual life of the Christian and does not hesitate to bring that wisdom home” (*Disciplines for Christian Living*, p. 2).

Nouwen taught a form of universalism and panentheism (God is in all things).

- “The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is the same as the one who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being” (*Here and Now*, p. 22).
- “Prayer is 'soul work' because our souls are those sacred centers WHERE ALL IS ONE ... It is in the heart of God that we can come to the full realization of THE UNITY OF ALL THAT IS” (*Bread for the Journey*, 1997, Jan. 15 and Nov. 16).

He claimed that every person who believes in a higher power and follows his or her vision of the future is of God and is building God's kingdom:

- “We can see the visionary in the guerilla fighter, in the youth with the demonstration sign, in the quiet dreamer in the corner of a cafe, in the soft-spoken monk, in the meek student, in the mother who lets her son go his own way, in the father who reads to his child from a strange book, in the smile of a girl, in the



## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

indignation of a worker, and in every person who in one way or another dreams life from a vision which is seen shining ahead and which surpasses everything ever heard or seen before” (*With Open Hands*, p. 113).

- “Praying means breaking through the veil of existence and allowing yourself to be led by the vision which has become real to you. Whether we call that vision 'the Unseen Reality,' 'the total Other,' 'the Spirit,' or 'the Father,' we repeatedly assert that it is not we ourselves who possess the power to make the new creation come to pass. It is rather a spiritual power which has been given to us and which empowers us to be in the world without being of it” (p. 114).

The radical extent of Nouwen's universalism is evident by the fact that the second edition of *With Open Hands* has a foreword by Sue Monk Kidd. She is a New Ager who promotes worship of the goddess! Her book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* was published in 1996, a decade before she was asked to write the foreword to Nouwen's book on contemplative prayer. Monk Kidd worships herself.

- “Today I remember that event for the radiant mystery it was, how I felt myself embraced by Goddess, how I felt myself in touch with the deepest thing I am. It was the moment when, as playwright and poet Ntozake Shange put it, 'I found god in myself/ and I loved her/ I loved her fiercely (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 136).
- “Over the altar in my study I hung a lovely mirror sculpted in the shape of a crescent moon. It reminded me to honor the Divine Feminine presence in myself, the wisdom in my own soul” (p. 181).

Sue Monk Kidd's journey from the traditional Baptist faith (as a Sunday School teacher in a Southern Baptist congregation) to goddess worship began when she started delving into Catholic contemplative spirituality, practicing centering prayer and attending Catholic retreats.

Nouwen taught that God is only love, unconditional love.

- “Don't be afraid to offer your hate, bitterness, and disappointment to the One who is love and only love. ... [Pray] `Dear God, ... what you want to give me is love--unconditional, everlasting love” (*With Open Hands*, pp. 24, 27).

In fact, God's love is not unconditional. It is unfathomable but not unconditional. Though God loves all men and Christ died to make it possible for all to be saved, there is a condition for receiving God's love and that is acknowledging and repenting of one's sinfulness and receiving Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Saviour.

Further, God is not only love; He is also holy and just and light and truth. This is what makes the cross of Jesus

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Christ necessary. An acceptable atonement had to be made for God's broken law.

In his last book Nouwen said:

- “Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God's house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God” (*Sabbatical Journey*, New York: Crossroad, 1998, p. 51).

### Richard Foster

Another person looked to for the mystical aspect of the Christian walk is Richard Foster.

Perhaps the best known Quaker in the world today is Richard J. Foster, although many are at most dimly aware that he is associated with the *Religious Society of Friends*. He is clearly one of the leading contemporary writers and speakers on Christian spirituality. While maintaining his ties with Friends, Foster deliberately speaks to a much broader audience. Richard Foster grew up among Evangelical Friends. In adult life, he has been a Friends pastor and a professor of theology at Friends University among the many positions he has held. In his books and speaking, he frequently makes reference to Quaker historical figures and his own Quakerism.<sup>93</sup>

One Quaker site says this about the division within Evangelical Friends:

“Evangelical Friends are so called because they believe in the authority of the Bible and in the historical aspects of the doctrine of salvation. Non-evangelical Friends emphasize the individual conscience and the inward practices of a mystical Christianity.”<sup>94</sup>

Unbeknownst to the writers of that quote, the persons who “emphasize the individual conscience and the inward practices of a mystical Christianity” are considered to be mainstream by both the Emerging movement as well as by the *Evangelical Friends*. I can say with confidence that Dr. Foster is a mainstream Evangelical Friend based on his pastoral position within the Friends church, his

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<sup>93</sup> Bill Samuel, “Quaker Writer on Christian Spirituality,” *QuakerInfo.com* (<http://www.quakerinfo.com/foster.shtml> - last accessed 8-12-09), Originally published July 1, 2001 at *Suite101.com*.

<sup>94</sup> From the site of the Peninsula Evangelical Friends Church site: <http://www.pefcpa.com/index.htm> -- the quote is from an article entitled, “What is an Evangelical Friend?” - <http://www.pefcpa.com/friends.htm> (last accessed 8-20-09).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Professorship at Friends University, as well as his association with the Religious Society of Friends. The following quote, then, should shed some light in regards to his *emphasis on individual conscience and the inward practices of a mystical "Christianity"* as documented by Dave Hunt.<sup>95</sup>

Failing to test the spirits, Foster followed his Quaker training in silence and meditation to reach an altered state of consciousness in which he believes to have met Jesus personally. Sound bizarre? It should, but Foster taught this same meditative technique, step-by-step, in the first edition of "Celebration of Discipline"...[we find]:

- "[I]n your imagination allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. Look back so that you can see yourself lying in the grass and reassure your body that you will return momentarily<sup>96</sup> ... Go deeper and deeper into outer space until there is nothing except the warm presence of the eternal Creator. Rest in His presence."<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon, "Christianity Today and Richard Foster," found at the *Berean Call* (<http://www.thebereancall.org/>); the article is found at: <http://www.thebereancall.org/node/7174> (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>96</sup> Out of body experiences need to be defined a bit here:

**ASTRAL PROJECTION** - Ability of the soul to leave the body and journey to other dimensions of space and time, known as the astral plane. New Age adherents declare that the physical realm is characterized by illusion and limits, whereas the astral plane is the source of all that is real and boundless. Occult leaders teach their followers to enter trancelike states while using meditative practices and hallucinogenic drugs. By doing so, they can project consciousness into the astral realm, tap into the cosmic consciousness, and obtain the wisdom of the ascended masters. Special chambers have been designed to create an environment for permitting the rapid release of the astral body from the physical body. They call this an out-of-body experience. Surroundings may include power objects, such as crystals or pyramids, New Age music, subliminal or meditation tapes, or a varied combination of other occult paraphernalia. Once the required trancelike state is achieved, the travelers are said to maintain contact with their physical form through a silver umbilical-like thread. While some astral projectionists report journeys to distant lands, others claim they traveled to faraway galaxies and parallel dimensions of space and time where they obtain the secrets of the universe. Some say they have reached heaven, were greeted by angels, and were cloaked in radiant light. Others assert they have reached the ethereal realm, met their spirit guide, and received vital guidance. Some former New Age adherents also report encounters with appalling demons and the paralyzing fear that they would never return to their physical form. Proponents of astral projection explain away these negative experiences as nothing more than necessary stepping stones to achieving enlightenment. See also: ...OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE.

Debra Lardie, Dan Lioy, and Paul Ingram, eds., *Concise Dictionary of the New Occult and New Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 2000), 32.

**OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE** - A sense of separation from the physical body and of being able to view oneself and others from an external vantage point. Out of-body experiences are usually reported in near-death experiences. New Age advocates encourage the deliberate separation of the astral body to achieve spiritual purification. See also: ALTERED STATE, ASTRAL PROJECTION....

ibid., 192-193.

**ALTERED STATE** - A changed condition of awareness in which the mind seeks to transcend mundane material reality and enter into ethereal dimensions of time and space. New Age practitioners are eager to achieve an altered state of consciousness, contending that it is a gateway to uncovering repressed capabilities of the mind, body, and spirit. They believe that people in altered states tap into intuitive powers that enable them to experience reality from a new perspective. Occult leaders advocate the use of altered states to interact with spirit guides, who are then invited to reside within the person under the guise of the "higher self." Achievement of altered states is considered a necessary step in the spiritual evolution of people toward divinity. Advocates use terms such as "surrender" and "release" "visualize" and "flow" to refer to altered states in which devotees experience lights, colors, and sounds. These are to lead to the ultimate state of existence or enlightenment. Those who achieve this state are said to have realized their innate divinity and unity with the Universal Mind.

ibid., 17. Again, to be clear, these are not Christian activities:

*Visualization... meditation... astral projection, and out-of-the-body experiences are examples of New Age techniques for achieving transformation.... Meditation, ... and astral projection are additional methods people can adopt to expand self discipline, awareness, and knowledge. By so doing, individuals would be choosing not only the methods through which they change but also the goals of their endeavors. They will be, in fact, creating their own realities; in other words, assuming responsibility for their own personal growth and betterment.*

John A. Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement: A Critical Assessment* (New York, NY: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 10, 12.

<sup>97</sup> I purchased a used first edition of *Celebration of Discipline* and have confirmed the quote mentioned by Dave Hunt to be accurate:

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

This is not Christian prayer. All one need to do is pick up one comparative religious book and study Eastern and New Age practices to agree with this summation. It is not Christian meditation either. This is an out of body experience that has *all* to do with the occult New Age practices and *nothing* to do with the Christian faith. Dr. Foster makes such a claim of affiliation on page 170 of his book where we find this: “*We of the New Age* can risk going against the tide. Let us with abandon relish the fantasy games of children. Let's see visions and dream dreams.”<sup>98</sup> In the excised edition, “*We of the New Age*” is replaced with “*We who follow Christ.*” Take note of the capitalization of New Age, something only found in *New Age* writing when including oneself in it.

What I am saying and have said may sound a bit brash... however, for Richard Foster and his brand of meditation to be accepted as it is (for instance, the *Be Still* DVD) is very worrisome. This shouldn't be making headway in the Faith, but sadly it is. Next up out of the trio I chose is a more modern personality, and that is, Rick Warren.

### Rick Warren

Again, I will defer to David Cloud on this matter since he has written the best book so far on the subject:<sup>99</sup>

**Rick Warren** has yoked up with mystic **Ken Blanchard** on various occasions, and Blanchard is intimately associated with New Age paganism. Blanchard visited Saddleback in 2003 and Warren told the church that he

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<sup>98</sup> I cannot believe I have to track down a history of the term “New Age,” however, in a conversation with a friend he asked what “New Age” meant when Dr. Foster used the word - almost in a defensive tone as if the concept meant something different in the 70's. I would argue the contrary: the term has lost significance since the publication of *Celebration of Discipline* and has become more of a blanket term today as compared to the specificity of use during the 70's and 80'. It was sort of a Bill Clinton moment if you ask me: “It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is. If the--if he--if 'is' means is and never has been, that is not--that is one thing” (Timothy Noah, “Bill Clinton and the Meaning of 'is',” *Slate Magazine*, September, 13 [1998]: <http://www.slate.com/id/1000162/> -- last accessed 8-23-09). In these movements, both the New Age and Emergent movements that is, words tend to lose their meaning, become fluid, or are left to the reader to deconstruct in a post modern fashion and apply it to their lives however they see fit. From my own studies the term and its meaning go back to Madame Helena Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophy and the *Theosophical Society*, as well as the Gnostic magazine published by the Freemasons, *The New Age*. I am not saying there is a grand-conspiracy mind you. The simplicity of these movements is to be found in their historical roots, which is in Gnostic philosophies of mind-body/spirit-matter dualism. A good synopsis of the use and understanding of “New Age” during the time of the publication of *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster:

Widespread use of the term New Age began in the mid 1970s (reflected in the title of monthly periodical *New Age Journal*) and probably influenced several thousand small metaphysical book and gift stores that increasingly defined themselves as “New Age bookstores”... As a result of the large-scale activities surrounding the Harmonic Convergence in the mid 1980s - the term was further popularized by the American mass media to describe the alternative spiritual subculture - including practices such as *meditation*, *channeling*, *crystal healing*, *astral projection*, psychic experience, holistic health, simple living, and environmentalism; or belief in phenomena such as Earth mysteries, ancient astronauts, extraterrestrial life, unidentified flying objects, crop circles, and reincarnation. A range of New Age publications appeared by the late 1980s such as *Psychic Guide* (later renamed *Body, Mind & Spirit*), *Yoga Journal*, *New Age Voice*, *New Age Retailer*, and *NaPRA ReView* by the New Age Publishing and Retailers Association.

Wikipedia article, “New Age,” found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Age#Origins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age#Origins) (last accessed 8-23-09).

<sup>99</sup> *Contemplative Mysticism*, 185-187 (emphasis in the original).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

had “signed on to help with the P.E.A.C.E. Plan, and he's going to be helping train us in leadership and in how to train others to be leaders all around the world” (Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, pp. 162, 163). Warren teamed up with Blanchard in the Lead Like Jesus conferences and audio series. Warren used Blanchard's materials in a Preaching and Purpose Driven Life Training Workshop for Chaplains at Saddleback in 2004 (*A Time of Departing*, p. 167). Warren also endorsed Blanchard's book *Lead Like Jesus*.

Blanchard, in turn, has strong New Age associations. He wrote the foreword to the 2007 edition of Ballard's book *Little Wave and Old Swell*, which is inspired by Hindu guru Paramahansa Yogananda. This book is designed to teach children that God is all and man is one with God. In the foreword Blanchard makes the following amazing statement: “Yogananda loved Jesus, and Jesus would have loved Yogananda.” I was a disciple of Yogananda before I was saved, and there is no doubt that he did NOT love the Jesus of the Bible!

Blanchard's recommendation appears on the back cover of Deepak Chopra's *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. He wrote the foreword to Ellen Ladd's book *Death and Letting God*, which promotes clairvoyance. He endorsed the 2005 book *Zen of Business Administration*, which is subtitled “How Zen practice can transform your work and your life.”

Blanchard joined members of the New Age occultic project *The Secret* in January 2008 for a one-day seminar entitled “Your Best Year Ever” (“Ken Blanchard Joins 'The Secret' Team,” Lighthouse Trails, Jan. 14, 2008). Rhonda Byrne, the author of *The Secret*, thanked “Esther Hicks and the teachings of Abraham.” Abraham refers to a group of spirit guides that Hicks channels. *The Secret* teaches the New Age doctrines that man is god. “You are God in a physical body ... You are all power ... You are all intelligence ... You are the creator” (p. 164).

Lighthouse Trails wisely observes:

- “Did Rick Warren know of Blanchard's sympathies when he brought him in to help at Saddleback? Of course he did. And do you think that Rick Warren and Ken Blanchard are going to train their 'billion' soldiers for Christ how to practice New Age mysticism and learn how to go into altered states of consciousness? You bet. And that is definitely something to be concerned about” (“Rick Warren Teams up with New Age Guru,” Lighthouse Trails, April 19, 2005).

Warren is also closely associated with New Age mystic **Leonard Sweet**. He teamed up with Sweet in 1994 to produce the *Tides of Change* audio set published by Zondervan. A photo of Warren and Sweet are pictured on the cover. Warren endorsed Sweet's book *Soul Tsunami*, the endorsement appearing on both the front and back covers. Warren invited Sweet to speak at the 2008 Saddleback Small Groups Conference called Wired.

Sweet promotes a New Age spirituality that he calls *New Light* and “the Christ consciousness.” He describes it

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

in terms of "the union of the human with the divine" which is the "center feature of all the world's religions" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 235). He says it was experienced by Mohammed, Moses, and Krishna. He says that some of the "New Light leaders" that have led him into this thinking are New Agers Matthew Fox, M. Scott Peck, Willis Harman, and Ken Wilber, plus the Catholic-Buddhist Thomas Merton. In his book *Quantum Spirituality* Sweet defines the New

Light as "a structure of human becoming, a channeling of Christ energies through mindbody experience" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 70). He says humanity needs to learn the truth of the words of Thomas Merton, "We are already one" (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 13). Sweet draws heavily from Catholic mysticism. He says:

- "Mysticism, once cast to the sidelines of the Christian tradition, is now situated in postmodernist culture near the center. ... In the words of one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, Jesuit philosopher of religion/dogmatist Karl Rahner, 'The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will be nothing'" (*Quantum Spirituality*, 1991, p. 11).

Observe, then, how close are the ties between contemplatives and the New Age! And contemplative spirituality is the bridge.

This is only a tiny glimpse into this frightful matter. Rick Warren does not believe that all religions worship the same God or that man is God, but his enthusiasm for contemplative practices and his lust for the newest thing have brought him and his followers into close association with those who do. He is promoting the same type of "spiritual" practices that are nurturing the New Age and his thinking is being corrupted by being this illicit association. Evangelicals who are reading and recommending books by mystics would be wise to take heed to this warning. If they delve into Catholic contemplative practices they are in great danger of being corrupted by this illicit endeavor.

I must emphasize here like I did in the preface that while this is a general critique of Evangelical Christianity failing to submit these teachings and theology to a minimal Biblical orthodoxy or standard -- one should take note that I didn't know a thing about this movement until a Biblical counseling class at seminary and some conversations at my church about this topic.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> While I am critiquing explicitly some aspects of Evangelical faith, my faith, I am implicitly putting my seminary and as well as my church to task. You see, my heart aches when I walk past pastoral desks and see books by many of the people mentioned herein, but no books about theology (Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, or Walter Elwell), Christian history (Hans Hillerbrand, John Witte Jr., or Quentin Skinner), apologetics (Norman Geisler, Richard Swinburn, C. Stephen Evans, or William Lane Craig); In other words, there seems to be an *overemphasis* as leaders in one area and no balance in other "meat and potato" areas. I likewise sink when I bring up authors like Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, Richard Foster, or Thomas Merton in conversation and I get glowing reviews about them. After mentioning an area of concern I have in the teachings of some of the above mentioned persons, all I get back are looks of disbelief, defensive tones, or no knowledge of the issue raised whatsoever. These "emergent" leaders seem to be accepted without any reservation, and I am sure they are recommended much the same way. This isn't about whether one listens to Dio or P.O.D. -- has adopted a stance on predestination, free-will, or nothing at all; it is about

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

- **Orthodoxy, Theory, or Hypothesis**

One of the ideological crossroads between McLaren and Jones is one that deals with the atonement. For instance, in Brian McLaren's novel *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, a hypothetical discussion is taking place between some characters. One of these characters, Kerry, is responding to Carol who just explained the atonement, let us read:

“For starters, if God wants to forgive us, why doesn't he just do it? How does punishing an innocent person make things better? That just sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?”<sup>101</sup>

A bit later in the text a partial answer was proffered by another character to try and better explain what Carol had said, let us listen to Neo try and clear up any confusion: “Really, what Carol explained [the atonement] is just one of six theories. It's called the ‘substitutionary atonement’ theory.”<sup>102</sup> This emphasis on the “theory” of Christ's sacrifice is a theme in the emergent movement. Alan Jones makes sure the reader understands his reservations about such a doctrine:

The other thread of just criticism addresses the suggestion implicit in the cross that Jesus' sacrifice was to appease an angry, God.<sup>103</sup> *Penal substitution was the name of this vile doctrine.* I don't doubt for one moment the power of sin and evil in the world or the power of sacrificial love as their antidote and the peculiar power of the cross as sign of forgiveness and restoration, but making God vengeful, all in the name of justice, has left thousands of souls deeply wounded and lost to the Church forever.... The Church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the *place of the cross must be reimagined* in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it.<sup>104</sup>

All this comes as no surprise since Brian McLaren surrounds himself with these likeminded people as well as recommending emphatically that Christians read Buddhist writers such as Thomas Merton.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, 143.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> That was a straw man in case you didn't catch it, which the “emergent critique of the modern church suffers from an over-population of,” Kevin Deyoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're not Emergent*, 151.

<sup>104</sup> Jones, *Reimagining Christianity*, 168, 132 (emphasis added).

<sup>105</sup> You can see a list of authors recommended by Brian McLaren on his own site. See: “*Doubt: The Tides of Faith' Written for Christian Single Magazine*,” <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/000159.html> (last accessed 8-12-09) at Brian McLaren's blog,

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Alan Jones holds an opinion on the virgin birth story as well, go figure. He believes that this story was born from an unhealthy view of sexuality rather than it being actual history:

I won't allow those who insist on a literal interpretations of these myths and doctrines to deprive me of my devotion to her. Was she literally a virgin: I don't know. I do know that in the old stories and commentaries about her, *virginity* was often a code word for absolute dedication. Christ, in this regard, was even referred to as the archvirgin. *But much of the emphasis on virginity arose from a negative and destructive view of sexuality.* So I doubt very much whether Mary was literally a virgin, but I know many who sincerely believe that she was.<sup>106</sup>

His ending to his logic is almost as bad as a Klu Klux Klan member saying he has a black friend, proving what exactly? This brings me back to Rob.

Why the side-by-side comparison to the mystery religions and the *hypothetical* rejection of the virgin birth in his book? I believe the answer to why Rob Bell and these other authors reject doctrines such as the atonement and the virgin birth is simple, they fill their readers and parishioners minds full of questions and analogies that allow the Christian faith to be so flexible as to never allow us to reach a consensus on doctrine. They then replace this doubt with *their* understanding of doctrine, in a sense the believer is “tossed to and fro by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men.”<sup>107</sup> Rob, I believe, truly feels deep down that historical views of truth exist in all religions equally. Therefore, the virgin birth stories in ancient religions *must be true*, even though he *prefers* the Christian story.

- **Crucifixion, Take It Or Leave It**

The person of Christ suffers the most when accepting a sliding cultural ruler in regards to what we should consider as foundational to Christian doctrine. You see, believing that Christ will come before or after the tribulation is a doctrine that has no weight on *who* or *what* Christ is. Rob would call this superficial theology. However, the manner of Jesus’ birth, death, and rising speaks directly to *who* and *what* Jesus claimed to be. This seems to be superficial theology to Rob and company. While Alan Jones says that the cross is an “unwelcome symbol of where Christians have gone off track,”<sup>108</sup> Paul says “we

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<sup>106</sup> Jones, *Reimagining Christianity*, 175 (emphasis added).

<sup>107</sup> Ephesians 4:14.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, *Reimagining Christianity*, 167.



## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

preach Christ crucified, to the Jews [it is] a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.”<sup>109</sup> Jones asks himself a question and then answers it: “What does the image of the cross mean?”<sup>110</sup>

It is a sign of the necessary crucifixion of ideologies in the face of concrete human experience the crucifixion of power plays, the crucifixion of a God we think we can conceptually control. It also is a sign of humanity's need to find someone to blame for its ills.<sup>111</sup>

I hearken back here to where it seems *that abstracts are exchanged for human qualities and figurative portrayals turned into literal portraits.*<sup>112</sup>

- **Sacrae Doctrinae**

Tony Jones, an emergent leader, wrote on his blog *Theoblogy*, about the depths in which this movement will go in order to change or challenge sacred doctrine:

Anyway, my point in all this is that the doctrine of the Trinity is still on the table. Some people, it seems to me, would like for us to no longer debate certain “sacred” doctrines -- the Trinity, the nature of Christ, the nature of scripture, the nature of marriage etc. And these persons tend to get very jumpy when emergent-types discuss these *sacrae doctrinae*, especially in books and at conferences that are being taped. “This is dangerous,” they say.<sup>113</sup>

Yes, the *Trinity* is being questioned. Instead of pointing to men like Merton, Yancey, and Meister Eckhart, maybe these authors/pastors should start providing answers to their parishioner’s questions rather than asking them to question history and doctrine, *ad infinitum*. Rob Bell joins this *bashing... sorry... questioning* the doctrine of the Trinity:

This three-in-oneness understanding of God emerged several hundred years after Jesus' resurrection. People began to call this concept the Trinity. The word trinity is not found anywhere in the Bible. Jesus didn't use the word, and the writers of the rest of the Bible didn't use the word. But over time this belief, this understanding, this doctrine, has become central to how followers of Jesus have understood who God is. It is a spring,<sup>114</sup> and

<sup>109</sup> NASB, 1 Cor 1:23

<sup>110</sup> Jones, *Reimagining Christianity*, 168.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Piper, Taylor, and Helseth, *Reclaiming the Center*, 153.

<sup>113</sup> “De Trinitate,” (12-29-04), found at: [http://theoblogy.blogspot.com/2004\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://theoblogy.blogspot.com/2004_12_01_archive.html) (last accessed 7-17-2012).

<sup>114</sup> “Bell’s term for a removable doctrine,” this insight came from Truth for Christ whose main page is: <http://www.truthforchrist.com/>, the

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

people jumped for thousands of years without it. It was added later. We can take it out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it, question it. It flexes, and it stretches.<sup>115</sup>

- **Historical Myths**

Now that we have allowed Rob and others to weave their emerging tales, let's see how it holds up to scrutiny. Lee Strobel asked Edwin Yamauchi<sup>116</sup> about the historical parallels the virgin birth story has with religious beliefs prior and contemporary to it:

**Strobel:** "What about Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility who's also known as Bacchus?" I asked. "He's frequently cited as being the product of a virgin birth."

**Yamauchi:** "No, there's no evidence of a virgin birth for Dionysus," Yamauchi said. "As the story goes, Zeus, disguised as a human, fell in love with the princess Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, and she became pregnant. Hera, who was Zeus's queen, arranged to have her burned to a crisp, but Zeus rescued the fetus and sewed him into his own thigh until Dionysus was born. So this is not a virgin birth in any sense."<sup>117</sup>

So the question becomes, why would Rob Bell even hypothesize such a thing? Why would Brian McLaren endorse such men as Alan Jones who views the virgin story just as badly? Are they *trying* to get Christians to believe false history in the hopes that they will look for mystical experiences elsewhere<sup>118</sup> to validate their faith rather than reasoned responses to reasoned questions? We know, for instance, that Rob Bell "is certain that the first three miracles in the book of John are directly related to Dionysus, Asclepius, and Demeter, and that the reference to women being saved in childbirth is a direct reference to Artemis, and that the first chapters of Revelation follow the sequence of the Domitian games,"<sup>119</sup> why does he believe this?

The downward spiral is this, these same mystery religions have similar stories (or so we are told) about their gods and goddesses resurrecting and dying. "What if" the story of Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection "was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers

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<sup>115</sup> Bell, *Velvet Jesus*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Professor of history at Miami University.

<sup>117</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2007), 180.

<sup>118</sup> Not elsewhere, but more accurately, in his church.... to listen to Rob open up in "contemplative prayer" (deep breathing inspired by Eastern philosophy), go to *Fighting for the Faith* (the breathing is near the beginning of this presentation): <http://www.fightingforthefaith.com/2008/11/rob-bell-calls-rosebrough-a-dog.html> (last accessed 8-13-09)

<sup>119</sup> DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 44; in Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 64-65.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus.”<sup>120</sup> “What if” Mithraism really influenced the Resurrection story of Christianity? Questions are healthy, yes I agree, but the “what ifs” have to stop.

- **Workplace Debate**

This brings to mind a time that I worked at a large machine shop and I was in an ongoing discussion with an engineer who happened to be a Buddhist. He mentioned during one of our talks that many years prior to Christ fasting for 40-days-and-nights,<sup>121</sup> Siddhartha Gautama<sup>122</sup> was said to have done that exact thing just before he achieved Nirvana (becoming *the Buddha*) while meditating and fasting under the Bodhi tree. His point was that Christianity borrowed this story from Buddhism as he claimed the Resurrection story was borrowed from the Roman military cult, Mithraism. Just as Jesus became “enlightened” after his fast in the wilderness *becoming* the Christ, so too did Siddhartha Gautama *become* the Buddha. He, the next day, gave me a book entitled *The World’s Sixteen Crucified Saviors, or, Christianity Before Christ*.<sup>123</sup> This book threw me at first. What were the implications of Christianity borrowing the Resurrection and Virgin birth stories? Paul believed that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain,”<sup>124</sup> not too “trampoline” of Paul. Faith is dependent upon the historical reality of Christianity and the knowability of such propositional truths, *NOT* borrowing myths from other religions.

After a good few months of studying history, manuscript evidence, and apologetic responses to such ideas, I got back to my Buddhist friend. We ended up having an hour-long discussion that confirmed what I had learned, that he was basing his ideas on the works of a German professor who wrote on the subject in 1882.<sup>125</sup> I pointed out that Buddha fasting near the Bodhi-tree did not show up in Buddhist

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<sup>120</sup> Bell, *Velvit Elvis*, 26.

<sup>121</sup> Matthew 4:1-3

<sup>122</sup> A concise history of Gautama Siddhartha comes Mike A. Robinson:

The Buddha was born in a wealthy family in India as Gautama Siddhartha. He was a son of a king and lived his early life as a prince. He was protected in a palace, as he enjoyed many earthly delights of royalty. One day, he ventured out into the countryside, and observed "Four Troubling Sights," which vexed him deeply. He saw a sick man, an elderly man, and a deceased man. Gautama was deeply troubled over these first-hand experiences of pain and death. Later, he came upon a poor beggar. This monkish beggar told Gautama that he was striving for enlightenment through self-denial. Gautama felt like this was the true path, and pronounced that he would seek enlightenment in the same manner: a manner in which he would expound and codify for his disciples after he labored many years ruminating on the meaning of suffering and unhappiness. At some point in this cosmic quest, he sat in a lotus position under a Bodhi tree and was determined not to leave until he discovered enlightenment. When he finally stood up, he announced that he was enlightened, and therefore was a Buddha.

*One Way to God: Christian Philosophy and Presupposition Apologetics Examine World Religions* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>123</sup> Kersey Graves, *The World’s Sixteen Crucified Saviors, or, Christianity Before Christ*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: The Truth Seeker Company).

<sup>124</sup> NASB, 1 Cor 15:14.

<sup>125</sup> A German philosopher, Rudolf Seydel (1835-1892) took this and popularized the idea that Christianity incorporated this story into the

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

literature until the fifth century.<sup>126</sup> The older sources place this fast as being 28-days long, later one's put it at 49-days, none say forty. Another point mentioned was that this fast was not part of Siddhartha Gautama becoming enlightened, it happened after he was enlightened.<sup>127</sup> Buddhists themselves say that this fast was of a different nature than that found in the Jewish and Christian customs, or that he didn't fast at all.<sup>128</sup>

After a few other conversations he was convinced that "all the written accounts of these myths date *after* the birth of Christianity."<sup>129</sup> The point of the above is to illustrate that the Christian documents and histories are of a different nature and much richer than its adversaries. However, my "adversary" (so-to-speak) was a Buddhist, what is detailed below is Christians defending history from other Christians.

- **History Primer**

Now, in regards to Christianity borrowing the Resurrection from Mithraism, here Dr. Yamauchi has an answer and not merely a question:<sup>130</sup>

Those who seek to adduce Mithra as a prototype of the risen Christ ignore the late date for the expansion of Mithraism to the west (cf. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God*, 1963. p. 76). The only dated Mithraic

<sup>126</sup> This 49-day fast comes from a biography of *the Buddha* entitled, *A Life of Buddha by Asvaghosha Bodhisattva*, which was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha A.D. 420; and From Chinese into English by Samuel Beal in his *Sacred Books of the East Vol. 19* [1883].

<sup>127</sup> See note 118.

<sup>128</sup> For instance:

At the end of these 49 days Shakyamuni Buddha decided to first instruct his former five ascetic-companions who resided in the Deer Park near Benares. When they saw him coming they said to one another: the ascetic Gautama has given up his tapas; he looks well fed; he must have gone back to the commoner's life; we will not offer him a seat, we will not pay respect. (After all they nevertheless offered a seat and paid respect.) We must pay attention to these ascetics' words describing the Buddha as well groomed or well fed. A leap forward. Today there are reports that meditating monks, having their alms bowl besides them during their retreat, are fed by generous donors who come and quietly fill these bowls with food. Something similar may have happened to Shakyamuni Buddha during these 49 days. To this day it is unimaginable that Indians, having a holy man in or just outside their village, should not take care of him. Such, in fact, would be bad karma, unwholesome action leading to unpleasant results in the future. Another reflection that sustains my conviction that the Buddha did not fast during these 49 days: The distance between Gaya where the Buddha Awakened and Benares is quite long, especially for those who walk this distance barefoot. It is very unlikely that a man who nearly completely fasted for a prolonged period of time, and then ate a handful of enriched rice, and then did not eat for another 49 days, should set out on a long-distance walk from Gaya to Benares, let alone that he should arrive there as a "well fed" man. The relevant sutra passages that describe his Great Awakening and the weeks after do not say that the Buddha, during his 49 days retreat, ate. Neither do they say that he did not eat. But considering the events following his Awakening, it is very unlikely that he fasted. At no moment during his career did Shakyamuni Buddha preach fasting. There is no Buddhist Scripture (sutra) in which fasting is recommended.

"Did the Buddha fast?" found at *Purify Our Mind* (<http://www.purifymind.com/BuddhatFast.htm> -- last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>129</sup> Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 53. The authors make exception for Osiris, they then deal with this myth as well:

More specifically, when one examines the details of the various mythic accounts of dying and rising gods, the difference between them and the Jesus story becomes even more pronounced. According to one version of the Osiris story, for example, Osiris was killed by his brother, chopped up into fourteen pieces, and scattered throughout Egypt. Isis then rescued all but one of his body parts, reassembled them, and brought him back to life. He was then given rulership of the underworld. To claim that this account parallels the Jesus story is, in our opinion, quite a stretch. Indeed, it's not even clear we should call it a resurrection account since Osiris was never fully reconstituted. Not only this, but poor Osiris really wasn't brought back to "life" at all, since his resuscitated rulership remained in the realm of the dead!

*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>130</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Easter - Myth, Hallucination, or History?" *Christianity Today* (March 15, 1974), 5.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

inscriptions from the pre-Christian period are the texts of Antiochus I of Commagene (69-34 B.C.) in eastern Asia Minor. After that there is one text possibly from the first century A.D. from Cappadocia, one from Phrygia dated to A.D. 77-78, and one from Rome dated to Trajan's reign (A.D. 98-117). All other dated Mithraic inscriptions and monuments belong to the second century (after A.D. 140), the third, and the fourth century A.D. (M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Afithriacae*, 1956).

The taurobolium was a bloody rite associated with the worship of Mithra and of Attis in which a bull was slaughtered on a grating over an initiate in a pit below, drenching him with blood. This has been suggested (e.g., by R. Reitzenstein) as the basis of the Christian's redemption by blood and Paul's imagery in Romans 6 of the believer's death and resurrection. Gunter Wagner in his exhaustive study *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries* (1963) points out how anachronistic such comparisons are:

- “The taurobolium in the Attis cult is first attested in the time of Antoninus Pius for k.D. 160. As far as we can see at present it only became a personal consecration at the beginning of the third century A.D. The idea of a rebirth through the instrumentality of the taurobolium only emerges in isolated instances towards the end of the fourth century A.D.; it is not originally associated with this blood-bath” [p. 266].

Indeed, there is inscriptional evidence from the fourth century A.D. that, far from influencing Christianity, those who used the taurobolium were influenced by Christianity. Bruce Metzger in his important essay “Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity” (*Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish and Christian* [1968]), notes:

- “Thus, for example, one must doubtless interpret the change in the efficacy attributed to the rite of the taurobolium. In competing with Christianity, which promised eternal life to its adherents, the cult of Cybele officially or unofficially raised the efficacy of the blood bath from twenty years to eternity” [p. 11].

Yamauchi continues his critique of such views that are given a form of validation in Rob Bell's *Velvet Elvis*. When asked about the influence of Mithraic religious stories on Christianity by Lee Strobel, he responded in part:<sup>131</sup>

**Yamauchi:** “The first public recognition of the Mithras in Rome was the state visit of Tiridates, the king of Armenia, in AD 66. It's said that he addressed Nero by saying, 'And I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras.' There is also a reference earlier to some pirates in Cilicia who were worshipers of Mithras, but,” he noted, “this is not the same as Mithraism as a mystery religion.”

<sup>131</sup> Strobel, 168-169.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

Settling back into his seat, he continued. "Mithraism as a mystery religion cannot be attested before about AD 90, which is about the time we see a Mithraic motif in a poem by Statius. No mithraea [or Mithraic temples] have been found at Pompeii, which was destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. The earliest Mithraic inscription in the West is a statue of a prefect under the emperor Trajan in AD 101. It's now in the British Museum.

"The earliest mithraea are dated to the early second century. There are a handful of inscriptions that date to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after AD 140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That's basically what's wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity."

**Strobel:** "The timing is wrong," I observed.

**Yamauchi:** "That's correct," he said, picking up a copy of his hefty *Persia and the Bible* and leafing through it until he found a reference to Gordon, the senior fellow at the University of East Anglia who has published extensively on history and archaeology. "Gordon dates the establishment of the Mithraic mysteries to the reign of Hadrian, which was AD 117-138, or Antoninus Pius, which would be from 138 to 161," Yamauchi said. "Specifically, Gordon said, 'It is therefore reasonable to argue that Western Mithraism did not exist until the mid-second century, at least in a developed sense.'"

Then he picked up a photocopy of an article from a scholarly journal called *Mithras*, published by the Society for Mithraic Studies in the aftermath of the 1974 Iranian conclave of scholars. He read the words of E. J. Yarnold of Oxford University: "The fervor with which historians used to detect wholesale Christian borrowings from the Mithraic and other mysteries has now died down.

Yamauchi looked up at me. "As Ronald Nash and so many other knowledgeable scholars have concluded, the dating disproves that Christianity borrowed its tenets from Mithraism," he said. Indeed, Nash is emphatic: "The flowering of Mithraism occurred after the close of the New Testament canon, too late for it to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity."

For those who are not catching the *gist* of what Yamauchi has said because of his tendency to throw dates around like a Benihana chef would throw vegetables and shrimp around, he is saying that the resurrection stories in Mithraism came *after* the Gospels were written and completed. These mystery religions, rather than Christianity, incorporated these stories to try to hold *their* religious adherents from joining the new faith known as Christianity, or, the Way. Therefore, the hypothetical examples that Bell

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

has chosen to use are just that, hypothetical. No matter how much Bell says “what if,” they will never come true. To be clear, he is replacing history with *pure myth*, or *lies*, but either way -- they are fabrications. The question should be this then, “Why?”<sup>132</sup>

- **The Jewish Rub**

Another point I wish to zero in on is Rob Bell’s borrowing from Jewish refutations of Christian biblical theology, as Bell portrayed the Hebrew word for *virgin*.<sup>133</sup> When Bell says, “But what if as you study the origin of the word virgin, you discover that the word virgin in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew Language at that time, the word virgin could mean several things.”<sup>134</sup> Origen answered his Jewish objectors of his day (c 248) when he said:

A Jew might split words and say that the words are not, “Look, a virgin [will give birth],” but, “Look, a young woman...” I reply that the word *almah* - which the Septuagint has rendered by “virgin,” but others by “young woman,” occurs ... in Deuteronomy, being applied [clearly] to a virgin, in the following passage: “If a woman who is a virgin [Heb. *almah*] is betrothed unto a husband.”<sup>135</sup>

This historical defense aside,<sup>136</sup> would it matter much if we were to give this “story” up? Dr. Geisler first

<sup>132</sup> A good answer to this can be found in a DVD critique on the emergent church by Charlie H. Campbell, *The Emerging Church & the Battle for Truth* (can be found at: [www.alwaysbeready.com](http://www.alwaysbeready.com)).

<sup>133</sup> For instance:

The word *almah* never refers to a married woman, and usually it is clear or implied that the woman is unmarried and a virgin (Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; Ps. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song 1:3; 6:8). In one of these texts the Septuagint translated *almah* as “virgin” (parthenos, Gen. 24:43), just as it did in Isaiah 7:14. In the other texts, the Septuagint used forms of the word *neanis*, “young girl,” a translation that also includes the idea of virginity. An *almah* is neither a child nor a mature woman, but a young woman who is unmarried but old enough to become married. The old-fashioned word “maiden” might be the best one-word substitute. As the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* correctly concludes, *almah* “represents a young woman, one of whose characteristics is virginity.”

Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 136.

<sup>134</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 26.

<sup>135</sup> David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), cf. Virgin birth, 671.

<sup>136</sup> See, Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), (recommended) 756-775.

It is true, of course, that there is also early evidence of denials of the virgin birth. Some of these, naturally, were by pagans. More significant, however, are the objections from Jews, who were in a better position to be aware of the facts and might reflect a more accurate picture of the tradition. Some who claimed to be Christian believers also raised objections. Among these various types of opponents of the doctrine were Celsus, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and the Ebionites. Significantly we do not find anyone who is otherwise orthodox (i.e., who holds to all the other basic doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith) denying the virgin birth. Machen aptly summarizes the negative testimony from the second century: “The denials of the virgin birth which appear in that century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession, much more probably than upon genuine historical tradition.” By contrast, the existence of strong positive testimony from the second century coupled with the other types of evidence already cited, argues forcefully for the historicity and factuality of the virgin birth. While not unambiguous or overwhelming, the evidence is sufficient to support belief in the biblical testimony on this important topic. (765)

See also, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), (recommended) 529-532.

It has been common, at least in previous generations, for those who do not accept the complete truthfulness of Scripture to deny the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. But if our beliefs are to be governed by the statements of Scripture, then we will certainly not deny this teaching. Whether or not we could discern any aspects of doctrinal importance for this teaching, we should believe first of all simply because Scripture affirms it. Certainly such a miracle is not too hard for the God who created the universe and everything in it—anyone who affirms that a virgin birth is “impossible” is just confessing his or her own unbelief in the God of the Bible. Yet in addition to the fact that Scripture teaches the virgin birth, we can see that it is doctrinally important, and if we are to understand the biblical teaching on the person of

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

defends the doctrine and then he adds the significance to such a historical event:

The word translated “virgin” (*almah*) refers to a young maiden who has never had sexual relations with a man. The wife of Isaiah who bore the son in fulfillment of the first aspect of the prophecy was a virgin until she conceived by Isaiah. However, according to Matthew 1:23-25, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a virgin even when she conceived and gave birth to Jesus. The physical conception and birth of the son of Isaiah was a sign to Israel that God would deliver them from physical bondage to the Assyrians. But, the supernatural conception and birth of the Son of God *was a sign to all of God's people that He would deliver them from spiritual bondage to sin and death.*<sup>137</sup>

Professor Archer concludes after an in-depth treatment of Isaiah 7:14 that “It should be observed that *almah* was an ideal term for the twofold aspect of the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.”<sup>138</sup> He continues:

The future mother of the antitype, Isaiah's wife-to-be, was a virgin up until the night of her wedding. But the Virgin Mary was a *virgo intacta* at the time the angel announced to her that she would become the mother of Jesus. Joseph had no carnal knowledge of her until after her firstborn Son was delivered, according to Matthew 1:24-25.<sup>139</sup>

- **Principled Defense**

It seems that the only thing that is being offered by the emergent movement is tolerance... and that is it! G. K. Chesterton hit the nail on the head when he referred to tolerance “as the virtue that remains after a man has lost all his principle.”<sup>140</sup> When Daniel B. Wallace tells us, “the virgin birth of the pagan god Dionysus is attested only in *post-Christian sources...several centuries after Christ,*”<sup>141</sup> and on the other spectrum we have Rob Bell telling us that the Gospel writers may have added the doctrine in to woo believers from the mystery religions, *both cannot be correct at the same time.*

Even if Rob Bell *personally* believes the doctrinally orthodox position, how is he going to convince others about it? Not by spinning false historical stories to please some skeptical bone in a person, that is for sure. Very confusing to say the least... dare I say it? Quite “bizarre” in fact.

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<sup>137</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), cf. Is 7:14, 267 (emphasis added).

<sup>138</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), cf. Is 7:14, 268.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Abby Nye, *Fish Out of Water: Surviving and Thriving as a Christian on a Secular Campus* (Green Forest, AZ: New Leaf Press, 2005), 94.

<sup>141</sup> *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 242 (emphasis added).



## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

You see, comparing a speaker who puts a high regard on Scripture (revealed revelation) as well as scientific, geological, archaeological, and anthropological (natural revelation) evidence of a young earth, as Rob did, is far different from a speaker giving validity to nonexistent history. I will highlight an observation by Andy Naselli who implicitly agrees with my main thesis (or I his, depending on your view), “when [Rob] Bell talks about ancient history, customs, language, etc., he not infrequently undermines his credibility.”<sup>142</sup>

**Again**, as new believers or parishioners join the church, issues such as the *virgin birth* are not points to focus on. Most important is who Jesus claimed to be and how the Holy Spirit is regenerating *said* person daily through relationships<sup>143</sup> and revelation. Doctrine follows years later often times. The immediate question should be is he or she “plugged” into a group where deeper concerns are met in a more personal, loving manner? These encounters for the young Christian in a more personal setting will *allow* questions to be answered. This positive aspect is what I take from the emergent movement and I think the modern church should adopt a model that creates this “plugged-in’ness.”

I would be remiss, before ending this chapter, not to deal with an ever growing practice in Evangelical circles, that is, contemplative prayer.<sup>144</sup>

- **Psychology, Prayer, and Discernment**<sup>145</sup>

As we work through the following issues, keep in mind that these critiques come from the heart of an apologist. Also know that in the marrying of psychology and Christianity, while healthy and biblical in some sense and use -- the potential for misuse and unbiblical practices are possible, and if Romans 3:10 is taken to heart, expected. While my personal life has been positively impacted by certain authors in this new integrative understanding of Christianity and psychology with counseling, I also would warn a

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<sup>142</sup> Andy is currently working on a Ph.D. in Theological Studies with a concentration in New Testament Exegesis and Theology at *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*, where he serves as research assistant to D. A. Carson. The quote was taken from his blog, “Thoughts on Exegetical, Biblical, Historical, Systematic, and Practical Theology” (<http://andynaselli.com/theology/>) The quote comes from a post he authored entitled “Nooma Bloop,” and is found at: <http://andynaselli.com/theology/nooma-bloop/> (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>143</sup> Although I disagree with the following quote in its pre-suppositions (the writer is a non-Christian philosopher), I do however believe the kernel of truth in it fits much better in a Christian paradigm of a God who can create from nothing and be the basis for the love we find in ourselves and His community:

**“God is the creator.”** Some people think of God as a kind of magician who can make objects appear suddenly out of thin air. But that is literal, childlike thinking. The real creative force in the world is love. Love inspires a man and a woman to create life. There is nothing more miraculous and wonderful than that creation, an act of love. Love of others brings people together to cooperate and create new ideas, new ways of living, new discoveries. Human creativity of all kinds derives from love, whether it is love of another person, or of a group.

Phil Washburn, *Philosophical Dilemmas: A Pro and Con Introduction to the Major Questions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>144</sup> “Other forms of relating to God that have unique value in connecting us to Him include **contemplative prayer** and **centering prayer**,” Larry Crabb, *Papa Prayer: The Prayer You’ve Never Prayed* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 22 (emphasis mine).

<sup>145</sup> This critique of contemplative prayer is from

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

person as they read these same books to pay extra attention to the entirety of the author's work separating the wheat from chaff.<sup>146</sup> In other words, have your biblical worldview glasses on.<sup>147</sup>

Now understand, when I say "heart of an apologist," I am saying that my mind works much like an auditor. While the CPA (said auditor) is investigating certain aspects of a corporation's books and comes across an anomaly (i.e., a "red flag"), he or she will investigate further; likewise, where *red flags* pop up in the Christian's reading, a deeper theological investigation is often times warranted. In the case highlighted here,<sup>148</sup> it is a hypothetical example of a pastor's encounter with a newer parishioner. By-the-by, *it makes no difference that the pastor in this example would have been male or female in the grand scheme of what the author expected the reader to get out of the example.* However, that being said, when I read this my *flag* went up, so-to-speak:

Kevin first spoke to the **pastor** following a Sunday service and identified himself as new in the city and a visitor to the church. Rev. Fernando told him **she** was pleased he had come and encouraged him to call any time if there was anything **she** or the church could do to help him. Two days later Kevin did just that, telling Rev. Fernando that he wanted to get together to talk if **she** had time to see him.<sup>149</sup>

This is a "red-flag" for the theologian because it means there is a more liberal interpretation of the Scriptures at work here, which means there is *most likely* a more liberal importing of psychological theories into the Christian-theistic worldview. Upon further investigation, the author's close ties to pantheists in projects and recommended reading is telling.

A book and author that influenced me positively via recommended reading through my church is that of Dr. Henry Cloud, entitled, *Changes that Heal*.<sup>150</sup> *Changes that Heal* is a book that I would recommend to

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<sup>146</sup> *Separate the Wheat From the Chaff* - "Distinguish the wanted from the unwanted, the valuable from the relatively valueless. It is what one did literally in the ancient agricultural practice of winnowing, one form of which was to expose, say, wheat to the wind so that the chaff blew away and the grains remained. The thought appears metaphorically in the Bible, where John the Baptist, speaking of the one 'that cometh after me,' continues (Matthew 3:12) 'Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'" James Rogers, *The Dictionary of Clichés* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1986), cf. *Separate the Wheat From the Chaff*.

<sup>147</sup> I would also ask anyone who is reading my writings to have his or her "glasses" on, I am a fallible, fallen individual as well... no pretense about it. This doesn't mean to have your opinion glasses on, although we will never be rid of our biases completely. What this means is that one should make it a goal in his or her life to exegete as best as one can. Two books I recommend are: Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Biblical Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991); Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks, *Living By the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2007).

<sup>148</sup> From a book that was part of my syllabus at seminary. I wish to say that this was the only class that proved to be doctrinally challenging and was the catalyst for this critique of the emergent church and contemplative prayer practices

<sup>149</sup> David G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short Term Structured Model, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 61 (emphasis added).

<sup>150</sup> *Changes that Heal: How to Understand Your Past to Ensure a Healthier Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

anyone wholeheartedly. However, I would do so with one reservation to those who would prosper from such a caveat,<sup>151</sup> and that is this: that the author is closely tied with many from the emergent church movement and has worked on projects which are tied to the still questionable practice of contemplative prayer practice (CPP).

Likewise, Dr. David G. Benner and even more so his co-author on many projects, Dr. Larry Crabb, have close acquaintances to Buddhists in their contemplative prayer projects. Benner and Crabb have both mentioned their sympathies for pantheistic/new age teachers. The logical question then would be: *why would a Buddhist or New Ager connect with this type of prayer?* I will let Mike Perschon of Youth Specialties and a contemplative prayer advocate answer this:

**Deep Breathing:** Every book on CPP I've ever read talks about deep breathing. Interestingly, while this is the most physical aspect of CPP spiritually, it's the most suspect. Truthfully, we all perform deep breathing when we're stressed out; only we call it a sigh and don't do it long enough. Deep breathing is generally the first step of any CPP.<sup>152</sup>

Max Lucado, Dallas Willard, Henry Cloud, and others support this meditation process where a person uses breathing techniques and meditation to grow closer to God.<sup>153</sup> There may in fact be a Christian concept of this type of meditation; I am not informed enough on the history -- if there is any -- to make a *for sure* response to it.<sup>154</sup> However, the closeness of Buddhist and New Age authors to these endeavors I believe to be telling. Likewise, the closeness to emergent church acolytes to the above stated persons is equally telling. In a recent three part series on Yoga, Hank Hanegraff, of the Christian Research Institute and radio host of *The Bible Answer Man Show*, said the following:

"In sum, while an alarming number of Western Christians suppose they can achieve physical and spiritual well-being through a form of yoga divorced from its Eastern worldview, the reality is that attempts to Christianize Hinduism only Hinduize Christianity."<sup>155</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Depending on the person's knowledge in such matters.

<sup>152</sup> From an online article archived in Youth Specialists (<http://www.youthspecialties.com/>) site at: <http://www.youthspecialties.com/freeresources/articles/spirituality/contemplative.php> (last accessed on 8-20-09).

<sup>153</sup> See for instance the DVD, *Be Still*, by Lon Allison, Mark Brewer - Director: Amy Reinhold, David Kirkpatrick (Fox Home Entertainment). Dr. Henry Cloud's statements can be taken out of context from the project, for a decent look at the negative aspects of the DVD *Be Still*, See: "Be Still Book Confirms True Nature of Contemplative Prayer," found at: <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/newsletter051908.htm> -- See also: <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/bestilldvd.htm> (last accessed 8-20-09); and, "Does Psalm 46:10 Teach Contemplative/Centering Prayer?" found at: <http://apprising.org/2008/09/does-psalm-4610-teach-contemplativecentering-prayer/> (last accessed 8-20-09).

<sup>154</sup> I can recommend an article entitled, "Contemplative Prayer: Seducing Spirits and a Doctrine of Devils," at: <http://www.earnestlycontend.com/cp.html> (last accessed 8-20-09).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

I fear this same event might be taking place in the acceptance of these liberally varied ideas of self and their application to the Christian's life. The lack of discernment in the church today, or even the idea that *maybe* these practices have been tainted by non-God philosophy, is astounding; in fact, in a recent conversation with a pastoral friend he included liberation theology<sup>156</sup> in the panoply of orthodoxy...

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<sup>156</sup> I am going to take some time with this topic, as, I believe it is a growing force within Evangelical thinking via the Emergent movement. I will primarily deal with definitions followed by suggested reading. I wish first, before I submit to men who are more knowledgeable than I on the subject matter say that at the heart of Liberation theology is the understanding that man, through struggle, will save man. And that this is how God will save mankind, through mankind. Since we will corrupt anything we touch (read Romans for surety in this), saving mankind then will surely be corrupted. It's a simple understanding of the deficiencies within the premise of all process theologies. When this movement got under way in earnest in Latin America, you had Catholic priests handing out sub-machineguns to Marxist rebels:

In 1985, a leader of the conservative wing of the Roman Catholic church in Latin America, Bishop Hoyos, denounced liberation theologians, saying: "When I see a church with a machine gun, I cannot see the crucified Christ in that church. We can never use hate as a system of change. The core of being a church is love."

"An Attack on Liberation theology," *Orange County Register*, 1 Dec. 1985, A10. This is an example of man saving man gone bad. A good working definition, then, of Liberation theology is this: Liberation theology teaches that "Christ's message pertained not only to salvation of the soul, but also to political salvation here on earth through the establishment of Christian socialism" (Bruce Frohnen, Jeremy Beer, and Jeffrey O. Nelson, eds., *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006], 502). Liberation theology emphasizes the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, particularly through political activism. Its theologians consider sin the root source of poverty, the sin in question being exploitative capitalism and class war by the rich against the poor. A comment left at a Catholic forum said this of the theology, "Liberation theology is Marxism disguised as religion, just as evolution is religion disguised as science." I agree with that pat statement.

Proponents of the theology of liberation minimize God's providential working in history and stress rather the revolutionary struggles of the poor and oppressed to transform history. Gutierrez believes, not that God actively guides history, but that he is revealed in history amid human efforts (violent if necessary) to forge a just society. For the Peruvian theologian, man rather than God is the artisan of human destiny. The "messianic humanism" proposed by Rubem Alves envisages the formation of a pact between God and persons, and in this pact both parties, as co-creators,\* jointly build a new society. According to Alves, God alone cannot guide the course of history, for his being, yet incomplete, requires human activity to be fully constituted. "In the context of the politics of human liberation man encounters a God who remains open, who has not yet arrived, and who is determined and helped by human activity. God needs man for the creation of his future." ...[this, may I add, is a good definition of Open-Theism, Neo-Theism, or Process Theology, which Liberation theology leans heavily].... Karl Marx explained human evil as economic maladjustment. In *Das Kapital* he attributed the inevitable injustices of humans to one another to dialectical conflicts between two classes, the bourgeois (the haves) and the proletarians (the have nots). But such a dialectical determinism does not do justice to the evidence above for personal self-determination. The continued power of individual choice may be seen in the dissidents' refusal to conform to the Soviet's "classless society."115 Alexander Solzhenitsyn and others have demonstrated that moral decisions come from within and are not imposed on us even by a coercive society. Class conflicts contribute to much human evil, and as far as possible ought to be justly avoided. But apart from an intrinsically sinful disposition, class conflicts do not account for all the evils of mankind. A Marxist diagnosis does not explain the evils done by people of the same class to one another, nor does it explain evils that persist in "socialist" efforts toward classless societies.

Gordon R. Lewis, and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 77, 229.

Whether or not one believes liberation theology to be influenced by Marxism, it is not difficult to recognize certain parallels between the two, in both the conception of human problems and the means advocated for overcoming the problems. In each case, the problems of society, whether termed evils or sins, are seen as resulting from inequitable distribution of power and wealth, and the solution lies in removing these inequities and the attending oppression. The assumption of liberation theology, as of Marxism, is that it is the economic struggle, and particularly the inequities in power and property, which determine human behavior. Presumably, those who are promoting such inequities are great sinners, while those who fight injustices are not. In fact, certain liberation theologians will in some cases regard a particular action (e.g., killing) as sin if it is committed by an oppressor, but not if it is committed by the oppressed in the struggle to remove inequities. The removal of inequities is believed to result in the removal of the occasion of sin as well. In reality, however, this theory seems not to have worked out quite this way. In the former Soviet Union, where the classless society was achieved, there were still notable power struggles among the leaders and repression, even involving the use of violence, of those outside the power structure, as millions of Hungarians, Czechoslovakians, and Poles could testify. It appears that possession of adequate resources for the supplying of the basic necessities of life does not negate the tendency to seek one's own satisfaction, even at the expense of others. Redistribution of power and wealth does not eliminate "sin."

Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Academic, 1998), 610: suggested, 608-617.

The strength of liberation theology is in its compassion for the poor and its conviction that Christians should not remain passive and indifferent to their plight. Inhumanity between people is sin and deserves the judgment of God and Christian resistance. Liberation theology is a plea for costly discipleship and a reminder that following Jesus has practical social and political consequences. Liberation theology's weakness stems from an application of misleading hermeneutical principles and a departure from historic Christian faith. Liberation theology rightly condemns a tradition that attempts to use God for its own ends but wrongly denies God's definitive self-disclosure in biblical revelation. To argue that our conception of God is determined by the historical situation is to agree with radical secularity in absolutizing the temporal process, making it difficult to distinguish between theology and ideology. Marxism may be a useful tool in identifying the class

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

without even so much as a bat of an eye.<sup>157</sup> So the question is this, is there a way to apply some discernment towards Christian counseling that the layman can incorporate into their daily lives? Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner pose some questions to help the counselor and practitioner in his endeavor to stay biblical:

1. Are there valid psychological insights that are essential to addressing human behavior outside of the truths of Scripture, especially in regard to addictions, depression, and serious and bizarre behaviors?
2. Does the Bible speak to all psychological issues, or only to spiritual issues?
3. Should biblical statements regarding basic issues such as marriage, family, divorce, and remarriage take precedence over psychological statements?
4. What level of theological training is necessary for Christian counselors to make sound judgments on the use or effectiveness of psychology?
5. How can counselors evaluate psychological theories and methods without a proper theological basis?
6. How does a counselor reconcile his own theology with competing theologies of his counselees and remain consistent in his or her counseling?
7. If counselors neglect the study of psychology altogether, are they not rejecting some valid understandings of human behavior that have been scientifically verified?
8. Regardless of what counselors believe about psychology and faith, should they be more concerned about what pleases the Lord than about what works in counseling?<sup>158</sup>

The authors go on to quote Van Til when he said “psychology cannot interpret theology but it can inform theology.”<sup>159</sup> Using these guidelines I will quote a site that may, in my mind’s eye, go a bit too far in its statements about those people involved in this new movement to offer more effective Biblical

<sup>157</sup> I must note here that this movement from its earliest conception was very political, as, they published statements against the United States government and their support for anti-Communist governments. In the very early 80’s, you had professors from “so-called stalwart ‘evangelical’ institutions as Wheaton College (Illinois); North Park College and Theological Seminary; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Calvin College; and Fuller Theological Seminary” sign for support of the following position in an article entitled “An Evangelical Response To El Salvador”:

The U.S. government has played a primary role in supporting the brutal military forces. Despite Romero’s plea (Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed by an unidentified assailant on Sunday, March 24, 1980), military aid to El Salvador was increased last year, larger amounts have been approved for this year, and more is now being planned. The stark reality is that U.S. weapons are being used by the Salvadoran military to persecute the poor and martyr Christians.

Edgar C. Bundy, *How Liberals & Radicals Are Manipulating Evangelicals* (Wheaton, IL: Church League of America, 1982), 118, 114.

<sup>158</sup> *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics: Surveying the Evidence for the Truth of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 408.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 409.

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

counseling to their parishioners and clients, however, they do make some points that I wish to replicate here:

This “ancient practice” is the same ancient practice that Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating teach - contemplative prayer. A year before the *Christianity Today* article came out, Crabb wrote the foreword for David Benner's book, *Sacred Companions*: ***“The spiritual climate is ripe. Jesus seekers across the world are being prepared to abandon the old way of the written code for the new way of the spirit.”*** Benner's book is clear about what that “new way” is when he talks about a “Transformational Journey” needed in the Christian's life, which includes the teachings of Meister Eckhart, Thomas Merton, Martin Buber, Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Basil Pennington and several others, all of whom promote a panentheistic, New Age view of God. For Crabb to write the foreword of Benner's book, it leaves no speculation of his affinity towards this same spirituality. His book, *The Papa Prayer*, is no exception; and he comes right out and says so! *The Papa Prayer* is nothing more than a union of mysticism and psychology, and the insights of this “revolutionary” prayer spring from Crabb's contemplative experiences.<sup>160</sup>

The question then becomes this, *what type of Christianity* are Benner and Crabb (as well as others) trying to marry with *what type of psychological theories*. Here is another example from the recommended reading list from my Biblical Counseling class from my seminary days.

Deep breathing, relaxation and prayer can be combined in a prayer-based relaxation procedure. Begin by having the client do some deep breathing exercises and then lead the person into a time of prayer-based relaxation. The following exercise is based on the time-honored Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

- Mark: As you continue with slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm, now say these words—just to yourself, not out loud—Lord, have mercy ... Lord, have mercy . . . Each time you breathe in, “Lord” ... Each time you exhale, “have mercy” . . . Lord, have mercy ... Lord, have mercy ... Just let yourself be calm in the presence of God ... Lord, have mercy.

With practice, this calming prayer-based rhythm can become a regular part of daily life. When the apostle Paul instructed believers in Thessalonica to “pray continually” (1 Thess 5:17), he probably had something like this in mind—that we should find a way to be continually aware of our relationship with God. The Jesus prayer is a way of living, a way of breathing, which continually reminds us that we belong to God and are always in need of God's mercy.

<sup>160</sup> From the website, Lighthouse Trail Research Project (<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/index.html>), the article used is found at: <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/larrycrabb.htm> (last accessed 8-20-09).

## But Who Do You Say I Am, Rob

For more about the Jesus prayer, see the classic book by an anonymous author, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. This is a stirring book about a Russian peasant's desire to pray continually. Over time the Jesus prayer became as natural to him as breathing.

For more on using prayer-based relaxation in therapy, Mark demonstrates this in his DVD on Christian counseling, published by the American Psychological Association (McMinn, 2006).<sup>161</sup>

Obviously, this study requires more than I can do here in this *brief* chapter, however, I wish to laud my professor, Rev. James D. Gibson, who was right to point out in his lecture, that many of these people specialize in a very small area, or narrow bandwidth. It is up the pastor who is counseling to take the whole of the works and apply it **Biblically** to the situation.

Dr. Benner himself points out positively that, “Ministers are the only counseling professionals who routinely have training in systematic theology, biblical studies, ethics, and church history...,”<sup>162</sup> which should assist the pastor in delineating between truth and error.<sup>163</sup> Which is where the pastor can apply his theological training, *hopefully a training that is biblical enough for the pastor to delineate between what can inform theology verses psychology interpreting theology.*<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> (The whole appendix is a complete quote) Mark R. McMinn and Clark D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 233.

<sup>162</sup> Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling*, 31-32.

<sup>163</sup> An example of error:

In working with their stress-afflicted clients, pastoral counselors can help them considerably by teaching them to develop self-awareness of the specific ways in which they manifest the stress response (i. e., by what signs or symptoms) and also to identify their personal stressors. Only when they recognize the sources of their stress can clients take successful steps to avoid them, or to prepare themselves to encounter them in a less stressful way. Knowledge of such techniques as dietary modification, neuromuscular relaxation, assertiveness training, meditation, time management, social skills training, and conscious avoidance of stressors that are not amenable to modification are recommended to counselors of clients suffering from stress. Also, biofeedback, physical exercise, voluntarily controlled respiration, self-hypnosis, systematic desensitization, and a number of other techniques are employed by specialists treating their clients for stress, and these, too, can be learned and applied by pastoral counselors or provided by people to whom they might prefer to refer their clients for additional therapy.

Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons, and Donald Capps, *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling, vol. 1* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1984), 462.

<sup>164</sup> Hindson and Caner, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, 408.