

FAITH UNDONE

*the emerging
church ...
a new
reformation
or an
end-time
deception*

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A Slaughterhouse Religion?

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7)

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (II Corinthians 5:21)

The heart and core of the Christian faith is based upon Jesus Christ's shed blood at Calvary as the only acceptable substitutionary atonement for mankind's sins. The Gospel message requires this foundation. The Bible says the wages of sin is death—thus every person alive should receive the penalty of spiritual death because none of us is without sin, since we are born with our sin nature intact. Satan hates the Gospel message. He understands what the Gospel means, and his agenda is to deceive mankind from understanding and believing so they can suffer eternally with him. While Scripture is very clear about the necessity of Christ's death in order for us to be saved, some believe this would make God a blood-thirsty barbarian. Embedded within the structure of the emerging church is just such a belief.

Precivilized Barbarity

Many in the emerging church movement would vehemently object if someone told them that emerging church leaders don't like the Cross. They would jump up and say, "Yes, they do. I've heard them talk about Jesus and His going to the Cross. They say they love the Cross."

Some emerging church leaders *do* say they love the Cross, but an underlying theme is gaining momentum among them. It says Jesus' going to the Cross was an example of sacrifice and servanthood that we should follow; but the idea that God would send His Son to a violent death for the sins of mankind—well, that is not who God is. A loving God would never do that! Such a violent act would make Christianity a "slaughterhouse religion."¹

Liberal theologian and pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), believed that the doctrine of the atonement, where "Jesus suffered as a substitute for us" because of our sins, is a "precivilized barbarity."²

In his book, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, Fosdick says that Jesus going to the Cross should be seen as an example of a life of service and sacrifice and not compared with "old animal sacrifices" and "made 'a pious fraud' played by God upon the devil."³ In Fosdick's book *Dear Mr. Brown*, he states:

Too many theories of the atonement assume that by one single high priestly act of self-sacrifice Christ saved the world.⁴

Fosdick ends that statement with a pronounced—"No!" He insists, "These legalistic theories of the atonement are in my judgment a theological disgrace."⁵

Fosdick considered the idea that God would actually send His Son to die on a Cross *to take our place* to be the basis for a violent and bloody religion. He rejected the biblical message of an atonement and substitutionary sacrifice.

Fosdick was the pastor of Riverside Church of New York

City from 1925 to 1946. While he has been long gone, his ideologies have remained intact and have drifted right into the emerging church. In October 2006, Riverside Church held the 5th Fosdick Convocation in honor of their former pastor. Two of the emerging church's most influential teachers were there as speakers in honor of Fosdick—Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo.⁶ As I will show you, McLaren resonates with Fosdick's view of the Cross.

False Advertising for God

In an interview, Brian McLaren questioned the idea of God sending His Son to a violent death, calling it “false advertising for God”:

[O]ne of the huge problems is the traditional understanding of hell. Because if the cross is in line with Jesus' teaching then—I won't say, the only, and I certainly won't say even the primary—but a primary meaning of the cross is that the kingdom of God doesn't come like the kingdoms of this world, by inflicting violence and coercing people. But that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and willing, voluntary sacrifice. But in an ironic way, the doctrine of hell basically says, no, that's not really true. That in the end, God gets His way through coercion and violence and intimidation and domination, just like every other kingdom does. The cross isn't the center then. The cross is almost a distraction and *false advertising for God*. (emphasis added)⁷

What an extraordinary example of faith under attack and the consequences of thinking *outside of the box*. If McLaren is right, all those who have ever lived and believed in Christ's atonement have been misled and wrong. McLaren has taken the freedom to reconstruct what faith means by distorting the Scriptures, or worse yet, saying the very opposite of what the inspired Word of God says. This is blasphemy! McLaren also states:

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And I heard one well-known Christian leader, who—I won't mention his name, just to protect his reputation. 'Cause some people would use this against him. But I heard him say it like this: The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something that God is incapable of Himself. God asks us to forgive people. But God is incapable of forgiving. God can't forgive unless He punishes somebody in place of the person He was going to forgive. God doesn't say things to you—Forgive your wife, and then go kick the dog to vent your anger. God asks you to actually forgive. And there's a certain sense that, a common understanding of the atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving. Unless He kicks somebody else.⁸

To further back up McLaren's rejection of the message of Christ's atonement through His blood, we look to Episcopal priest Alan Jones. In his book *Reimagining Christianity*, Jones carries through with this idea that God never intended Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross to be considered a payment for our sins:

The Church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it.⁹

The other thread of just criticism addresses the suggestion implicit in the cross that Jesus' sacrifice was to appease an angry God. Penal substitution [the Cross] was the name of this vile doctrine.¹⁰

Brian McLaren has endorsed *Reimagining Christianity* and says of the book:

Jones is a pioneer in reimagining a Christian faith

that emerges from authentic spirituality. His work stimulates and encourages me deeply.¹¹

“That God Does Not Exist”

This idea of rejecting God’s judgment placed on Jesus Christ instead of us is not exclusive with Fosdick or McLaren. In fact, such rejection is integrated into the teachings of many others. In 1991, William Shannon (biographer of Catholic monk and mystic Thomas Merton) said:

This is a typical patriarchal notion of God. He is the God of Noah who sees people deep in sin, repents that He made them and resolves to destroy them. He is the God of the desert who sends snakes to bite His people because they murmured against Him. He is the God of David who practically decimates a people ... He is the God who exacts the last drop of blood from His Son, so that His just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased. This God whose moods alternate between graciousness and fierce anger ... *This God does not exist.* (emphasis added)¹²

So in other words, according to Fosdick, McLaren, and Shannon, Jesus should be seen as a *model of sacrifice* to follow in our own lives, but to view God the Father as a judge against sin is not a proper view of God. Those who reject the atonement realize the greatest threat to their heretical views is those who take the Scriptures literally and seriously. Fosdick explains:

Were you to talk to that fundamentalist preacher, he doubtless would insist that you must believe in the “substitutionary” theory of atonement—namely, that Jesus suffered as a substitute for us the punishment due us for our sins. But can you imagine a modern courtroom in a civilized country where an innocent man would be deliberately punished for another man’s crime? ... [S]ubstitutionary

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atonement ... came a long way down in history in many a penal system. But now it is a precivilized barbarity; no secular court would tolerate the idea for a moment; only in certain belated theologies is it retained as an explanation of our Lord's death ... Christ's sacrificial life and death are too sacred to be so misrepresented.¹³

This is another perfect example of how the emerging church turns doctrine it doesn't understand into a mockery against Scripture and God's plan of salvation. God's ways are not our ways and to expect them to line up with our own human reasoning is ludicrous:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55: 8-9)

Former Catholic priest Brennan Manning has been a major influence in emerging spirituality. In his 2003 book *Above All*, he quotes William Shannon almost word for word, regarding the atonement:

[T]he god whose moods alternate between graciousness and fierce anger ... the god who exacts the last drop of blood from his Son so that his just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased, is not the God revealed by and in Jesus Christ. And if he is not the God of Jesus, *he does not exist*. (emphasis added)¹⁴

Dying for the Sins of the World

Marcus Borg is Distinguished Professor in Religion and Culture and Hundere Endowed Chair in Religious Studies at Oregon State University. He is a lecturer and the author of several books, some of which are *Jesus and Buddha*, *The God We Never*

Knew, and *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously But not Literally*. While most would not consider him an emerging church leader, his thinking has greatly influenced the movement and its leaders. Brian McLaren says he has “high regard”¹⁵ for Borg; the two of them participated in a summer seminar series at an interspiritual center in Portland, Oregon in 2006.¹⁶ Rob Bell references and praises him in Bell’s popular book *Velvet Elvis*.¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary and one of the contributors for Richard Foster’s *Renovare Spiritual Formation Study Bible*, considers Borg an essential part of the emerging spirituality. Brueggemann states:

Marcus Borg is a key force in the emerging “new paradigm” of Christian faith.¹⁸

Borg explains in his book *The God We Never Knew* that his views on God, the Bible, and Christianity were transformed while he was in seminary:

I let go of the notion that the Bible is a divine product. I learned that it is a human cultural product, the product of two ancient communities, biblical Israel and early Christianity. As such, it contained their understandings and affirmations, not statements coming directly or somewhat directly from God.... I realized that whatever “divine revelation” and the “inspiration of the Bible” meant (if they meant anything), they did not mean that the Bible was a divine product with divine authority.¹⁹

This attitude would certainly explain how Borg could say:

Jesus almost certainly was not born of a virgin, did not think of himself as the Son of God, and did not see his purpose as dying for the sins of the world.²⁰

If what Borg is saying is true, then we would have to throw

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out John 3:16 which says God so loved the world He gave His only Son, and we would have to dismiss the theme of a blood offering that is prevalent throughout all of Scripture. In the Old Testament, it is clear:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11)

But Borg rejects this emphasis:

To think that the central meaning of Easter [resurrection] depends upon something spectacular happening to Jesus' corpse misses the point of the Easter message and risks trivializing the story. To link Easter primarily to our hope for an afterlife, as if our post-death existence depends upon God having transformed the corpse of Jesus, is to reduce the story to a politically-domesticated yearning for our survival beyond death.²¹

What is behind this mindset? Listen to one New Ager describe what underlies this line of thought:

Jesus was an historical person, a human becoming Christ, the Christos, is an eternal transpersonal condition of being. Jesus did not say that this higher state of consciousness realized in him was his alone for all time. Nor did he call us to worship him. Rather, he called us to follow him, to follow in his steps, to learn from him, from his example.²²

Fosdick would resonate with this. When he says, "Christ's sacrificial life and death are too sacred to be so misrepresented," he means that Christ is an example to be followed, not an innocent sacrifice for our guilt and thus worthy of praise and wor-

ship. Satan wants desperately to be worshiped and adored as God. He hates all that Jesus' death stands for. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, purchased with his own blood the lives of those written in the Book of Life.

The Bible says, "without the shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22), and also, "He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Are we to reject these Scriptures and other ones as well that speak of the atonement because it doesn't sound logical? Scripture tells us that the carnal mind is at enmity against God. We need to recognize that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is our final authority, and we must adhere to the truth of its teachings:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. (I John 4:10, 14)

Endnotes

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