

Dear Friend,

In our first article, we showed how the Emergent Church markets Catholicism. The documentation we gave was from Brian McLaren, a prominent leader of the movement. In this second article, we show how McLaren sets aside the Gospel and the authority of the Bible in order to clear a path into mysticism, which he then describes. In a third article, we will deal with the noxious mystical aspect of the whole association.

Yours in the grace of the precious Savior,
Richard Bennett

Christianity Defaced as Leader of Emergent Church Movement Embraces Mysticism

Part II

The Emerging Church movement has hailed as its “manifesto” Brian McLaren’s book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. In it, McLaren explains that the genesis and title of the Emergent Church movement takes its model from the growth of a tree,

“The meaning of emergent as used in these and other settings is an essential part of the ecosystem of generous orthodoxy. A simple diagram can illustrate what we mean by emergent thinking. . . Each ring [of a tree] represents not a replacement of the previous rings, not a rejection of them but an embracing of them, a comprising of them and inclusion of them in something bigger. . . [likewise] some thought seeks to embrace what has come before—like a new ring on a tree—in something bigger. This is emergent (or integral, or integrative) thinking. Emergent thinking has been an unspoken assumption behind all my previous books. . . .”¹

While this definition gives an excellent picture of McLaren’s *modus operandi*, it also is the Hegelian dialectic idea² in a different format. Such change does not describe the biblical pattern of growth that the believer experiences. The biblical pattern requires a putting away of worldly thinking and an adherence to thinking in line with the Bible, which produces godly understanding and behavior.

McLaren further states, “This God-given thirst for emergence. . . is causing new forms of Christian spirituality, community, and mission to emerge from modern Western Christianity. . . a generous orthodoxy is an emerging orthodoxy, never complete until we arrive at our final home in God.”³ Contrary to what McLaren states, new forms of Christianity are not developing. Rather, he is inserting new definitions into the classical terminology so that the words suddenly do not mean what they used to mean, thus intentionally confusing people. McLaren has stated that he was going to use devices that confuse because he thinks, “clarity is sometimes overrated.”⁴

¹ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004) pp. 276-278 Underlining in any quotation indicates emphasis in original text.

² The Hegelian model starts with a thesis and then an antithesis is introduced. Finally, these two merge into a synthesis, which is a new thesis, and the whole process starts over. Marxism is based heavily on this model.

³ McLaren, pp. 284-285

⁴ “... places here where I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated.” McLaren, p. 23.

McLaren is at no loss to demonstrate how his “emergent thinking” works. The object of his book is to lump all Protestants and Catholics together, which would be the new ring around the Protestant Catholic split, and to move beyond that⁵ into Eastern mysticism, which would be the new ring around Catholicism.

The “Solos”—the basic biblical principles utterly denied

In order to accomplish his first step of lumping Protestants and Catholics together, McLaren has to redefine the Lord Jesus Christ, Holy God, biblical authority, theology, salvation, and conservative Protestant denominational distinctives. However, after the example of the Lord and the Apostles, true believers adhere to God’s written Word alone as the final authority—*Sola Scriptura*.⁶ Before the all-holy God, according to the Bible, an individual is saved by grace alone—*Sola Gratia*,⁷ through faith alone—*Sola Fide*,⁸ in Christ alone—*Solo Christo*.⁹ Following on this, all glory and praise is to God alone—*Soli Deo Gloria*.¹⁰ These five biblical principles, called “the solas,” are the foundation of true faith in the Lord. They are founded on Scripture, existed in the early Church, and have been the basis of all genuine biblical revivals since then. The solas were the foundational principles for which so many thousands of Evangelicals gave their lives at the stake—John Huss, William Tyndale, John Rogers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Anne Askew, John Bradford, and John Philpot, to name but a few—and for which millions were martyred under various tortures during six hundred years of papal Inquisition. Nevertheless, McLaren makes it very clear that conservative Protestants will have to compromise these basic biblical principles for the sake of community; otherwise they cannot be part of his “generous orthodoxy”. According to McLaren, what we have just outlined in the solas must be discarded. Thus, he proclaims, “Calvinists in particular and fundamentalists in general” are to give up their “solos” or “alones” as distinctives because the word *sola* is not in the Bible.¹¹ What he is telling the Bible believers is that they must renounce the five basic biblical principles—principles that were the distinctives, principles that separated the Reformers from the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, although McLaren has assured his readers that “emergent thinking” does not reject any of the thinking that has preceded it, yet when he applies his method, his words of assurance turn out to be of no value whatsoever.

On the most fundamental of these distinctives McLaren states, “Scripture is something God had ‘let be,’ and so it is at once God’s creation and the creation of the dozens of people and communities and cultures who produced it.”¹² In this, as in most of his teaching, McLaren is in line with the Church of Rome. While Papal Rome does not say these words, she embodies the same concept when she states, “[Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God...”¹³ McLaren has clearly paralleled the Catholic line in attempting to equate man’s creativity on a par with God’s. The Scripture itself teaches something totally different, “...*holy men of God spake*

⁵ McLaren, p. 210

⁶ John 10:35,17:17, Proverbs 30:5-6, I Corinthians 4:6, II Timothy 3:15-17

⁷ Romans. 3:24, Ephesians 2:8, 9

⁸ Acts 16:31, Romans. 4:5, 5:1

⁹ Ephesians 1:3-14, I Timothy 2:5, Acts 4:12

¹⁰ I Corinthians 10: 31, Colossians 3:17

¹¹ McLaren, p. 198

¹² McLaren, p. 162

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) Para 81. Square brackets and italic in the original.

as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”.¹⁴ The Bible **alone** is the Word of God revealed to men as the Holy Spirit moved them. According to the Apostle Paul, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God...*”¹⁵ It is not as McLaren would have one believe—“the creation of the dozens of people and communities and cultures.” It is especially serious to undermine the authorship of God’s written Word. Such belittling of the authority of the written Word prevents a person from coming to knowledge of the truth and embracing it as it is in Christ Jesus. This means that McLaren’s teaching is literally soul damning because it has “*taken away the key of knowledge.*”¹⁶

History fabricated to meet desired ends

McLaren also lies about historical facts in order to be able to present an integrated (emergent) picture of Protestants and Catholics on the same issue. He states, “The Christian community at its best through history has always had a deep feeling and understanding for this integrated dual origin of the Scriptures...the Christian community in its Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox forms has sought to hold on to both dimensions of the origin of Scripture...to hold them together as friends, as partners, as colleagues.”¹⁷ In history, true Bible believers **never** bowed to the man-made notion of a “dual origin” of the Scripture. They held to the Scripture as God’s revelation alone. Many were burned at the stake for it. McLaren’s “friends, partners, and colleagues” of the Bible is nothing but a re-statement of the Roman Catholic notion that “Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition are bound closely together and communicate with one another.”¹⁸ The Catholic statement and McLaren’s statement on the “integrated dual origin of the Scriptures” are in essence the same. Both are outright lies. To put away truth for these fabrications—not only of doctrinal distinctives but also of the facts of history—is what the “generous orthodoxy” requires. This is nothing new. It is simply the traditional teaching of Papal Rome using other words.

Denying the Gospel

McLaren absolutely denies the Gospel when, for example, he states,

“Perhaps our ‘inward-turned, individual-salvation-oriented, un-adapted Christianity’ is a colossal and tragic misunderstanding, and perhaps we need to listen again for the true song of salvation, which is ‘good news to all creation.’ So perhaps it’s best to suspend what, if anything, you ‘know’ about what it means to call Jesus ‘Savior’ and to give the matter of salvation some fresh attention. Let’s start simply. In the Bible, save means ‘rescue’ or ‘heal’. It emphatically does not mean ‘save from hell’ or ‘give eternal life after death,’ as many preachers seem to imply in sermon after sermon. Rather its meaning varies from passage to passage, but in general, in any context, save means ‘get out of trouble.’ The trouble could be sickness, war, political intrigue, oppression, poverty, imprisonment, or any kind of danger or evil.”¹⁹

Contrary to McLaren, Christ Jesus proclaimed, “*I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*”²⁰ The Lord Himself summarized the Gospel when He said, “*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on*

¹⁴ II Peter 1:20, 21

¹⁵ II Timothy 3:16, 17

¹⁶ Luke 11:52

¹⁷ McLaren, p. 162

¹⁸ *Catechism*, Para 80

¹⁹ McLaren, p. 93

²⁰ Luke 12:5

him.”²¹ The contrast is stark; the one who personally believes on the Son has everlasting life. The one who denies personal salvation is not only under the wrath of God, which is surely the soul’s death, but God’s wrath abides on him. McLaren has formally denied the faith. He and his followers have fulfilled the Word spoken of Scripture, that they “*being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*”²² One can see McLaren’s heresy in other pastors and authors in the Emerging Church movement, such as Alan Jones. McLaren has endorsed Jones’ book, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit without Disconnecting Your Mind*. Alan Jones, like McLaren, rejects what is central and pivotal to the Gospel message. Jones brazenly declares, “The Church’s fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it.”²³ Jones goes on to say, “Penal substitution was the name of this vile doctrine.”²⁴

As we saw above, the Lord declared, “*He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*”²⁵ If McLaren and others, such as Alan Jones, continue to deny personal biblical salvation then they shall neither enjoy true life or happiness here nor in the world to come. Rather, they are now under the wrath of God’s condemnation. As there is no way of escaping the wrath of God but by the Lord Jesus Christ, those who will not personally trust and believe in Christ’s penal substitution in his or her place must go to eternity under the wrath of God and be cast, “*into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”²⁶ Such is the miserable condition of those who accept such teaching, i.e., denying personal salvation, which we have documented.

McLaren, however, is not concerned with hell because, he says, “Isn’t hell such a grave ‘bottom line’ that it devalues all other values? It so emphasizes the importance of life after death that it can unintentionally trivialize life before death. No wonder many people feel that ‘accepting Jesus as a personal Savior’ could make them a worse person—more self-centered and less concerned about justice on earth because of a preoccupation with forgiveness in heaven. Again, although I believe in Jesus as my personal savior, I am not a Christian for that reason. I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world.”²⁷

In the above statement McLaren does what countless others have done before him. He remakes Jesus into a social justice mascot. “Accepting Jesus as a personal Savior” for him is not focused on “forgiveness” but rather on “justice on earth.” The Lord Himself spoke about sin before God, and He was not an advocate of “justice on earth!” He taught that “*...whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin... if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*”²⁸ In this passage, the Lord showed that He was not referring to political bondage but to a person’s slavery

²¹ John 3:36

²² Romans 10:3

²³ Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit without Disconnecting Your Mind* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005) p. 132

²⁴ Alan Jones, p. 168

²⁵ John 3:36

²⁶ Matthew 22:13

²⁷ McLaren, p. 100 Emphasis in the original.

²⁸ John 8:34-36

to evil passions and desires. The Lord's message is about the bondage to sin and of the spiritual liberty that He brings. Christ Jesus' message is "...*except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*"²⁹ It never was a call for "justice on earth." It is interesting that the Catholic priests, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, would agree with McLaren as they wrote, "Liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor."³⁰ Let it be clearly and emphatically stated: if Christ Jesus does not save a person spiritually, that person's case is desperate, and he will die in his sins. McLaren's profession, "I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world," suggests that the whole world makes up the kingdom of God. Unless his profession is interpreted in the sense of personal repentance and salvation from sin, which he denies, McLaren's personal salvation is a socialized reduction of the Gospel message.

The true message is the clarion call of the Lord, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"³¹ The Lord's message will always be "*everlasting life*," notwithstanding a thousand McLarens who try to reduce His teaching into pragmatism, i.e., "concerned about justice on earth." McLaren needs the light of the biblical *solas* to draw him out from his efforts to demolish the Christian faith; but he has rather turned aside into a still darker haunt, Eastern mysticism.

The Mystic Poet

To move into mysticism, McLaren has yet another hindrance—the preaching of the Gospel and Bible truth in terms of methodical exegesis of Scripture, propositional knowledge, and systematic theology. To destroy these objective methods of preaching and teaching is necessary because mysticism is the attempt to have direct, subjective communication with Holy God, thereby taking to one's self the role of mediator. The Bible states clearly, however, that this role is given to the Lord Jesus Christ alone—"For... *there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*"³²

McLaren, in his chapter entitled "Why I Am Mystical/Poetic," never formally defines what a mystic is nor quotes anybody who does. Rather, he sets up a false dialectic. McLaren writes, "This mystical/poetic approach takes special pains to remember that the Bible itself contains precious little expository prose. Rather it is story laced with parable, poem interwoven with vision, dream, opera...personal letter and public song, all thrown together with an undomesticated and unedited artistic passion."³³ For him, to preach the Gospel and Bible truth in terms that primarily address the mind is to reduce it to something scientific, mechanical, and dead. His idea is that preaching needs to be done by poets who address the emotions primarily, the direct opposite of addressing the mind. He quotes Walter Brueggemann, "Poetic speech is the only proclamation worth doing in a situation of reductionism, the only proclamation, I submit, that is worthy of the name preaching."³⁴ McLaren's immediate comment on Brueggemann is this, "This non-prose world...is the world entered by the mystic, the contemplative, the visionary, the prophet, the poet." His insinuation is that men of reason and logical thinking have not under-

²⁹ Luke 13:5

³⁰ *Introducing Liberation Theology* <http://www.landreform.org/reading0.htm> 2/10/06

³¹ John 3:16

³² I Timothy 2:5

³³ McLaren, p. 155

³⁴ McLaren, p. 146

stood or used poetry at all. This suggestion is patently false. Having thus created a false distinction, he now is ready for a synthesis between the two, which allows for direct communication with God. He says, “There long have been Christian traditions recognizing the profound importance of mysticism and poetry, and the corresponding limitations of rationality and prose, including the via negativa—the negative way—and the hesychastic tradition, which discovers God in silence. Both traditions remind us of the limitations of language when talking about God...”³⁵ The hesychastic tradition³⁶ is the synthesis, or the “emergent” circle around McLaren’s misleading distinctions regarding addressing mind and emotion. Having thus been able to insert into his argument the “larger” or “emergent” idea of discovering God in silence, an Eastern monastic idea, he concludes,

“A generous orthodoxy, in contrast to the tense, narrow, controlling, or critical orthodoxies of so much of Christian history, doesn’t take itself too seriously. It is humble; it doesn’t claim too much...It doesn’t consider orthodoxy the exclusive domain of prose scholars (theologians) alone, but, like Chesterton, welcomes the poets, the mystics, and even those who choose to say very little or to remain silent, including the disillusioned and the doubters. Their silence speaks eloquently of the majesty of God that goes beyond all human articulation.”³⁷

With this, he has set the stage for mysticism and buttresses his new position by praising Ignatius of Loyola, the mystical founder of the Jesuit order and originator of the counter-Reformation—a man who died an unbeliever.³⁸

By “emergent thinking” (the Hegelian dialectical method), McLaren has worked his argument from objective teaching to mysticism and cited Ignatius of Loyola as an example that mysticism is acceptable in the West. McLaren explains, in some detail, one of his own mystical experiences with God.

“For a period of about 20 minutes, I felt that every tree, every blade of grass, and every pool of water become especially eloquent with God’s grandeur...These specific, concrete things became translucent in the sense that a powerful, indescribably, invisible light seemed to shine through. The beauty of the creations around me...seemed...to explode, seemed to detonate, seemed to radiate with glory. An ecstasy overcame me that I can’t describe. It brings tears to my eyes as I sit here and type. It was the exuberant joy of simply seeing these masterpieces of God’s creation...and knowing myself to be among them. It was to be one of them, and to feel and know that ‘we’—all of these creatures, molecules, and phenomena—were together known and loved by God, **who embraced us all into the ultimate ‘We.’**”³⁹

This man’s darkness is a heart breaker. He is stating that through this mystical experience he has been brought into the ultimate “We.” It cannot be so. God is holy, totally “other” than His creation. There is no direct communication between God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men. McLaren is tragically wrong about his experience, totally deceived by “the light” that made him think he is part of God. Confusion of God with His creation

³⁵ McLaren, p. 151

³⁶ The hesychastic tradition is basically the Eastern orthodox monastic practice.

³⁷ McLaren, p. 155

³⁸ See J. A. Wylie’s contrast of Ignatius of Loyola’s life and experience with his contemporary, Martin Luther, in *History of Protestantism*, Book Fifteenth. Originally published 1878. Reprinted by Hartland Publications, 2002. Also posted on www.bereanbeacon.org.

³⁹ McLaren, p. 178

has ever been the hallmark of Hinduism, Buddhism, and every other form of polytheism over the centuries.

The Culmination

Having reduced his idea of salvation from personal to universal, having reduced God from an All Holy God to his own notion of a mere loving god, and having redefined theology from the study of God to the study of man, McLaren has also invented a “salvation” that signifies “get out of trouble.” In all of his writing, his tactic for success is the Roman Catholic methodology of ecumenism. Behind the poetry and rhetoric of McLaren’s movement is heresy. McLaren’s paradigm is in the domain of apostasy, showing by its duplicity and falseness a withdrawal and defection from the Gospel of grace. Satan’s trick is always to promote leaders who think that they are truly Christian, while at the same time they proffer new unbiblical techniques for the glorious work of Christ Jesus. Ecumenical strategy, re-defining God, a fictitious contrast replacing the Word of truth, redefining theology, rewriting history, the utter denial of basic biblical principles, and the rejection of the Gospel are just a part of what McLaren proposes. This is the deed and work of antichrist. It is the sin of a so-called “spiritual” man. Unless present day Christians take the biblical warnings with radical seriousness and examine their own hearts and households, they can be deceived by this lethal scheme. Unless this generation of the Evangelical church takes seriously the Gospel, as the Lord and His Apostles spoke it, it will become more and more part of Papal Rome. The Church of Rome has already attempted to usurp Christ’s place and His prerogatives, and far from truly representing Him, she represents His greatest enemy. If peoples succumb to the Emerging Church movement, they will be surrendering to “...*the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*”⁴⁰ Nothing could possibly be more descriptive of the Papacy than this. It has been kept up by deception, delusion, and its pretended growth and success. Thus, we now see the growth and success of a movement that embodies much of the strategy and teaching of Papal Rome. Many of the subtle artifices of man and various pretences of the world are evident in the Emergent Church movement, yet like the Papacy it is remarkable in its propagation. What we see is patent apostasy making shipwreck of the faith. For us, however, it is to fear the All Holy God and obey His commandment and, “*hold fast the form of sound words...in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*”⁴¹ Steadfastness to the Gospel is of utmost necessity. It is dangerous when those who profess to be true Christians remain unaware of the attacks that are presently confronting the Gospel. Those who would strive for the faith of the Gospel must stand firm in it, aware of present dangers, and carry on unwavering in the hour of crisis. In the words of the Apostle, “...*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*”⁴² ♦

(In Part III, we will document the syncretistic Catholic mysticism in the Emergent Church movement.)

⁴⁰ II Thessalonians 2:9

⁴¹ II Timothy 1:13

⁴² Philippians 1:27