

EMERGING TRUTH AND THE NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN

Session 4 – Trends and Effects

Continued from week 3: Hell is justified because of the horrendous offense of defying an infinitely holy, good, loving and just God.

But Isaiah explained that God would make Jesus absorb the punishment for our sins:

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.
9 And they made His grave with the wicked
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.
10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.

God did this because of His great love, to save us from His righteous wrath:

6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.
(Romans 5:6-11)

God accomplished this through the death of His Son on the cross:

13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,
14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.
(Colossians 1:9-14)

Doug Paggit radio interview.

The Doug Pagitt interview is found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0isqLRhClo>

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:

1. Major leaders in the EC are denying basic Biblical teachings and recasting them in the image of contemporary sensibilities. The crises facing humanity are enormous, so they affirm this is Jesus' main concern. The thought of a God who punishes sin is unthinkable, so they deny His existence.
2. Our concern over people's earthly troubles will be of no comfort to them if they die without finding eternal life in Jesus Christ.
3. The horror of sin, the dread of God's wrath, and the depth of His love is most clearly and gloriously seen in the Cross of His Son, Jesus.

The Doug Pagitt interview is found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0isqLRhClo>

TRENDS AND EFFECTS OF THE EMERGENT MOVEMENT

1. The Emergent Church is increasingly promoting theological liberalism.

The EC describes this as either the shift from modernism to postmodernism or the return to a more "ancient" or "authentic" Christianity, but **at its core it is teaching that denies the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."** (Jude 3).

The EC is doing this with fresh personalities that have mostly emerged from conservative evangelical churches. They have used new media very effectively to tell a whole new generation that the faith of their fathers is misguided, outdated, and in many ways, the cause for many of the world's ills.

This message is presented as a protest against what is slick, fake, and hypocritical in contemporary American Christianity. It resonates because there **is** a lot of slickness, fakery and hypocrisy!

This protest, combined with the assurance that Emergent Christianity is actually a **return** to an older, more authentic, more Biblical Christianity has made many people believe its claims.

("What a relief that authentic Christianity does not have exclusive, intolerant truth claims and actually cares so much about the stuff **I** think is important!")

2. The Emergent Church is increasingly encouraging interfaith spirituality.

A. The EC is willing to learn from non-Christian beliefs and religions.

"Western Christianity has (for the last few centuries anyway) said relatively little about mindfulness and meditative practices, about which Zen Buddhism has said much. To talk about different things is not to contradict one another; it is, rather, to have much to offer one another, on occasion at least.

"If, as a Christian, I am to love my neighbor, and treat my neighbor as I would be treated, then without question one of my duties in regard to my neighbor of another religion is to value everything that is good

that he offers me in neighborliness – including the opportunity to learn all I can from his religion. Another duty is to offer everything I have that could be of value to him – including the opportunity to learn from my religion if he can. This is not a compromise of my faith or his: this is a required practice of it.” Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 287-288

B. Mystical practices are important to the EC’s concept of Christian spiritual growth.

There are many such disciplines recommended, often alongside Biblical practices like the study of Scripture, worship, prayer, and fasting. This makes *discernment* especially difficult. For sake of space and time, I will only focus here on examples of *breathing exercises* and *centering prayer* as examples of the mysticism recommended by EC leaders.

Leonard Sweet is a professor and a major influence in postmodern Christian thought. He coauthored a book with Brian McLaren entitled, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church.* In his book *Quantum Spirituality*, he recommends these breathing exercises, among others: (All errors in the original.)

“5. Take a deep breath of life holding someone’s hand. Nothing is more personal and private than breathing. Yet nothing connects us more to one another and the earth than breathing. Each breath we take contains approximately a quadrillion (10¹⁵) atoms breathed by the rest of humanity within the past few weeks.

“6. Take another deep breath while holding a pet or plant. The connectedness of our breathing encompasses not simply the human order but all creatures that breathe, including persons, plants, and animals.

“7. Stand in front of a picture of a family member who has died. Recall joyful memories of them and laugh. With the breath you took for that laugh, your loved one literally became a part of you. In every breath there are more than a million atoms breathed personally at one time or another by every breathing earthling that has ever lived.

“8. Hold your Bible and breathe meditatively. The breathtaking, nay, breathgiving truth of liveness is more than Methuselean in its span: Part of your body right now was once actually, literally part of the body of Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Esther, David, Abigail, Moses, Ruth, Matthew, Mary, Li ke, Martha, John, Priscilla, Paul... and Jesus.

“9. Keep breathing quietly while holding your Bible. You have within you not just the powers of goodness resident in the great spiritual leaders like Moses, Jesus, Muhammed, Lao Tzu. You also have within you the forces of evil and destruction. The youthful comrade and confidant of Joan of Arc was Gilles de Rais, a marshall of France and one of the wealthiest men in Europe, who was condemned to the stake in 1440 for the crimes of witchcraft, heresy, sodomy, and the sexual abuse and murder of over 140 children. Resident in each breath you take is the body of angels like Joan of Arc and devils like Gilles de Rais, Genghis Khan, Judas Iscariot, Herod, Hitler, Stalin and all the other destructive spirits throughout history.

“10. Gather a group together for a Navajo breathing ceremony. Stand in a circle, everyone facing the center of the circle. If there are any present in special need of prayer, ask them to “center” the circle. Place your hands in the center of the backs of those standing on either side of you and observe silence. Get in touch with one another’s breathing patterns. Now breathe together as a circle, bending the knees slightly as you inhale, straightening up as you exhale.

“Keep doing this until the circle becomes one breath.”

Sweet is not alone in writing about Christian mysticism. Tony Jones wrote *The Sacred Way*, Doug Pagitt authored *BodyPrayer: The Posture of Intimacy with God* and Brian McLaren gave us *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*.

Even more explicitly, Rob Bell recommends that his readers take three months to study a book by Ken Wilber, one of the most esoteric New Age teachers alive today.

Important notes regarding mysticism:

1. This mystical trend is pronounced in the Emergent Church, but it is also growing in the broader, more conservative evangelical Christian movement, particularly through contemplative or “centering” prayer.

Scriptural meditation is not the point of these exercises. Neither is any other “form” of prayer.

A major proponent of these practices, Richard Foster, explains:

“At the outset I need to give a word of warning, a little like the warning labels on a medicine bottles. Contemplative prayer is not for the novice. I do not say this about any other form of prayer. All are welcome, regardless of proficiency or expertise, to enter freely into adoration and meditation and intercession and a host of other approaches to prayer.

“But contemplation is different.”

Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 156)

2. The instructions given for contemplative prayer are very similar to those for mantra meditation found in Buddhism and other Eastern religions, including a wide range of New Age practices.

Books from evangelicals promoting and defending these practices are peppered with disclaimers and clarifications to separate this kind of prayer from Eastern and New Age practices.

Even as Christian authors offer their disclaimers, New Age authors point to “Christian mysticism” as a connection to their own beliefs and those of Eastern religions.

The case of Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk whose writings are enormously influential offers a sad case of just how far this connection can go.

“Near the end of his life, the American Christian monk, poet, social critic and mystic, Thomas Merton said that he wanted ‘to become as good a Buddhist as I can.’ (Steindl-Rast, 1969).”

Source: <http://www.thomasmertonsociety.org/altany2.htm>

Catholic priest and mystic Henri Nouwen showed the same appreciation for the world’s religions in writing the foreword for another priest’s book:

“While deeply anchored in his own Christian tradition, the author shows a wonderful openness to the gifts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Moslem [*sic*] religion. He discovers their great wisdom for the spiritual life of the Christian and does not hesitate to bring that wisdom home”

(Thomas Ryan, *Disciplines for Christian Living: Interfaith Perspectives*, p. 2).

In the journal he kept during the last year of his life, Nouwen wrote:

“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*, p. 51)

Spiritual leaders should be chosen by their faithfulness to the Word of God:

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

The Bible's instructions for prayer are clearly different from these practices:

5 And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father Who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
13 And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. (Matthew 6:5-13)

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

The Biblical instructions and examples regarding prayer are full of worship, confession, praise, praise and petition, but not the constant repetition of a word or phrase to "center" the person at prayer.

This is why these ancient/new prayer practices are rooted in and defended from church history, and rarely, briefly and poorly from Scripture.

You will also find no Biblical basis to learn from religions that deny God and His Son, Jesus.

3. Not everyone who has encountered these practices uses them in the same way or ends up suffering the same harm.

God's grace can preserve us from the damage of believing lies and half-truths. But this gives us no reason to wander from Biblically faithful instructions and examples for our spiritual development. That is presumption, not faith!

4. These practices are often defended by pointing out the “genetic fallacy” – which is the error of rejecting something because of its source.

But in evaluating instructions we are given to grow in Christ, this argument only goes so far. Why?

Scripture is the supreme, sufficient and final authority for everything we do to grow in Christ.

People who do not believe in salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone cannot be guides to growth in Christ!

They are still dead in their own sins, and blind guides.

Only a fool would take the medical advice of a doctor whose own protocol killed him!

3. The Emergent Church increasingly denies the saving work of Jesus on the cross, replacing it with their social, earthly understanding of the Kingdom of God.

A. “Living the right way” matters more than “believing the right things.”
 (“Who knows what right beliefs are, anyway?”)

B. Personal, saving faith in Jesus is not necessary for salvation.
 God will someday accomplish the “salvation” of every person.

**Jesus said that the Scriptures promised His death and resurrection.
 They should now be proclaimed to the world for the forgiveness of sins in His Name:**

Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.”
 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.
 46 Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:44-47)

Paul faced the multi-religious, pagan crowd in Athens and preached Jesus, risen from the dead, as the basis for God’s judgment:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31)

If our witness and work stop short of the cross and the resurrection, we have not proclaimed the Gospel!

4. Emergent Christianity is rapidly influencing every facet of Christian life in America: Christian schools of every level, publishing companies, churches from every denomination and style, and an entire generation of youth and disenchanted older Christians, including pastors.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must

continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:13-16)