

THE LIBERAL ROOTS OF THE EMERGENT CHURCH

Over a century ago spiritual liberalism swept through the once-sound mainline denominations, wreaking theological havoc on anyone in its path. Once solid and fundamentally based seminaries became infested with the liberal teachings of the so-called “German Enlightenment” and before long heretical intellectualism, which doubted the authority of the Bible, quickly spread to the leaders of the denominations, into the pulpits and finally to those in the pews.

Today, one doesn't have to look far to see the spiritual disrepair that liberalism has left the denominations in. Because of the longstanding apostasy of the spiritual liberals, untold millions have already entered eternity without Jesus Christ – *having previously believed that those entrusted with teaching them the Christian faith were doing so faithfully and authentically.*

Using much the same modus operandi, Satan is now out to destroy the Evangelicals of our times. It worked well 100-150 years ago in the mainline denominations and it's working again now. So, with the predicted falling away of the end-times in full swing (2 Thess. 2:3), every truth-seeking Christian needs to be aware of the “new” liberalism - The Emergent Church.

WHAT IS “THE EMERGENT CHURCH?”

This short piece is not meant to fully educate on Emergent error. Nor will I go into the secondary issues of Rick Warren's “Purpose Driven” philosophy or the “Seeker Sensitive” ideas of Bill Hybels and Willow Creek. There are many fine resources from trustworthy apologetics ministries and others that are shedding light on these troubling teachings as well as on Emergent thought. The DVD our ministry produced called *The Er-*

rors of the Emergent Church is one such tool. (See www.ericbarger.com) However, for the sake of those who may have never heard the term “Emergent,” let me offer a quick definition.

The Emergent Church Movement takes its name from the idea that the culture has changed, and a new church should emerge in response. It apparently grew out of discussion groups inside the Young Leadership Network in the 1990's.

To Emergents, Christianity should be:

- * Experience over Reason
- * Spirituality over Doctrine and Absolutes
- * Images over Words
- * Feelings over Truth
- * Earthly Justice over Salvation
- * Social Action over Eternity

Put bluntly, the Emergent Church Movement is a complete redefinition of Christianity. It is unquestionably the new Liberalism. However, don't wait for Emergent teachers to use the term “Emergent.” Learn how to spot it for yourself.

HOW TO SPOT THE EMERGENT CHURCH IN YOUR CHURCH

Here is a short list of authors, teachers and areas of concern that may indicate that the leadership of your church is being influenced to varying extents by Emergent Church philosophy.

* Are books or videos by teachers such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Doug Pagitt or Tony Jones being recommended or used in classes, home groups or church services? These men began by simply questioning the authority of the Bible and the orthodox nature of Christian doctrine and have now redefined what they call Christianity

into a completely cultic, yet loosely defined and identified, religion.

It is a genuine oxymoron that the wildly unorthodox ideas taught by these men could be as readily accepted as they are in supposedly “Evangelical” churches, seminaries and even entire denominations.

* Have biblical doctrines such as salvation by grace, repentance and the reality of a literal Hell been marginalized or abandoned? Is there a constant insistence that the Church must abandon history and orthodox teaching and change our methods in order to be relevant to the postmodern world?

It is a completely flawed concept to believe that postmoderns are somehow different than all generations before them and that if we are to reach them then we must change. Sin in the hearts of men is still the problem and the Cross is still the antidote! God has entrusted us with the **ONLY** message that can cure the sickness of sin. **Who are we to change the message?** We must lovingly and accurately deliver the whole Gospel regardless of how it may be accepted and remember that it is the Holy Spirit's task to draw men to Jesus – not ours. To edit the Gospel – regardless of how well-intentioned – is to thwart the Holy Spirit's work and merely assures the eternal damnation of those we seek to reach. (Romans 1:16)

* Is Contemplative Prayer/Spirituality being introduced and practiced? Is there talk of “Spiritual Formation,” centering prayer and something called “lectio divina” which, in a nutshell, is leading Evangelicals directly into the mystical and sometimes occult-based practices of the Roman Church? Have you heard the term “labyrinth”? (An usually intricate maze to meditate in, with basis in Greek, Egyptian and Cretan Mythology and used in Tantric Buddhism.) Mystics contend

that utilizing a labyrinth will supposedly bring a relaxed mental attitude and end the search for life's meaning! In reality, this road leads to New Age mysticism and even the occult, as does the popular Emergent practice of Yoga.

A few popular contemplative adherents are Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, Leonard Sweet, Thomas Keating, Richard Foster and Frank Viola.

* Have buzzword phrases like "Missional Christianity," "Incarnational Christianity," "Conversational Christianity" and "Relational Christianity" been attached to the identity of your church?

* Have the teachings of Open Source, Open Theism or Process Theology been embraced? (Open Theism teaches that God knows the past and lives in the present but has no idea of what the future holds. Obviously, this destroys every prophetic passage in the Bible – including the blessed hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.)

* Is there a new, uncanny identification with saving planet Earth? Has environmentalism become common pulpit rhetoric? (Brian McLaren contends that it is Earth – and not unregenerate humans – that Christ came to save.)

* Perhaps the most important question to ask is about the authority of the Scriptures. In your church, is the Bible held in utmost regard by those in leadership? Is the inerrancy of the Bible preached faithfully? Is there a complete and unapologetic dependence on God's Word by those in leadership? The growth of liberalism and Emergent ideas is directly proportionate to the value placed on the Scriptures by individuals and church leaders. Without an unwavering accountability to the Word of God, every individual Christian, as well as every local church and national denomination, will soon find themselves in jeopardy.

WHAT TO DO IF EMERGENT IS IN YOUR CHURCH

- * Prayer (conduct Spiritual Warfare!)
- * Dialog (ask questions)
- * Confront (Matthew 18)
- * Warn Others!
- * Flee! (when all else fails)

What we see happening in the Church today is no shock to those who study prophecy. The Scriptures are replete with warnings about false teaching and false teachers. Jesus alone warns of this an amazing 14 times; Paul and Peter, too. A great end-time apostasy is indeed going to sweep through the Church preceding the return of the Lord. I believe that before the spirit of Antichrist is finished, error will be the norm in allegedly "Christian" circles and orthodoxy will be the oddity. But as overwhelming as it may seem, I guarantee that you are not alone!

If you are alarmed at even the subtle Emergent influences at work in your church, so are many others who are battling for the very life of their local churches and even their denominations. Many biblical Christians are making the same stands that you are faced with making. God will indeed lead you as you hold faithfully to His Word, as you witness and as you pray. Great is the reward for those who walk with Jesus and follow the command to contend for the authentic faith (Jude 3). Don't quit!

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