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EMERGENT ESCHATOLOGY THE ROAD TO PARADISE IMAGINED

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“... He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

After publishing my book¹ about the Emergent Church, I attended an Emergent conference in Chicago, where Dr. Moltmann spoke to his dedicated following—250 Emergent leaders. One such follower, Danielle Shroyer, had published a book about his theology, describing it as “neo-Hegelian, panentheistic, universalism.”² The front cover of the book contains an endorsement by Moltmann. Interacting with various Emergent leaders confirmed how foundational Moltmann’s theology and its unique eschatology is to their movement.

By attending that conference and hearing Moltmann in person I verified what is contained in this chapter. He did teach universalism. He does teach a cosmic reconciliation of all things to God without a future, cataclysmic judgment. As I show in the following research, G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy includes the idea that all contradictions must synthesize into a progressively better world. Those who follow this idealistic philosophy claim that it is not necessary to choose between theism and atheism because the synthetic reconciliation will happen no matter what. They believe it is built into the very being of the cosmos. We can either help it along or hinder it, but it will happen.

Since I wrote this book, the movement has continued and in many ways is

now a version of theological liberalism. LeRon Shults has moved to Europe and is now an atheist. Theological liberalism and political liberalism are hardly different. When we hear the term “progressive,” we should realize that the definition of “progress” is that of Hegel and his various followers (theistic or atheistic). The reason for the heated passion we see in political debate is that those who are not joining the progressive agenda are seen to be hindering the process of social and spiritual evolution that will supposedly make the new cosmos a paradise for all.

Those who believe in Christian theism as defined in the Bible are seen as the worst possible enemies of the imaginary eschatology of those who are “progressive,” according to this theology/philosophy. Belief in a permanent distinction between good and evil, God and creation, heaven and hell, and so forth, is entirely incompatible with their mentally constructed, emerging paradise. Bible-believing Christians continually delay the process because we think in distinct categories that never synthesize into some better cosmos without future judgment. That is how they see it.

It is reasonable to see Hegel and his German philosophical followers as the founders of the Emergent Church. We are again seeing German romanticism

and idealism deceive many people. When this happened before, the results were National Socialism in Nazi Germany and Communism in the USSR. Moltmann fought for Nazi Germany. But after being held prisoner in the England after the war, he became a theist and created the “Theology of Hope.” Will his theistic version work out any better? There is no evidence that it will. The Bible does not teach social and spiritual evolution into a future paradise without judgment. We are warned to flee to Christ and His gospel in order to escape certain future judgment. We need forgiveness of sins that His shed blood alone provides.

The Following is Chapter One of
The Emergent Church—
Undefined Christianity

Imagine a world where the polarity of time is reversed so that history moves backward toward Paradise rather than forward toward judgment. Consider a world in which God is so immanently involved in the creation that He is undoing entropy³ and recreating the world now through processes already at work. Think of a world where the future is leading to God Himself in a saving way for all people and all of creation. This imaginary world is our world viewed through the lens of Emergent eschatology.

Several acts of God’s providence brought me to know the nature of Emergent theology and its unique eschatology. The first happened in 1999 during my final year in seminary when the seminary hired a new professor, LeRon Shults. Shults, a theological disciple of the German Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, became my professor for a logic class. Shults often

described his beliefs with this simple statement: “God is the future drawing everything into Himself.”

Some years later, several people suggested that I consider writing an article for Critical Issues Commentary, our ministry newsletter, examining a new movement called “*The Emerging Church*.” For my study I carefully read Brian McLaren’s book *A Generous Orthodoxy*.⁴ What baffled me about his theology was that his views were nearly identical to those refuted 40 years earlier by Francis Schaeffer, who had called it “the new theology.” But as Schaeffer so clearly showed, the result of this theology is despair because under it there is no hope of knowing the truth. But the Emerging writers describe their theology as one of hope. If there is no hope of knowing the truth about God, man, and the universe we live in (as they claim), then how is hope the result? It turns out that a theology from the 1960s, first articulated in Germany when Schaeffer was writing his books, is the answer. We shall follow up on that idea later.

That leads to a second providential event. A member of our congregation handed me a book that she thought might be of interest in my research: *A is for Abductive – The Language of the Emerging Church*.⁵ Under the entry “Eschaton,” the heading “The end of entropy”⁶ appears. It then says, “In the postmodern matrix there is a good chance that the world will reverse its chronological polarity for us. Instead of being bound to the past by chains of cause and effect, we will feel ourselves being pulled into the future by the magnet of God’s will, God’s dream, God’s desire.”⁷ Reading this brought my mind back to 1999 and Shults’ interpretation of Pannenberg: “God is the future drawing everything into Himself.” Could this be the ground of Emergent “hope”?

The third providential event was the debate with Doug Pagitt, the 2006 event on the topic of *The Emergent Church and Postmodern Spirituality*.

That event gave me the opportunity to ask Pagitt, a nationally recognized leader in the Emergent movement, whether or not he believed in a literal future judgment. He would not answer either way but did state that judgment happens now through consequences in history. His refusal to answer that question convinced me that the Pannenberg/Shults eschatology was behind the movement!

The fourth providential event was a meeting with Tony Jones of the Emergent Village with the goal of setting up another debate. It turned out that they did not want another debate, but Jones offered to answer any of my questions about Emergent. I responded by e-mail asking about Stanley Grenz, Wolfhart Pannenberg, LeRon Shults, and Jürgen Moltmann and their influence on Emergent theology. Jones replied that Grenz (who, as I will later show, praises the theologies of both Pannenberg and Moltmann) was influential and that Jones himself was studying under a professor named Miroslav Volf who had studied under Moltmann. Also, he helped me with his comment that their hope-filled belief generally leads them to reject eschatologies that “preach a disastrous end to the cosmos.” (I appreciated Jones’ willingness to show me I was looking in the right direction in my studies.)

The fifth providential event was when I fell and fractured my ankle while trimming trees. The broken ankle required that I sit with my leg elevated for a full week in order to get the swelling down. I had found a copy of Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* that I knew I had to read if I was going to write this book and prove my thesis. Reading Moltmann was so laborious that finishing the book was not likely to be completed quickly. But because of my immobility I finished Moltmann, taking notes on the contents of every page. The same week I read Moltmann I obtained the just-published *An*

Emergent Manifesto of Hope with Pagitt and Jones as the editors. I read that as well and found Moltmann cited favorably by two emergent writers.⁸ In that same book Jones describes why this theology is so hopeful for them: “God’s promised future is good, and it awaits us, beckoning us forward. We’re caught in the tractor beam of redemption and re-creation, and there’s no sense fighting it, so we might as well cooperate.”⁹ Or as professor Shults always said, “God is the future drawing everything into Himself.”

All of this leads me to my thesis: That the worldview represented by the theology of Grenz, Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Shults is the bedrock foundation of the Emergent Church movement. Their language and ideas present themselves on the pages of many Emergent books. For example, McLaren writes, “In this way of seeing, God stands ahead of us in time, at the end of the journey, sending to us in waves, as it were, the gift of the present, an inrush of the future that pushes the past behind us and washes over us with a ceaseless flow of new possibilities, new options, new chances to rethink and receive new direction, new empowerment.”¹⁰ Here is Pagitt’s version of it:

God is constantly creating anew. And God also, invites us to be re-created and join the work of God as co-(re)creators. . . . Imagine the Kingdom of God as the creative process of God reengaging in all that we know and experience. . . . When we employ creativity to make this world better, we participate with God in the re-creation of the world.¹¹

These writers often refer to “God’s dream.” Apparently they mean that God imagines an ideal future for the world that we can join and help actualize. When this dream becomes reality in

the future, it will be the Kingdom of God.

This series of providential events in my life worked together to help me accurately understand a movement that works very hard to stay undefined. Definitions draw boundaries. Definitions are static. But definitions are necessary in order for us to understand anything. With no defined categories we would be hopeless human beings because, for example, we need our rational minds and valid categories to distinguish between food and poison. Definitions are valid, and no amount of philosophical legerdemain can change that reality. Definitions, to their way of thinking, impede the process of the “tractor beam” of redemption they are experiencing. They consider definitions too “foundationalist,” as we will discuss in a later chapter. I believe that I can now define the Emergent Church movement more accurately because I understand what they believe.

The Emergent Church movement is an association of individuals linked by one very important, key idea: that God is bringing history toward a glorious kingdom of God on earth without future judgment. They loathe dispensationalism more than any other theology because it claims just the opposite: that the world is getting ever more sinful and is sliding toward cataclysmic judgment.¹² Both of these ideas cannot be true. Either there is a literal future judgment or there is not. This is not a matter left to one’s own preference.

JÜRGEN MOLTMANN

The best way to understand the Emergent theology of hope is to study its primary source: Jürgen Moltmann’s 1964 book *Theology of Hope*. My copy of the book is the 1991 re-release of the book which contains a new introduction. In the introduction Moltmann provides attribution for the thinking that led him to write his book: “I found

important categories for the pattern of this tapestry in the messianic philosophy of the neo-Marxist Ernst Bloch.” Bloch was an atheist. In 1960 Moltmann read Bloch’s *Principal of Hope* and proceeded to develop his idea that a Christian theology of hope would make great sense. It also would not necessarily compete against Bloch’s atheist version: “The atheism that wants to free men and women from superstition and idolatry and the Christianity that wants to lead them out of inward and outward slavery into the liberty of the coming kingdom of God—these two do not have to be antagonists. They can also work together. Which of them will prove to be stronger in the long run is something we may confidently leave to the future.”¹⁵

To most of us the idea that an atheist philosophy and Christian theology could both be valid is a contradiction. It certainly is to me. But what binds Moltmann and Bloch together is the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The idea that contradictions, through the processes of history, synthesize into a better future can be found in Moltmann’s theology. This is true for him because the God of hope is both coming and present, and because the world’s future is also God’s future. Therefore it must be a glorious future where all things are new and better. For the atheist Marxist the processes of history synthesize into a better future because it is their nature to do so. For Moltmann, the Christian and atheist can work together for that better future, and if Moltmann is right the atheist will participate in the glorious future that God brings. If the atheist is right Moltmann will participate as well (at least during this life).

It is said that Hegel is one of the most difficult philosophers to understand. It can be said that theologians who are inspired by Hegelian thinking are difficult as well. That is true of Moltmann. A survey of the index of Moltmann’s book shows the following

persons were the most often cited: Karl Barth on 26 pages; Rudolph Bultmann on 32 pages; and Hegel on 34 pages. He uses the three in an interesting way. He characterizes Barth’s theology as “the transcendental subjectivity of God”¹⁶ and Bultmann’s as “the transcendental subjectivity of man.”¹⁷ This comes in a long section where he is seeking to establish what the idea of God’s self-revelation could possibly mean. His proposed answer is a dialectic¹⁸ synthesis of contradictions:

This cleavage into objectification and subjectivity is not to be escaped—nor can theology escape it in bringing the gospel to the modern world—by declaring one side of this kind of thinking to be vain, deficient, corrupt and decadent. Rather, theology will have to take the hardened antitheses and make them fluid once more, to mediate in the contradiction between them and reconcile them. That, however is only possible when the category of history which drops out in this dualism, is rediscovered in such a way that it does not deny the antithesis in question, but spans it and understands it as an element in an advancing process.¹⁹

This dense theology is based on the Hegelian synthesis, as it is popularly called. And for Bloch the atheist and Moltmann the Christian it provides the hope that future history is on course for a glorious existence.

I do not overemphasize when I say that for Moltmann, the idea of the dialectic explains almost everything in theology and history. For example, the death and resurrection of Christ are interpreted as contradiction and synthesis. (Please bear with me at this point because this material is dense and long, but necessary to address it if we are to

understand the Emerging Church.) Moltmann, by the way, uses the term “emerging” often in his book as characterizing that which synthesizes from contradictions:

Only when we see the progressive, eschatological driving forces in the contradictory event of the cross and resurrection itself, do the true problems arise. The revelation—i.e. the appearances of the risen Lord—does not acquire its character of progressiveness from a reality foreign to it, from the mysteriously continuing history after Easter, but itself creates the progress in its process of contradiction to the godless reality of sin and death. It does not become progressive by ‘entering into’ human history; but by dint of promise, hope and criticism it makes the reality of man historic and progressive. It is the revelation of the potentiality and power of God in the raising of the one who was crucified, and the tendency and intention of God recognizable therein, that constitute the horizon of what is to be called history and to be expected as history. The revelation of God in the cross and resurrection thus sets the stage for history, on which there emerges the possibility of engulfing of all things in nothingness and of the new creation. The mission on which the man of hope is sent into this advance area of universal possibilities pursues the direction of the tendency of God’s own action in omnipotently pursuing his faithfulness and his promise.²⁰

So the cross and resurrection, seen as a dialectic, synthesize into an emerging new reality in history, and we can par-

ticipate in it. I hope we all notice that this has nothing to do with the Biblical categories of the blood atonement, justification by faith, and the return of Christ to reward the righteous and judge the wicked. Such ideas are revealed in Scripture, but Moltmann does not take Scripture alone to be God’s self-revelation. Rather scripture, past salvation history, and God’s future are a part of a grand dialectic that is going somewhere good and hopeful.

Moltmann’s view of the historical character of the resurrection of Christ is itself predicated on a dialectical understanding that synthesizes the contradictory ideas. For example, he sees a modernistic, mechanistic view of history as a “self-contained system of cause and effect”²¹ that would rule out the resurrection. He contrasts that with an existential understanding of the resurrection based on the disciples’ “existential decision.”²² He instead detaches the resurrection from any current views of history (or our ideas of “really happened” in a provable sense) and uses the presupposition of Christ’s resurrection as the ground of a new view of history:

Then the theology of the resurrection would no longer be fitted in with an existing concept of history, but an attempt would have to be made, in comparison with and contradistinction to the existing views of history, to arrive at a new understanding of history with the ultimate possibilities and hopes that attach to it on the presupposition of the raising of Christ from the dead.²³

But if we cannot know Christ was raised by any ordinary way of knowing the truth of historical events, how do we know that the presupposition of such a resurrection is a better one than, say, a presupposition that Joseph Smith really had the definitive revelation of God?

For Moltmann this presupposition is

the ground of belief that God is still creatively involved in the processes of history leading them to a glorious future:

The raising of Christ is then to be called ‘historic’, not because it took place in history to which other categories of some sort provide a key, but it is to be called historic because, by pointing the way for future events, it makes history in which we can and must live. It is historic, because it discloses an eschatological future. This assertion must then give proof of itself in conflict with other concepts of history, all of which are ultimately based on other ‘history-making’ events, shocks, or revolutions in history.²⁴

But as Moltmann’s reader I’m nearly persuaded to scream, “Was Jesus really bodily raised from the dead, and did He appear bodily to reliable witnesses, and must I believe in the saving value of His death, burial, and resurrection in order to be saved from God’s wrath?” The answer is that we cannot expect to know these matters because the proof of what type of world or history lies in the future, where God is bringing history. So, as he said earlier, that might be the future as understood by atheistic Marxists. If so, we shall find out. According to this view, our hope is not in Jesus’ resurrection that furnished proof to all men and thus made them accountable (as Paul said in Acts 17:31), but in Jesus’ resurrection as a view of history with a hopeful future.

As we shall see with the Emergent Church’s theology, which is derived from Moltmann and others, a serious problem exists. The problem is that this hope is based on an the idea that history is not headed toward cataclysmic judgment in which those who do not believe the Christian gospel are judged and lost for eternity but is headed

toward the kingdom of God on earth with universal participation. But what if Paul was right and the resurrection of Christ means judgment for all who refused the “proof” it provided? With the Moltmann and Emergent idea, we cannot know what is “true” about competing religious ideas until the future, at which time God brings things to where He is drawing them. For most people it will be too late! We cannot expect to stand before God’s judgment seat and then say, “Okay, now I see which view of history was correct; let me into the kingdom.”

Moltmann’s understanding of the resurrection of Christ is so obscure that pages and pages of dense writing are required just to determine what it means to refer to the event as “historical.” Hegelian synthesis supposedly helps us find this meaning in the future—a future that is projected to be a good one. But this means that apocalyptic visions of future cataclysm caused by God’s wrath cannot be the Biblical message. Therefore he rejects the “apocalyptic” idea that God will judge evil and set up a world of righteousness populated by believers. Moltmann writes:

The apocalyptic expectation is no longer directed toward a consummation of the creation through the overcoming of evil by good, but towards the separation of good and evil and hence replacement of the ‘world that lies under the power of evil’ by the coming ‘world of righteousness’. This shows a fatalistic dualism which is not yet so found in the prophets.²⁵

What he means by the overcoming of evil by good is that this happens beyond history (what he calls “Christ’s future”) and not by any cataclysmic judgment of the wicked who eventually end up in the lake of fire. That would be “fatalis-

tic dualism” to his way of thinking. Heaven and hell, if they literally exist, are not subject to a dialectic process that ends up with a better future universally for all people. Some come under eternal judgment.

Moltmann’s theology, which embraces the Hegelian dialectic and uses it to interpret Christian hope, comes from philosophy, not careful Biblical interpretation. He feels no need to deal with passages of Scripture that contradict his ideas, but this is not surprising coming from a 20th-century German theologian. In the German theological schools theology and philosophy had often been so intertwined that they were inseparable. This happened when the Bible ceased to be considered God’s inerrant, verbal, self-revelation. If the Bible were so considered, then its statements about heaven and hell, future judgment, the terms of justification, and everything else would define truth. But for Moltmann and his 21st-century Emergent followers, the Bible is not viewed as such.

CONTEMPORARY DISCIPLES OF MOLTSMANN

Typically Emergent writers exhibit either thinking like Moltmann or the thinking of Moltmann. To demonstrate this I will cite some examples from the previously mentioned *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*. Barry Taylor, who teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary, begins his essay with this paradox: “God is nowhere. God is now here.”²⁶ What does this paradox mean? It means that we are to jettison historical concepts of God: “Faith in the twenty-first century is not exclusively centered on concepts of God.”²⁷ He repeats “God is nowhere, God is now here” a half dozen times. Taylor analyzes the idea of God’s death similar to the way Hegel does as cited by Moltmann. Writes Taylor, “We live in a post-Neitzschean world of faith and spirituality. Nietzsche’s declaration that

God is dead still holds true, since interest in all things spiritual does not necessarily translate to a belief in a metaphysical God or the tenets and dogmas of a particular faith.”²⁸ Compare what Moltmann wrote: “Hegel in 1802 described the ‘death of God’ as the basic feeling of the religion of modern times . . .”²⁹ That was before Nietzsche’s birth. Moltmann then cites Hegel and addresses how Hegel’s ideas could be used to interpret Good Friday and resurrection through a dialectical process that would deliver us from both “romanticist nihilism” and “the methodical [sic] atheism of science” to a synthetic, hopeful future.³⁰ We can see the same thinking in Taylor: “*God is nowhere. God is now here.* God is present; God is absent. The future of faith rests in the tension between these words, and it is from this place of discomfort and complexity that new life emerges.”³¹ This, too, coincides with Hegel’s ideas.

Another Emergent author, Dwight J. Friesen, is such a proponent of Moltmann’s theological use of Hegelian thinking that he entitled his essay “Orthoparadoxy – Emerging Hope for Embracing Difference.”³² Friesen praises Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* as a “ground breaking book” and cites it approvingly in regard to contradictions containing possibilities and hope for the future.³³ Friesen writes, “Just as he [Moltmann] highlights the necessity of contradictions for life, so I declare that embracing the complexities of contradictions, antinomies, and paradoxes of the human life is walking in the way of Jesus.”³⁴ In keeping with Moltmann’s theology and Emergent thinking in general, Friesen sees the process of embracing contradiction as leading to the kingdom of God becoming “manifest” in the world: “An orthoparadox ethic rightly holds differences, tensions, and paradoxes in reconciling movement toward oneness with the other. When orthoparadoxy becomes our way of being in

the world, the kingdom of God is manifest.”³⁵

Lost in this perspective is any hope of actually knowing something to be truth that will continue to be true forever and binding upon those who will one day appear before God in judgment. Friesen says, “Orthoparadox theology is less concerned with creating ‘once for all’ doctrinal statements or dogmatic claims and is more interested in holding competing truth claims in right tension.”³⁶ As with Moltmann, Friesen never addresses clear Bible statements that refute Friesen’s claims. Jude told us to “earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” The Biblical writers did not see this once-for-all delivered faith as a grand jumble of contradictions and paradoxes.

A paradox, by the way, is meaningless, like a square circle. One can say the words “square circle” but cannot contemplate the meaning of the statement. Jesus did not think His words were contradictory or paradoxical: “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day*” (John 12:48). This one statement by Jesus challenges Emergent theology to its very core. Jesus spoke words, these words conveyed binding truth, once for all, and are so authoritative that for those who reject them they shall serve as condemning evidence against them at God’s future judgment. This is no dialectic process but truth spoken for all people telling them to either believe and be saved or reject and be lost.

Another influential theologian in the Emergent movement and postmodern theology in general is the late Stanley Grenz. Grenz’s book *Beyond Foundationalism – Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (coauthored by John R. Franke) shows how the ideas of Pannenberg and Moltmann are being fleshed out in America at the beginning of the 21st century.³⁷ Grenz quotes Moltmann extensively and positively,

quite accurately explaining his theology, even down to acknowledging its Marxist roots.³⁸ Grenz makes the caveat that he is concerned that Moltmann’s interpretation of Bloch is in danger of “slipping into an anthropocentric foundationalism, which replaces the specificity of the biblical hope for hope as a structure of human existence.”³⁹ Inasmuch as Moltmann did say that the Marxist version is not in competition with his, Grenz is correct to be concerned about that. But what is amazing is that he claims that we want to embrace the “specificity of the biblical hope” when I do not see Grenz doing so himself! I say that because a literal future judgment in which some are raised to eternal life and others are raised and consigned to the lake of fire is as absent from Grenz’s theology as it is from Moltmann’s.

One reason for the absence of the specifics of God’s future promises according to Grenz’s eschatology is his practice (mentioned earlier) of feeling free to ignore whatever Biblical material doesn’t suit his purposes. For example, here is a passage Paul wrote to persecuted Christians that describe a specific Christian hope:

This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in

His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed. (2Thessalonians 1:5-10)

Laying aside all the sophistry that Grenz has used to undermine the possibility that we actually can know with clarity what the Bible means, this passage is not that hard to understand. There will be a future judgment, and the future is not universally an ideal future for all people regardless of the present beliefs and actions. Paul taught it, and no one can deny it. The only thing left for Moltmann, Grenz, and their Emergent followers is to deny that we can know what the Bible means. I will deal with their method in another chapter. But know that when they are talking about “Christian hope” they are not using the same categories of thought as those of the Biblical writers.

This section from a chapter entitled “Eschatology: Theology’s Orienting Motif” shows how divergent the eschatology of Grenz and his co-author is from specific Biblical promises about the end of the age. Consider this:

There is a real universe “out there,” we readily acknowledge. But this reality—this “out there”—lies “before,” rather than “beneath” or “around” us. Ours is a universe that is in the process of being created, as many scientists acknowledge [a book about theology in an evolutionary world is cited]. Therefore, rather than merely being discovered via experimentation, the new creation toward which our world is developing is experienced through anticipation. . . . As God’s image bearers, we have a divinely given mandate to participate in God’s work of constructing a world in the present that reflects God’s

own eschatological will for creation.⁴⁰

He goes on, based on the idea of socially constructed reality and linguistics, to explain how we participate with God constructing the future world God intends. For example, “We participate with God, for through the constructive power of language we inhabit a present linguistic world that sees all reality from the perspective of the future, real world that God is bringing to pass.”⁴¹ But this future world cannot now be known, according to Grenz’s understanding, because it is not objective until the future. This postmodern thinking denies the objectivity of historic knowledge, denies the objectivity of present knowledge, but asserts the objectivity of future knowledge. Grenz writes, “Therefore, the ‘objectivity of the world’ about which we can truly speak is an objectivity of a *future*, eschatological world.”⁴²

So in this view, we now live in a socially constructed, linguistic reality that is not objectively known. The “real” world is the future world; the words of the Bible do not authoritatively and objectively tell us the details of the future world; and God is immanently involved in the present world creating and causing it to move toward the future world. In this view we are to participate in God’s work of creating the future world but we have no objective knowledge of what this future world is—yet. Moltmann, Grenz, and the Emergent Church tell us that this constitutes “hope.”

I must say that I cannot see how that lack of objective knowledge about the currently unknowable future should be construed as “hope.” This concept holds only if they are right that the world is growing toward the kingdom and there is no future judgment. If this future world is different than they (in neglect of the Biblical data about future judgment) deem it to be, they may be no

more than romantics looking at life through rose-colored glasses. Grenz says, “Through the use of linguistic models and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community constructs a particular world for human habitation. . . . In short, then, theologians assist the church in the world-constructing business we share.” In my assessment, this hope, though said to be hope in God, is really hope in man.

The Bible says that God spoke and the world that we live in came into being. It says that it was marred by the Fall and faces judgment. The theology that spawned the Emergent Church says that we construct the world into a better future with God’s help, as co-(re)creators of the world with God (using Pagitt’s terminology). There are various ways they see this happening. Moltmann laid great stress on the Hegelian dialectic. Grenz stresses socially constructed reality and linguistics for creating the future world. Contemporary Emergent writers stress various versions of good works, the social gospel, and cooperation with other religions to bring the future kingdom of God to pass. But all agree that the future is glorious, hopeful, universally good news for all people and the creation itself, and they deny that a cataclysmic, cosmic, judgment will occur which will permanently separate good from evil. Emergent leaders see a glorious journey toward paradise, not the threat of divine judgment. But what if they are wrong?

In summary, the “hope” of Emergent/postmodern theology is based on the Hegelian idea that contradictions synthesize into better future realities. Hegel’s ideas are philosophical and have not been proven in the real world. Moltmann took Hegel’s ideas and created a Christian alternative to Marxism (which is also based on Hegel’s philosophy) that he called a “theology of hope.” Emergent Church leaders published a book entitled *An Emergent Manifesto*

of Hope that cites and echoes Moltmann’s ideas. A key book on postmodern theology by Grenz does the same. The “hope” espoused by these teachers is not based on literal promises found in the Bible, but rather on philosophical speculation. In the last chapter of this book I will return to this idea and discuss the ideas of the contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber, which also are based on Hegel and have strongly influenced Emergent teachers.

In the next chapter we will examine what the Emergent Church means when it says they are “missional.” We will see that they doubt that truth about rigid theological categories can be known, but are certain they can know the nature of the Christian mission.

End Notes

1. *The Emergent Church—Undefining Christianity*; Bob DeWaay, 2009.
2. Danielle Shroyer, *The Boundary-Breaking God*, Jossey-Bass, 2009.
3. Entropy is the principle by which physicists describe heat loss in a closed system. The existence of entropy is a proof that the universe is not eternal because if it were infinitely old it would have already died of heat death.
4. CIC Issue 87, March/April 2005. <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue87.htm>
5. Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive – The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
6. *Ibid.* 113.
7. *Ibid.*
8. in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones editors (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007);

- Moltmann is cited favorably by Dwight Friesen on page 203 and Troy Bronsink page 73 n. 24.
9. Ibid. Tony Jones, 130.
 10. Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 283.
 11. Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-imagined*; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003/2005) 185.
 12. Please note that classical amillennialism also believes that the world is facing future judgment. Emergent is not merely opposed to dispensationalism, but any version of eschatology that asserts that God will bring cataclysmic judgment at the end of the age.
 13. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, (HarperCollins: New York, 1991)
 14. Ibid. 9.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid. 50 ff.
 17. Ibid. 58 ff.
 18. "Dialectic," as I use it and as Moltmann uses it, describes a process whereby apparently contradictory ideas are resolved into a superior but often presently unseen third option. In popular language this is described as "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis."
 19. Moltmann *Theology of Hope* 50.
 20. Ibid. 226, 227.
 21. Ibid. 177.
 22. Ibid. 178.
 23. Ibid. 180.
 24. Ibid. 181 emphasis in original.
 25. Ibid. 134.
 26. Barry Taylor, "Converting Christianity *The End and Beginning of Faith*" in *Emergent Manifesto* 164.
 27. Ibid. 165.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 168.
 30. Taylor, 169.
 31. Ibid. 170.
 32. Dwight J. Friesen in *Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 201 – 212.
 33. Ibid. 203.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid. 206.
 36. Ibid. 209.
 37. Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism – Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
 38. Ibid. 247.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Ibid. 272.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Ibid. emphasis in original.
 43. Ibid. 273.

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