

Emerging or Submerging?

Part 2

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The Importance of Doctrine

Why is doctrine important to the Christian? On a practical level, our understanding of and adherence to the essential doctrines of the faith will directly affect how we live out our daily lives. More importantly, however, there are essential doctrines we must believe in order to proclaim ourselves Christians in the first place. I will go even further to say that if we reject these essential doctrines, then we are rejecting historic, biblical Christianity.

In the last issue of *Calvary Chapel Magazine*, I referred to Rob Bell's analogy of the great doctrines of the Christian faith being likened to the different "springs" in a trampoline. The first "spring" mentioned in *Velvet Elvis* is the Trinity, about which he says: *This three-in-oneness understanding of God emerged in the several hundred years after the resurrection* (22).

Immediately, we see that Rob's understanding of the Scriptures and history are quite distorted by his liberal mindset. The doctrine of the Trinity did not develop "several hundred years after the resurrection"; this teaching was stated repeatedly in the pages of the New Testament.

Jesus said, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 28:19).

Paul, in his benediction to the Corinthians, said, ***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all*** (2 Corinthians 13:14). These are just two examples of the Trinitarian formula found in the New Testament, which was completed before AD 70.

Rob goes on: *It is a spring and people jumped for thousands of years without it. ... the springs aren't God. They have emerged over time as people have ... experienced and reflected on their growing understanding of who God is. Our words aren't absolutes. Only God is absolute, and God has no*

intention of sharing this absoluteness with anything, especially words people have come up with to talk about him (22-23).

Recall from the last issue the postmodernist's convoluted view of language: words only mean something to the person or the community they originate with and can never be trusted to express absolute truth or certainty. Therefore, Rob is really downplaying words. He is also subtly questioning biblical inspiration by referring to the Scriptures as "words people have come up with to talk about him [God]."

The doctrine of plenary inspiration says that the Bible is God's Word through which He reveals Himself to us, not words that men have come up with to talk about God! By these words, Rob is not exactly denying the Trinity; in fact, he says he believes in it. What he is saying though is that the doctrine of the Trinity isn't that important—a bold insinuation in light of the New Testament's emphasis on the deity of Christ, which is an aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Christ cannot be God if there's no plurality in the divine nature. To say the doctrine is not that important, Bell is putting himself in the place of judging what's important to God and what's not. Since God saw fit to fully reveal Himself as triune through Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity is obviously more important than Rob Bell believes it to be!

Regarding the virgin birth, Rob goes on to say: *What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in ... What if that spring [the doctrinal position of the virgin birth] was seriously questioned? ... Could a person still love God? Could you still be a Christian? Is the way of Jesus still the best possible way to live? Or does the whole thing fall apart? ... If the whole faith*

falls apart ... then it wasn't very strong in the first place ... God is bigger than the Christian faith (26-27).

What Bell is saying is God is bigger than all of these doctrinal issues. In other words, he's implying that even if the virgin birth were not true, we could still be Christians, we could still love God, and Jesus still has the best way to live.

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Now again, Rob Bell says he believes in the virgin birth (at least at this point he does). But by these words, he is diminishing the vital importance of the virgin birth. You cannot throw out the virgin birth and still have Christianity. If Jesus had a dad named Larry, then He's no Savior. He's not the Messiah. He couldn't die for your sins. None of the things that the Bible goes on to say about Him could actually be a reality because they are predicated on His sinlessness. They're predicated on the fact that He is God's Son, not Larry's son.

Rob Bell's undermining of essential, historical Christian doctrine is typical of the Emergent Movement's methodological attack upon biblical orthodoxy and a strong indicator that the leaders of this movement are on the slippery slope to apostasy. ☹

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