



The Emergence of Imaginary Eschatology

By Bob DeWaay

Imagine a world where everything is getting better because God is still creating it. Imagine a world in which there is no more entropy (the principle of heat loss that means that everything left to its own heads toward disorder). Imagine a world where creative people are co-recreating the world with God. This imaginary world is the world as it exists in the minds of the leaders of the Emerging Church.

In a section of the book *A is for Abductive – The Language of the Emerging Church*, Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer reveal their understanding of “the eschaton.” The heading of the section is called, “The end of entropy.” They state, “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 the 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” (page 113).

Let us consider some of these concepts. The “postmodern matrix” suggests that our socially constructed “reality” has a very tenuous relationship with the “the way things really are.” Since we are deemed to be in a mental matrix and are quite unable to use the traditional tools of study to determine what aspects of our beliefs are true or false, we are now liberated to have a paradigm shift to a matrix that is more appealing. Given such newfound liberty, why not opt for the scenario that is most pleasant? For Emergent leaders, that is a world where God is working in history with us to head back toward the Garden of Eden now, since they have imagined a world with time running backwards rather than forward (assuming that is what they mean by reversed chronological polarity).

The problem with being bound by the past, in this thinking, is that we live in a world that is cursed because of sin. Entropy is one example of the effects of the Fall. According to the Biblical worldview, God created the world, called it “good” and completed creation (Genesis 1:31-2:2). The rebellion of Adam and Eve led to expulsion from Eden and a curse on the entire creation. Romans 8 tells us that the whole creation is in slavery to corruption. In the imaginary matrix of the Emergent Church, the results of the Fall are being progressively undone now and we can expect the world to become a

better place as we “co-recreate” it with God. Doug Pagitt says, “And God also, invites us to be re-created and to join the work of God as co-(re)creators. . . . When we employ creativity to make the world better, we participate with God in the re-creation of the world” (*Church Re-imagined*; 185). In the imaginations of these men, we are becoming unchained from the results of the curse and are helping God re-create paradise.

The benefit of an imaginary worldview is that it can be anything one wants it to be. For example, even though the second law of thermodynamics (entropy) has been demonstrated to be true and is accepted as a scientific fact, one can imagine a world where it does not exist. In such a world one could create a perpetual motion machine. Such a world would not tend toward disorder and would not require continual effort to maintain order (like cleaning and repairing houses). Add to this the fact that since God does exist, He could undo entropy, re-engage in the process of creation, and make the world get better and better in spite of human sin. Why not imagine that He will?

The problem is that saying “peace, peace” when there is no peace is the essence of false prophecy. The world is not heading toward paradise through a collaborative effort between God and man; it is heading for judgment: *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. . . . But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells”* (2Peter 3:10, 13). A Christian worldview sees history as linear, beginning with creation and ending in judgment (Emergent thinking rejects this in favor of a helix). Though various eschatological views have differed on the details about what happens between creation and judgment, nearly all agree that there is a future judgment. The imaginary world in the minds of Emergent leaders is not heading toward a future catastrophic judgment by God. I asked Doug Pagitt about future judgment in our debate and he refused to affirm belief in it.

The Bible tells us how to respond to imaginary eschatology: *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise Me, ‘the Lord has said, You will have peace’; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart,*

They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you' (Jeremiah 23:16, 17). The Bible tells us that we are headed for judgment and that the only escape is to repent and believe the gospel. Those who do repent will participate when God does create a new heavens and new earth AFTER judgment. Those who do not repent will suffer judgment even if they imagine it does not exist.

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