

Emerging or Submerging? Part 3

This is the third in a continuing series exposing the Emergent Movement's false doctrines.



BY PASTOR BRIAN BRODERSEN

The Resurrection

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33

The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith and the central message of the Gospel. Paul said, ***“If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty”*** (1 Corinthians 15:14). Later in this same passage, Paul said, ***“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable”*** (verse 19).

As we survey the New Testament, specifically the Book of Acts and the Epistles, we see the apostles boldly and passionately proclaiming Christ risen from the dead—over and over again.

However, those within the Emergent Movement, which we have been considering for the past few issues, don't see the resurrection the way the apostles saw it. To get a better understanding of the Emergents' views on this essential doctrine of the Christian faith, we will return once again to Rob Bell's book, *Velvet Elvis*.

Everybody's god in the first century had risen from the dead. To claim a resurrection had occurred was nothing new. ... To try to prove there was an empty tomb wouldn't have gotten very far with the average citizen of the Roman Empire: they had heard it all before (164).

Here Rob Bell is subtly but certainly diminishing the uniqueness of the resurrection of Christ; equally significant is his promotion of liberal mythology as fact. To insist “everybody's god in the first century had risen from the dead” is either blatant dishonesty or total delusion on Bell's part. He is referring to the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults of the latter first and second centuries and wrongfully insisting that they were prevalent in the apostolic period. However, historian and apologist Dr. Edwin

Yamauchi, a professor of Ancient History, Biblical Archaeology, and Early Church History at Miami University, has examined the entire matter on several occasions and considers groundless the case for any significant Dionysian or Mithraic influence on Roman society. His conclusion is that there is no evidence of the penetration of these cults into the West until the end of the first century AD.

But not only is Bell undermining the uniqueness of the resurrection of Christ, he is also striking out against the Gospel as consisting of propositional truth—such as Christ dying for our sins and being raised for our justification. The Emergents do not try to convince people of the truth in order that they can believe and be saved. In fact, they claim that early Christians did not emphasize Christ's resurrection.

It is important to remember that we rarely find these first Christians trying to prove the resurrection actually occurred ... (164).

This assertion is just not true. In fact, we see Peter and John arrested in Acts 4:2a for preaching ***“in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”*** Later, verse 33b says the apostles ***“gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”***

In Acts 17, we see Paul going to the synagogue and reasoning with the Jews, ***“explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead”*** (verse 3a).

Finally, later in chapter 17, we see Paul speaking ***“with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as ... those who happened to be”*** in the marketplace, ***“preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection”*** (verses 17-18, NIV).

Preaching and seeking to convince people of the resurrection was far from rare—it was the central message of the apostles!

Emergents so detest propositional truth that they deny the obvious and try to get people to believe that the big attraction in the early church was the sense of community. Again, Rob Bell expresses this in *Velvet Elvis*:

So many passages about the early church deal with possessions and meals and generosity. They understood that people are rarely persuaded by arguments, but more often by experience. ... To the outside world, it was less about proving and more about inviting people to experience this community of Jesus' followers for themselves (164).

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Here you see clearly the influence of post-modernism on the Emergent mind. Post-modernism emphasizes feelings and experience; therefore, it is diametrically opposed to propositional truth or argumentation. It's about having an experience; so the “many passages” (I can think of two or three) that talk about “possessions and meals and generosity,” these are the key to understanding how the early Christians evangelized. According to the Emergents, the early church didn't go out and preach that Jesus rose from the dead. They didn't try to convince people that the resurrection was a fact, because, after all, everybody's god had risen from the dead.

This type of teaching is a rejection of biblical authority and an attack on much of Evangelicalism's historical understanding of the faith. It is an attempt to reinvent Christianity. ☹️

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