

ROB BELL: GOSPEL? WHAT GOSPEL?

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 6:14)

On Tour With Rob Bell

In his article **STAR POWER: A HIGHER CALLING: His message packs the house** covering the final night of Rob Bell's recently wrapped up tour of "bars, music clubs and theaters in a huge circle of the United States he made by tour bus," David Crumm of the Free Press writes: after Bell had preached about everything from the creation of the universe to the ultimate meaning of life,... [A man in attendance said,] "It was such a refreshing look at our faith - I could have heard more."

That's generally what crowds have said throughout Bell's nationwide "Everything is Spiritual Tour." Bell's gee-whiz style, laced with wry humor, has managed to link the book of Genesis to theories in quantum physics to an impassioned plea for the world's needy.

As he talked in Detroit, he used a marker and whiteboard to sketch diagrams of molecules, planets, stars and God's creation of humanity. Just in case anyone was feeling dizzy, he quipped, "Don't worry. There'll be aspirin in the bar afterward."

And speaking of a bar, in these venues there literally was a bar. In his post **An Open Letter to Rob Bell**, Emergent pastor J.R. Briggs says to Bell: there's a part of me that says that its not every day that a brotha can sell the house out each night by talking at them for two hours at a time. Maybe I should just say, 'Preach on, brother man, and do it if it works. If people want to pay it, Rob should play it.'

Secondly, it's cool that you're wanting to perform/speak/talk/teach at secular venues like the TLA and all. Open bar, cool setting, bouncers that have tattoo dragons running up their neck that wouldn't be caught in church on a Sunday morning, the fact that its not in the Christian ghetto, etc. But it confused me: was the goal to communicate with those far from God during your tour or was it to communicate to Christians (specifically that night, in the Philly area) about what it means to live with God in the world?

As you can see there are even people among the Emergent crowd who have concerns about what Bell was trying to do during this tour. And now we bring in Crumm once again to share some further information with us in his aforementioned article, which is subtitled "Preacher electrifies audiences with a spiritual journey." O no doubt Bell's popularity is beginning to soar, though we really shouldn't find that surprising considering Rob Bell's Emergent man-pleasing message: Along the way, press coverage was glowing. A story in the New York Times quoted Andy Crouch, an editor at Christianity Today magazine, calling Bell "a central figure for his generation and for the way that evangelicals are likely to do church in the next 20 years."

The Christian Century magazine went even further, reporting that "some people predict that Rob Bell ... will be the next Billy Graham."

The Chicago Sun-Times called him "a maverick minister who has discovered a revolutionary way to communicate the gospel to a new generation."

The Untaught And Unstable Distort The Scriptures

And it is this near "gospel" of Rob Bell, fast on his way to becoming a cultural icon making him closer to the Elvis of Emergent than the next Billy Graham, that we take a brief look at here. It is clear that Bell is no friend of fundamental and Reformed Christianity as Crumm notes: In his road show, he dismisses creationism, the idea that the world literally was created in six days. And he argues that the Bible's message is more about helping the world's poor than about personal success.

Bell said that, even though his own nondenominational church is often described as evangelical, he doesn't like to use that word anymore. "The word evangelical has been hijacked by people with a loaded political agenda.

"What got Jesus angry was poverty, institutional racism and religious people who were indifferent to suffering people," Bell said. "And what got Jesus very angry were religious people going around proclaiming who was in and who was out of God's kingdom."

This is an interesting bit of revisionist history by Bell but we'll resist the urge to wrestle with the serpent here. O sure, fight the power! It all sounds so good to young people, but what Bell and others in this Emergent rebellion have actually done is to make a caricature of our Lord and have reduced their version of Jesus to a "cause" to live for. However, the Master Himself clearly told us that - "*the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10, **KJV**) Dr. Walter Martin once asked, "And if you don't think those people are lost, then what in the world are you bothering to call yourself a Christian for?"

Oddly enough, just watch how hard those within Emergent are trying to shake that very tag within their convoluted "conversation" today. However, this doesn't change the fact that the Jesus they say they follow clearly said - "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" (John 20:21) The actual mission of Jesus Christ is a real area of confusion which leaders within the **Emergent Church** all seem to share as they peddle their man-centered reimagined social gospel. In fact Tara Dooley, who interviewed Rob Bell for the Houston Chronicle, gives us Bell's own vacuous version of the Christian mission: "We are passionate about people being healed on the inside, and we are passionate about society being healed on the outside," Bell said. "We would call that **the whole Gospel.**" (emphasis mine)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ without Jesus? Um, I don't think so Rob. And I'm hardly the only one who can see that his presentation is off. Let's consider this bit of testimony from pastor Jason Woolever, who along with Emergent theologian **Leonard Sweet**, happens to be with the very liberal United Methodist Church. In his post **Rob Bell and hell** Woolever tells us: I just watched Rob Bell's Nooma video, "Bullhorn." In the video Rob is speaking out against Christians who stand on the street corner and use a bullhorn to tell people that they need to repent or they are going to burn in hell. Rob seems very concerned because people like this are misrepresenting God. He says Jesus never talked that way and that he would never do that. Rob talks about the centrality of love in Christianity. Loving those who are different than us and who don't believe the same thing as us. He says that when we do so, we are actually loving God. Agreed.

It seems to me that Rob is largely reacting to bad Christianity by presenting a half gospel.

Well Jason, as we're about to see it's more like no gospel at all. We turn now to some eyewitness testimony which concerns Bell's alleged "revolutionary way to communicate the gospel to a new generation." In my previous work **Rob Bell: A Very Poor Christian "Communicator"** I shared this from a youth and college pastor named **Patrick Hanley**. Hanley is quite familiar with Bell's "communicating" and he offers us this bit of testimony at **Perelandra** while critiquing my work: I have a hard time throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. I know that bell can be loose but **I've read his book and listened to many of his sermons. I saw him speak** this past weekend. **it was entertaining** but if there was a lost person there **they probably would have remained lost.**

I know he doesn't make the way of salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. but he does articulate the importance of biblical community probably better than anyone i know. so does mark driscoll. he has connected people to each other in genuine biblical community. (emphasis added)

The New Deimproved Crossless Christianity

The question that needs to be asked is just what kind of Christianity are you "communicating" there Rob when you leave out the central element—the Cross of Jesus Christ? Now in the interest of fairness after my initial article Patrick did clarify his words a bit in a comment at **Verum Serum**: I like a lot of what Bell says. I saw him speak last week in Indy and it was pretty good. My only wish is that he would be more cross-centered.

Well, there's good reason why Rob Bell's not more cross-centered Patrick, because in his own warped and toxic view of the atonement Christ redeemed the universe on the Cross and allegedly everything in it. As such there would be no need for repentance and even being born again because Bell believes that everyone is *already* redeemed. And then, right in line with **Brian McLaren** and **Doug Pagitt**, we have the reimagined social gospel because the **Emergent** mission is to simply awaken people to what they already have and then teach them how to be "followers of Jesus" in the "kingdom" regardless of what their own particular "faith traditions" might happen to be.

This is actually what **Emergent Guru Brian McLaren** was talking about concerning his generous—way too overly generous—orthodoxy, which is in reality everything but orthodox. But as usual in these kinds of cultic philosophies Jesus stands right in the way because in opposition to wishy—washy spirituality the Master teaches that flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And what follows now is a brief look at Rob Bell's spiritualized universal view of the atonement from **Velvet Elvis**: So this reality, this forgiveness, this reconciliation, is true for everybody. Paul insisted that when Jesus died on the cross he was reconciling "**all things**, in heaven and on earth, to God." **All things everywhere**. This reality then **isn't** something we make true about ourselves by **doing something**. It is **already** true. Our choice is to live **in this new reality** or cling to a reality of our own making. (146, emphasis mine)

This poses an interesting question: Rob, does "all things everywhere" include Satan himself? Because this is inherent within the doctrine of panentheism now Oozing its way into the Emergent Church through **Spencer Burke**. In his short review of Bell's **Velvet Elvis** pastor-teacher Gary Gilley rightly points out that "Rob Bell is one of the fresh young voices now representing the emerging church movement." Gilley also informs us correctly that a significant part of Bell's "background is in alternative and punk rock music."

Now while Bell "mentions no theological training or connection with a recognized denomination or organization" in his **Velvet Elvis**, we will note here that Bell did go to Wheaton College and he graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary, birthplace of the Church Growth Movement. Gilley also reminds us that Bell's "message apparently has incredible appeal." Then he asks the critical question for the Christian: But what is his message? Bell echoes many of the themes found in the writings of other emergent leaders, such as Brian McLaren. For example:

- 1) Redefining the gospel message. Bell seems to have a better grasp of the gospel than McLaren but, like a fly buzzing around, he never quite lights long enough for us to be sure. He admits to Christ coming to bring forgiveness, righteousness and restoration. But he is critical of people having to believe the right things (the gospel) to get "in" (pp. 34-35).
- 2) Who is "in" or "out" does not seem to be an issue to Bell. He never discusses his position on universalism/inclusivism, but the implication is that God must have others who would not call themselves Christians (pp. 166; 146, 161).
- 3) Of course, if that is true, the need to bring others to Christ is not necessary. In fact, Bell is highly critical of those who would evangelize, preferring that we would just "be a blessing." He writes, "God chooses people to be used to bless other people....God blesses everybody" (p. 165).

For those of us who have studied this neo-liberal cult of the Emergent Church we recognize immediately that this is indoctrination into the new pseudo-Christian message of the alleged "spiritual journey." But this kind of mystical mumbo jumbo is only the inevitable result of the practice of **Contemplative Spirituality**, which is a core doctrine in the twisted almost Christianity of this Emergent rebellion. In any event however, Dale Van Dyke of Reformation 21 correctly states in his very thorough review of Bell's book **Velvet Elvis**:

According to Bell, Jesus' death actually and really accomplished the forgiving of everyone's sins and the reconciliation of everybody to the Father. In other words, God's wrath has been propitiated for everyone. He now loves everybody in the same way and seeing everyone as robed in the righteousness of Christ. All that is left is for people to "live in this new reality"...

This doctrine is not only erroneous, it has disastrous results. Bell's error here is precisely what has led to the abysmal decline of missions in the mainline churches. After all, if the nations are already reconciled to God because of Christ, why bother them with pesky, fundamentalist missionaries who demean them by telling them they still need to be saved from the wrath that is to come?

Nothing Is Hidden From Its Heat

In closing, as the sky grows ever more red each morning, if you've gotten yourself twisted up in this Emergent rebellion you might want to give this some very serious thought. If the Lord is angry enough with what is attempting to pass for His Church in America today that He is bringing His light to bear upon **Billy Graham**, just how do you think He's going to handle a punk rock appreciating pseudo pastor like Rob Bell? A mixed up man who will enthrall audiences with his theories about quantum physics and evolutionary fairytales until people nearly believe in his almost the gospel message. Thus is created a whole batch of close to Christians who one day might believe.

As one who has intensely studied this messed up movement for this past here at **Apprising Ministries** I can tell you with certitude that is exactly what this Emergent rebellion is all about. Conversation such as this: "Hey dude; let me ask you, what if this—or maybe even that—just could possibly be; you know?" And the sad truth is, you can sit in your little offices and you can sit around your little coffee houses and "graciously" discuss what the real meaning of the word "is" might be until you impress yourselves. But God really couldn't care less what we think about this squalid sinner-sensitive Christian "thing" which we have erected through the years within His House.

Because it wasn't any of us up there hanging on that Cross being ignored today; it was our Creator Himself. Rob, I suggest you try wrapping your gifted mind around that one. peace.
