



# MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

## THE EMERGENT CHURCH

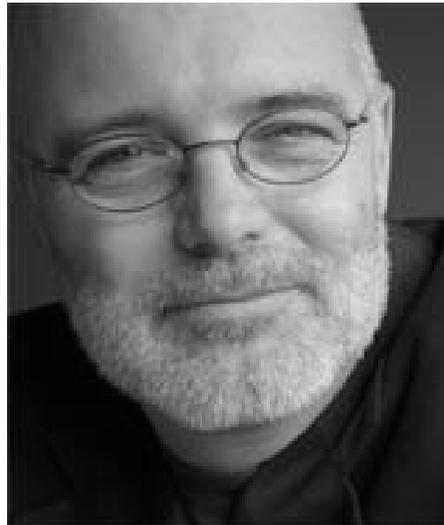
### A NEW PATH TO ANCIENT RELIGION

By Albert James Dager

Over the past few decades there has appeared a new way of looking at church ministry which incorporates a more world-relevant approach to church services. Called “the emergent church movement,” it was born out of a feeling that in many modern churches something has gone wrong, especially in failing to attract the younger, postmodern generation.

The seeker-friendly approach of Bill Hybel’s Willowcreek Community Church in Illinois and Rick Warren’s Saddleback Community Church in Southern California—adopted by thousands of churches of various persuasions—reached previous generations through slick marketing promotions, peer-oriented programs, technological innovations and pop culture techniques. But the newer, media-savvy generation is said to be seeking something more relevant to their felt needs. Largely unchurched and raised in non-Christian homes, these youth nevertheless sense a need for something beyond the material. Disillusioned with the Christian religion because of what they perceive as insincerity, money-grubbing and phoniness witnessed in the scandals of Roman Catholic pedophile priests and in the televangelist arena, they are more and more being drawn to other spiritual disciplines such as Buddhism and New Age philosophies. Those within the emergent church movement are attempting to reach these youth with a spiritual approach that would appeal to them in the name of Jesus.

Much of the reason for the success of the emergent church model stems from disillusionment among young evangelical pastors who perceive the traditional pastoral role as too restricting and not relevant enough to today’s postmodern culture.



BRIAN D. MCLAREN  
A FOREMOST PROPONENT OF THE  
EMERGENT CHURCH MOVEMENT

People, it seems, are looking for a more spiritual approach to life. The materialism that has characterized the modern world in the West has not fulfilled the promise of contentment and inner peace that soothes the soul. Not only the culture, but the churches in the West have operated largely on a materialistic model themselves. But that materialism is not represented in the mega-church expansions of huge campuses and buildings to

house the many facets of today’s growing, peer-oriented ministries as much as it is represented in the striving for personal wealth and achievement that characterized the lives of the parents of the young emerging church congregants.

The hippie culture of the 1960s and 1970s was based on disillusionment with the materialism and prosperity of the post-World War II decades, and led the youth to explore the spiritual aspects of human existence. So, too, the postmodern culture of the media-raised, techno-savvy youth of today is spawning a new spirituality that likewise is based on disillusionment with the materialism and prosperity of the technology boom of the 1980s and 1990s.

It’s as if the culture of the West continues to swing from a high to a low, back to a high and then to another low in its affection for prosperity.

No true believer in Jesus would suggest that material prosperity is the benchmark of spiritual purity. In spite of the continued popularity of the positive thinking and positive speaking heresies, and the burgeoning churches of such teachers as Joel Osteen (whose church is the largest and fastest growing in the United States), other churches are emerging that are also growing rapidly while focusing more on spiritually-satisfying techniques.

The question is whether the spirituality seeking of the emerging church is of the pure, Holy Spirit-led variety, or is just another man-centered attempt to quench

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the spiritual thirst of seekers who, at the bottom line, just want to feel better about themselves and be assured that God loves them just as they are.

### **EMERGING CULTURE**

Particularly in the West, we are witnessing the disintegration of the Christian culture inherited from our European forefathers. It isn't so much that the United States was founded as a Christian nation, as it was the biblical ethic that permeated western culture, that formed the basis for our nation's founding. Even the non-Christian elements involved in the formation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were keenly aware of the moral and ethical standards of that biblical ethic and they embraced them.

In Europe the Reformation had established a strong biblical ethic. Whereas Roman Catholicism imposed harsh penalties upon dissidents in those countries in which it continued to wield strong influence, except for Calvin's Geneva and the Anglican Church's persecution of those who refused its authority in the British Empire, Protestantism in general was benign toward differing expressions of the Christian faith, and even toward non-Christian religions.

Until the middle of the twentieth century the biblical ethic that permeated western culture continued to hold sway over many people's consciences. As the influx of non-Christian elements into western society increased there came a gradual departure from the biblical ethic and, worse, a concerted turning away from it.

On the cover of her book, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, by Diana Eck, professor of comparative religion at Harvard University, it says:

"The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world," leading religious scholar

Diana Eck writes in this eye-opening guide to the religious realities of America today. The Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated the quotas linking immigration to national origins. Since then, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, and new varieties of Jews and Catholics have arrived from every part of the globe, radically altering the religious landscape of the United States. Members of the world's religions live not just on the other side of the world but in our neighborhoods; Hindu children go to school with Jewish children; Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs work side-by-side with Protestants and Catholics.<sup>1</sup>

For centuries the desire of many who immigrated to our shores was to throw off their foreign ways and assimilate into American culture. My own father refused to speak Lebanese or Arabic and insisted that we speak correct English. He also spoke fluent Spanish due to his being raised in Mexico as a youth.

Of late, as more and more people have emigrated from non-western nations, special interest groups have worked assiduously to keep them bound to their native roots and to eschew the nation's western European heritage. As a result the nation has become fractured into myriad sub-cultures that threaten the cohesiveness and stability of the country.

In the past, great contributions have been made from all cultures to the nation, as a melting pot. Today each sub-culture looks out for its own interests.

From my studies of the globalist and Communist conspiracies in the 1960s I recall vividly the threat that the United States would be destroyed from within by causing factions to arise between whites and blacks, men and women, rich and poor, labor and management, and by pitting ethnic group against ethnic group. By creating a climate of envy between the

so-called "haves" and "have-nots," the designs of the enemies of sovereignty in the United States have almost completely been achieved. Few ethnic groups identify themselves as Americans without a hyphen. I have witnessed the fulfillment of that threat through the gradual takeover by Marxists within the media and government to the point that righteousness and right-thinking are ridiculed and held in contempt, while selfishness and evil of every sort are embraced.

I've said all this to lay the groundwork for the reasoning behind the emergent church movement. There are those within Christianity who recognize that there is an emerging culture that is foreign to the western culture which has until lately embraced the biblical ethic of the Christian faith. That emerging culture is called post-Christian or post-modern.

### **Postmodernism**

How can there be such a thing as postmodernism. Doesn't "modern" mean "contemporary," "current," "up-to-date"? How can there be something newer than that?

In common usage that is what "modern" means. However, to sociologists, anthropologists and theologians, the term "modern" means something entirely different. Our primary concern is how modernism relates to theology. There it applies to religious philosophy that seeks to accommodate traditional religious thought with contemporary religious values, particularly in the rejection of supernatural elements. So-called "modern" thinkers within Christianity have attempted to explain away the mysteries and miracles of the Bible through human rationale. This has often led to the explanation that the biblical narratives of miracles were really allegory and poetry rather than true accounts of real events. The terminology of modernists within Christianity is often indistinguishable from that of true believers but their definitions vary and are often clouded in vague ex-

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1 Quoted by Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 71.

pressions of dissent from the truth. We see these modernists all the time on media productions dealing with biblical issues such as the nature of Jesus Christ, His Resurrection, the Virgin Birth, and other important truths. They are the “Christian scholars” who, while feigning belief, offer rationalizations as to why the Bible doesn’t really mean what it says; there are rational explanations for seemingly supernatural events.

It is the belief of those within the emerging “church” movement that modernism ran its course and has been on the verge of extinction since the 1960s. With the influx of eastern philosophy and religion into the West has come a hunger for something beyond the rational and mundane. People have been seeking more meaning to life than material existence. The rise in popularity of eastern thought among those brought up in Christian homes is a testimony to the failure of Christianity to meet the spiritual needs of people during the modernist phase. Having divested Christianity of its supernatural element, the modernists have created a spiritual vacuum which eastern gurus have been more than willing to fill.

That’s not to say that all of Christianity has fallen into the modernist trap. There have always been, and always will be, those who hold to the literalness of Scripture. But the vast majority of Christians today have lost sight of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. They give lip service to Jesus as Redeemer, but live as if they have no accountability to Him or to His Word. The hypocrisy of such living has not been lost on the young. As a result, many youth are turning away from Christianity and are embracing other forms of spirituality. And who can blame them? When salt has lost its savor it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled upon by men.

### **Post-Christian**

As more and more youth from Christian homes have divested themselves of their parents’ beliefs, and as emigration from non-Christian nations has continued to rise, the nations of the West have gradually slipped into a post-Christian

phase. It is as if postmodernism and post-Christianity are twins—one with a cultural face, the other with a religious face. Postmoderns largely reject Christianity and, more importantly, the truths of the Bible (perceiving them to be the same), and are turning to eastern thought for their spiritual sustenance. Atheism and agnosticism are always evident, but they are not the major philosophical base for most people’s beliefs. The vast majority of Americans, for instance, say they believe in God, but their concept of God is foreign to the Scriptures. And among many who say they believe in Jesus, the vast majority either have an unbiblical concept of Him (as merely a holy man, a prophet, a peacemaker, or some other non-deity), or they use Jesus to promote their peculiar humanist philosophy such as socialism, asceticism, even vegetarianism and animal rights activism.

For the past few decades at least, there have arisen men and women who have recognized the deconstruction of the Christian faith in the West and have correctly pointed to the malaise created by a materialistic approach to that faith. Consumerism within Christianity is rampant, and it reflects the material-mindedness of the major voices within Christianity. Mammon is at the heart of many ministries. Such ministries appeal to the materialistic person who is happy to spend his money on God if he can get a sufficient return for his investment.

The seeker-friendly churches that have arisen in the past few decades have catered to that material-mindedness. With slick promotions and peer-oriented programs that appeal to the comfort zone of target communities those churches have seen much success. And they will continue to do so. But there are those today who see these churches as valuable to only a limited segment of society. They do not appeal to the postmodern seeker who isn’t impressed with flashiness and materialism, but rather seeks a more spiritual outlet for his soul. These have given rise to the “Emergent Church.”

## **THE EMERGENT CHURCH**

Just where and how the emergent church movement began is difficult to ascertain. At first it wasn’t so much a movement as it was a conversation among certain pastors who felt there was something missing in their approach to ministry. Recognizing the value in some of the traditional views of ministry, yet wishing to make ministry more relevant to today’s culture, they sought a spiritual renewal for those who had given up on church.

Essentially, emergent churches are rejecting the flashy elements of seeker-friendly churches and are embracing ancient forms of spirituality found in the traditional churches.

Although most of the emergent churches are hierarchical, the focus is upon lay ministry with the pastor as “one of the bunch” instead of an authority figure who runs the whole show.

To all outward appearances the emergent church movement is a grass-roots phenomenon. There appears to be no single authority or group of authorities heading it up. However, there has developed a leadership of sorts—people who write about the emergent church model, offering instruction and information on the philosophy of the movement. These often link to one another on Web sites and cite one another in books, as well as converse among themselves through Web blogs. Yet the vast majority of churches that identify themselves as “emergent” or “emerging” are headed by little-known pastors within the larger Christian community.

As I researched various emergent church sources I found one name in particular that seems to be regarded as a foremost authority on the emergent church model. Brian D. McLaren is cited often by other emergent church leaders. We will focus primarily on his writings and those of another authority, Dan Kimball.

### **BRIAN D. MCLAREN**

Named one of the twenty-five most influential evangelicals by Time Magazine in 2005, Brian D. McLaren is in the forefront of the emergent church movement. “Postmodernist, author, pastor, and Emergent senior fellow” is how McLaren

is described as a contributing author for *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, published by Zondervan. A senior fellow is a person within an educational establishment who is regarded by his peers as an expert in his field, is widely published and who has garnered a significant amount of accreditation and awards for his work in that field. In his introduction to the contributors of the aforementioned book, Leonard Sweet has this to say about Brian McLaren:

A senior fellow with Emergent, Brian is known for a generous and irenic spirit that never posits an “us against them” mentality but finds openings to diverse ways of being Christian.

An English scholar (the unlikely product of a Plymouth Brethren upbringing), Brian left academia in 1986 to become founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, a nondenominational ministry in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. Widely sought on the lecture circuit, Brian spends a lot of time explaining the meaning of postmodern, a word that, depending on who you ask, is charged with meaning, stands for everything wrong in the world today, has lost its momentum (indicating mostly that a lot of time has passed since the 1960s), or does not really mean “anti” or “after” so much as “growing from and moving beyond.”

Brian wrote and published music (many of his songs are sung at his church) before he became a published author in 1998. Since then it has been a blitz: *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, 13 strategies for positioning churches in mission; *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*, a

book that puts to shame the cultivated irreverence of the academic elite; *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, a fictional narrative that has struck a chord across the theological spectrum; and *More Ready Than You Realize*, a theological meditation on the “dance” of evangelism, based on an e-mail exchange between Brian and a dancing partner (“Alice”), that advocates that Christians are more ready to do evangelism than they realize and that postmodern people are more ready to hear the gospel as story (not as argument) than we or even they realize. Brian’s most recent writing projects include *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, a sequel to his earlier fictional narrative, as well as collaborations with Leonard Sweet (“A” is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church) and Tony Campolo (*Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel*).<sup>2</sup>

While not the originator of the emergent movement (it just seemed to morph into existence), McLaren is certainly at the center of it, and claims to have coined the term, “Emergent Church.”

In the late 1990s, I was invited to become part of Leadership Network’s Young Leader Networks (YLN), also briefly known as the Terranova Project. I was grandfathered in as the network’s “old guy,” having moved beyond 39 in 1996. In 2001, I met with Doug Pagitt to discuss our future plans, YLN having just been launched by Leadership Network to continue on its own as an independent entity. Doug is a tall, Nordic-looking fellow with a mischievous smile. He’s the pastor of Solomon’s Porch ([www.solomonsporch.com](http://www.solomonsporch.com)) in Min-

neapolis, former leader of YLN, and (then was) still well shy of 40. One of us—I can’t remember which (a sign of good collaboration or an aging memory, or both)—came up with a new name for the group: emergent ([www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com)) We had no idea how fitting the name was and how helpful it would be in our ongoing work.<sup>3</sup>

“Emergent” identifies something new that arises out of something old as a logical or natural consequence. In this case, postmodern church out of modern church.

McLaren quotes Steven Johnson’s best-selling book, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001):

Emergence is what happens when the whole is smarter than the sum of its parts. It’s what happens when you have a system of relatively simple-minded component parts—often there are thousands or millions of them—and they interact in relatively simple ways. And yet somehow out of all this interaction some higher-level structure of intelligence appears, usually without any master planner calling the shots. These kinds of systems tend to evolve from the ground up.<sup>4</sup>

### **EMERGENT’S LEGITIMATE CONCERNS**

When we look at the world today we can agree that Christianity has lost much of its influence in our culture. More precisely, biblical truth is what has really lost its influence. Christianity as a religious system has the numbers to support the idea that it is still a major world religion. But Christianity is largely a shell comprised of many diverse, unbiblical elements. The truth of the Gospel has been displaced by most Christian religions with their own peculiar theological sur-

2 Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (emergentYS Books: El Cajon, CA), p. 56.

3 Steven Johnson, quoted by Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialty Books, published by Zondervan, 2004), p. 275.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

missing to the point that it is now only a vague expression among a few die-hard believers. In truth, we are not so much in a post-Christian era as we are in a post-Bible-as-absolute-truth era. However, most Christians do not make the distinction between Christianity and the true Gospel. Perhaps this is why the Gospel in its purest form has fallen out of favor in the world. It has not been expressed in its purity, but has had to share space with all the human reasoning that has corrupted Christianity and fractured it into so many divergent expressions ranging through a broad spectrum from true faith to skepticism.

It is the goal of the emergent church movement to present Christianity in all its expressions—regardless of whether or not those expressions are truly biblical—as a viable alternative to traditional Christianity for the postmodern seeker of spirituality. On that broad spectrum it would be somewhere in the middle, certainly rejecting skepticism but open to many other expressions that might not see eye-to-eye on how to interpret Scripture, and, in truth, are even antagonistic to the idea that Scripture is to be the sole arbiter of spiritual truth.

And that is, as we will see in our progression, where the emergent church movement embraces its greatest failure. It is more concerned with the religious system of Christianity than it is with defending sola scriptura.

Brian McLaren offers some insight into how these expressions might be reconciled if not necessarily embraced uniformly:

Make no mistake, I am deeply for old method-message systems to be conserved. The oldest things (things we almost threw away, not fully appraising their value) often turn out to be the most precious, the most worth preserving. And without preserving the whole message-method systems in our heritage, invaluable resources will be lost forever. (Many of these historic spiritual ways of faith and life could be compared to rain forests. For centuries we have cut them down and replaced them with monocultural farms and pastures,

housing developments, slums, or whatever, and now we discover—almost too late—that they play an essential part in our planetary survival.)

Meanwhile, the more I have changed my methods in preaching, evangelizing, discipleship, leading worship, and so on, the more experience I have gained sharing the good news with what are often called “the unchurched,” and especially those we might call “postmodern seekers.” These people have asked me new questions, or old questions in new ways. The more I have interacted with them, the more questions I have had about not just my changing methods but my so-called unchanging message.

My questioning was intensified by my interest in church history. The more I read about the patriarchs and Celts and anchorites and monastics and mendicants and scholastics and Reformers and Anabaptists and pietists and all the rest, the more I realized that the method-message system that I followed and believed was relatively new. Methodologically, I had to admit that Luther never asked anyone to say “the sinner’s prayer.” Calvin never issued an “altar call” or asked people to “come forward” for salvation. Augustine never invited anyone to “accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.” St. Francis didn’t summarize the gospel in terms of “four steps” or “four laws.” Menno Simons didn’t use “the bridge diagram.” Polycarp never asked “the two diagnostic questions,” and Gregory of Nyssa never talked about “the born-again experience” or “the Rapture” or “plenary verbal inspiration and inerrancy.” Aquinas never asked how many people “crossed the line” after his preaching, nor did Pascal wonder how many “made a decision for Christ” after reading his *Pensées* [Thoughts]. The apostle Paul himself didn’t even use “the

Roman Road” when he preached in Rome or anywhere else!

These relatively new methods that I and my tribe practiced (sinner’s prayer, bridge diagram, four laws, two diagnostic questions) fit the message as I understood it, while the differing methods of earlier times and places differed from mine precisely because their message differed from mine. For example, I had to admit that before Anselm, the theory of the atonement (penal substitution) that my tribe celebrated as the heart of the gospel was largely unknown. Could people have been true Christians without understanding penal substitutionary atonement?

More: I had to admit that while the death of Jesus on the cross as the substitutionary atoning sacrifice for my sins was at the heart of my understanding of the gospel, for many Christians both ancient and contemporary, the Resurrection, not the cross, was the crux of the gospel. And for many others (such as the Eastern Orthodox), the Incarnation seemed more central than either the cross or the Resurrection. What gives? It got worse as I learned that for still other Christians, it was the life of Christ (or the teaching of Christ, or the moral example of Christ, or the community formed by Christ, or the commission given by Christ), not his birth, death, or resurrection, that was closest to the heart of the gospel. This diversity of opinion was getting embarrassing. If the message never changes, which message was I talking about?<sup>5</sup>

McLaren’s confusion was exacerbated by the many expressions of the Gospel found even in contemporary circles, thinking they are mutually exclusive rather than complementary:

Now my head was really spinning because deep down, I had been noticing things in my own Bible study, unsettling things—like how in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the gospel seems to be about

something called the kingdom of God, and its operative words are repent and follow, but how in John, the gospel seems to be about something called eternal life and avoiding death or condemnation, with the operative word being believe. On top of that tension I also felt a certain tension between the style of Jesus (parables, questions, conversations) and the style of Paul (expositions, answers, monologues). And high on top of all that, of course, was the difference among popular contemporary versions of the gospel—a five-point Calvinist version versus a power-of-positive-thinking version, versus a name-it-and-claim-it-health-and-wealth version, versus a standard fundamentalist version or a therapeutic version or a classic Pentecostal version. Was this liberal guy right? Did the church (from Paul of Tarsus to TBN of Southern California) paste over Jesus' singular original gospel its own plural designer gospels?

That couldn't be, I reasoned. Otherwise, the gospel is just a cloud of smoke, swirling to conform to whatever currents it encounters. That's not good news; it's not even news.<sup>6</sup>

McLaren's conclusion describes, if it doesn't define in every detail for all emergent proponents, the essence of the emergent message. Evidently not understanding that all of the aspects of the Gospel are important, and none to be stressed over the others, he attempts to simplify things by laying out "four seminal ideas" that he claims helped him reach a new and better understanding of the Gospel.

His first idea is to view the Gospel as a narrative or story rather than as propositions, mechanisms, abstractions or universal concepts. His concept of "story" is

not fable, but merely forms the basis for believing what that story entails:

The answer is not abstract propositions but news: "At a certain time and at a certain place, God was uniquely revealed to humanity through a person born to a young peasant woman named Mary. Here's what happened..."<sup>7</sup>

His second idea is that the Gospel is many-versioned, many-faceted, many-layered, and Christ-centered. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the Book of Acts, and Paul's epistles, tell different versions of the same Gospel.

...The church has continued to offer many versions of the story ever since. No one version is the whole story, and the expanding, deepening resonant story that we encounter in ever-new dimensions seems to pulsate with more and more meaning, meaning that could never be contained in even the longest, most detailed single compilation we could attempt....

This many versioned-story (sic) reveals many facets and many layers. For example, there are facets or layers of the story that deal with guilt and sin, others that deal with hope and the future, still others that focus on justice and compassion, some that are primarily addressed to individuals, and others that relate more globally to all humanity. There are political layers to the story and interpersonal layers, psychological-sociological layers and mystical-spiritual layers.

But all of these versions, facets, and layers center in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

McLaren's third idea is that the Gospel is cumulative—that it continues the story of creation, of human crisis, of

Abraham to be blessed and be a blessing to the nations, the story of the Exodus, exile and return, and many other stories found throughout the Bible that bring the entire Gospel into focus throughout the history of mankind:

And as you read church history, that's very much how it continues, until today. And so the gospel is not just about what Jesus began to do and teach between approximately 5 B.C. and A.D. 28; it is also about the continuing work of Jesus ever since, and (thinking now of John's Revelation) the story will continue until the consummation of all things.<sup>9</sup>

Idea number four is that the Gospel is performative and catalytic:

This story always accomplishes things: It is powerful. It performs, catalyzes, saves. The story does so, empowered by God's Spirit, by convening and sustaining a community that seeks to understand it, inhabit it, let it inhabit them, and thereby live by it. The story inspires action in this community, action carried out in faith, hope, and love.<sup>10</sup>

Who can argue with that? If anything, McLaren has put his finger on the pulse of today's churches and found them to be largely listless and dying in spite of outward appearances of growth. The problem, according to the emergent church model, is that they are resting on the laurels of success gleaned during the modern phase of western culture, but are on the verge of disintegration unless they adapt to the spiritual needs of the postmodern generations. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to reevaluate the old forms of worship and ministry that have been cast aside by the modern churches.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

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## DIVERSITY

Responding to critics of the emergent church movement, several emergent leaders, among them Brian McLaren, made a joint statement affirming their unity of purpose if not method:

...We have repeatedly affirmed, contrary to what some have said, that there is no single theologian or spokesperson for the emergent conversation. We each speak for ourselves and are not official representatives of anyone else, nor do we necessarily endorse everything said or written by one another. We have repeatedly defined emergent as a conversation and friendship, and neither implies unanimity—nor even necessarily consensus—of opinion. We ask our critics to remember that we cannot be held responsible for everything said and done by people using the terms “emergent” or “emerging church,” any more than our critics would like to be held responsible for everything said or done by those claiming to be “evangelical” or “born again.” Nobody who is a friend or acquaintance of ours, or who agrees with one of us in some points, should be assumed to agree with any of us on all points. Nobody should be held “guilty by association” for reading or conversing with us. Also, contrary to some uninformed reports, this conversation is increasingly global and cross-cultural, and because North Americans are only a small part of it, we urge people to avoid underestimating the importance of Latin American, African, Asian, European, and First Nations voices among us.<sup>11</sup>

Fair enough. But this is also what makes it difficult to assess the “conversa-

tion” as a whole. Is it really a legitimate movement that will promote the true Gospel in its entirety? Or is it another attempted “fix” for a Christianity so fragmented that it must compromise truth in order to reach consensus?

The concept of “guilt by association” is not entirely without merit. One is generally known by the company one keeps. We should not be judged if we keep company with sinners, as Jesus did, but if we keep company with, or worse, give credence to or collaborate with, those who promote spiritual error (especially in the name of Christ) without challenging them on those errors, we become partakers of those errors. We give assent to them by our silence and then lead others astray.

At this point I am not saying this is a problem in the emergent conversation, but it is important that we not just accept everything said in its name as truth. I believe the proponents of that conversation would agree with this.

Among those contributing to this joint statement was Dan Kimball, founding pastor of “Graceland” worship services at Santa Cruz Bible Church, and of Vintage Faith Church, both in Santa Cruz, California. Kimball serves on the Emergent-YS (Youth Specialities) board and speaks extensively around the United States. He has authored a definitive book entitled, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. With forewords by Rick Warren and Brian McLaren, this comprehensive volume is a virtual manual for those wishing to bring their church into the emergent fold.

Even though the book finds much wanting in the seeker-friendly model of Rick Warren’s Saddleback Community Church, Warren nevertheless graciously affirms Kimball’s message, recognizing that his own model may not work for everyone:

This book is a wonderful, detailed example of what a purpose-driven church can look like in a postmodern world. My friend Dan Kimball writes passionately, with a deep desire to reach the emerging generation and culture. While my book *The Purpose-Driven Church* explained what the church is called to do, Dan’s book explains how to do it with the cultural-creatives who think and feel in postmodern terms. You need to pay attention to him because times are changing.<sup>12</sup>

Brian McLaren says of Dan Kimball’s book:

This book will offer you stimulating new ideas and practical suggestions to engage our emerging culture with the gospel. Our understandings of the gospel constantly change as we engage in mission in our complex, dynamic world, as we discover that the gospel has a rich kaleidoscope of meaning to offer, yielding unexplored layers of depth, revealing uncounted facets of insight and relevance. No doubt, as we move into the postmodern world, we will look back and see ways in which our modern understandings of the gospel were limited or flawed, and no doubt, we must be humble and careful, because we can (and will) make the same mistakes in our new context.

But that’s our challenge, and when you turn the last page of this book, you will feel more motivated and equipped to face that challenge ... and to see it as a thrilling opportunity and privilege.<sup>13</sup>

Kimball does a masterful job of outlining the emergent model while insisting that there is no single model for all emerging churches:

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11 “Response to Recent Criticisms,” Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Spencer Burke, Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, Chris Seay, *The Ooze: Conversation for the Journey*, www.theooze.com, June 2, 2005.

12 Rick Warren, “Foreword,” *The Emerging Church, Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

13 Brian McLaren, *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Instead of one emerging-church model, there are hundreds and thousands of models of emerging churches. Modernity may have taught us to look for a clean model to imitate. But in today's post-modern context, it's not that simple.

However, you can see striking patterns developing among churches that are connecting with post-Christian hearts and minds all across America, as well as in England. I'll refer to several examples in this book. But please remember, there is no one-size-fits-all way of doing things, because you can't box-in the emerging church. It will be made up of large churches, small churches, and home churches, multiracial and intercultural churches, inner-city, rural, and suburban churches. I hope you will see this book not as a how-to manual for a church model but as a stimulant to get you thinking about what God might have you do uniquely in your context.<sup>14</sup>

Kimball states that the emerging church must redefine how it measures success. Rather than measuring success by methodologies, strategies, or innovative ways of doing things, even by numbers, he wants the emerging churches to see if they exhibit the characteristics of a "kingdom-minded disciple of Jesus produced by the Spirit."<sup>15</sup> This includes more than just attending services once or twice a week, but manifests itself in good works:

How should we measure success in the emerging church? By looking at what our practices produce in the called people of God as they are sent out on a mission to live as light and salt in their communities (Matt. 5:13-16). By seeing if people in our church take social justice and caring for the needy seriously as part of the mission Jesus did. We must measure

success by looking for the same characteristics that the Spirit of God commended in the emerging missional Thessalonian church of the first century: "And so you became a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia....The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead" (1 Thess. 1:7-10).<sup>16</sup>

Kimball's appeal strikes at the condition of the vast majority of churches in Christendom today. He eschews the idea of idleness within the churches and appeals for a more active role on the part of all members of the churches.

May our hearts beat fast when we think of how our churches can be known for their love, for the way they pray, for how they share Jesus, instead of being known merely for a style of preaching, music, artwork, or candles. The emerging church is about the Spirit of God producing missional kingdom-minded disciples of Jesus no matter what methodology we use. The emerging church is about love and faith in a post-Christian world. The emerging church is about Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

This is well-stated. But how can this be accomplished? There are several methods offered by Kimball which take us back to what he calls "Vintage Faith."

#### **VINTAGE FAITH**

Kimball's experiences have caused him to see the emergent model as the answer to the declining interest among young people in traditional church services—even the seeker-sensitive services:

Little by little, I began to recognize that non-Christian students, who had once been impressed by all of our programming, dramas, media clips, and topical messages, were showing less and less interest. With technology now so accessible to teenagers that they could easily create their own flashy video clips, seeing it in church was no big deal. Fancy PowerPoint presentations lost their uniqueness as students were creating their own presentations for school. The special effects in the video games they were used to went far beyond what we could ever offer. Their lives were fast-paced as it was; coming to church for yet another fast-paced experience was losing its impact.<sup>18</sup>

The answer, according to Kimball: slow things down; bring the people back to the awe and structure of more ancient forms of worship. Rejecting the modern approach to Christianity, Kimball's model incorporates a liturgical or ritualistic approach that seems to be appealing more and more to the younger generation of the hip and media-savvy. This is a new, "postmodern" approach to Christianity which is replacing objectivity, analysis and control with a new sense of "mystery" and "wonder." The Bible is perceived as not merely a revelation from God but also as a relevant approach to serving man and producing the Kingdom of God on earth.

...A post-seeker-sensitive worship gathering promotes, rather than hides, full displays of spirituality (extended worship, religious symbols, liturgy, extensive prayer times, extensive use of Scripture and readings, etc.) so that people can experience and be transformed by the message of Jesus.

14 Dan Kimball, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

This approach is done, however, with renewed life and is still “sensitive” as clear instruction and regular explanation are given to help seekers understand theological terms and spiritual exercises.<sup>19</sup>

Kimball was greatly concerned for the future of the Christian faith upon learning that other churches throughout the United States were experiencing the same thing: lack of interest among the postmodern youth. He began experimenting with his own Wednesday night events which had drawn many youth through loud rock-pop music. He decided to go to an “unplugged” evening, replacing flashing lights with candles. He also replaced dramas and flashy videos with high schoolers reading sections of Scripture while sitting on stools. Instead of the band playing loud electric music it went acoustic. The stage was given an eclectic, bohemian look. What happened surprised him:

The loud rock-pop music of our typical Wednesday night events was usually met with high-pitched screams and yells. But as our unplugged evening unfolded, I could hear the voices of the high schoolers rising in worship. When I got up to speak, instead of the rustling of squirming teenagers in the back, there was stillness. One particular group of more hardcore skater kids who normally caused a lot of disruption sat quietly to listen. Please remember, this was not our Sunday morning believers high school services; this was our outreach night. We typically hired security officers to patrol the grounds at these events.

When one of the unplugged nights ended, one teenager waited to speak with me. He was one of our more disinterested and unresponsive teens, and I was dreading what he would say. I was expecting

him to tell me how dull and boring the evening had been and that he wouldn’t be coming back. Instead, he smiled and gave a nod of approval. “I like this,” he said. “This was really spiritual.”<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Kimball got the idea for his “unplugged” service from watching MTV:

I was pretty much at a loss as to what to do. Then late one night I happened upon the band the Cranberries playing an Unplugged concert on MTV. It was an all-acoustic performance. The stage was draped with a dark, rich fabric and lit by candelabras. It looked more like a grandmother’s attic than a rock-concert venue, and I was struck by the simplicity of it. No fancy light shows or drum-set risers. I also noticed how close the audience was seated to the musicians. There wasn’t a giant separation between the two groups. Rather, they were sort of all together in a “community.” I immediately felt that there was something very interesting to this “unplugged” approach.<sup>21</sup>

Recognizing that MTV studies culture and knows their audience, Kimball was prompted to try the unplugged experiment. What he found out not only surprised him, it gave him a greater understanding of what postmodern youth want:

...This was fairly mind-tweaking. Non-Christian teenagers now desire spiritual experiences? I knew Christian teenagers desired the spiritual, but the non-Christian? Instead of turning them off, this was causing them to desire to know God more? Of course teenagers still need plenty of fun events and Jell-O Olympics and all-night shut-ins. But now we

need to recognize that perhaps this culture is forcing their spiritual hunger to surface all the more. Their desire is to experience God and not just be told about him or told about the things he doesn’t like, which also happen to be the things they want to do.<sup>22</sup>

It isn’t really surprising to those who know that every man has a spiritual nature. Although there are some who suppress that nature by choice, refusing to acknowledge the reality of God or their need for His intervention in their lives, the vast majority of humanity is keenly aware of the need for spiritual fulfillment in their lives. This certainly explains the burgeoning interest in New Age and eastern philosophies in the West. Having become disillusioned with Christianity, many—especially among the young—are seeking out alternative avenues of spirituality. That, after all, is the underlying motivation for the emergent church model.

It is telling that Kimball says the youth who like his emergent model don’t like to be told what not to do—which is what much of Scripture is about. How can we make disciples for Christ unless we explain what He demands of us?

### **EMERGENT METHODOLOGY**

Kimball distinguishes between the modern and postmodern or post-Christian worship service, and offers detailed instruction on how to design a worship gathering. His basis for those instructions are stated thusly:

Modern thinkers want things very orderly and systematic because they learn in a logical and progressive manner. They prefer, generally, to sit and listen. Emerging post-Christian generations, on the other hand, long to experience a transcendent God during a worship gathering rather than simply learn about him. They want fluid-

19 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

ity and freedom rather than a neatly flowing set program. They want to see the arts and a sense of mystery brought into the worship service, rather than focusing on professionalism and excellence. This will shape how a worship gathering is designed.<sup>23</sup>

Kimball contrasts what he calls the “modern linear approach” for a service with his “organic vintage-faith approach.” The modern linear approach, used in most churches today, generally starts with worship in music, proceeds to announcements followed by a drama or video. “Everything is planned around and leads toward the message as the focal point and centerpiece of the service.”<sup>24</sup> In the organic vintage-faith approach “the experiential theme is woven into and flows throughout the gathering as the focal point and centerpiece.”<sup>25</sup>

The vintage-faith method downplays the message and emphasizes experience of worship based upon a liturgical and sacramental approach. It isn’t that Kimball believes it isn’t important to know about God, but it is just as important to experience Him.

Kimball does offer a caveat to the multisensory worship model:

The danger, of course, is focusing so much on experience that we teach people to respond only by feelings and emotions. The goal is not to manipulate people’s emotions through experiences or preaching or use of multisensory experiences. We need discernment. I believe the more the emerging church uses multisensory worship and teaching, the stronger and deeper our use of Scripture needs to be. Those of us who are emerging leaders need to make sure we are using Scripture to

guide and teach as we worship. This will put Jesus all the more at the center of our worship gatherings, not move him away!<sup>26</sup>

In spite of this caveat, the fact remains that Scripture and teaching play a relatively small role in the vintage-faith model compared to all the time given to multisensory worship. In Kimball’s example of a vintage-faith service lasting approximately two hours, about 30 minutes are given to a message during which Scriptures and images are projected upon a screen. The vast majority of time involves drama, art, dance, singing, and other incidentals.

Keeping the services fresh may not always follow the same exact pattern. At different times they may or may not incorporate the use of icons, incense, candles, and other items and methods gleaned from the liturgies of the traditional churches. This focus on liturgy has opened the door for more traditional churches to engage in the emergent conversation. Many Lutheran, Anglican, and Episcopalian pastors are warm to the idea that their traditions may be finding new favor among leaders within the evangelical community through the emergent model. They are incorporating the teachings of McLaren and Kimball in their own approaches to ministry.

Episcopal Voice, which is published for the Episcopal Church in western Washington, featured a lead article on “The Emerging Church” in which it is stated:

A new church is emerging in cafes and coffee houses, pubs and bars, not only here in the United States but in England and Australia. In our own diocese, it’s found at the Church of the Apostles (COTA) with its living-room tea bar. In England, it is on the streets of East London in the Anglican-

sponsored church Moot. And in Australia it is found at the Café Church in downtown Sydney. But in each and every case, a new way of being church is erupting from the ground up. It is contextual as well as textual; Bible-based but rooted in the absolutely unique expression of the local setting.

Local and international leaders of the emerging church movement hosted an afternoon workshop entitled “The Mission-shaped Church: A Learning Party” on April 17 at the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lynnwood. It was an opportunity for members of the Diocese of Olympia and the Northwest Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to experience first-hand the spirit of the emerging church.<sup>27</sup>

According to the author, the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has endorsed the emerging church movement, as has the General Synod of the Church of England.<sup>28</sup> Rowan Williams’ theology is orthodox, but his views on homosexuality in the church are very liberal.

### **OUR CONCERNS**

Our regular readers are well aware of our position on the modern churches. We have stated over and over again that the very concept of institutional religion is foreign to the Gospel, even though God has used the various institutions at different times to preserve the Scriptures and to spread the Gospel. My book, *The House Assembly: Recapturing the First-Century Model for the Gathering of the Saints* (Sword Publishers), challenges even the use of the word “church” as an erroneous translation of the Greek *ekklesia*, which means merely “called out.” “Church” comes from a Latin root which means “the

23 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

27 Peter Strimer, “The Emerging Church,” *Episcopal Voice*, June, 2005, p. 1.

28 *Ibid.*, p. V3.

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Lord's (house), which in turn conjures the idea of a building or institution. Enough said here. For a full explanation read *The House Assembly*.

### **Following Jesus as a Buddhist**

I've said all this to lead up to my concerns about the emergent church movement: it focuses strongly on institutional unity and ecumenism as a goal and as a means to spread its message of post-modern, post-Christian spirituality. All religious institutions, not just Christian, are seen by McLaren and others as legitimate means through which one may be a follower of Jesus. Lamenting the threat to the world's religions from global consumerism, primarily emanating from the United States, he would rather that the world's religions grow stronger but with Jesus at their center:

...The Christian faith, I am proposing, should become (in the name of Jesus Christ) a welcome friend to other religions of the world, not a threat. We should be seen as a protector of their heritages, a defender against common enemies. Just as Jesus came originally not to destroy the law but to fulfill it, not to condemn people but to save them, I believe he comes today not to destroy or condemn anything (anything but evil) but to redeem and save everything that can be redeemed and saved.<sup>29</sup>

Acknowledging the evils in other religions, McLaren also points out (rightfully so) the evils in Christianity. He also tells us to embrace the "wheat" found in those other religions:

Now, contrary to popular opinion, it is not true that all religions say basically the same things. They have much in common, but there are notable contradictions and incompatibilities, many of which become more significant as they go deeper. But in many cases (again,

not all), at any given moment, different religions are not always saying different things about the same subjects; rather they are often talking about different subjects entirely. Zen Buddhism, for example, says little about cosmic history and purpose as do Judaism and Christianity (and Theravada Buddhism). Western Christianity has (for the last few centuries anyway) said relatively little about mindfulness and meditative practices, about which Zen Buddhism has said much. To talk about different things is not to contradict one another; it is, rather to have much to offer one another, on occasion at least.<sup>30</sup>

When McLaren speaks of "evil" in other religions, he fails to see that religion itself is evil; it is contrary to everything the Gospel stands for, leading people astray to worship false gods. His concept of evil is narrowly defined as that which destroys the creation. What destroys the soul is not of as much concern to him. This is why he recommends "dialogue" with those of other religions, not to convert them to Jesus Christ, but so that we can learn something "good" from one another:

If, as a Christian, I am to love my neighbor as myself and to treat my neighbor as I would be treated, then without question one of my duties in regard to my neighbor of another religion is to value everything that is good that he offers me in neighborliness—including the opportunity to learn all I can from his religion. Another duty is to offer everything I have that could be of value to him—including the opportunity to learn from my religion if he can. This is not a compromise of my faith or his; this is a required practice of it.<sup>31</sup>

For the true believer in Jesus—the true disciple of Jesus who wishes to be led by the Spirit of God—there is nothing "good" that can be learned from other religions. Yes, this is narrowminded; yes, it may be mistaken for self-righteousness; yes, it may seem arrogant. But if we believe that Jesus is the only way to God, as He says He is, then, as Scripture says, there is no "common spiritual ground" for believers with non-believers:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion has light with darkness? And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God, as God has said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from among them, and be separate," says the Lord, "and do not touch the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

If our intention in dialoging with people of other religions is anything other than to lead them to Christ, then our motive is not based upon the pure love of God emanating from us; it is based upon compromise of the truth.

There is nothing in any other belief system that can benefit us. We already have all we need in Scripture in order to come to a perfect knowledge of truth, and to learn how to live for our Lord:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may

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29 Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 254.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

31 *Ibid.*

be perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

If there are any truths found in other belief systems that happen to be compatible with Scripture, well and good, but we don't have to learn them outside of Scripture. Otherwise we will delude ourselves (or Satan will delude us) into thinking that all paths lead to God after all. Not only is it not necessary to lead others to Jesus, we don't have to believe in Him to the extent Scripture requires. We can be a Buddhist and still follow Jesus. And this is the delusion that McLaren has embraced:

I must add, though, that I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. This will be hard, you say, and I agree. But frankly, it's not all that easy to be a follower of Jesus in many "Christian" contexts, either.<sup>32</sup>

To which Christian religion is McLaren alluding? There are many different expressions of the "Christian religion" from Mormonism to Roman Catholicism to Southern Baptist, and even including those who have divorced themselves from the institutions. While it is possible to be a true believer in, and follower of, Christ in most Christian "contexts," the objective is not to make adherents to any Christian religion or to Christianity in general; the objective is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. That is not possible within non-Christian contexts.

McLaren consistently compares Christianity with other religions as if all are equal expressions of truth, and all have problems that need to be overcome. His argument may be slanted in favor of

Christianity, but it is far removed from biblical truth. Indeed, he hopes that Jesus will save all religions—not all within the religions—the religions themselves:

Ultimately, I believe "they" and "we" can all experience this transformation [by God's Spirit] best by becoming humble followers of Jesus, whom I believe (as I said in the earliest chapters of this book) to be the Son of God, the Lord of all, and the Savior of the world.

In this light, although I don't hope all Buddhists will become (cultural) Christians, I do hope all who feel so called will become Buddhist followers of Jesus; I believe they should be given that opportunity and invitation. I don't hope all Jews and Hindus will become members of the Christian religion. But I do hope all who feel so called will become Jewish or Hindu followers of Jesus.

Ultimately, I hope that Jesus will save Buddhism, Islam, and every other religion, including the Christian religion, which often seems to need saving about as much as any other religion does.<sup>33</sup>

In that case, why not pray that Jesus saves Wicca, or native religions that still practice cannibalism, or Satanism?

These may be extreme examples, but the evil is not merely in the bad conduct of religious adherents; it is in the very nature of the world's religions. In spite of McLaren's affirmations of a proper Christology, his thinking is unbiblical and borders on being anti-Christ (I am being generous here).

### **Eclectic Christianity**

Just as McLaren's approach to other religions seeks common ground, his approach to the many contexts of Christianity seeks common ground. The full title of the book from which we are quoting in this section is *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical,*

post/Protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian. Much of what he writes is tongue-in-cheek, but that does not excuse his unbiblical and ecumenical statements. His belief system is an eclectic form of Christianity, pointing out the good and bad of all the various Christian traditions. He calls one expression of his beliefs "charismatic/contemplative," contrasting the two, and the contemplative part comes from Roman Catholicism.

### **Catholic Contemplative**

McLaren is particularly enamored of Roman Catholic mysticism:

If charismatics gave me my high school diploma in the ways of the Spirit, it was from Catholic contemplatives that I entered an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Dismayed with the fatigue of following the charismatic method of being "in the Spirit," McLaren credits a Roman Catholic mystic for showing him a better way:

Along the way I read and met Catholic contemplatives who helped me learn a lesson from this fatigue. They believed no less fervently than charismatics that the risen Jesus is present in Spirit and can be experienced. But rather than locating that experience one step beyond the normal, they located it in the very center of normalcy. Instead of jumping and shouting, they typically recommended sitting in silence, walking calmly, or in some other way relaxing and quieting one's soul.

One Catholic named Brother Lawrence called this realization "practicing God's presence." I began to experiment with this practice early in my spiritual journey. My goal was to learn to realize that

32 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Jesus (via the Holy Spirit) was my companion at every moment (even now as I sit on an airplane over the North Sea, returning home from the UK) and to open myself to the sense of being accompanied at all times. This practice became, I think, the single most important spiritual discipline in my life (along with regular church involvement and tithing). No wonder that one of the names Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit was Comforter or Companion, and no wonder the early apostles spoke of “walking in the Holy Spirit.”

Through the years I have noticed that among the people most dedicated to missional activism, you find either (a) people burned out because of the difficulty of the task, or (b) people who have best learned to undergird their activism with contemplation, with quiet resting, with finding God in the center of normalcy—including the normalcy of struggle and hard work. Contemplation isn’t only for passive, withdrawn people, but also for active, involved ones. A Catholic philosopher, Josef Pieper, has helped me a great deal in this regard.<sup>35</sup>

Among the contemplatives, both Catholic and non-Catholic, McLaren endorses Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola (head of the Inquisition) and Richard Foster, whose organization, Renovaré, promotes New Age beliefs and practices (See Media Spotlight’s special report, *Renovaré: Taking Leave of One’s Senses.*)

One New Age practice (or ancient occult practice that has been revived in the New Age) is walking through a labyrinth while meditating or praying. Walking through labyrinths is one spiritual discipline promoted in the emerging church movement. Dan Kimball utilizes the labyrinth in his church services:

One time during our annual art event, we set up a prayer labyrinth,

which was really a series of experiential prayer stations. A labyrinth is a mazelike path similar to those designed into the floors of European cathedrals during the Middle Ages. Christians of that time would slowly walk the labyrinth as an aid to contemplative prayer and reflection. Ours took an hour to go through, and it was incredible to see so many people waiting their turn and then spending such an extended amount of time in prayer.<sup>36</sup>

The use of labyrinths to connect with the spirit world is a practice found in ancient religions. The idea was to connect with the sacred in nature. One New Age Web site has this interesting history of labyrinths:

Revelations from nature are a part of humankind’s connection to the creative nature of the Universe. Nature can be thought of as a reflection of the laws of creation. In many cultures from ancient Europe to the Americas it was considered a rite of passage to have a vision quest—to spend time totally alone in nature, in a spot chosen by the elders as a sacred place. From this time of solitude and of humility would come a vision. This vision could occur in the form of a bird whose spirit would teach or from an animal, a rock, or even the wind and water. Although the guidance came from within their own being, often it was linked to a place in nature.

Labyrinths are temples that enhance and balance and bring a sense of the sacred—a place where we can confirm our unity with the cosmos, awaken our vital force and elevate our consciousness. These structures are space/time temples where we can behold realities that oddly enough transcend space and time. The orientation, form and geometry of a labyrinth

has symbolic as well as spacial importance. It is a mirror for the divine, a place to behold the beauty in nature....

Spiraling inward and out, this serpentine flow is the most generative form of subtle energy. The process of moving through the pathway unwinds this stored energy, releasing, magnifying, and ultimately harnessing the flow. Working directly in conjunction with the human energy fields this spiraling flow interacts with the kundalini energy coiled at the base of our spine converting the subtle energy into life force itself. This uncoiling of the kundalini vitalizes us through a process of unfolding both upwards and inwards, an exhalation and ingathering of energies known as the dance of creation.

Labyrinths are known as sacred gateways and have been found at the entrance of ancient sites around the world. Often located at the center of subtle ‘earth energies’ these temples enhance, balance, regenerate and confirm our unity with the cosmos.

A type of Labyrinth known as a Yantra was used as a meditation by Hindu midwives to assist in childbirth and served as a means of relaxation for the birth canal, another labyrinthine form.

The spiral is the most generative form of subtle energy. When its coil is unwound the stored energy is released. The areas where straight ley lines cross, or where underground water runs are places to build sacred temples, labyrinths. These places are rich in both yin and yang (yin underground water crossing yang energy lines). The labyrinth resonates to this numinous spiral, the Phi ratio known as the ‘Golden Mean’ found in all of nature.

35 Ibid., p. 176.

36 Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church, Op. Cit.*, p. 169.

Labyrinths have always been associated with ancient pilgrimage routes and rituals of self-discovery. They were worn as a form of protection and ornamentation and were often found carved on doorways to bless a dwelling.

Labyrinths are time windows, portals, where time stands still. They are known to facilitate altered states of consciousness and have parallels with reincarnation, initiation, prosperity, and fertility rites.<sup>37</sup>

Labyrinths are thought by some to be a legitimate part of Christian worship simply because some ancient churches (Roman Catholic) incorporated them. The oldest known church labyrinth dates to around A.D. 400. Addressing the use of labyrinths in ancient churches, Sandra Kyne, adherent of Celtic history, myth and magic,<sup>38</sup> says:

The oldest known labyrinth design on a church floor dates to 400 in Orléansville, Algeria, and measured eight feet in diameter. By the 12th century, variations began to appear on church floors in greater numbers throughout France. The largest with a 42-foot diameter is the eleven-circuit labyrinth of Chartres Cathedral. Other cathedrals in France and Italy have two-foot wide labyrinths etched into their walls. Many of these have been worn down from people tracing the winding path with their fingers.

In addition to the number of circuits, the church labyrinth differs from the Cretan labyrinth in another way: Rather than the path simply coming to an end in the center, the church labyrinth has a wide circle at its core. The one in Chartres has a six-lobed rosette at its center. A few other variations of the floor labyrinth were constructed in Germany and England.

During the time of Christian pilgrimages to the holy land, church labyrinths were referred to as "Chemin de Jérusalem". For people who could not afford a trip to the Middle East, the church labyrinth served as a way to spiritually take the journey. For those less physically able, the wall labyrinth was available. Both became objects for expressing devotion.<sup>39</sup>

Hopefully, it is merely ignorance or naiveté that sparks people like Dan Kimball and others in the emerging church movement to incorporate ancient pagan practices that were adopted by Roman Catholicism to appease their pagan "converts" in ancient times (and still today).

The entire Catholic contemplative discipline is pagan at its roots. But what does God say about adopting the ways of the heathen in worshipping Him?

Take heed to yourself that you are not snared by following them [the heathen], after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise."

You shall not do so to YHWH your God, for every abomination to YHWH, which he hates, they have done unto their gods. For they have even burned in the fire to their gods their sons and their daughters. (Deut. 12:30-31)

It behooves believers in Jesus to examine every approach used by their leaders to worship the true God. If it is not found in Scripture as a means of worship, it must be suspect. Many pagan elements have found their way into the churches by way of their Roman Catholic ancestry. These, God calls "abominations."

God does not want us approaching Him outside our rational minds. Exercises designed to help people "experience

God," rather than just to know Him, love Him and obey Him according to the clear teachings of His Word, are dangerous diversions gleaned from human wisdom.

In his Catholic contemplative approach, Brian D. McLaren speaks of his veneration for Mary:

Last spring I was speaking at a conference near Santa Clara, California. I like to get outdoors every chance I get. One day my early morning walk took me to Our Lady of Peace Roman Catholic Church near my hotel. Behind the church is a huge statue of Mary surrounded by a beautiful garden, which is in turn surrounded by bustling freeways.

Attracted by this little garden of peace amid the chaos of morning Bay Area traffic, I found myself sitting on a bench with Mary towering over me, looking down on me with a kind face, her arms extended. An Asian woman knelt at Mary's feet, obviously in prayer and in some anguish, her hand reaching up and resting affectionately on Mary's big toe. Sitting there, I was deeply moved by the woman's piety and Mary's image.

How ironic, I thought, for a boy raised Protestant to be sitting there with tears in his eyes, moved by Our Lady of Peace and a humble Asian lady seeking peace. That day I became a little more Catholic and a little more catholic, too.<sup>40</sup>

Need I say more?

### **Sacramentalism**

Sacramentalism, the belief that certain practices convey God's grace merely by engaging in them, is a heritage of Roman Catholicism that continued in some Protestant churches at the time of the Reformation and is beginning to be manifested within some of what formerly would have been called evangelical

37 *Myth and History of Labyrinths*, [www.labyrinthia.com](http://www.labyrinthia.com).

38 "Interviews," *Universal Pagan*, July, 2004.

39 Sandra Kynes, *The Mystery and Magic of Labyrinths*, [www.kynes.net/labyrinth.htm](http://www.kynes.net/labyrinth.htm).

40 Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 221.

churches. The emergent church movement is strongly sacramental and Brian McLaren is a strong proponent of sacramental and liturgical systems of worship. He affirms that sacraments are a means to grace, a Roman Catholic concept:

A sacrament is an object or practice that mediates the divine to humans. It carries something of God to us; it is a means of grace, and it conveys sacredness. I care little for arguments about how many sacraments there are (although I tend to prefer longer lists than shorter ones). What I really like about the sacramental nature of Catholicism is this: through learning that a few things can carry the sacred, we become open to the fact that all things (all good things, all created things) can ultimately carry the sacred: the kind smile of a Down's syndrome child, the bouncy jubilation of a puppy, the graceful arch of a dancer's back, the camera work in a fine film, good coffee, good wine, good friends, good conversation. Start with three sacraments—or seven—and pretty soon everything becomes potentially sacramental as, I believe, it should be.<sup>41</sup>

I am reminded of how New Ager Ruth Carter Stapleton told of being born again by looking at a beautiful painting. What's the difference? God's grace is somehow imparted through unbiblical means, even without belief in Jesus as the only way to God.

#### **Savior of What?**

Within his eclectic approach to Christianity, McLaren questions the value of focusing on salvation of the soul, and stresses rather the need to focus on the salvation of creation. This is where his "Green" Christianity applies. Reading Roman Catholic priest, Vincent Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered*, McLaren

became convinced that salvation of the soul has been touted almost exclusively as the only salvation Jesus came to bring. His following statement is certainly true:

...I still believe that Jesus is vitally interested in saving me and you by individually judging us, by forgiving us of our wrongs, and teaching us to live in a better way. But I fear that for too many Christians, "personal salvation" has become another personal consumer product (like personal computers, a personal journal, personal time, etc.), and Christianity has become its marketing program. If so, salvation is "all about me," and like Vincent Donovan, I think we need another song.<sup>42</sup>

One subject that seems to be conspicuously absent from the emergent church teachings is that of sin. When mentioned it is often couched in terms that excuse it as the product of a greater evil, usually adverse environmental impacts caused by greedy corporations, warfare and other major calamities. As McLaren says, we need forgiveness for our "wrongs." The one place I found the word "sin" in his writings it referred to those things that interfere with the emergence of healthy families, communities and cultures:

Sin, in this model, can be understood as lower levels or rings resisting the emergence of higher levels or rings, body-lusts refusing to be integrated with mental ideals in an ethical soul; individual wills (a mental faculty) refusing to develop the virtues of soul necessary so that healthy families and communities and cultures can emerge; individual kingdoms (which we could call me-isms) or national or religious or ethnic kingdoms (which we could call we-isms) refusing to yield territory to the emergence of the larger (and

largest) reality—God's kingdom (which we could call good theism). Like physical illness, which involves the parts not integrating with ease (hence disease) to yield the emergent reality of health, sin mucks up God's original intent for the story of creation, sabotaging emergence by replacing it with stagnation and decay.<sup>43</sup>

What gobbledegook! This definition of sin is New Age Christianity-speak. It has nothing to do with the Scriptural truth that sin is anything that is contrary to the will of God. Period. End of discussion. The problem is that McLaren believes all Christians must become social and conservation activists in order to be faithful to the Gospel. He rails against the evils of capitalism and American consumerism, perhaps rightly so in many cases, but he neglects to balance his tirades with acknowledgments of the benefits wrought by these things. We can find fault with individuals and corporations—even governments—that trash nature, but there are also elements within these entities that work hard to conserve nature.

In several areas McLaren assumes that Christians who are not on board his emergent bandwagon are abusive and despoilers of earth:

So, as the old system of church-as-chaplain/baptizer/servant-of-state-and-commerce gives way to a new prophetic role, the poor and forgotten benefit, and so do all living things. One realizes that the spirit of St. Francis and the spirit of Mother Teresa are one and the same: the Spirit of Jesus, to whom the poor and sick and the sparrows and salamanders are all precious, each in a unique way.<sup>44</sup>

Pardon me for not wearing my tutu and fairy wings, but this is so simplistic as to be laughable. First, with acknowledgment that the churches as institutions

41 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

have certainly had their share of evil elements, throughout history true believers have demonstrated concern for the things McLaren prizes. Second, the spirit of St. Francis and of Mother Teresa are not the Spirit of Jesus. So-called "Saint" Francis was a Catholic monk whose life may have found communion with nature, but that isn't any proof that he had the Spirit of God any more than that of a New Age tree hugger. Mother Teresa believed that her role was to help Buddhists be better Buddhists and Hindus be better Hindus. Her works of mercy were commendable, but so are the works of anyone—believer in Jesus or not—who makes similar sacrifices. Salvation still comes only through belief in and obedience to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Equally simplistic (and not true) is McLaren's belief that sin is merely a symptom of a deeper-lying evil: consumerism:

We're already focused on fighting symptoms like abortion, promiscuity (hetero or homosexual), divorce, and profanity. We might add terrorism to the list. But these are in many ways the symptoms of the very disease that we inadvertently tend to support, aid and abet, defend, protect, baptize, and fight for—a system sick with consumerism, greed, fear, violence, and misplaced faith (in the power of the Economy and the State and its Weapons).<sup>45</sup>

Please. Did abortion, promiscuity, divorce, profanity and terrorism not exist before modern consumerism? These are not symptoms; they are sins unto themselves. It is foolish to blame consumerism for these evils. And while we're at it, the subject of abortion isn't really dealt with in McLaren's call for preserving God's creation. In truth, he ignores the subject completely. It appears as if he is more concerned for sparrows and salamanders than he is for the unborn children de-

stroyed by the millions by those he links hands with in his quest for saving the environment. It is a conundrum that many who get teary-eyed over saving the whales have no qualms about killing babies.

But not only does McLaren bash non-emergent Christians, he believes that, among other things, the environment must be saved in order for the Kingdom of God to be manifested on the earth. He says it began with Jesus and is spreading throughout the world a little at a time:

How did he do it? The Gospels tell us. He selected 12 and trained them in a new way of life. He sent them to teach everyone this way of life. Some would believe and become practitioners and teachers of this new way of life, too. Even if only a few would practice this new way, many would benefit. Oppressed people would be free. Poor people would be liberated from poverty. Minorities would be treated with respect [what about majorities!?] Sinners would be loved, not resented. Industrialists would realize that God cares for sparrows and wildflowers—so their industries should respect, not rape, the environment. The homeless would be invited in for a hot meal. The kingdom of God would come—not everywhere at once, not suddenly, but gradually, like a seed growing in a field, like yeast spreading in a lump of bread dough, like light spreading across the sky at dawn.<sup>46</sup>

A quaint sentiment, but not biblical. These things may characterize true believers' (and some others') attitudes toward their fellowman and creation, but it is not possible that the Kingdom of God will be manifested throughout the world by men's efforts. The Kingdom of God is present in the Body of Christ (not Christianity) at this time, but it will not be realized in the earth until Jesus returns, suddenly, I might add, at the end of this age.

The idealism of New Age Christianity (which is really what McLaren and other proponents of the emergent church movement are selling) may sound wonderful, but it does not really address the sin nature of man, or the truth that the earth is in the hands of Satan who works his evil through the world's religions that these people cherish so much.

### **Feminism**

One characteristic of the emerging church movement that needs attention is the feminist element that insists that male leadership is "patristic," "abusive," and "inadequate." Discussing the relationship between Jesus and His Father, McLaren goes to great lengths in apologizing for using masculine pronouns for God. It appears as if he is plagued by a collective guilty conscience for all of the world's men:

This is as good a place as any to apologize for my use of masculine pronouns for God in the previous sentence. You'll notice that wherever I can, I avoid the use of masculine pronouns for God because they can give the false impression to many people today that the Christian God is a male deity. God is not a male. Instead God is personal (we might say super-personal) in a way that human maleness and femaleness together image better than either can alone. Maleness and femaleness are biological categories, and God is Life beyond biological categories....

The masculine biblical imagery of "Father" and "Son" also contributes to the patriarchalism or chauvinism that has too often characterized Christianity, maybe even more significantly than the pronoun problem. Two deeper problems underlie this problem of masculine imagery. First is the problem of language itself, which will be dealt with in Chapter 9. Second is the problem of the Bible

45 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

itself, which will be explored in Chapter 10.<sup>47</sup>

In Chapter 9, McLaren talks about theological “jargon,” but does not address the masculine/feminine issue. In Chapter 10, he takes apart the word “God-breathed,” or “inspired” and emphasizes the cooperative effort of men and God in producing the Scriptures. While what he says is true, his context tends to ignore the truth that the words themselves are still sanctioned and inspired by God if not dictated by Him. This, then, allows him to impugn the use of masculine pronouns when speaking of God.

If McLaren feels compelled to apologize for using those masculine pronouns, then what does that say about God? That McLaren is more compassionate toward women? That God doesn’t know who or what He is? That McLaren has to apologize for God? What?

Did Jesus err in calling His Father “Father”? Is it not conspicuous that He did not call Him “Father-Mother” as so-called “Christian feminists” prefer? This hatred for one’s masculinity, born out of the feminizing of modern (and postmodern) men by the Satanically-controlled mass media is an affront to God.

God is who God is. Adam was made in God’s image. Out of Adam God took the woman. It is McLaren’s low view of Scripture, in spite of his protests that he has a higher regard for Scripture now than ever in his life (how low must it have been before?), that causes him to fall into this evil trap. There is a reason God has maintained man’s primacy over woman:

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the

woman, but the woman for the man. (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)

But I do not allow a woman to teach, or to hold authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim. 2:12-14)

And don’t give me that old canard about how men abuse women because of these Scriptures. It is the sin nature of man that causes him to abuse women (and other men, by the way). Both men and women have abused children, and many times men have been the victims of abuse by their wives. None of this negates the truth of God’s Word or that His purpose in maintaining the headship of the man over his wife is valid.

Read the Scriptures. These were not “cultural” distinctives that have been abandoned. They are eternal truths: God made the man first; the woman sinned first; the woman was created for the man; the man was not created for the woman. None of these truths have changed just because mankind (created as male and female) has become more “enlightened.”

In his fear of offending women, McLaren almost exclusively uses female pronouns for generic references. Just a couple of examples follow:

...We would go to the world of arts and trades and notice how a master violinist, a master carpenter, a master electrician, a master of martial arts passes on her mastery to students or apprentices.<sup>48</sup>

In another example McLaren shows us how God saves by teaching or revealing, using the example of an ignorant young farmer who is taught by his “sagely grandmother” how to care for his land, how to let his fields remain fallow, how to rotate his crops, etc.<sup>49</sup>

Notice how McLaren takes primarily masculine trades and convolutes the pronoun to emphasize a feminist position. In the interest of conserving space, these are only two of several examples where he uses feminine pronouns to describe masculine activities, and vice versa.

Within the emerging church movement will be found many women in authority and in a teaching capacity, contrary to Scripture. The feminized men who take part in this practice have abdicated their role of leadership and, out of fear of offending those who perceive maleness as equal to abusiveness, dismiss the Scriptural emphasis on the male role as out of touch with today’s more enlightened cultural distinctives. Dan Kimball is another such man:

In the emerging culture, the role of women in the church is a huge issue. People in the emerging generations think of churches as male-dominated and oppressive to females. So whatever your theology may be about the role of women in the church, I would still highly encourage you to have females in up-front roles as much as possible, whether it is teaching, giving announcements, leading worship, sharing testimonies, or reading Scripture. This is critical for the emerging church.<sup>50</sup>

There is no quarrel with the idea of women in all these roles except for teaching simply because Scripture does not allow for it. Because people in the “emerging generations” think erroneously that “the church” is oppressive to females (not to say some individual churches may be), does not mean that we scrap God’s design to suit them. Some things must be received on God’s terms regardless of how “distasteful” they may seem to the unregenerate soul or the rebellious Christian.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 75.

48 *Ibid.*, p.87.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

50 Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, Op. Cit., p. 150.

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## **A Low View of Scripture**

McLaren's low view of Scripture almost echoes that of Roman Catholicism which, while correctly stating that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, nevertheless says that it cannot stand alone. Equally authoritative are the Catholic Church's tradition and its teaching authority. Along these lines McLaren calls his echelon of authority "dynamic tension":

When you choose both/and rather than either/or regarding Catholicism and Protestantism, you learn to live with dynamic tension in other areas as well. You resist the reductionist temptation to always choose only one thing over another, and you learn to hold two or more things together when necessary.

Anglicans have demonstrated this both/and beautifully in relation to Scripture. Scripture is always a factor in Anglican thinking. In Anglicans' best moments, it is their primary factor, but it is never fall 2005—never the only factor. Rather Scripture is always in dialogue with tradition, reason, and experience. None of them sola can be the ultimate source of authority: that source is God alone, the only ultimate sola. In the dynamic tension of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, Anglicans seek to discern God's authority, and when these four values agree, Anglicans seek to live with the tension and tolerance, believing that better outcomes will follow if they live with the tension rather than resolve it by rejecting one of the four values. All four—Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience—are gifts from God, and none should be rejected.<sup>51</sup>

Certainly reason plays a part in our faith. But our reason must be based upon the clear teachings of Scripture. Likewise

any traditions or experiences. McLaren places these four things in equal balance when, in truth, Scripture must be the authority that holds sway over the other three. Otherwise one ends up with a subjective religion—one that looks at Scripture through one's own experiences, traditions or faulty reasoning. This explains why Anglicanism has embraced homosexuals in ministry, women in authority and teaching, and the seeking of unity with the Vatican. The subjective nature of such a low view of Scripture belies McLaren's claim to hold Scripture in high regard. Evidently he also holds his own opinion (reason) in just as high a regard when it comes to discerning truth. He further says:

...The belief that truth is best understood by reducing it to a few fundamentals or a single "sola" insight is, to me, at least questionable if not downright dangerous. Isn't truth often best understood in a conversation, a dialectic (or trialectic), or a dynamic tension? Isn't it subverted by a tendency to "sola-ize"? It wasn't just a rock singer back in the 1970s who crooned "one is the loneliest number." The wise preacher of Ecclesiastes said two are better than one, and three better still. Reductionism isn't all it's cracked up to be.<sup>52</sup>

McLaren's appeal to Ecclesiastes is faulty. The Scripture he refers to has nothing to do with coming to a knowledge of truth. It has to do with those of like mind holding each other up.

By "sola," he is referring to "sola scriptura," or "only Scripture" as the authority for all beliefs and practices for true believers in Jesus. "Reductionism," is a bad word to him. It means reliance upon Scripture alone for all truth. He consistently impugns Scripture as the only source of authority and instead champions the Marxist concept of "dia-

lectic" as the path to truth. This dialectic approach of Marxism was honed to perfection by international communism. We don't need it in the Body of Christ.

Dialectic basically means taking various points of view and coming to consensus. But since not all points of view can be true, it is impossible to come to the truth; half-truths and downright lies are then held up as authoritative. This has created the climate for McLaren and his ilk in the emergent church movement.

Further evidence of McLaren's low view of Scripture is found in his statement relating to the hypothetical question, "How do you know that the records we have of Jesus are what really happened?"

...I would have to say that I cannot know this with absolute, undoubtable, unquestionable certainty.<sup>53</sup>

The only records we have of Jesus and His life are found in Scripture. What McLaren is saying is that he cannot be absolutely sure that Scripture is trustworthy. If that is not enough to dismiss his leadership in this movement nothing else is.

## **Evolution, Homosexuality, Etc.**

McLaren likes to emphasize how "conservative Christians" have failed where "liberal Christians" have paved the way to enlightenment:

The best of liberal and conservative Christians were, then, truly heroic, but in different ways. Liberals were heroic for tackling tough issues often several decades before the conservatives. For example, in terms of science and learning, they tackled issues like evolution and the age of the earth long before their conservative counterparts. Ethically, they were concerned about racial reconciliation in the 1950s and 1960s in America, while conservatives often opposed them, finally getting at least superficially concerned in the 1990s (largely through the in-

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51 Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 210.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

53 Brian D. McLaren, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

fluence of the Promise Keepers movement). Liberals took action on the issue of women in ministry decades before most conservatives began to rethink their position. The same could be said about stewardship of the earth, concern for the poor, sensitivity to the plight of Palestinians, and a questioning of unconditional support for Israel. And although the debate has been agonizing, liberals have blazed the trail in seeking to treat homosexual and transgender persons with compassion. Conservatives may follow in their footsteps in this issue just as they have in others, several decades down the road, once the pioneers have cleared the way (and once their old guard has passed away).<sup>54</sup>

This paragraph speaks volumes about McLaren's liberal leanings. He gives lip service to conservatives, calling them "heroic," but limits that heroism to personal conversions and discipleship, as well as for making inroads into radio and television.<sup>55</sup> He applauds liberals for "tackling tough issues," including evolution, but the liberal approach to evolution is to support it. Why should we be happy about that?

Such a statement betrays McLaren's leanings toward liberalism while he tries to put on the face of a true believer in Jesus. But which Jesus?

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, your minds would be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he that comes proclaims another Jesus, whom we have not proclaimed, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him. (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

There are many Jesuses being proclaimed today. They say we will find Him here, in the Purpose-Driven movement,

or there, in the Roman Catholic Church, or there, in the emergent churches:

"Then if any man says to you, 'Look, here is Christ,' or 'There,' do not believe it.

"For there will arise false Christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so much that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect." (Matthew 24:24-25)

There seems to be no end to "new things" springing up in the churches. Many are dissatisfied with the "old guard," hoping, or at least waiting with bated breath, for them to pass away.

I am not championing conservative Christianity. There are certainly plenty of problems in that camp. I am merely pointing out the bias of McLaren in favor of liberal Christianity which he disguises as "a generous orthodoxy." He may be generous in his approach to all religions and religious expressions, but there is ample evidence of his intolerance toward the idea of the Bible being the only source for absolute truth.

The excuse will be made that McLaren doesn't speak for all emergent churches. Well and good. But why, then, do so many in the emergent churches not only tolerate his divergence from biblical truth, but link to him on their Web sites and blog sites, recommend his books, and join him in his "dialectic" dance for a better understanding of "truth"?

Knowing that he coined the phrase "emergent" should be a caution to any right-thinking believer not to have anything to do with the movement. Just as so many have rejected the status-quo of the clergy-laity, Nicolaitan system that Jesus hates without sacrificing the truth of Scripture, anyone else can do so also without joining a movement that is so questionable on so many fronts.

I do not buy the idea that, somehow, the emergent churches are more compassionate, more concerned about the envi-

ronment, more interested in social justice, and more loving of others than those outside their pale. True believers are always concerned about righteous works in all their forms. But we do not believe we have to compromise with non-believers to have an effect. Nor are we so naïve to think that we are going to save the world before Jesus comes.

Regardless of how much the emergent church leaders may wish to dissociate themselves with the status-quo, the fact remains that they are merely substituting one form of the Nicolaitan spirit for another. They are still churches, and they are still clergy-laity oriented.

The emergent church movement speaks out of both corners of its mouth; it has a forked tongue with many tines. But it leads away from Scripture as the only source of truth and toward Satan's lie that all religions lead to God as long as those in them think of Jesus in some benevolent fashion.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no man deceive you, for many will come in My name, saying I am Christ, and shall deceive many." (Matthew 24:4-5)

The emergent church movement says that Jesus is Christ. But so do many pseudo-Christian cults. The truth is not in the declaration but in the definition of terms. The leaders within this movement may use the right words, but they are deceiving many. Unfortunately there are all too many leaders within evangelical circles who are incorporating the emergent church movement into their programs either out of naïvite or ignorance. I pray you will take heed.v



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54 Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 138.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 139.