

Emerging or Submerging?

BY PASTOR BRIAN BRODERSEN



Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

In the last issue, I outlined the marks of a false prophet and declared that I believe the Emergent Movement and its leadership are indeed false prophets. Some might think that statement provocative, others inflammatory, and others downright slanderous. However, in the next few issues I intend to demonstrate by Scripture and by their leaderships' own words the truth of my statement.

By their own admission, the people who adhere to this belief system, men like Brian McLaren and Rob Bell, are unashamedly postmodern. Those within this movement are fully convinced that we have passed out of the modern era and are now living in the postmodern era. Postmodernism's main tenet is that there is no absolute truth; in contrast, Jesus said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life"*** (John 14:6a). Therefore, to proclaim to be a Christian postmodernist is an oxymoron, to say the least!

Those who hold to the postmodern mindset reject any notion of objective truth and insist that the only absolute in the universe is that there are no absolutes. "Tolerance," one author writes, "is the supreme virtue and exclusivity the supreme vice. Truth is not grounded in reality or in any sort of authoritative 'text,' but is simply constructed by the mind of the individual" (Michael Kruger, "The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Spring 2001).

Equally important in the comprehension of postmodernism is its convoluted view of language. This set of theories is referred to as deconstruction, which assumes that "language cannot render truths about the world in an objective way." This statement is very

significant, as we will see later, because language, the author says, "by its very nature, shapes what we think. Since language is a cultural creation ...", meaning ultimately is shaped by what society finds acceptable, according to postmodernism (Gary L. W. Johnson. *Reforming or Conforming* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008]).

Ironically, the Emergents, as I will hereafter refer to them, believe that postmodernism is the truth about the way things really are. But that in and of itself is a contradiction because their whole premise is that you can't really know what is true. The Emergents are openly hostile against those who believe the Bible to be the inerrant, authoritative Word of God. They are tolerant, kind, and loving toward Muslims, atheists, Hindus, and Buddhists, yet they are intolerant of those who insist that the Bible is the final authority.

Many books have been written by some of the more well-known leaders in this movement; but for the sake of these articles, we will concentrate on the writings of Rob Bell, whom I mentioned earlier.

Rob Bell's most well-known book at this point is *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. The premise is this: In his basement, he has a framed velvet Elvis. In his book, he points out that there are many velvet Elvises and you can find them at swap meets and yard sales. They are all portraits of Elvis to some degree, but they all vary. Some are better, some are worse. He compares this to the Christian faith. There are all kinds of different versions out there but no one version is right in comparison to the others. Rob Bell says *Velvet Elvis* is his version, if you will, of the Christian faith.

In the introduction he writes, "I embrace the need to keep painting, to keep reforming." He goes on to say, and this is key: "By this I do not mean cosmetic, superficial changes like better lights and music, sharper graphics, and new methods with easy-to-follow steps." In other words, he is not referring to

externals. And when I talk about the problems with the Emergent Movement, neither am I. I'm not addressing whether you have candles at your worship service or dim the lights or you have some art plastered on the walls of your meeting room. Those are just cultural things and with each passing generation of Christians, culture changes and Christians are going to express themselves somewhat differently.

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What Rob Bell is referring to directly follows: "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." He is not talking about peripheral issues, but real core Christian beliefs. This movement is a very dangerous one. And the reason it's dangerous is the packaging. The Emergent way of thinking is liberalism in the hippest, coolest package ever seen. It's artistic, emotive, expressive, and culturally relevant, especially with the youth of today. Externally, it's very attractive, but what people don't realize is that under this very thin veneer, some deadly spiritual ideas are being promoted.

Further into *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell likens the great doctrines of the Christian faith to the different "springs" in a trampoline. In the next issue, we'll consider the Emergent's view on a couple of these so-called springs: the Trinity and the Virgin Birth. ↩

**All quotes by Rob Bell are taken from Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).*