

Hazards unfolded by Emerging Church leaders

By Richard Bennett

It is quite difficult to define properly the Emerging Church movement. The basic conviction behind the movement is that Christianity needs to be reinvented to become relevant to our postmodern generation. The group desires to make Christianity more appropriate for our time, such as regarding the environment. The Emerging Church leaders hold that the Bible and reason do not hold the answers to life's questions. Experience, they insist, must become the key factor to encounter spiritual reality. Consequently, there are many experiential attractions promoted by the Emerging Church leaders that, in fact, are traditional Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox practices. Such things are icons, statues, prayer stations, candles, incense, and sacramental rituals. Such are the beginnings of the hazards that are upheld.

Brian McLaren, to all intents and purposes, is the main leader of this movement. He is a prime example of where we are headed as mystical experiences, and so-called contemplative prayer, continue to become more accepted and widespread. He is now joined by Phyllis Tickle as a formidable leader of Emergent Christianity.¹ The Catholic priest, Richard Rohr, is also a leading figure in the movement. The website, "*Center for Action and Contemplation*,"² states that the founder is Richard Rohr.³ He is author of a very popular book in contemplative circles, "*Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*."⁴ In January of 2008, Rohr was a "presenter" at a conference on "*Jesus and Buddha: Paths to Awakening*."⁵ Consistent with contemplative spirituality, Rohr taught the equality of Buddha with Christ and the indwelling of God in all things. Rohr taught that the teachings of both Jesus and Buddha call people to transformational honesty. He declared, "They are both teaching us how to see and how to see all the way through! They both knew that if you see God for yourself, you will see the Divine in all things."⁶

Leonard Sweet is also one of the Emerging Church leaders and a close friend of Brian McLaren. Sweet's website states, "No church leader understands better how to navigate the seas of the 21st century" and that currently he is "the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University Madison, NJ and a Visiting Distinguished Professor at George Fox University, Portland, Oregon..."⁷ His website boasts about a book that he has written that is "already called 'a spirituality classic'." Stating, "Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic is the book that launched what today is called 'postmodern publishing' as well as Len's ministry to postmodern culture..."⁸ Sweet challenges the church's reluctance to accept his insights. He writes, "So far the church has refused to dip its toe into postmodern culture. A quantum spirituality challenges the church to bear its past and to dare its future by sticking its big TOE into the time and place of the present...."⁹ Sweet's solutions are far worse than the problems he

¹ Phyllis Tickle teachings were documented in an address called, Catholic Mysticism and the Emerging Church.

² <http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/>, 1/23/09.

³ <http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/aboutus/founder.html>, 1/23/09.

⁴ <http://www.amazon.com/Everything-Belongs-Gift-Contemplative-Prayer/dp/0824519957>, 1/23/09.

⁵ <http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/JB/speakers.php>, 1/23/09.

⁶ <http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/JB/> 1/24/2009

⁷ <http://www.leonardsweet.com/biocv.asp>, 1/24/09.

⁸ <http://www.leonardsweet.com/Quantum/>, 1/24/09,

⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, p. 10

claims to be resolving. As other leaders, he incorporates New Age concepts, practices from eastern mysticism, universalism, and pantheism. Brian McLaren said of Sweet's 2001 book "*Carpe Manana*". "I am a better pastor and a better Christian because of Len's brilliant and stimulating work. *Carpe Manana* is a...valuable continuation of the conversation he has been having with the church in America for many years."¹⁰

In the Emergent Church, Jason Clark is one of the influential promoters of the movement in the UK. Clark states about himself, "I have a Doctor of Ministry degree in the area of "Church and Culture" and am now a PhD candidate at Kings College London, researching theological assessments of consumerism and the implications for ecclesiology. I lecture, and teach, in the UK, and internationally on a regular basis. I co-ordinate a resource network, Emergent UK, and I am a council member of the Evangelical Alliance UK."

He writes about the things he most loves and values in the Emergent movement. "1. Theology: the freedom and company to think theologically, to find integration of my faith into a postmodern world. That church planting is no longer predicated upon getting people to pray a prayer to go to heaven when they die. The Gospel is much bigger and than that myopic premise. Finding the face of God in thinking theologically, honestly and openly, does not make you a heretic or backslider." 2. Experiment: Freedom to do church differently, to experiment, and do lots that is the same, both extremes are true and needed. 3. Connection: to people all around the world, from many countries and many church tribes. Generous: realize that there is no postmodern way of doing churches, there are many ways, and we need many more, some like they currently are and some radically different, many valid and connecting in different context."

Jason Clark has been the pastor of Vineyard Church, Sutton, UK for twelve years. On January 29, 2009 he was carded to do his part among several lecturers in a presentation of "Exploring the Emerging Church: Theology, Culture, Ritual, and Meaning" at Calvin College Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA."¹¹

Rob Bell is another director of the Movement. He is especially popular in Christian high schools and youth groups. He is the author of *Velvet Elvis*. He is also the creator of mini-film series called Noomas, from the Greek word, pneuma; meaning spirit or breath. Rob Bell is very open about his affinities towards the mystical. For example he states, "We're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life."¹²

Popular also is Dan Kimball. His book, *The Emerging Church*, explains how post-modernists think and feel from previous generations. Kimball holds that the basis of learning has shifted from rational and logical thought to the realm of experience. People, he insists, increasingly desire the mystical rather than the evidential, and facts based faith. Such occult mysticism is sugarcoated, deadly poison, which is typical of the Emerging Church. Other examples of influential persons in the Emerging Church Movement are Dallas Willard, Calvin Miller, and the former Catholic Priest, Brennan Manning.

¹⁰ <http://www.leonardsweet.com/sweetened/books.asp>, 1/24/09.

¹¹ Documentation for what we quote are on the blogs at: <http://deepchurch.org.uk> and the web site: <http://www.vineyardchurch.org/>

¹² Quoted in a 2004 *Christianity Today* article titled 'Emergent Mystique'

Another Emerging Church leader is Erwin McManus who stated that his “goal is to destroy Christianity as a world religion and be a recatalyst for the movement of Jesus Christ.”¹³ McManus’ own words about his book “The Barbarian Way” are the following,

The Barbarian Way was, in some sense, trying to create a volatile fuel to get people to step out and act. It’s pretty hard to get a whole group of people moving together as individuals who are stepping into a *more mystical*, faith-oriented, dynamic kind of experience with Christ. So, I think *Barbarian Way* was my attempt to say, ‘Look, underneath what looks like invention, innovation and creativity is really a *core mysticism* that hears from God, and what is fuelling this is something really ancient.’ That’s what was really the core of *The Barbarian Way*.”¹⁴

“A core mysticism that hears from God” is the very heart of what it means to bypass the mind and Jesus Christ as the one mediator, and to lead people to the spirit world, totally unprotected by the Lord and the Holy Spirit. At the present time, there is a lack of biblical discernment with some who are considered well-respected Christians. For example, Evangelical apologist Ravi Zacharias states, “One of the greatest saints of recent memory was Henri Nouwen.”¹⁵ Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) was a Catholic mystical monk. Nouwen remains a veritable celebrity teacher of neo-Gnostic Contemplative Mysticism. On top of this, he explicitly taught universal salvation for everyone. He wrote, “Today I personally believe that Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her way to God.”¹⁶ It is only when Christians contend for the faith, and study the horrendous hazards of such as the Emerging Church movement, that we can avoid such deceptive statements like that made by Ravi Zacharias of Henri Nouwen.

As we stated at the beginning, Brian McLaren is the main director of this movement. Therefore, we need to study what he has written is the policy of the association. In his book, “*A Generous Orthodoxy*,” McLaren explains that the genesis and title of the Emergent Church movement takes its model from the growth of a tree. He writes,

“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....”¹⁷

While this definition gives an excellent picture of McLaren’s *modus operandi*, it also is the Hegelian dialectic idea¹⁸ in a different format. Such change does not describe the biblical pattern

¹³ Christian Examiner, March 2005

¹⁴ http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god_article.php?id=6989 1/26/2009

¹⁵ <http://apprising.org/category/henri-nouwen/>

¹⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*, (Crossroad Publishing Company: New York, NY, 1998), 51.

¹⁷ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004) pp. 276-278 Underlining in any quotation indicates emphasis in original text.

¹⁸ 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.

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.”¹⁹ 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.”²⁰

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 that²¹ into Eastern mysticism, which would be the new ring around Catholicism.

The “Solas”—the Basic Biblical Principles Utterly Denied

In order to accomplish his first step of lumping Protestants and Catholics together, McLaren has to redefine, biblical distinctives, biblical authority, Holy God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation. McLaren makes it very clear that conservative Protestants will have to compromise the five basic biblical principles, called “the solas” for the sake of community; otherwise they cannot be part of his “generous orthodoxy.” According to McLaren the solas must be discarded. Thus, he proclaims, “Calvinists in particular and fundamentalists in general” are to give up their “*solas*” or “alones” as distinctives because the word *sola* is not in the Bible.²² What he is telling the Bible believers is that they must renounce the five basic biblical principles—these very principles that separated the Reformers from the Roman Catholic Church. These basic biblical principles are the very essence of Christian faith. After the example of the Lord and the Apostles, true believers adhere to God’s written Word alone as the final authority—*Sola Scriptura*.²³ Before the all-holy God, according to the Bible, an individual is saved by grace alone—*Sola Gratia*,²⁴ through faith alone—*Sola Fide*,²⁵ in Christ alone—*Solo Christo*.²⁶ Following on this, all glory and praise is to God alone—*Soli Deo Gloria*.²⁷ 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

¹⁹ McLaren, pp. 284-285

²⁰ “... 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.

²¹ McLaren, p. 210

²² McLaren, p. 198

²³ John 10:35,17:17, Proverbs 30:5-6, I Corinthians 4:6, II Timothy 3:15-17

²⁴ Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:8, 9

²⁵ Acts 16:31, Romans. 4:5, 5:1

²⁶ Ephesians 1:3-14, I Timothy 2:5, Acts 4:12

²⁷ I Corinthians 10: 31, Colossians 3:17

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.

The first and most fundamental of these principles, ‘Sola Scriptura’ the authority of the Bible alone as the standard of truth, McLaren utterly weakens. He 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.”²⁸ 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....”²⁹ 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 as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*”.³⁰ 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....*”³¹ 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.*”³²

History Fabricated to Meet Desired Purposes

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.”³³ 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.”³⁴ 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

²⁸ McLaren, p. 162

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) Para 81. Square brackets and italic in the original

³⁰ II Peter 1:20, 21

³¹ II Timothy 3:16, 17

³² Luke 11:52

³³ McLaren, p. 162

³⁴ *Catechism*, Para 80

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.”³⁵

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.”*³⁶ 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 him.”*³⁷ 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 in 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.”*³⁸ One can see McLaren’s heresy in other pastors and authors in the Emerging Church movement, such as Phyllis Tickle, Richard Rohr, Leonard Sweet, Rob Bell, Dan Kimball, and Erwin McManus

The Consequences

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.”*³⁹ If McLaren and the others that we have named 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.”*⁴⁰ Such is the miserable condition of those who accept such teaching, i.e., denying personal salvation, which we have documented. The Gospel 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.”*⁴¹ The Lord’s message will always be *“everlasting life,”* notwithstanding a thousand McLarens who try to reduce His teaching to experience and emergence. McLaren and his breed need the light of the biblical *solas* to draw them from their efforts to demolish the Christian faith; but they have rather turned aside into a still darker haunt—Catholic mysticism.

³⁵ McLaren, p. 93

³⁶ Luke 12:5

³⁷ John 3:36

³⁸ Romans 10:3

³⁹ John 3:36

⁴⁰ Matthew 22:13

⁴¹ John 3:16

The Culmination

McLaren and his kind have attempted to modernize the ancient Universalist concept of salvation from personal to global. They have attempted to reduce God from being the All Holy God to their own notion of a mere loving god. They have redefined theology from the study of God to the study of man. In their writings and presentations, their tactic for success is the Roman Catholic methodology of false ecumenism. Their 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, this is the deed and work of antichrist. 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 present day Christian churches with their pastors take seriously the Gospel, as the Lord and His Apostles spoke it, churches can 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 people succumb to the Emerging Church movement, they will be surrendering to "...*the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*"⁴² 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.*"⁴³ Steadfastness to the Gospel is of utmost necessity. It is dangerous when those who profess to be true Christians remain unaware of the hazards 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.*"⁴⁴



Permission is given to copy and distribute this article.

Our MP3s are easily downloaded and our DVDs seen on Sermon Audio at:

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/212>

Our website is: <http://www.bereanbeacon.org>

⁴² II Thessalonians 2:9

⁴³ II Timothy 1:13

⁴⁴ Philippians 1:27