

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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The Emergent Church's Retreat into Pre-Reformation Darkness

by Paul M. Elliott

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In recent years, the Emergent Church movement has become a headline-grabbing favorite of the religious media establishment. Emergent leaders' books and videos line the shelves of religious bookstores. Press coverage of their activities and pronouncements is overwhelmingly favorable. The movement has received national exposure in a two-hour PBS television special and on ABC's *Nightline*. Emergents' influence has spread like wildfire in colleges, seminaries, and churches – mainline liberal, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical alike.

Emergent Church¹ leaders and their supporters promote the movement as “the way forward” for the church. It is, they claim, a “new Reformation” with its own “95 theses” and its own new Luther pointing the way. But the Emergents' “way forward” is in fact a headlong, headstrong retreat into pre-Reformation spiritual and intellectual darkness.

1 Some in the movement once used the name “Emerging Church,” but more recently its leaders, and the quasi-official website emergentvillage.org, have standardized on the term “Emergent.”

“By Their Fruits You Will Know Them”

Most Bible-believing Christians know little about the Emergent Church movement, even as it devours once-sound churches, Christian colleges, and seminaries. Many sincere Christians have been confused and even deceived. They are ready to give Emergents the benefit of the doubt because the movement's place on the theological spectrum seems difficult to pin down. Are they liberals? Are they conservatives? Do they simply defy conventional labels?

Emergent's own definition of their movement is unhelpful: “a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”² Emergents make up their theology (if it can be dignified by that term) on the fly, and it changes with the winds.

Bible-believers need not be confused by the Emergent confusion. The Lord Jesus Christ himself gave us a straightforward procedure for evaluating all men and movements:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not

2 From the banner of the movement's flagship website, www.emergentvillage.com.

bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (*Matthew 7:15-20*)

We must evaluate Emergents' fruits by the infallible standard of Scripture alone. The Bible employs none of the man-made, sliding-scale labels churches too often apply in such evaluations – liberal/conservative, classical/progressive, traditional/contemporary, old-school/new-school. Nor does the Bible speak in terms of following a “third way” of compromise. In His Word, the Holy Spirit uses only two categories: truth and error.

The dividing line between truth and error is fixed and well-delineated in God's Word. It is the Christian soldier's battle front. On one side is light, on the other side darkness. There is no demilitarized zone where the forces of truth and error may meet under a flag of truce and negotiate. Unless Christians view the fruits of the Emergent confusion in those terms, we view them un-Biblically.

Those fruits include deconstruction of the Bible, grace, faith, salvation, and the church. Emergents' deconstruction of the person and work of Jesus Christ is openly blasphemous. Emergents arrogantly pro-claim that the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone, is an insult to their intelligence. Man, not Christ or the Bible, is preeminent in Emergent thinking. The Emergent Church may be the most narcissistic movement in church history.

Emergents reject truth/error thinking. Their keynote is the deadly embrace of paradox. Emergent leaders have invented an Orwellian newspeak that employs terms such as “orthoparadox” (“correct paradox”), and “paradoxology” (the “glory of paradox”) to describe their approach to all things.

New Luther or Blind Leader?

In 2004, Emergent guru³ Brian McLaren published what was hailed as a landmark book called *A Generous Orthodoxy*.⁴ Phyllis Tickle, who according to her

³ We use the term “guru” advisedly; McLaren and other Emergent Church leaders position themselves as spiritual advisers imparting transcendental, higher knowledge – higher than the Word of God.

⁴ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional—Evangelical—Post-Protestant—Liberal/Conservative—Mystical/Poetic—Biblical—Charismatic/Contemplative—Fundamentalist/Calvinist—Anabaptist/*

website is “a lay eucharistic minister and lector in the Episcopal church,”⁵ wrote the foreword, in which she said:

Religion is like a spyglass through which we look to determine our course, our place in the order of things, and to sight that toward where we are going [*sic*]. On a clear day, no sailor needs such help, save for passing views of a far shore. But on a stormy sea, with all landmarks hidden in obscuring clouds, the spyglass becomes the instrument of hope, the one thing on board that, held to the eye long enough, will find the break in the clouds and discover once more the currents and shores of safe passage. Ours are stormy seas just now; and I believe as surely as Martin Luther held the spyglass for sixteenth-century Europe, so Brian McLaren holds it here for us in the twenty-first....

...The emerging church has the potential of being to North American Christianity what Reformation Protestantism was to European Christianity. And I am sure that the generous orthodoxy defined in the following pages is our 95 theses. Both are strong statements, strongly stated and, believe me, not lightly taken in so public a forum as this. All I can add to them in defense is the far simpler statement: Here I stand.

So, on that basis, the one thing that remains is to invite you to join thousands and thousands of others who have already read these words and subsequently assumed them as the

Anglican—Methodist—Catholic—Green—Incarnational—Depressed-Yet-Hopeful—Emergent—Unfinished Christian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁵ Her website, phyllistickle.org, describes her extensive liberal media connections. She was the “founding editor of the Religion Department of *Publishers Weekly*, the international journal of the book industry, is frequently quoted in print sources like *USA Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Times* as well as in electronic media like PBS, NPR, *The Hallmark Channel*, and innumerable blogs and web sites. Tickle is an authority on religion in America and a much sought after lecturer on the subject...Tickle is a founding member of The Canterbury Roundtable, and serves now, as she has in the past, on a number of advisory and corporate boards.”

theses of a new kind of Christianity and the foundational principles for a new Beloved Community.⁶

The “Beloved Community” of which Tickle speaks is a term coined by pseudo-Christian philosopher Josiah Royce (1855-1916). In his 1913 book, *The Problem of Christianity*, Royce said that the doctrine of the incar-nation is not about the coming of God in the person of Jesus Christ, but the incarnation of God in the visible church. He added that “the visible church, rather than the person of the founder [Jesus Christ], ought to be viewed as the central idea of Christianity.” To Royce, the “problem of Christianity” was Jesus Christ.

Royce also said that the visible church forms a “Universal Community of Interpretation” that redefines “Christianity” to suit the conditions of the times. Royce is a favorite philosopher of the Emergents. Tellingly, his long-out-of-print book was recently republished by the Catholic University of America, an institution of the greatest chameleon-church on Earth.⁷

Confused and Proud of It

Brian McLaren is clearly comfortable in the intellectual and theological company of people like Tickle and Royce. The full title of McLaren’s “95 theses of the Emergent Church” is quite a mouthful:

A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional—Evangelical—Post-Protestant—Liberal/Conservative—Mystical/Poetic—Biblical—Charismatic/Contemplative—Fundamentalist/Calvinist—Anabaptist/Anglican—Methodist—Catholic—Green—Incarnational—Depressed-Yet-Hopeful—Emergent—Unfinished Christian

Rather than being ashamed of his confused state of mind, McLaren wears this complex and contradictory title proudly. He uses each of the descriptions in the lengthy subtitle of his book as the title of a chapter within it. McLaren presents himself as the guru of a “new Reformation” built not on Biblical orthodoxy, but on a man-centered theology of paradox.

A follow-up book, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (2007), authored by McLaren and twenty-six other Emergent thought leaders, is an equally confused and confusing theological Tower of Babel. Its architects and builders are bent on not simply tearing down the Reformation, but on taking the church back into pre-Reformation darkness. In the process, McLaren and his fellow Emergents leave no doubt that they are not really Christians at all.

The Origin of the Term “Emergent”

The Emergent Church movement is unabashedly postmodernist. Emergents’ only absolute is that there are no absolutes. Feelings and experience preclude the acceptance of propositional truth. Emergent “truth” comes through dialogue and consensus, and therefore today’s “truth” is not necessarily tomorrow’s. Theology is “conversational.” Truth itself is “emergent.”

What is the definition of “emergent”? Brian McLaren offers this:

There are many kinds of thinking. Some thought is discursive, tracing the development of an idea in a linear way. Some is polemical, staging a winner-takes-all fight between ideas. Some is analytical, breaking down complex wholes into simple parts or tracing complex effects back to simpler causes. But some thought seeks to embrace what has come before – like a new ring on a tree – in something bigger. This is emergent (or integral, or integrative) thinking.⁸

This definition of “emergence” has its roots in the philosophy of a man named Ken Wilber, who mixes elements of Christianity, Buddhism, New Age, and Eastern philosophies into his so-called religious practice. Wilber is becoming popular as a thought leader among an ever-widening circle of Evangelical and Reformed churches and seminaries. McLaren says the definition of “emergence” is based on Wilbur’s evolutionary concept of the “Great Nest of Being” which consists of, as McLaren puts it, “these realities”

1. Space and Time: the primal creation in which everything emerges.

6 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 11-12.

7 Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 1913, republished in 2001 by Catholic University of America Press, 43 and 340.

8 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 316.

2. Inanimate Matter: the domain of physics and chemistry in space and time.
3. Microbiotic and Plant Life: the domain of microbiology and botany, which embraces domains 1 and 2 and adds life.
4. Animal Life: the domain of zoology, which comprises domains 1 through 3 and adds increasing levels of sentience and intelligence.
5. Human Life: the domain of anthropology and psychology and art and ethics, which comprises domains 1 through 4 and adds increasing levels of consciousness and culture.
6. Spiritual Life: the domain of awareness of God, accessed through theology and spirituality and mysticism, which encompasses domains 1 through 5, and adds the experience of the sacred and conscious relationship with God.⁹

This kind of thinking marries Eastern mysticism and New Age thought with classical Darwinism. Everything emerges from something else, says McLaren. He then gives his first example of how he says Christians need to practice “emergent” thinking: “In whatever ways Protestants feel they emerged from Catholicism...they can't despise their roots or reject their past.”¹⁰ As we shall see, what McLaren has in mind is a redefinition of Protestantism as the prelude to an unconditional surrender to Roman Catholicism.

Say “So Long” to the Solas

How does the Emergent Church’s “new Reformation” compare with the one that freed Biblical Christianity from the shroud of Romanism? What of the five *solas*, the rallying cries of that Reformation? What of *sola Scriptura*, the Reformers’ declaration that the Christian’s authority is Scripture alone? What of *sola gratia*, salvation by grace alone? What of *solus Christus*, the truth that salvation is through Christ alone? What of *sola fide*, justification by faith alone? And do Emergents believe in *solī Deo gloria*, that the glory belongs to God alone?

9 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 317-318.

10 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 317.

Emergents dismiss adherence to such fundamentals, says spokesman Barry Taylor, as “a constant reminder that religion can be a source of chaos and confusion.”¹¹ But who is really living in the realm of chaos and confusion — those whom the Emergents deride as “fundamentalists,” or Emergents who have exalted themselves against the knowledge of God? How do the theological currents flowing through the Emergent Church compare with the Reformation’s great and fundamental statements of the Biblical faith “once for all delivered to the saints”? We shall allow Emergent Church spokesmen to answer for themselves, to their own condemnation.

Deconstructing the Word of God

We begin with *sola Scriptura*, the doctrine that the Christian’s sole authority is Scripture alone. Emergent Church leaders will tell you they are uncertain of most things. They wear ambiguity like a badge of honor. But they *are* certain of one thing: The Bible is *not* the inspired, infallible, inerrant, uniquely authoritative Word of God.

What do Emergent Church leaders say is the nature of the Bible? Emergent guru McLaren says that the Bible is “an inspired gift from God – a unique collection of literary artifacts.”¹² Emergent leader Doug Pagitt agrees with McLaren, hinting at what they mean by “inspired.” The “history of the Christian faith,” Pagitt says, is that “the Scriptures come from and inform the church.”¹³ In other words, they do not come from God in the sense of verbal, plenary, authoritative inspiration spoken of in passages such as *2 Timothy 3:16-17* and *2 Peter 1:20-21*.

McLaren is even more explicit. He says that “*the purpose of Scripture is to equip God’s people for good works.*”¹⁴ The italics are his. McLaren and other Emergents repeat this statement frequently in their writings, almost as a mantra. But there is never a word about Scripture’s telling mankind *how to become* one of God’s people, through faith in the

11 Barry Taylor, “Converting Christianity” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope: Key Leaders Offer an Inside Look*, Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, editors (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 165.

12 Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 75.

13 *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 171.

14 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 183.

person and work of Jesus Christ. Throughout their writings, Emergents assume that everybody is already one of "God's people." You just have to get busy doing "good works," as they define them.

But after stating that "the purpose of Scripture is to equip God's people for good works," McLaren follows immediately with this: "Shouldn't a simple statement like this be far more important than statements with words foreign to the Bible's vocabulary about itself (inerrant, authoritative, literal, revelatory, objective, absolute, propositional, etc.)?"¹⁵

Just how "foreign" does McLaren think these words are to Scripture? He does not hesitate to tell us, in a book with one of the most ironic titles ever: *Adventures in Missing the Point*, co-authored by McLaren and so-called "Evangelical left" spokesman Tony Campolo. McLaren's and Campolo's title reflects their fatuous belief that the Bible-believing Christian church has "missed the point" on just about everything. (Of course, Emergents have "gotten the point.") "The Bible is an inspired gift from God – a unique collection of literary artifacts," McLaren says. But it is not the inspired, infallible, inerrant, propositional, revelatory, absolute, objective, Word of God. What's more, McLaren asserts, "not even one-hundredth of one percent of the Bible" presents "objective information about God."¹⁶

Those are some pretty absolute statements from a man who claims that little, if anything, is certain. But McLaren is just getting warmed up. The Christian church, says McLaren, has misrepresented the Bible as something containing "universal laws." "We claimed that the Bible was easy to understand," he laments. "We presented the Bible as a repository of sacred propositions." All of that was wrong, he says. And, echoing the true position of the Roman Catholic Church-State, McLaren laments that "we mass produced the Bible" and gave Christians the impression that they could interpret it for themselves.¹⁷

Orthoparadoxy and Paradoxology

How, according to Emergents, are we to approach this "inspired" but humanly-originated, non-inerrant, non-infallible, non-authoritative Bible? Emergent

spokes-man Dwight J. Friesen, a professor of practical theology at Mars Hill Graduate School (Seattle) and a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the ultra-liberal National Council of Churches, says that Christ was not interested in orthodoxy but in "a full and flourishing human life."¹⁸ What must develop, says Friesen, is not orthodoxy – correct teaching – but a piece of Emergent doubletalk called *orthoparadoxy* or "correct paradox." Friesen writes:

Orthoparadoxy represents a conversational theological method that seeks to graciously embrace difference while bringing the fullness of a differentiated social-self to the other. Through the methodology of orthoparadoxy, competing ideas, practices, and hermeneutics are seen as an invitation to conversational engagement rather than as something to refute, reform, or revise.¹⁹

Current theological methods that often stress agreement/disagreement, win/loss, good/bad, orthodox/heresy, and the like set people up for constant battles to convince and convert the other to their way of believing....²⁰

Orthoparadox theology is less concerned with creating "once for all" doctrinal state-ments or dogmatic claims and is more interested in holding competing truth claims in right tension.... Orthoparadox theology requires a dynamic understanding of the Holy Spirit.²¹

...see conversation starters where you once saw theological disagreement.²²

Emergent Church spokeswoman Nanette Sawyer has added another term to the Emergent lexicon of confusion and doubt: *paradoxology*. Sawyer is an

18 Dwight J. Friesen, "Orthoparadoxy: Emerging Hope for Embracing Difference" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 204.

19 Friesen, 207.

20 Friesen, 208.

21 Friesen, 209.

22 Friesen, 212.

15 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 183.

16 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 262.

17 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 76-77.

ordained Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) minister with degrees from both Harvard and McCormick divinity schools. Sawyer, like most of her fellow Emergents, takes refuge from the light of truth in the caverns of paradox. Those who believe the Bible's categorical, propositional truth claims are arrogant and superficial, she says. They have not ascended to the lofty realms of higher knowledge that can only be attained by embracing paradox:

There is a beauty in paradox when it comes to talking about things of ultimate concern. Paradox works against our tendency to stay superficial in our faith, or to rest on easy answers or categorical thinking. It breaks apart our categories by showing the inadequacy of them and by pointing to a reality larger than us, the reality of *gloria*, of light, of beyond-the-beyond. I like to call it *paradoxology* – the glory of paradox, paradox-doxology – which takes us somewhere we wouldn't be capable of going if we thought we had everything all wrapped up, if we thought we had attained full comprehension. The commitment to embracing the paradox and resisting the impulse to categorize people (ourselves included) is one of the ways we follow Jesus into that larger mysterious reality of light and love.²³

The Gnostics, who sought to destroy the Biblical faith of the early church by leading it to a "higher" mystical knowledge beyond Scripture, would be proud of Nanette Sawyer. So would the Church of Rome, whether 16th– or 21st–century. This is how we must approach the Bible, according to Brian McLaren:

Drop any affair you may have with Certainty, Proof, Argument.... The ultimate Bible study or sermon in recent decades yielded clarity. That clarity, unfortunately, was often boring – and probably not that accurate, either, since reality is seldom clear, but usually fuzzy and mysterious....²⁴

Find things to do with the Bible other than read and study it [and McLaren then suggests several that are forms of medieval, mystical meditation commended by the Roman Catholic church].²⁵

In the recent past we generally began our apologetic by arguing for the Bible's authority, then used the Bible to prove our other points. In the future we'll present the Bible less like evidence in a court case and more like works of art in an art gallery.²⁶

In the recent past we talked a lot about absolute truth, attempting to prove abstract propositions about God (for instance, proving the sovereignty of God).²⁷

That approach, McLaren asserts, is passé in the postmodern world. Protestants have gotten it all wrong about the Bible, by using concepts of truth and error to "lay low" their Catholic "brethren" —

Protestants have paid more attention to the Bible than any other group, but sadly, much of their Bible study has been undertaken to fuel their efforts to prove themselves right and others wrong (and therefore worthy of protest)...the Bible does not yield its best resources to people who approach it seeking ammunition with which to lay their [Catholic] brethren low.... How many Protestants can't pick up their Bibles without hearing arguments play in their heads on every page, echoes of the polemical preachers they have heard since childhood? How much Bible study is, therefore, an adventure in missing the point?²⁸

Stone Soup Theology

Emergent theology must embrace mystery and paradox, and discard propositional truth, because of

23 Nanette Sawyer, "What Would Huckleberry Do? A Relational Ethic as the Jesus Way," in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 48.

24 Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 84.

25 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 85.

26 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 101.

27 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 102.

28 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 138.

its rush to include all ideas and perspectives in the pursuit of “higher knowledge.” Emergents often refer to their approach as “conversational theology.” In the Emergent view, too many cooks don’t spoil the soup. They enrich it and spice it up.

But the dish simmering in the Emergent kitchen is actually stone soup. The recipe reads thus: Start not with God’s Word but with an empty pot. Fill it not with Living Water but with the dank and putrefying fluid of broken cisterns. Throw in any old stone just as long as it is not Christ the Rock of Offense. Then let everyone who comes along throw in any heresy he (or she) wishes, whether it’s fresh from the fertile fields of postmodernism, or stinking and moldy from the dark cells of the Middle Ages. Stir the soup constantly and mix thoroughly. You can serve this fetid dish at any stage in the cooking process. Serve hot, cold, or lukewarm. It doesn’t matter, because your fellow Emergents (and their camp followers in academia and the religious media) will say it’s delicious no matter what.

For Bible believers whose spiritual taste buds have not been seared with a hot iron, the true taste of this theological soup is bitter irony: While Emergent theology claims to be generously inclusive, it is fatally exclusive of anything that really matters. While it welcomes any and every idea the sinful mind of man can imagine, it rejects anything from the mind of God. Certain ideas are forbidden – or if they are introduced into the conversation, they will be ridiculed and quickly rejected. Those ideas are the Bible’s propositional truths.

The results are predictable. The Emergent “God” is not the God of the Bible, but whatever Emergents make him/her/it out to be – and you will find Emergents referring to “God” as any of the three.

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

“Grace” is not the gift of God that brings about salvation from sin and Hell, but Emergents’ gift of inclusiveness to anyone of any religion, or no religion at all, as long as all can agree on a left-wing social-economic-environmentalist agenda.

Jesus Christ may be many things, but He is not the God of the Bible. He may be a moral example, a

social revolutionary, a religious iconoclast, or a radical environmentalist. As we shall see, in the Emergents’ twisted theology He may even be an insane sexual pervert. Emergents’ blasphemy of Christ knows no limits.

The Gospel: An Insult to Emergents’ Intelligence

The writings of Emergent Church spokesmen contain many recurring themes, but one is especially prominent: The Biblical Gospel of personal salvation from sin and wrath by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, is an insult to their intelligence. Nanette Sawyer, whose love of “paradoxology” we mentioned earlier, is among the insulted. Her story is typical:

My explicit rejection of Christianity happened when our family minister implicitly rejected me. When I was a preteen, he visited our house, spoke with my parents, then pulled me aside, the eldest, for a chat of our own. He asked me if I was a Christian. This is a very interesting question to ask a child who has been raised in a Christian household. Being asked such a question I was, in essence, being told that I might *not* be a Christian. I responded that I didn’t know. The conversation went downhill from there and ended with my saying that I guessed I wasn’t a Christian. He told me that I had to believe [on Jesus Christ as Savior] to be a Christian and I didn’t believe it.

After that, I spent a good fifteen years defining myself as *not Christian*. Some of the things that I had been taught in Christian contexts, both explicitly and implicitly, were unacceptable to me. I was taught, for example, that there are good people and bad people, Christian people and non-Christian people, saved people and damned people, *and we know who they are*.

...I was taught that I was inherently bad, and that I would be judged for that. I was told that the only way out of the judgment was to admit how bad I was....

Thinking back on that pivotal interaction with my childhood minister, I believe the whole conversation missed the mark in a big way. He was defining Christian identity as assent to a list of certain beliefs, and he was defining Christian community as those people who concur with those beliefs.... In asking me if I was a Christian, and accepting [my] answer, he essentially told me that I wasn't part of the community. I wasn't *in*; I was *out*.²⁹

Affronted by this, Sawyer says that she later became a "Christian" through Hindu meditation and the medieval, mystical Roman Catholic practice of "centering prayer" — all while a student at Harvard, taking a master's degree in comparative world religions. She then tells of her experience while attending the services of a liberal Presbyterian church in Boston:

The minister there invited me into the community by serving me communion without asking if I was a Christian.... He didn't ask, "Are you one of us?" He didn't say, "Do you believe?" He simply said, "Nanette, the body of Christ, given for you."³⁰

On this basis, Sawyer says, she became a "Christian" and was subsequently ordained as a minister in the apostate PCUSA.

With all this background, you may understand the reason my statement of faith, my personal credo, written in seminary and required for ordination in the Presbyterian Church [USA], included the line: "I believe that all people are children of God, created and loved by God, and that God's compassionate grace is available to us at all times."

Imagine my surprise when a particular pastor challenged me on this point. He suggested that "children of God" is a biblical phrase, and that I was using it

unbiblically. He believed that not all people are children of God, only Christians....³¹

Imagine a pastor having the nerve to say that to be a "child of God" is a doctrinal term with a specific Biblical meaning! How thoroughly un-postmodern can you get? Sawyer recounts her shocked reaction to this intellectual baboon: "I focused on not letting my jaw hit the floor." She continues:

So what about the Bible on this question of the children of God? Is it unbiblical to call all people the children of God? It *is* true that there are many places in the New Testament that talk about the children of God as the followers of Jesus. But it is *not* true that this must lead us to the kind of arrogance that asserts that non-Christians are not children of God....

Even if we could answer the question of who is and isn't a child of God, it wouldn't help us be better followers of Jesus; it would only help divide people into more categories.³²

Rather than submitting to the Gospel teaching that only those who believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior have the authority to be called the children of God (*John* 1:12), Sawyer goes on to misread three New Testament passages to support her contention that even the Bible itself is "undermining such an exclusionary claim."³³

Like Nanette Sawyer, Brian McLaren also takes umbrage at the Bible's doctrine of salvation:

...I used to believe that Jesus' primary focus was on saving *me* as an individual.... For that reason I often spoke of Jesus as my "personal Savior" and urged others to believe in Jesus in the same way....³⁴

29 Nanette Sawyer, "What Would Huckleberry Do?", 43-44. Italics are in the original.

30 Sawyer, 44.

31 Sawyer, 45.

32 Sawyer, 46-47. Italics are in the original.

33 Sawyer, 47.

34 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 107. Italics are in the original.

Through the years...I became less and less comfortable with being restricted to the "personal Savior" gospel.³⁵

McLaren says that his rejection of the Biblical Gospel is rooted in his rejection of the Bible's teaching of eternal punishment in Hell for those who do not receive Christ as Savior. He says that "radical rethinking" of the doctrine of Hell is needed.³⁶ Since McLaren can't stand Jesus' own words on the subject (He spoke of Hell far more than of Heaven), he dares to put these words in Christ's mouth:

"I am here to save you...not by telling you to...focus on salvation from Hell after this life (as some people are going to do in My name) – but by giving you permission to start your participation in God's mission right now, right where you are, even as oppressed people. The opportunity to start living in this new and better way is available to you right now: The kingdom of God is at hand!"³⁷

The audacity of Emergents in suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (*Romans* 1:18) seemingly knows no bounds.

Given these and other statements by Emergent Church leaders, it seems almost ludicrous to compare their mind-set with the salvation *solas* of the Reformation, but we shall do so, because it further reveals the depths of their darkness.

Deconstructing Grace

What of *sola gratia*, salvation by God's grace alone? The term "grace" does not appear often in Emergent writings, and the reason is simple: Since everyone is a "child of God," no one needs the kind of grace of which the Bible speaks. When Emergents do speak of "grace" at all, it is not as the basis of salvation from sin through Christ. In the Emergent lexicon, grace means *inclusiveness*. And that is the basis on which, they claim, God is saving society and the environment through the moral example of Christ.

35 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 108-109.

36 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 109.

37 *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 25.

Emergent spokesman Samir Selmanovic, who grew up as a Muslim, became a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, and now serves on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, writes a chapter in *The Emergent Manifesto of Hope* called "The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness." His theme is that everyone, "Christian" and non-Christian, is going to be "saved" by the grace of inclusiveness:

For the last two thousand years, Christianity has granted itself a special status among religions. An emerging generation of Christians is simply saying, "No more special treatment. In the Scripture God has established a criteria [*sic*] of truth, and it has to do with the fruits of a gracious life" (see *Matthew* 7:15-23; *John* 15:5-8; 17:6-26). This is unnerving for many of us who have based our identity on a notion of possessing the truth in an abstract form. But God's table is welcoming to all who seek, and if any religion is to win, may it be the one that produces people who are the most loving, the most humble, the most Christlike. Whatever the meaning of "salvation" and "judgment," we Christians are going to be saved by grace, like everyone else, and judged by our works, like everyone else.³⁸

By using such twisted definitions of "grace" Brian McLaren is able to assert that:

The average Roman Catholic today (at least, among those I meet) is increasingly clear about God's grace being a free gift, not something that can be earned or merited. It's hard to keep protesting against [such] people....³⁹

On the basis of such an inclusive "grace," McLaren says that we need to redefine – actually deconstruct – what it means to be a Protestant, and come together in an all-embracing Christendom:

What if we were to redefine *protest* as "protestifying," *pro* meaning "for" and *testify* meaning "telling our story"?...Both Catholics and Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox too,

38 Samir Selmanovic, "The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 195.

39 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 139.

can come together as pro-testifiers or post-Protestants now, because together we are reaching a point where we acknowledge...we have a lot to learn from the very people we've been protesting...[and] can come together searching for what we are for....⁴⁰

It is not only other nominal "Christians" with whom Emergents seek to come together. Their redefinition of grace as inclusiveness embraces "our Muslim sisters and brothers" as well. McLaren writes:

Ramadan is the Muslim holy month of fasting for spiritual renewal and purification. It commemorates the month during which Muslims believe Mohammed received the Quran through divine revelation, and it calls Muslims to self-control, sacrificial generosity and solidarity with the poor, diligent reading of the Quran, and intensified prayer.

This year [2009], I, along with a few Christian friends (and perhaps others currently unknown to us will want to join in) will be joining Muslim friends in the fast which begins August 21. We are not doing so in order to become Muslims: we are deeply committed Christians. But as Christians, we want to come close to our Muslim neighbors and to share this important part of life with them. Just as Jesus, a devout Jew, overcame religious prejudice and learned from a Syro-phonician woman and was inspired by her faith two thousand years ago (*Matthew 15:21ff, Mark 7:24ff*), we seek to learn from our Muslim sisters and brothers today.⁴¹

Thus McLaren embraced Islam and endorsed its celebration of the Quran, the corrupt book Muslims place in authority over the Bible, while twisting Scripture to accuse Jesus Christ of "religious prejudice." Following this blasphemous outburst, "committed Christian" McLaren began his obser-

40 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 140.

41 Brian McLaren, "Ramadan 2009: Part 1- What's Going On?" posted on August 13, 2009 at his website, www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/ramadan-2009-part-1-whats-going.html.

vance of Islam's Ramadan with this published prayer:

God, Creator of all people, in this month when a billion people will observe Ramadan with fasting and prayer, with devotional reading and with kindness to the needy, may your Spirit be at work in the hearts of Muslims, Christians, and Jews (who together make up over half the world's population) as well as people of other faiths and no stated faith.

May your gentle voice call us to move beyond our tribal visions of a deity who loves "us" but hates "them." Help us to see you more truly as you are, a God who is pure light, rich in mercy, whose mercy triumphs over judgment, who knows us each by name, and who graciously considers us beloved, wherever we are from, whatever our background, whatever labels we apply to ourselves or others apply to us.

May your voice of truth call us to question the prejudices and misconceptions about you and about one another that we learned from well-meaning but misinformed authority figures, even when they thought they were speaking in your name.⁴²

The number one "misinformed authority figure" McLaren rejects is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Christ-rejection is the true basis of Emergents' inclusive "grace."

Deconstructing Faith

At this point it may seem even more absurd to ask about Emergents' attitude toward *sola fide*, salvation by faith alone, apart from works. But we press on, if only to demonstrate that Emergents' notions of "Biblical faith" are just as astonishingly un-Biblical as their notions of "grace" and their view of the Gospel as an insult.

42 Brian McLaren, "Ramadan 2009: Day 1" posted on August 21, 2009 at his website, www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/ramadan-2009-day-1.html.

We shall cite just one example. Emergent leader Randy Woodley, one of the contributors to *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, is a Cherokee Indian who works for an organization called First Nations Ministries. As a discerning Christian reads Woodley's chapter titled "Restoring Honor in the Land" it becomes obvious that his theology is rooted in the animism of the American Indian.

Woodley says "the American church" has "a stolen continent as its foundation."⁴³ He quotes liberal theologian Walter Brueggemann as saying that "land is central, if not *the central theme* of Biblical faith" (italics his). The Scripture-driven Christian may ask, "Really? And how is such a 'Biblical faith' to be worked out?" Woodley tells us: Through the "salvation" of Indian lands "stolen" by white Europeans – that is, the return of the entire North American continent to its "rightful owners" —

As a Native American, I view the land given to my people through covenant with the Creator as sacred. We have developed ceremonies, stories, and traditions [all steeped in pagan animism, we must note] that aid us in living a sacred life on the land. Living this life is one that is reminiscent of the original covenant with human beings in the garden. It can be characterized as a "shalom sense of place." Because our land was stolen, the nonindigene must find it difficult to feel the same congruity with the land. Yet the apparent sense of loss and incongruity felt by nonindigenes cannot be avoided until the issue of stolen land and missing relationship with America's host people is worked through.

The solutions will not come easily. There will be more pain and loss to be sure, and it will likely span several generations. Yet God's shalom kingdom demands that the issue of land be addressed. The issue must be addressed if Native Americans are ever to come back from marginality and into wholeness. It must be addressed if nonindigenous peoples ever hope to recover the missing sense of place that God has always intended for all human

beings to experience to gain integrity, congruence, and wholeness in their lives. Seeking out and establishing relationships between the emerging church and indigenous people is paramount to finding shalom and providing a secure future for the next seven generations.⁴⁴

So much for *sola fide*, Biblical faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to save individuals from sin and eternal condemnation, apart from works. Authentic Christian faith focuses not on fixing up this dying world, but looks forward to "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Authentic Christians seek to win souls for that kingdom, not to rearrange the kingdoms of man on Earth.

Deconstructing Christ

What of *solus Christus*, salvation through Jesus Christ alone? In their published statements about Jesus Christ, Emergent spokesmen seem to be engaged in a competition to see who can be the most blasphemous.

Brian McLaren devotes several chapters in his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, to the subject of Jesus Christ. They are in a section deceptively titled "Why I am a Christian" in which McLaren brazenly demonstrates that he is no Christian at all.

Chapter one is titled "Seven Jesuses I Have Known"⁴⁵ and chapter two is titled "Jesus and God."⁴⁶ You may have already guessed from the title of the second chapter that McLaren teaches a distinction between Jesus and God. The undiscerning reader might miss this, at least in the beginning. McLaren uses a lot of Bible words and even Bible quotations to describe Christ. Jesus is the "Son of God" — "the image of God" — "the radiance of God's glory" — "the image of the invisible God." But McLaren's definitions of these terms are not the Bible's.

McLaren refuses ever to say that *Jesus is God*. He spends several pages explaining why he stops short

43 Randy Woodley, "Restoring Honor in the Land: Why the Emerging Church Can't Dodge the Issue" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 299.

44 Woodley, 301.

45 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 49-76.

46 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 77-86.

of this: “*God is not a male*” (italics his).⁴⁷ He goes on to say:

The masculine biblical imagery of “Father” and “Son” also contributes to the patriarchalism or chauvinism that has too often characterized Christianity....

There is so much more that could be said, but for now, let’s conclude: “Son of God” is not intended to reduce or masculinize God....⁴⁸

When McLaren comes to his fourth chapter, “Jesus: Savior of What?”, he says that Christians have “demoted” Jesus by claiming that He died on the cross to save individuals’ souls from eternal damnation:

I believe we’ve also misconstrued, reduced, twisted, and torqued the whole meaning of what words like *savior*, *save*, and *salvation* are supposed to mean for generously orthodox Christians.⁴⁹

...it’s best to suspend what, if anything, you “know” about what it means to call Jesus “Savior” and to give the matter of salvation some fresh attention.

Let’s start simply. In the Bible, *save* means “rescue” or “heal.” It emphatically does *not* automatically mean “save from hell” or “give eternal life after death” as many preachers seem to imply in sermon after sermon.⁵⁰

Elsewhere in the same chapter, McLaren denies the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement for sinners, and places Jesus in the category of a moral example pointing the way in man’s quest to improve society and the environment.

To say that Jesus is Savior is to say that in Jesus, God is intervening as Savior in all of these ways, judging (naming as evil), forgiving (breaking the vicious cycle of cause and effect, making reconciliation

possible), and teaching (showing how to set chain reactions of good in motion). Jesus comes then not to condemn (to bring the consequences we deserve) but to save by shining the light on our evil, by naming our evil as evil so we can repent and escape the chain of bad actions and bad consequences through forgiveness, and so we can learn from Jesus the master-teacher to live more wisely in the future....⁵¹

“This,” McLaren concludes, “is a window into the meaning of the cross.”

Elsewhere in *A Generous Orthodoxy* McLaren makes it clear that when he uses Biblical terms such as “reconciliation” – “evil” – “repent” – and “forgiveness” he has nothing like the Bible’s definitions in mind.

By “reconciliation” he means the reconciliation of oppressed social classes and their oppressors, and the reconciliation of those who differ theologically under the umbrella of inclusivism – not the reconciliation of sinful men to the holy God through the blood of Christ.

“Our evil” is “the oppression of the poor and disadvantaged” – not the sin nature and the eternal death sentence passed on to the entire race through the Fall of Adam.

The “consequences we deserve” are societal and environmental consequences here on Earth – not eternity in Hell.

“Repent” means making society and the physical world a better place – not turning from sin to faith in Christ, or ongoing repentance through the operation of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

“Forgiveness” means forgiving each other of our injustices – not being forgiven by God, the One offended in all offenses, based on propitiation of His wrath by the blood of Christ.

These things, not what the Bible actually teaches, are what McLaren and his fellow Emergents claim the Bible means by “words like savior, save, and salvation.”

47 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 82.

48 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 83-84.

49 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 99. Italics are in the original.

50 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 101. Italics are in the original.

51 *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 104-105. Parentheses are in the original.

So much for *solus Christus*, salvation from eternal damnation through God the Son alone. In the Emergent mind, Jesus Christ is emphatically not the only Savior from sin and Hell.

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

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

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

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

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

To which Kirk-Davidoff says she responded: “You know, some people say Angel is a Christ figure...What do you think?”⁵²

The Emergent “Jesus” can be just about anything, even an insane sexual pervert, so long as he is not God – the Christ of the Bible who is seated at the

right hand of the Father in power and glory, and is coming again to judge the world.

The Audacity of Heresy: What Attracts Evangelicals?

The Emergent Church movement’s “new Reformation” embodies an incredible array of past heresies, while adding new ones of its own. Emergents begin with the denial of the inspiration, infallibility, and sole authority of the Scriptures. From there it is a short journey to the embrace of mystery – not in the Biblical sense of truth once hidden and subsequently revealed, but of inscrutable ambiguities open only to higher intellects; and the embrace of paradox – the god of “yes-and-no” instead of the God of “Yes, and Amen” (2 *Corinthians* 1:19-20).

From there it is but a small step to deny the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ. And from there the headlong plunge into the abyss accelerates with the teaching of the false doctrine of a moral-example “atonement” by Christ on the cross, the social gospel of the mainline liberals, salvation (whatever that may mean) by moral effort, ecumenical inclusivism and syncretism, the lie of universalism, and even pagan animism and sexual perversion.

How is it, then, that so many in Evangelical and reputedly conservative Reformed churches are embracing the Emergent Church movement, or expressing their appreciation for its “positives” while perhaps (but not always) also weakly expressing their “concerns”? There are no positives about a movement that stands against everything the Bible stands for. And “concern” is a woefully insufficient response from people who are supposed to be engaged in spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness that are behind evils like the Emergent Church movement (*Ephesians* 6:10-12).

Students of church history will recognize much of Emergent Church thinking on the Bible as the warmed-over 20th-century Neo-orthodoxy that destroyed most mainline Protestant churches as well as many conservative ones. Emergents are following in the insolent footsteps of Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and others. These in turn were influenced by early 19th-century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, whose great gift to theology was to assert that there is no such thing as objective truth.

52 Heather Kirk-Davidoff, “Meeting Jesus at the Bar: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Evangelism” in *The Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 34-35.

The main reasons the Emergent Church movement is finding such acceptance is that few among Evangelicals and the Reformed today are thoughtful students of church history, nor are they truly students of systematic theology. Those who assiduously study the genuine article immediately recognize the lessons of history and the system of doctrine contained in Scripture, and reject the worthless as counterfeit. The undiscerning, on the other hand, are condemned to repeat the deadly mistakes of the past by embracing a theology of nonsense that leads souls to Hell.

The Emergent Church movement is spreading a new wave of spiritual poison through religious academia. The fact that Emergents are welcomed on the faculties and in the classrooms of openly liberal seminaries is no surprise. But today Emergents also find a friendly response in the majority of reputedly more conservative Bible colleges and seminaries. It ranges from favorable classroom exposure to outright advocacy by professors and administrators. Reputedly conservative schools that have fallen into the Emergent web include Biblical Theological Seminary, Biola University, Covenant Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, Erskine College and Seminary, Houghton College, Reformed Theological Seminary, Taylor Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and most Southern Baptist schools.

It only takes a few years of exposure to false teaching for young minds to become the generation that will carry the poison out of the seminaries and colleges, into the pulpits, and into the pews.

There is another reason why so many in the Evangelical and Reformed camps are accommodating and even embracing the Emergent Church movement. That reason is intellectual pride. The Emergent Church movement is all about the pride and glory of man, not the glory of God.

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

Christ alone. They reject such a doctrine because it means that true Christianity is an exclusive rather than an inclusive faith.

We have also seen that the Emergent Church movement is all about prideful man's embrace of mystery and paradox as the keys to "higher knowledge." The Emergent focus is not on Biblical orthodoxy, but on "a generous orthodoxy" – "orthoparadoxy." Emergent leader Rob Bell boasts, "This is not just the same old message with new methods. We're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion...."⁵³

Too Busy Having Conversations to Listen to God

At this point it may seem absurd to round out this discussion by asking a final question about Emergent views of the *solas*, but we shall press on: What is the Emergent view of *solī Deo gloria*, the doctrine that the glory for man's salvation – indeed for all things – belongs to God alone? The answer is that Emergents are all about "conversation." Emergent cohorts (discussion groups) meet regularly around the country to have, as their website emergentvillage.org puts it, conversations about what they think is important. There is no touch-stone, no authoritative body of propositional truth. Truth is what they make it, and they make it up as they go.

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

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

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

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

- significant interest in “community,” communal living, and renewed monastic practices
- an open-source [inclusive] approach to community, theology, and leadership that encourages flatter structures, networks, and more personal and collective participation
- revitalized interest in the social dimensions of the gospel of Jesus, including community development, earth-keeping, global justice, and advocacy – with a particular emphasis on a relationally engaged approach to these issues
- renewed interest in contemplative and bodily spiritual formation disciplines that have, historically, been important Christian practices [e.g., Medieval Catholic meditative practices such as “centering prayer”]
- a renewed emphasis on creation theology that celebrates earth, humanity, cultures, and the sensuous and esthetic as good gifts of the Creator to be enjoyed in their proper contexts
- cultivation and appreciation of the arts, creativity, artful living, and provocative storytelling
- reexamination of vocation, livelihood, and sustainable economics.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Mark Scandrette, “Growing Pains: The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 34. The “messy and fertile” reference comes from Scandrette’s comment elsewhere in the book (22): “The emerging church is like junior high students and sex – a lot of people are talking about it, but not a lot of people are actually doing it – and those that are doing it are messy – and fertile as hell.”

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

The Biblical Response

Above all, Scripture-driven Christians must recognize the true nature of the Emergent Church and its leaders, in contrast to the true nature of the believer. The ultimate test is the attitude of each toward Jesus Christ, who said that He himself is the truth:

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:6-10).

In the early 1960s, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the few in Britain who spoke out against Evangelicals’ embrace of the Ecumenical Movement. His words also serve as a Biblical warning to Christians who claim to be true to God’s Word but are merely “concerned” about the Emergent movement, or think it may have “positives” to contribute:

To regard a church, or a council of churches, as a forum in which fundamental matters can be debated and discussed, or as an opportunity for witness-bearing, is sheer confusion and muddled thinking. There is to be no discussion about “the foundation,” as we have seen. If men do not accept that, they are not brethren and we can have no

dialogue with them. We are to preach to such and to evangelize them. Discussion takes place only among brethren who share the same life and subscribe to the same essential truth. It is right and good that brethren should discuss together matters which are not essential to salvation and about which there is, and always has been, and probably always will be, legitimate difference of opinion....

Before there can be any real discussion and dialogue and exchange there must be agreement concerning primary and fundamental matters. Without the acceptance of certain axioms and propositions in geometry, for example, it is idle to attempt to solve any problem. If certain people refuse to accept the axioms, and are constantly querying and disputing them, clearly there is no point of contact between them and those who do accept them. It is precisely the same in the realm of the church. Those who question and query, let alone deny, the great cardinal truths that have been accepted through-out the centuries do not belong to the church, and to regard them as brethren is to betray the truth. As we have already reminded ourselves, the apostle Paul tells us clearly what our attitude to them should be: "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (*Titus* 3:10). They are to be regarded as unbelievers who need to be called to repentance and acceptance of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. To give the impression that they are Christians with whom other Christians disagree about certain matters is to confuse the genuine seeker and enquirer who is outside [and also, we would add, to confuse those within the church]. But such is the position prevailing today. It is based upon a failure to understand the nature of the New Testament church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (*1 Timothy* 3:15). In the same way it is a sheer waste of time to discuss or debate the implications of Christianity with people who are not agreed as to what Christianity is.

Failure to realize this constitutes the very essence of the modern confusion.⁵⁵

Christian, do not be confused or deceived. Christ's true Church has no place for the Emergent Church's "generous orthodoxy."

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The Lord has said, "You shall have peace";' and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'... I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings." (*Jeremiah* 23:16-17, 21-22)

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Get Dr. Elliott's *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the OPC and Beyond* (\$19.95) for \$10 postage paid. Send check or money order to The Trinity Foundation, PO Box 68, Unicoi, TN 37692. Offer valid until May 31, 2010.

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

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For more information on the Emergent Church see the following video by Richard Bennett of Berean Beacon:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfI9H1ZajLs>.