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The Challenge of the Emerging Church

by Gary E. Gilley

The emergent church is a slippery name for a slippery movement. The movement is so new (originated in the late 1990s), so fragmented, and so varied that there is no defining it. It has no official leaders¹ or headquarters;² some have said that there are thousands of expressions yet only a few churches have sold out to the concept; and even those claiming the name can't agree on what is going on.³

Brian McLaren, the closest to a spokesperson for the movement so far, states:

"Right now Emergent is a conversation, not a movement. ... We don't have a program. We don't have a model. I think we must begin as a conversation, then grow as a friendship, and see if a movement comes of it."⁴

The name "emerging church" speaks of a church that is emerging from something, coming out of more traditional expressions of the church, and emerging into a postmodern expression. Its adherents see it as a postmodern church for a postmodern culture.

Even this gets tricky because the prefix "post" has become all too trendy. We hear not only of post-



modern, but also of post-Christian, post-Protestant, post-analytical, post-liberal, post-conservative, post-everything. The problem with "post" is that it describes what one is not, much better than it describes what one is.

McLaren believes that defining "postmodern" is premature⁵ — we don't yet know what form it will take, so defining the postmodern church is even more problematic. Emergent church leaders all believe that the modern church cannot connect with the postmodern mind. But for now we can say the emergent church is a movement chasing a culture.

Dan Kimball, author of *The Emerging Church*, says this is necessary because the "basis of learning has shifted from logic and rational, systematic thought to the realm of experience. People increasingly long for the mystical and the spiritual rather than the evidential and facts-based faith of the modern soil."⁶

Kimball suggests that the seeker-sensitive church, the church that chased the last generation's culture, is out of date:

"...the things that seeker-sensitive churches removed from their

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HARMENEUTICS

Paul wrote to Timothy that he should “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me” (2 Timothy 1:13). The Apostle knew that sound doctrine has a good effect on the spiritual health of the Christian. He encouraged the young pastor to keep and guard sound teaching, for without doing so, the result would be confused Christians and an unhealthy Church.

We are to protect the integrity of the Scriptures, and we do this in part by demanding a proper interpretation. Unfortunately, many Christians do not want to work hard at rightly dividing the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) to gain a proper interpretation. This lack of effort opens them to be titillated with all sorts of fanciful and far-out interpretations. It is the seedbed for the cults and aberrational teachers.

Gary Gilley notes that in the process of interpretation “there are a number of difficulties that confront the Bible student.” But we need not panic, as Richard Mayhue reminds us that there are “seasoned guides” who can help us clear these stumbling blocks. These guides “can lead through new territory, over troublesome terrain, and around dangerous obstacles. They also will serve to keep you from getting lost or ending up on a dead-end path. Beyond this, they will point out important details that might be overlooked in your beginning travels.”

Sadly, many Christians look to teachers who offer novel interpretations rather than sound hermeneutics.

While these men and women want their followers to believe they are revealing spiritual insights that might otherwise have been missed, they are in fact sending people down a dead-end path or a deadly drift. It is a case of the blind leading the blind (Matthew 15:14) and followers turning a deaf ear to the truth (2 Timothy 4:4).

Some of these interpretations should tip us off as to the ineptness of the teacher. Benny Hinn’s claims disintegrate when his sermons are subjected to even a cursory review. Take, for instance, his sermon where he boasted of his astute Bible knowledge because he is an “Israelite” and knows things most Westerners don’t know. It was here that he claimed the “Jews got angry” with Jesus when He stated He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. Regrettable for Hinn is the context in which our Lord’s proclamation was made. His words were not that of a public discourse, but a private one given in the upper room to His disciples as they celebrated the Passover meal (John 14:6, cf. John 13:1-2). Neither the Jews, nor His disciples, “got angry.”

Another example is Hinn’s sermon on Luke 24 and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Here Hinn said, “And the Holy Spirit made it so clear to us that these two were never mentioned again in the Bible. It’s almost like they were dishonored. We don’t even know who they are. To this day we do not know their names.” Once again, a simple reading of the text shows Hinn’s incompetence. Luke’s report of the pair does not end on the road with their being “dishonored,” but continues as

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News Updates

TBN PULLS PLUG ON LINDSEY

Prophecy author Hal Lindsey has had his television show dropped by the Trinity Broadcasting Network. The best-selling author of such books as *The Late, Great Planet Earth* contends the network removed the show from its lineup in an effort to silence his views on radical Islam. The network first insisted that censorship was not a factor, but later issued a statement that said TBN officials were concerned about offending Arabs and Muslims.

On Dec. 1, Lindsey arrived at TBN's facilities to tape his program, but was told to cease production because TBN management did not approve of the script. TBN's official stance is that Islam is essentially a peaceful religion. "That's where we violently disagree," Lindsey is quoted as saying in a WorldNetDaily report. "Islam is not a peaceful religion; although there may be moderate Muslims, it's because they have not become followers of the Quran," he added.

Lindsey's program, "International Intelligence Briefing," was scheduled to return to TBN's lineup in January, according to John Casoria, general counsel for the network. TBN said it suspended the program to make room for Christmas-themed broadcasts. Lindsey argued that this was the first time in the 12-year history of "IIB" that his December programs had been preempted because of a lack of seasonal content. In early January, Lindsey countered that "he will not return to his twice-weekly Christian commentary program," because of the network's effort to suppress his opinions, according to WorldNetDaily.

As reports of TBN's actions were picked up by the media, TBN President Paul Crouch issued a letter saying that a resolution to the dispute was possible. The letter stated, "Hal and I have talked about the potential return of Hal's 'International Intelligence Briefing' to the TBN programming schedule. This is certainly my desire and Hal has indicated to me that he is very interested in returning to his regular time slot." However, Crouch's correspondence also requested guidelines be set by Lindsey as to his content by avoiding "political aspects" and targeting "biblical perspectives."

Lindsey immediately responded and vowed never to return to the network. Lindsey told WorldNetDaily, "I am not going back to TBN. There's a friendship there, but also differences in opinion in what ought and ought not to be presented. And I don't want any censorship."

—MKG

OSTEENS GROUNDED

In December, Joel Osteen, pastor of the huge Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, his wife Victoria, and two children boarded a commercial flight at Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston bound for a Vail, Colo., ski vacation. A short time later the Osteen family walked off the Continental Airlines plane — still on the ground in Houston. The family's holiday plans were temporarily grounded as a result of an altercation between the pastor's wife and a flight attendant. Mrs. Osteen "failed to comply with the flight attendant's instructions, and they were asked to leave the flight," according to an FBI representative.

As a result of the incident, other passengers on the flight had their holiday plans delayed for about two hours while the Osteens left the plane and had their luggage retrieved.

According to Sheila Steele, a passenger sitting behind Mrs. Osteen, "She was just abusive. She was just like one of those divas." According to a *Houston Chronicle* report, a dispute arose when Mrs. Osteen "was upset about liquid on her pull-down tray and asked a flight attendant to have it cleaned." When the flight attendant answered that she was not able to immediately respond to the request, Mrs. Osteen, "pushed a flight attendant and tried to get into the cockpit," the newspaper stated. Another passenger said Pastor Osteen was "very calm, very professional," throughout the ordeal.

The FBI added that the situation "was quickly resolved between the airline and the Osteens." Continental Airlines refused to comment other than to say the "situation was resolved." Mrs. Osteen explained that contrary to the FBI statement and news reports that she was asked to leave the airplane, it was her choice "to remove myself from the situation." The Osteen family subsequently boarded another flight to Vail.

—MKG

DREAM TAKER?

In 2003, author Bruce Wilkinson tried to equal the success of his 2000 run-away best-seller, *The Prayer of Jabez*, with *The Dream Giver*. This latter self-help volume encouraged its readers to go after the big dream of "what God wants to do in His world *through you*."

At the time of the book's release, Wilkinson was responding to what he said was his own God-given "big
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by J. Greg Sheryl

Islam (alongside Christianity and Judaism) is one of the three great monotheistic religions on earth today. Additionally, Islam is the youngest of the world's major religions.¹ With 1.2 billion adherents worldwide — approximately one out of every six people — it is the fastest-growing religion in the world today, and the second-largest religion on earth, next to those professing Christianity.

MUHAMMAD: THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

Islam's founder, Muhammad,² whose name means "praised," was born about A.D. 570 in Mecca, which is in present-day Saudi Arabia. His father was named Abdullah and his mother Amina. He was orphaned at an early age and then reared by his grandfather for a short time. After his grandfather died, Muhammad was reared by his uncle, Abu Talib. Concerning his youth, journalist Judith Miller summarizes:

"Little is known about Muhammad's early years despite the many legends and hagiographies that have provided countless tales, most of questionable origin. After all, what is widely regarded as the most authoritative biography, that of the eighth-century believer Ibn Ishaq, was not written until 125 years after Muhammad's death."³

At age 25, Muhammad was offered and accepted a marriage proposal from his 40-year-old, wealthy, widowed employer named Khadijah. One source writes, "From then on he was free to spend time in the pursuit of religious ideals, retreating to the desert to meditate and pray."⁴

This same source states:

"At the age of 40, after six months of meditation in a cave on Mount Hira,⁵ the vision came to him. The messenger was the angel Gabriel, Muhammad claimed, and his appearance on that night in 610 A.D., the Night of Power,⁶ was his turning point. That night, he claimed, the word of God came down from the seventh heaven to the first, entrusted to Gabriel, who would dictate it to Muhammad as occasion demanded. 'Proclaim!' the voice commanded him. 'Proclaim in the name of the Lord, the Creator, who created man from a clot of blood! Proclaim! Your Lord is most gracious. It is He who has taught man by the pen that which he does not know.'⁷ The Night of Power launched Muhammad on his mission, and he emerged from the cave of Hira as the prophet of Islam, through whom, his followers

would claim, the final revelations of God would be given."⁸

The collection of Muhammad's revelations over the remaining 22 or 23 years of his life became the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. In a *surah* (chapter) of the Qur'an, Muhammad is called "the Seal of the prophets,"⁹ meaning that he is "the last and the greatest of all prophets who superseded all prophets before him, including Jesus."¹⁰

Initially, Muhammad was unsure of whether his visions were from God, or whether he might be demon-possessed. One source notes:

"At first Muhammad was deathly afraid of the source of his newly found revelation, believing that he was possessed by a *jinn* or evil spirit. But he found in Khadija a great source of comfort and encouragement."¹¹

Muhammad continued to have revelations, which he believed were from God. Three years after his first revelation, he began to preach to his fellow Meccans.¹² For the most part, he was not well-received, and, indeed, was persecuted by some. Still, he had some converts, among whom were his wife Khadijah and his friend Abu Bakr.

His wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib both died in A.D. 619. Although he took no additional wives

while Khadijah was living, he took several after her death. Estimates of the number of wives he had after Khadijah's death range from at least eight¹³ to 13 or more.¹⁴ Two of his marriages were controversial. He took a 6-year-old girl named Aisha as a wife, and consummated the marriage when she was nine. She became his favorite wife. Regarding another:

"After he had married his sixth wife he desired to marry Zainab, the beautiful wife of Zaid, his adopted son. According to Arab custom it was unlawful for a man to marry the wife of an adopted son, even if her husband divorced her. However, a revelation came to Muhammad that God had permitted him to have Zainab, whereupon Zaid divorced her and she became Muhammad's seventh wife."¹⁵

Theology and ethics professor James A. Beverley provides this biography:

"Muslims believe that in 620, one year after the death of Muhammad's first wife, the angel Gabriel brought Muhammad by night to Jerusalem on the back of a heavenly horse named Buruq. In the holy city the prophet conversed with Jesus, Moses, and Abraham.¹⁶ Then, according to the Quran, Muhammad and his angel companion were taken by ladder to the seventh heaven. Muslims believe that the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is built on the spot from which Muhammad ascended. This episode is known as the *miraj*."¹⁷

Thus, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is Islam's third-holiest site.

The year A.D. 622 was pivotal, both in the life of Muhammad himself and also in the history of Islam. In that year, due to persecution, Muhammad fled from his birthplace of Mecca to a place called Yathrib, 280 miles north of Mecca. Yathrib was later renamed Medina, "the city of the Prophet." Located in present-day Saudi Arabia, it is second only to Mecca as the holiest place in Islam. It is also where Muhammad is buried. As one scholar explains:

"July 16, 622, is the most famous date in Islam. It is known as the flight to Medina, the Hegira. It is the beginning of the Islamic calendar, year 1 A.H. (After the Hegira). Muhammad, Ali [Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law], Abu Bakr, and his followers took up residence in what was to become the second most important city in Islam."¹⁸

Beverley also details the last years of Muhammad's life:

"Then, for eight long and bitter years, the Prophet engaged in repeated military battles with his Meccan enemies. There were significant victories (most notably on March 15, 624, at Badr) and major setbacks, one being at Uhud just a year later. By January 630, however, Muhammad triumphed, took control of Mecca, and destroyed the idols in the Kaba. Medina continued to be his home base. He led military campaigns in northern Arabia, and returned to Mecca for a final pilgrimage in early 632. He was in poor health at the time, traveled back to Medina, and died on June 8 of that year, in the embrace of Aisha, one of his many wives."¹⁹

During Muhammad's final pilgrimage to Mecca, "He there delivered an address in which he said, 'This day I have perfected your religion for you' (Sura 5:5)."²⁰

AFTER MUHAMMAD'S DEATH: DIVISION

Muhammad had no male heir and he appointed no successor. After his death, there was a division among the Muslims as to who should succeed him. Some thought the matter should be decided by consensus of the community. Others thought Muhammad's successor should be a relative of his. The group that favored a consensus won out, at least initially, and thus it was decided that Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr would become the first caliph (successor). This group that favored a successor to Muhammad being chosen by consensus became the Sunni group within Islam.

The other group, which thought Muhammad's successor should be from his relatives — in this case, they thought it should be Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin — became the Shiites. Thus, we have the two main groups of Muslims that exist in the world today.²¹ It is estimated that 90 percent of today's 1.2 billion Muslims are Sunnis, and the remaining 10 percent are either Shiites or else one of the smaller divisions or sects of Islam. The Sufis, one example of which are the famous "whirling dervishes," are not a separate branch of Islam; rather:

"The Sufis are those within both Sunni and Shi'ite Islam who sought in their direct experience with God, to fill this gap — the need for human experience [of God]. The Sufis are known as the mystics of Islam."²²

The renowned poet Rumi was a Sufi.

THE QUR'AN: ISLAM'S HOLY BOOK

As mentioned above, the collected revelations of Muhammad over the last 22 or 23 years of his life became the Qur'an. The Qur'an is roughly the length of the New Testament, and is divided into 114 surahs, or chapters, and contains 6,616 verses.²³ Each verse of the Qur'an is called an *aya*.²⁴

In most editions of the Qur'an, the surahs are not organized chronologically. Rather, with the exception of the very short first surah (which forms sort of an introduction to the remainder of the Qur'an), the surahs are generally organized by length, with the longer surahs being at the beginning of the Qur'an and the shorter surahs at the end.

The Qur'an is regarded to be the uncreated, eternal, perfect Word of God, a copy of the Word of God in heaven. "Islam teaches that the Qur'an is an exact word-for-word copy of God's final revelation, words inscribed on tablets that have always existed in heaven."²⁵ Also:

"Muslims call the Qur'an the 'Mother of books' (sura 43:3), and believe no other book or

revelation can compare. Surahs 2:23 and 10:37-38 challenge anyone to 'present some other book of equal beauty.'"26

Muslims have a regard for the Qur'an similar to what Christians have — not for the Bible — but for Christ Himself.²⁷ Additionally, "Muslims are exhorted to wash and purify themselves before touching the Quran. They must not hold it below waist level, or place any book or object on top of it."²⁸

As Dr. George Braswell explains:

"Islam then is a book religion. It was revealed from Gabriel to Muhammad in the Arabic language. Arabic thus becomes intertwined with the revelation itself. Any translation into another language loses its original authenticity."²⁹

Donald S. Tingle has similarly noted, "Muslims generally believe that the Qur'an is untranslatable. Therefore, any attempt at a translation is really a commentary on the Arabic Qur'an."³⁰ Again, Tingle has written that, "Many Muslims believe that the Arabic Qur'an can never be translated adequately, and so it should be memorized and recited in Arabic even if it is not your native language."³¹

Muslims believe:

"There are 104 Islamic sacred books of direct revelation, but only four still exist: the Book of the Law (Torah) delivered through Moses, the Psalms through David, the Gospel through Jesus, and the most important book, the Quran through Muhammad."³²

Muslims also believe that God has sent 124,000 prophets to mankind. "In the Qur'an the names of 28 prophets are found, most of whom are biblical characters."³³ Of this number:

"Four are Arabs. Three are from the New Testament: Zechariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. The rest are from the Old Testament. Thus the Quran asserts, 'To every people was sent a Messenger.' (Surah] 10:48). Islam gives high

titles to six prophets: Adam is the Chosen of God, Noah is the Preacher of God, Abraham is the Friend of God, Moses is the Speaker of God, Jesus is the Word of God, Muhammad is the Apostle of God."³⁴

What are some of the themes of the Qur'an? James A. Beverley provides for us "the eight major themes"³⁵ discussed in the Qur'an as: Allah; Muhammad; the Quran itself; biblical material; Jesus; true believers; unbelievers; and heaven, hell, and judgment day.³⁶

ISLAM: ITS PRACTICES AND BELIEFS

The word *Islam* means "submission," and a Muslim is "one who submits" (to God). Like Christianity, Islam is a missionary faith.³⁷ It seeks to convert others. Muslims believe that their religion is the final and the best religion. For instance:

"Muslims sometimes tell the story of travelers who stopped at a desert oasis to refresh themselves. Some stayed behind while others journeyed forward. Then the group that went on came to a second oasis more beautiful than the first and refreshed themselves. Some remained, but others continued on their journey until they arrived at the most beautiful oasis of all. Muslims would say that the first group are the Jews, the second group the Christians and the third group the Muslims."³⁸

Muslim convert to Christianity Abdul Saleeb gives another Muslim illustration of the supposed superiority of Islam over Judaism and Christianity:

"Muslims pride themselves that they are the final religion. They are the most perfect and elevated religion of all humanity. In fact, you hear many times people illustrate that ... Judaism is like elementary school; Christianity is like high school; and Islam is like the university — you kind of graduate into this spiritual maturity when you become a Muslim."³⁹

Two attributes of God that are emphasized in Islam are His oneness and his transcendence. God's transcendence means:

"God is distinct from his world, does not need it, and exceeds the grasp of any created intelligence that is found in it (a truth sometimes expressed by speaking of the *mystery and incomprehensibility* of God)."⁴⁰

Concerning Islam's emphasis on the oneness and transcendence of God, one source notes:

"Muhammad preached a strict monotheism and prevailed. But the monotheism was so severe that no room was left for the Christian affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Although the Christianity Muhammad rejected was largely heretical, worshipping Jesus and Mary as gods in addition to God (*surah* 5:119), Muhammad firmly denounced such believers as guilty of the greatest of all sins, *shirk* (associating partners with God). To this day Islam stresses the indivisible unity of God. Instead of *unity* Muslim scholars sometimes use the more severe word *unicity* to emphasize both God's absolute oneness and uniqueness. God's nature remains separate from creation and unmanifested; he reveals his will but not himself."⁴¹

Again, according to this same source:

"For the Muslim this transcendence of God must never be forgotten. Even though the Qur'an teaches that God is closer to man than his jugular vein (*surah* 50:16), still God is seen as wholly transcendent and never to be mingled with his creation."⁴²

While God's oneness and transcendence are emphasized in Islam, God's love, holiness, and immanence (i.e., His permeating His creation) are not emphasized. Concerning God's love in Islam, Drs. John Ankerberg and John Weldon state:

"In Islam, Allah's love is based on conditional performance and/or divine decree. In Islamic theology, much like Buddhist philosophy, the concept of love seems [to be] primarily that of 'mercy.' It is more impersonal than personal."⁴³

In one sense, Islam is a simple faith, in that what is required of the individual believer in Islam is clearly delineated. There are five — or some would say six — practices (pillars) and five — or some would say six — articles of faith required of each Muslim. George Braswell has written, "The Quran marks out the straight path ([surah] 1:6; 6:154), and of all world religions Islam has the clearest and most concise description of how to please God."⁴⁴

It is common for works introducing Islam to at least mention the five pillars (duties) of Islam. These are the five (or six) required practices for each person who claims Islam as their religion:

1. The Confession of Faith (the *Shahada*) — "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet." For a person to sincerely make this declaration publicly is all that is required to become a Muslim.

2. Prayer (*salat*) — This involves the ritual of prayers five times a day. ("Shi'a [i.e., Shiite] Muslims combine two of the prayers requiring them to pray only three times in the day."⁴⁵) James Beverley has written, "The length [of the prayers] varies during each of the five prayer times, but one can count on praying at least one hour every day."⁴⁶

3. Giving (*zakat*) — This is Muslims giving 2.5 percent of their income. Because giving is a requirement, it is more like a tax than like a freewill offering.

4. Fasting (*sawm*) — Unless a person's health prevents it, each Muslim is required to fast from dawn to sunset on the 30 days of the month of Ramadan, which is the 9th month in the Muslim calendar. This month is the month when Muhammad supposedly began receiving his revelations.

5. Pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*) — Each Muslim who is financially and physically able to do so is required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The rituals accompanying this pilgrimage require several days to perform.

6. *Jihad* ("striving" or "exertion in the cause of God"⁴⁷) — This is sometimes considered a sixth pillar of Islam.

About the pillars or duties of the individual Muslim believer listed above, Braswell observes, "The pillars are demanding. They are time-consuming. The Quran requires them. One does not question them."⁴⁸

In addition to the six pillars, or deeds, of Islam, there are also six beliefs that Islam requires of its adherents. (Whether or not the sixth belief is required is debatable):

1. One God, Allah.

2. God's angels.

3. God's prophets.

4. God's Scriptures — As mentioned above, they believe four sets of Scripture have survived: The Law of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus, and, most importantly, the Qur'an through Muhammad.

5. The Day of Judgment, which includes belief in heaven and hell.

6. Predestination — This is sometimes listed as an article of the Islamic faith. "Muslims believe *everything* that happens, *both good and evil*, is predestined by Allah's will, his immutable decree."⁴⁹

Thus, we see that according to Islam, Allah requires both right actions and also right beliefs.⁵⁰

SIX SOURCES OF AUTHORITY⁵¹

No, we are not playing with the number "666" here. There just happen to be six sources of authority for the individual Muslim (although a Muslim would normally only *acknowledge* the first four to be sources of authority for them):

1. First, and most importantly, the Qur'an, which is believed to be the

eternal and very Word of God.

2. A second source of authority for the Muslim is the *hadith*, which are the written traditions about the words and deeds of Muhammad and his contemporary followers.⁵² There are various collections of hadith compiled by different individuals. Braswell writes, "An early collection of Hadith by al-Bukari from about A.D. 870 is a popular collection."⁵³ (Although Muslims would normally state that the hadith are secondary in importance to the Qur'an, in actual practice, most Muslims combine information from both sources, without even realizing that they are doing so.)

Based upon the information contained in the Qur'an and the hadith are two further sources of authority:

3. *Ijma* — This is the consensus of the spiritual leaders of the Muslim community.

4. *Qiyas* — Analogical reasoning used to process information contained in the Qur'an and the hadith.

These first four acknowledged sources of authority for the individual Muslim are also the basis for *shari'ah* (Islamic law). Normally unacknowledged sources of authority for the individual Muslim are:

5. *Adat* — The custom of the Muslim community to which one belongs. That is, what is everybody else in the Muslim community doing? Within this source of authority is contained what Christians, particularly, would regard as superstitions, such as charms to ward off the "evil eye;" good luck charms; in general, practices believed to ward off evil and/or bring good luck; pilgrimages to the shrines or tombs of Muslim saints; etc. These sorts of *animistic* practices are common among Muslims, and are sometimes referred to by missiologists, among others, as "folk Islam."

6. *Qanan* — International law.

ISLAM'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BIBLE AND JESUS

Islam teaches that the Bible was originally correct, but that it has been changed and corrupted. This charge is completely groundless, but Islam *must* say this to explain the differences

between the Qur'an's renderings of biblical events and doctrines versus the Bible's own accounts and teachings regarding these same events and doctrines. The Qur'an contains biblical narratives, but it changes at least some of these narratives from what the Bible relates.

John Ankerberg and John Weldon, citing a work by Robert Morey, enumerate some of the differences between the Qur'an's version of events and the Bible's version of those same events:

"Muslims and Christians agree that it is impossible for God to inspire error in His Word. The Quran, however, contains a large number of statements that contradict the Bible. ... Dr. Robert Morey lists more than 100 contradictions; for example, citing A. Yusuf Ali's translation (one accepted by Muslims), the Quran teaches that the ark of Noah came to rest on the top of Mt. Judi (Sura 11:44), not Mt. Ararat as the Bible teaches; that Abraham's father was Azar (Sura 6:74), not Terah as the Bible teaches; that he attempted to sacrifice Ishmael (Sura 37:100-112), not Isaac as the Bible teaches; that Pharaoh's wife adopted Moses (Sura 28:8-9), not his daughter as the Bible teaches; that Noah's flood occurred in Moses' day (Sura 7:136, cf., 7:59ff.); that Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave birth to Jesus under a palm tree (Sura 19:22), not in a stable as the Bible teaches; that Mary's father was named Imram (Sura 66:12); and many more."⁵⁴

Not only does the Qur'an contradict the Bible's version of certain narratives, but Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb note at least one instance in which the Qur'an even contradicts itself. They write:

"In [sura] 7:54 (and 32:4) we are told that the world was made in six days. But in [sura] 41:9-12 it says it took God a total of eight days to create the world (two plus four plus two). But both cannot be correct."⁵⁵

The attitude of Islam toward Jesus could be summarized as positive, but fatally inadequate: Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet sent by God, that He had a virgin birth, that He was sinless, that He healed people, and even raised people from the dead. Despite agreeing with Christianity about all these points, Islam teaches that Jesus was only a man. What it explicitly denies about Jesus is that He is the Son of God (see, e.g., surah 4:171; 112:3-4) and the Redeemer. It also denies that He was crucified on the Cross (see surah 4:157); therefore, of course, He wasn't resurrected either. Donald Tingle has written:

"Muslims deny the death of Jesus, because it is incomprehensible to them that God would permit a prophet to be killed. All prophets are opposed, but they all prevail in their lifetimes. To believe otherwise would be to question the power of God."⁵⁶

In view of what Tingle has written, one can only wonder what Muslims would make of biblical prophets who were killed, such as Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20-21); Isaiah, who tradition records was sawn in two; John the Baptist; and others. Additionally, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem as a city "who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her" (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). And He said, concerning Himself, "I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). Perhaps Muslims would simply assert that the Bible had been corrupted in these places.

According to Islam, Jesus and Muhammad were both prophets, but Jesus was an inferior prophet to Muhammad. In other words, Islam proclaims "a different Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4). He is identical in certain ways to the Jesus of the Bible, but, being only human and not divine, He is inadequate to be man's Savior.

This brings up a couple of other issues: First, Islam does not accept the fact that every person has inherited a

sin nature; and thus, Islam denies that man even needs a Savior. From what can be gathered, Islam's attitude appears to be that man is weak and liable to stumble, but God is forgiving and merciful.⁵⁷ Thus, man needs no Savior.

Secondly, Islam also explicitly rejects belief in the Trinity, while at the same time misconstruing it as a belief in three gods, the Father, the Son, and Mary. If God had authored the Qur'an, it is difficult to imagine that He Who knows everything would misunderstand and misconvey the Christian understanding of the Trinity!

Additionally, the Qur'an actually has Jesus denying that He should be worshipped:

"Then God will say: 'Jesus son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: 'Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?'' 'Glory be to You,' he will answer, 'I could never have claimed what I have no right to. If I had ever said so, You would have surely known it. You know what is in my mind, but I know not what is in Yours. You alone know what is hidden. I told them only what You bade me. I said: 'Serve God, my Lord and your Lord.' I watched over them while living in their midst, and ever since You took me to Yourself, You have been watching them. You are the witness of all things'" (sura 5:116-117).⁵⁸

Braswell states, "A Sunni [Muslim] tradition tells of the return of Jesus as messiah. He breaks the cross, kills pigs, dies, and is buried beside Muhammad."⁵⁹ Similarly Tingle reports:

"Muslims believe that before the end of the world Jesus will come back to earth, slay all who do not accept Islam, reign for forty years, die and be buried next to Muhammad in Medina."⁶⁰

A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF MUHAMMAD AND ISLAM

Islam and Christianity are incompatible with one another; one cannot be a "Christian Muslim." And while

one can be friends with Muslims, there is no basis for the deepest kind of fellowship between a Christian and a Muslim. Christianity and Islam cannot both be true, because they contradict one another on cardinal Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, and so forth. Let us examine Islam's truth claims for a moment.

In responding to the question, "Did Muhammad really believe what he taught?" James Beverley responds:

"Yes. Critics of Muhammad who argue that he was a fraud pay little attention to the enormous evidence of his total commitment to his religion. He actually fought in military battle to defend his faith, something hard to imagine if he was a con artist."⁶¹

If, indeed, Muhammad was sincere, this is a good quality. However, sincerity by itself is not enough. No, for we all know that a person can be *sincerely* wrong. Indeed, a person who is *sincerely* wrong may be more deadly than a person who is an out-and-out fraud; because the sincere person speaks from a conviction that what he says and/or does is the truth, which can be more compelling to others than an outright charlatan who realizes the falsity of his words and actions.

Islam also believes very strongly in monotheism. This is commendable. But that by itself is not enough, for James tells us, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!" (James 2:19).⁶²

By setting himself up as the prophet *par excellence*, and the Qur'an as the corrector and "superseder" of all other Scriptures, Muhammad effectively made all other prophets and Scriptures unnecessary, obsolete, and irrelevant. According to Islam, Muhammad *alone* is the greatest prophet; the Qur'an *alone* is the uncorrupted Scripture. Thus, Islam seeks to *replace* the Bible as the Word of God with the Qur'an as the Word of God, falsely insisting that the revelations in the original, uncorrupted Bible agree with the revelations in the Qur'an. Yet

Muhammad and the Qur'an do not teach what Jesus and the Bible teach. And because the Bible has not been corrupted (as Islam falsely claims) — if Muhammad is a true prophet of God and the Qur'an is the true Word of God, then Muhammad and the Qur'an ought to say exactly what the Bible says. But they don't. Someone is wrong — Jesus and Muhammad cannot both be prophets of God, because their messages were different.

The Bible declares, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

Christian apologist and author Ravi Zacharias was once asked by a Muslim store owner, "What do you think of Muhammad?" Zacharias was taken aback by the man's question, but decided to answer it.

Their interchange went something like this: "Do you believe that Muhammad was a prophet?" Zacharias asked. "Yes," replied the Muslim. "Was Jesus a prophet?" Zacharias asked. "Yes," replied the Muslim. "Did Muhammad say Jesus was a prophet?" asked Zacharias. "Yes," the man responded. "Can a prophet of God lie?" Zacharias queried. The man now realizing the paradox answered, "No, a prophet of God cannot lie." To which Zacharias responded, "Jesus claimed to be the only way to God. If Jesus was right, Muhammad was wrong; on the other hand, if Jesus was wrong, Muhammad was still wrong, because he claimed that Jesus was right." The man realized he had been painted into a corner, and left in a bit of a huff. Zacharias admitted that there was a little bit of an equivocation in his interchange with the Muslim, because the man could have responded to Zacharias that Jesus did *claim* to be the only way to God, but that Muslims "reject that claim as being not factual."⁶³

Also, the man could have said that the Bible had been corrupted at that point, and that Jesus had never said those words.⁶⁴ Or, the man could have admitted that Jesus was a prophet of God, and that He had said

those words, but that Christ's statement about being the only way to the Father had been abrogated by Muhammad's teaching, which came some 600 years later.

And concerning this six-century interval, Christian apologists Josh McDowell and Don Stewart make a perceptive observation concerning Muhammad's denials in the Qur'an about essential biblical teachings concerning Jesus:

"A major problem with accepting Mohammed's account is that his testimony is 600 years after the events occurred, while the New Testament contains eyewitness or firsthand testimony of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ."⁶⁵

We must also notice that through the pen of the apostle Paul, the Bible says some things that sound startlingly appropriate to the religion of Islam, claiming as it does, angelic inspiration for its "gospel:"

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

Again the Bible says that, "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

We have seen above that Muhammad taught "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4) than the Jesus of the Bible. As we look at Islam's beliefs above — its "five (or six) pillars," we see that Islam also teaches "a contrary gospel" to the Gospel of Christ. For it teaches a "gospel" of works, in contrast to the Gospel of Christ, whose Gospel is the righteousness of justification by faith alone in Jesus as one's Savior, *apart* from works of righteousness (Romans 3:21-4:8).

Concerning false prophets, Jesus said:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing,

but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

If a prophet is known by his fruit, we must look at the fruit that Muhammad has borne to see whether or not he was a true prophet. We have seen that, although Muhammad spoke complimentary things about Jesus, he also explicitly denied essential Christian teaching about Jesus, as found in the Bible. And he taught a different gospel, contrary to the one taught in the Bible.

The Bible exhorts us:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

As shown above, the Lord Jesus taught that we would know a true prophet from a false prophet by their fruit. Sound doctrine (that which is in harmony with the Scriptures) is part of a prophet's fruit (see 1 Timothy 6:3-5). We have here examined some of the fruit of Muhammad. What we have found in this regard is the bad fruit of false teaching concerning vital doctrines of eternal significance — including proclaiming a different Jesus and a different gospel. Thus, regardless of Muhammad's sincerity (or lack of it), he was a false prophet. If Muhammad was a false prophet, then the religion of Islam — of which he was the one and only prophet (though far from its only spokesman) — is also false.

While many people are unaware of or unconcerned about Islamic religious doctrine as a whole, one aspect of Islam — its violence — has attracted worldwide attention in recent years. We will now turn our attention

to the issue of violence and whether the Qur'an supports the use of violence or not.

ISLAM AND VIOLENCE: ARE THEY RELATED?

On Sept. 11, 2001, Muslim extremists attacked the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. On July 7, 2005, Muslim extremists attacked a London subway system.

These attacks and others carried out by Muslims lead one to wonder if Islam itself is behind acts of violence and terrorism. Or, instead, are the words of the musician convert to Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens and now named Yusuf Islam, true when he said about the terrorists responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks on America, "Not only did terrorists hijack planes and destroy life; they also hijacked the beautiful religion of Islam"?⁶⁶

Dr. Patrick Cate says:

"The vast majority of Muslims in this world are warm, friendly people who would not consider harming others. Muslims may be the most hospitable people on our globe. They love to have company and be guests themselves — a guest is considered a sacred trust from God."⁶⁷

Likewise, Abdul Saleeb, a Muslim convert to Christianity, wrote:

"My main thesis is very simple: the vast majority of Muslims are obviously very peaceful, fun-loving people who want a good future for themselves and their children."⁶⁸

Similarly, Christian author and apologist, Ravi Zacharias has stated:

"...not every Muslim is committed to violence. I am thankful that many have condemned the brutality of the [Sept. 11, 2001] attack on America. They do not want their families to grow up in fear. I was raised near an Islamic community in India, and had numerous friends of that faith. Many were good friends, and they did not advocate or con-

done violence against non-Muslims."⁶⁹

Zacharias has also well said, "Whatever else we do, we must know the truth [regarding Islam] and respond in courteous and peaceable ways."⁷⁰

LOOKING BACK: VIOLENCE IN MEDINA

In A.D. 622, Muhammad fled to from Mecca to Medina, almost 300 miles to the north, because of persecution due to his preaching. His famous flight is known as "the Hegira," and Muslims date their calendar beginning from this pivotal event in Islam's history. Just as in Western countries, it has been customary to assign dates after the birth of Jesus as "A.D." such-and-such a date, Muslims assign to dates "A.H.," meaning "After the Hegira." (A.D. 622 is the year 1 A.H. in the Muslim calendar). Muhammad lived the last decade of his life in Medina.

Muhammad's final 10 years in Medina are critical to the theme of violence in Islam, because it was during these years that Muhammad became increasingly aggressive and warlike toward those whom he opposed. It has been said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."⁷¹ This saying might well be applied to the life of Muhammad as he moved from humble beginnings in the city of Mecca to a position of power and authority in Medina.

ANTI-SEMITIC VIOLENCE AND THE QUR'AN

Although Muhammad initially had high regard for the Jews and Christians, referring to them as "people of the Book," he later became antagonistic toward the Jews. Patrick Cate, an expert on Islam, writes:

"The Qur'an has 114 surahs, or chapters, which are not arranged chronologically, but from longest to shortest. However, a study of the surahs in chronological order displays a development of thought. When evaluated chronologically, a clear progression exists confirming hostility toward

Jews and Christians. In order to identify the dichotomy between peace and war, it is necessary to understand this progression. Muhammad was born in Mecca in A.D. 570 and sensed his call in A.D. 610. He preached in Mecca from A.D. 610-622, frequently as a street preacher. If read chronologically, the first surahs are divided into early Meccan, middle Meccan, and late Meccan teachings of Muhammad. In each of these three periods, there is a gradual increase in Muhammad's confirmation of Jews and Christians (called 'the people of the book') as fellow believers, and of the Bible as Scripture. This 'confirmation' is especially obvious in the late Meccan surahs. For example, Muhammad says, 'If you don't believe me, check with the people of the book, the Jews and Christians.' In other words, read the Bible, which was given by God. His point was that he was preaching the same message of the Jews and Christians, only it was in the Arabic language. Middle Meccan surah 29:46 says, 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you [the people of the book]; Our God and your God is one..' However, things changed in A.D. 622, when Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina. When a few people in Medina doubted Muhammad's prophethood, he told them to go and check with several Jewish tribes who were in Medina at the time. When asked, the Jews denounced him as a prophet, and in fact called him a false prophet. And from that point on, world history changed, as Muhammad turned radically against Jews and to some degree against Christians. All of the jihad and the anti-Jewish and anti-Christian surahs are found in the Medinan surahs. What appears to outsiders as contradictions within the Qur'an does not bother most Muslims. Abrogation is the Islamic doctrine that later surahs abrogate, or replace,

earlier surahs. Often, which surahs Muslims choose to emphasize depends on their political status. When Muslims are in the majority, they tend to speak from Medinan surahs and repress Christians. On the other hand, when Muslims are in a minority, they tend to speak from Meccan surahs and emphasize all that we have in common, frequently saying, 'Muslims and Christians worship the same God and believe the same things, except that Muslims do not believe Christ is the Son of God.'"⁷²

"ETHNIC CLEANSING" AGAINST THE JEWS OF MEDINA

While in Medina, Muhammad began a program of "ethnic cleansing" against the Jews there, which former long-time Presbyterian missionary in Iran, William M. Miller, describes thus:

"The Jews were unhappy over Muhammad's victory [over the Meccans] at Badr [in A.D. 624], and some of them composed and recited verses in which they ridiculed the people of Madina [i.e., Medina] for submitting to a man who had slain his own people [i.e., Meccans] in battle. ... Realizing that the Jews were his enemies, Muhammad determined to get rid of them. He accused one of the [Jewish] tribes, called Banu Qainuqa, of breaking a treaty, and informed them they must accept Islam. When they refused, the Muslims besieged them for fifteen days, defeated them, and drove them from their homes, and confiscated all their property."⁷³

Miller continues:

"Having fought and defeated several hostile tribes, Muhammad next attacked another Jewish tribe, the Banu Nadir, which had been friendly to some of his enemies. They were ordered to leave all their possessions and depart. On their refusal to do so, a force of Muslims was sent

against them, which cut down their date trees and ruined their properties. Seeing they could resist no longer, they agreed to depart, and were allowed to take with them only what they could carry on their camels. Their arms and their crops were divided among the Muslims. After a time Muhammad attacked another large Jewish tribe called the Banu Quraiza, which to this time had been friendly to him, but had recently failed to participate in one of his battles. Tradition states that Gabriel came to Muhammad and ordered him to arise and strike 'the idolaters who are possessors of the Book, the Banu Quraiza.' At once a large force was sent against this tribe. When their provisions were exhausted and they were unable to resist any longer they asked permission to emigrate as the Banu Nadir had done. This request was refused, and they were ordered to surrender unconditionally. This they were forced to do. Then the women and children were sold into slavery, their property was divided among the Muslim soldiers, and their 800 men were taken to Madina and there massacred. Thus the Jews in and about Madina were eliminated."⁷⁴

In a conversation with theologian R.C. Sproul, Muslim convert to Christianity Abdul Saleeb summarizes these events by stating:

"When Muhammad moved to Medina, ... there were three Jewish tribes living in the suburbs of that city. And Muhammad expelled the first group, looted the second tribe, and he killed 700 men — all the men — of the third Jewish tribe."⁷⁵

In this same conversation with Sproul, Saleeb also commented:

"Truly, the seeds of hatred toward the Jews and the Jewish religion are all over the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. There is a very, very well-established tradition of prophet Muhammad writ-

ten in the oldest biography of Muhammad written by a Muslim historian that says, 'Kill the Jews wherever you find them.'"⁷⁶

These things have been dealt with here at some length to demonstrate Muhammad's increasingly aggressive conduct while at Medina, and also to show his growing hatred of the Jews that blossomed there, as shown above.

THE ISLAMIC PILLAR OF JIHAD

As noted earlier, Islam has five "pillars" (or duties), which it requires of individual Muslims. *Jihad* is sometimes considered a "sixth pillar" of Islam. Concerning this additional pillar, Donald Tingle explains:

"*Jihad* has often been mistranslated as 'holy war'; it actually means 'striving' in the cause of God. Muslims have been taught that wrong can be addressed with the sword. If it is impossible to use the sword effectively, then Muslims can use their words in the fight against evil. If even speech is too dangerous, then they can resist silently in their hearts. But armed struggle in the fight against evil is a viable option."⁷⁷

While Tingle asserts above — and some Muslims agree — that "holy war" is an incorrect translation of the word *jihad*, George Braswell differs, "Both non-Muslim and Muslim writers have used the phrase 'holy war' with reference to *jihad*."⁷⁸ And James Beverley has noted that the Qur'an itself uses the term *jihad* in reference to "holy war."⁷⁹ However, Tingle seems to be correct in saying that the actual meaning of the word is "'striving' in the cause of God," and that this striving may or may not involve physical warfare.

DOES ISLAM ENCOURAGE VIOLENCE?

In a magazine article concerning Islam and the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on America, Beverley offered three possibilities as to how one could view Islam in the aftermath of that infamous day. These three options are

also relevant to us, as we consider the question of whether or not the religion of Islam encourages violence:

1. Islam is actually a religion of peace.

2. Islam has a "dark side," which the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks reveal.

3. Sept. 11, 2001, represents the true nature of Islam.⁸⁰

Concerning the first option possibility, former Muslim Abdul Saleeb has written:

"Even our president [George W. Bush] has said that Islam is a religion of peace and is a loving religion. Some claim that these violent Muslims are to Islam what the Ku Klux Klan is to Christianity. Recently, somebody made the claim that Osama bin Laden is to Islam what Timothy McVeigh was to Christianity. These are absolutely false analogies. Bin Laden can quote Qur'anic verses and traditions from Muhammad that justify his actions. McVeigh could not quote from the Bible or refer to Jesus to justify his actions. When the Klan commits acts of racial violence, they are betraying the teachings of Jesus Christ. These false analogies and characterizations are being perpetuated by Western media, politicians, and intellectuals."⁸¹

Sometimes Muslims will say that the word "Islam" means "peace." Concerning this assertion, Patrick Cate observes:

"Although many Muslims say that the word Islam means peace, the meaning is actually submission — submission to God as a slave would submit to his owner. The reason for their claim is that the roots of their words for submission and peace are related."⁸²

Ernest Hahn elaborates on this by stating, "The same Arabic word root (S-L-M) stands behind *salaam* (peace), similar to the Hebrew *shalom*."⁸³ However, whatever measure of peace Islam might offer is only given to

those who embrace Islam and those who are under its authority.⁸⁴

This leaves us with the other two options: Either Islam has a "dark side" or Islam is a religion prone to violence. One thing that screams for the latter option is that this author is unaware of any other religion that has suicide bombers, who try to kill as many people as they can, operating under its banner and in its name. Cate offers one powerful reason why Islam alone has this feature:

"In Islam there is no assurance of salvation. Muslims will never tell you, 'I know I am going to heaven.' They will frequently say, 'I think, or I hope, that I will go to heaven after I burn in hell awhile to pay for my sins, but only God knows if I will make it.' However, the only exception is that anyone who dies in holy war for the sake of God goes straight to paradise (surah 47:4). This provides a clear reason for the willingness to be a martyr for the sake of God in holy war."⁸⁵

Thus, Islam entices its militant adherents by falsely promising them heaven, while instead leading them and other non-Christians that they kill in the process into a Christless eternity in hell. Further, Cate observed:

"Iran's [late] Ayatollah Khomeini stated, 'The purest joy in Islam is to kill and be killed for Allah.' For this reason [i.e., the assurance of salvation], nearly all Muslim wars are declared 'holy wars,' as it is the best way to ensure recruitment of troops. Ironically, Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein each declared his war a holy war when the two were fighting each other. The Qur'an is not the only authority for Muslims — Hadith (the written traditions of Muhammad) is also authoritative, as is a fatwa, a religious legal ruling. Hadith, like the Qur'an, teaches *jihad*. For instance, one book of Hadith quotes Muhammad saying, 'The last hour would not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims kill them; until the

Jews hide themselves, and the stones and trees would speak up saying, ... There is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him' (Sahih Muslim, book 40, #6985).⁸⁶

Ravi Zacharias stated:

"The most often quoted passage [in the Qur'an] on the use of force in world-domination is the *ayatus-saif*, which literally means 'the verse of the sword.' Surah 9.5 says, 'But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war).'⁸⁷

Again, he wrote:

"Those [within Islam] who defend militancy cite two other passages. Muhammad himself, after various conquests, wrote from Medina to both Caesar in Rome and Chosroes in Persia, saying, 'Submit or suffer consequences.' When he wrote the Treaty of Medina, he divided the people into two categories — *Dar al-Islam* or The House of Islam and *Dar al-Harb*, The House of War. Militants also point to Muhammad's last words: 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz reported that the last statement made by the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) was: "O Lord, perish the Jews and the Christians. ... Beware, there should be no two faiths in Arabia."⁸⁸

Zacharias added:

"Those who challenge the violent side [of Islam], question how Muhammad could ever have uttered those words. Those who defend it, defend the authority of the Tradition and the warfare that was carried on, even in their prophet's lifetime."⁸⁹

Abdul Saleeb comments:

"Following September 11, the Muslim Council of Detroit issued a statement saying that Muslim terrorists in general are misinformed and misguided fanatics who are misinterpreting Islamic

texts. However, these terrorists, in fact, have many texts from the Qur'an that they can correctly quote to support the legitimacy of their actions of violence, terror, and persecution. Even though these Muslim terrorists might be few in number compared with the 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, nevertheless they represent a very serious issue that we need to address."⁹⁰

In answer to the question of whether or not Islam is "a religion of the sword," Beverley responded:

"Yes, to some degree. Muhammad engaged in military battles against his enemies and Muslim leaders created a vast empire through war. However, while Muslims believe in just war, the Quran forbids using force to convert people."⁹¹

Saleeb notes a saying attributed to Muhammad by one hadith (i.e., tradition):

"Allah's apostle said, "Know that paradise is under the shades of swords."⁹²

Contrast this saying of Muhammad with the words of Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion when a crowd came to arrest Him:

"But Jesus said to [Peter], 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword'" (Matthew 26:52).

Or again, take note of the attitude of Jesus in the following passage:

"Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked

them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of'" (Luke 9:51-55).

One can imagine what Muhammad's response to a similar situation might well have been.

Although the Crusades of the Middle Ages are an embarrassment to the Church of Jesus Christ, they are an embarrassment precisely *because* Christ's kingdom was not meant to be spread or maintained by force. Additionally, Beverley notes:

"Both the example of the prophet [Muhammad] and some emphases in the Qur'an provided warrant for Islam's earliest leaders to spread Islam by military conquest. Bloody expansionism was also justified through original Islamic law that divided the world into two realms: *Dar al-Harb* (the land of war) and *Dar al-Islam* (land under Islamic rule). Both Paul Fregosi's *Jihad in the West* and Jewish scholar Bat Ye'or's *Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam* document the reality of Muslim crusades long before the notorious Christian crusades of the Middle Ages."⁹³

Notice how Allah incites Islam's followers to violence in the following passage from the Qur'an:

"Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not" (surah 2:216).⁹⁴

George Braswell provides the following helpful summary regarding when Islam justifies killing:

"In the Islamic view there are justifications for ending life. Highway robbers may be executed. In the Quran, adultery is dealt with by one hundred stripes; Muhammad added stoning. Apostasy for one who renounces Islam may have fatal consequences. Murder demands a just retribution. Jihad or holy war results in killings."⁹⁵

Concerning apostasy, Tingle makes this observation:

“All people are permitted to convert to Islam, but none are permitted to leave Islam for another faith. Christian converts from Islam today can face disinheritance, the loss of their children, imprisonment, banishment from their country or even death. Those who leave Islam are considered to be not only traitors to their faith but also to their country if they live in a predominantly Muslim land.”⁹⁶

Consistent with this, William Miller, the Presbyterian missionary to Iran, wrote:

“According to Islamic law, the penalty for apostasy is death. In some countries a Muslim who is baptized, or who has only shown interest in Christianity, may quite possibly be poisoned by his own family. In countries in which Islam is the national religion the abandonment of Islam is considered an act of disloyalty to the state.”⁹⁷

Illustrative of this penalty for apostasy from Islam is the following account by Beverley:

“In 1999 I had lunch with an American whose identity I must conceal lest I place his life in renewed danger. Over our meal he told me of a simple but life-altering fact. A few years earlier, he realized that he no longer believed in Islam, and he abandoned his faith. As a result, he received death threats — not in Sudan, or Libya, or Iraq, but in the United States.”⁹⁸

Saleeb notes:

“Our understanding of violence in relation to Islam should not be limited to suicide bombings or planes blowing up buildings. The violence of Islam has taken many forms. The vast majority of cases of persecution of Christians around the world today occur in the Islamic world. For example, Christians in southern Sudan have been horribly persecuted for their faith by the Muslim

government in northern Sudan. Another example of Islamic violence and aggression is the blasphemy law in Pakistan; it says that anyone who insults Muhammad commits a crime punishable by death. The roots of this law are in the earliest teachings of Islam itself. The Islamic law of apostasy states that any person who converts away from Islam to any other religion, whether that person becomes a Christian, a Jew, or whatever else, has committed a crime punishable by death. Salman Rushdie is an Indian-born British author and a nominal Muslim. Some years ago, he wrote *The Satanic Verses*, a novel in which he allegedly insulted Muhammad. The Ayatollah Khomeini, at that time the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued a *fatwa*, a religious ruling, that anyone who killed Rushdie would get a reward of several million dollars from the Iranian government.”⁹⁹

But killing is not the only form of violence sometimes sanctioned by Islam. For instance, “the Quran actually teaches that husbands are superior to wives and can beat them.”¹⁰⁰ Beverley notes that the permission for a husband to beat his wife is found in surah 4:34, which well-known Qur’anic translator N.J. Dawood translates thus:

“Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Surely God is high, supreme.”¹⁰¹

Beverley comments:

“Many ancient and modern Muslim authorities have accepted the plain meaning of the text. For example, Abdullatif Mushtahiri, a contemporary scholar, writes:

‘If admonishing and sexual desertion fail to bring forth results and the woman is of a cold and stubborn type, the Quran bestows on man the right to straighten her out by way of punishment and beating, provided he does not break her bones nor shed blood. Many a wife belongs to this querulous type and requires this sort of punishment to bring her to her senses!’”¹⁰²

This matter of wife-beating also brings up a different issue, unrelated to violence, which we will merely mention here: The issue of Islam’s treatment of women. Concerning this, Beverley has written elsewhere:

“Likewise, no one can deny the lack of women’s rights under Islam, regardless of Muslim apologists’ passion to the contrary. The widespread practice of female genital mutilation in Muslim countries alone signals the reality of women’s oppression. Women are forbidden even to drive a car in Saudi Arabia.”¹⁰³

Again regarding the theme of violence within Islam, we cite one final quotation from Beverley on this subject:

“Until they were freed suddenly in mid-November [2001], eight expatriate Christians were on trial in Afghanistan on charges of Christian evangelism. Followers of Jesus in many Muslim countries can be put to death for sharing what they believe.”¹⁰⁴

Although many additional examples of violence in Islam could be given (not to mention the suppression and oppression of others by Islam), the majority of Muslims are not terrorists, nor prone to acts of violence against non-Muslims. However, the seeds of violence are in the religion of Islam itself. When we look at Muhammad’s fruit, we see that, when his teachings are literally, faithfully applied, violence and bloodshed can be a natural result. Those who engage in such acts have many precedents to draw from; out of their own Islamic sources of authority, such as the Qur’an and the hadith. In some cases,

those seeds bear fruit and sprout into actual acts of violence.

Regarding this bad fruit of physical violence, we recall the solemn words of Jesus concerning false prophets:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:15-20).

We must also note that physical violence is not a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

The history of the Christian Church has itself not been free of violence. However, regarding Islam’s historical use of force in spreading the faith and its historical suppression of dissent, we see a clear contrast between this and what Jesus said just prior to His crucifixion about His own kingdom:

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’” (John 18:36).

Additionally, concerning Islam’s destructiveness and violence, exemplified in part by Muhammad himself, one is reminded of these words of Jesus, which offer a stark contrast between certain motivations behind Islam and the motivation of Jesus. Jesus said:

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Ergun and Emir Caner, brothers who converted from Islam to Christianity, have said:

“The greatest difference between Jesus Christ as God and Savior and Muhammad as prophet of Allah, comes at this point. Jesus Christ shed His own blood on the cross so that people could come to God. Muhammad shed other people’s blood so that his constituents could have political power throughout the Arabian Peninsula.”¹⁰⁵

As Christians, we must love Muslims, in the spirit of Christ and for the sake of Christ, Who alone is the Way to the Father; but we must stand against Islam. We must remember also that, unlike Muhammad, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Endnotes:

1. See Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam: An Introduction To the Muslim World*. New York: Plume, 2002, pg. 5.
2. Alternate spellings are Muhammed or Mohammed. One source notes, “Since there is no standardized method of transliterating Arabic script into Roman script, one often finds Islamic terms spelled in a variety of ways (e.g., Muhammed, Mohammed; Moslem, Muslim, etc.)” Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985, pg. 364, note 1.
3. Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names*. New York: Touchstone, 1996, pg. 88. Miller also notes that, “One of the three main Arabic biographies [of Muhammad] is available in English translation: A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Is’haq’s ‘Sirat Rasul Allah,’* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955),” pg. 488, note 6.
4. *Islam: A guide to understanding Muslim religion, history, and culture*. Private circulation material of SIM (SIM, P.O. Box 7900, Charlotte, N.C. 28241-7900), n.d., pg. 4.
5. This cave was “three miles from Mecca,” according to William M. Miller, *A Christian’s Response to Islam*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976, pg. 19).
6. The Night of Power is spoken of in surah 97 of the Qur’an.
7. “Proclaim in the name of the Lord,” are the first five verses (Arabic, *ayat*, plural of *aya*, a verse) of surah 96 of the Qur’an. Some translations render the word, “Recite,” instead of “Proclaim.” The word *Qur’an* (alternate spelling, *Koran*) means “to recite.”
8. *Islam: A guide to understanding Muslim religion, history, and culture*, op. cit., pg. 4.

9. Surah 33:40.

10. Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993, pg. 9. (Abdul Saleeb is a pseudonym.) Also, Donald S. Tingle, *Islam & Christianity*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985, pg. 13.

11. *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, op. cit., pg. 71, italic in original.

12. James A. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 2001, pg. 11.

13. *Understanding Islam: An Introduction To the Muslim World*, op. cit., pg. 53.

14. Yahiya Emerick, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide To Understanding Islam*. Indianapolis: Alpha Books, 2002, pg. 285.

15. *A Christian’s Response to Islam*, op. cit., pg. 32. The passage in the Qur’an where the Lord supposedly sanctioned this act is surah 33:37-38.

16. One source states regarding this event, “On the spot of the present Dome of the Rock, he was taken up into heaven to view it and to meet Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, whom he led in prayer.” George W. Braswell, Jr., *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000, pg. 12.

17. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 11. (See also sidebar on pg. 10.)

18. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 13.

19. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

20. *A Christian’s Response to Islam*, op. cit., pg. 37.

21. There are other important differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites that time and space do not permit us to delve into here. However, this is the origin of the division between them.

22. Malcolm Steer, *A Christian’s Evangelistic Pocket Guide To Islam*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd., 2004, pg. 11.

23. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 24.

24. Dr. Robert Morey makes the following comments concerning verses in the Qur’an, “the Quran did not originally have numbered verses. Numbering the verses is a Western idea. Translators differ somewhat in how they number the verses. What is verse 5 in Yusuf Ali’s translation may be verse 4 in Pickthal’s translation]. Arberry[’s translation] does not even number each verse; he numbers paragraphs instead.” Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1992, Appendix B, “English Translations of the Quran,” pp. 209-210.

25. Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2002, pg. 83.

26. *Ibid.*, pg. 84.

27. See Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2000, pg. 21.
28. *Islam: A guide to understanding Muslim religion, history, and culture*, op. cit., pg. 6.
29. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 24.
30. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 31, note 3.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 25.
32. *Islam: A Guide To Understanding Muslim Religion, History, and Culture*, op. cit., pg. 6.
33. *A Christian's Evangelistic Pocket Guide To Islam*, op. cit., pg. 14.
34. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 22.
35. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 22.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-30.
37. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 3. Also, *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 4, 25.
38. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 22.
39. R.C. Sproul and Abdul Saleeb, *The Dark Side of Islam*. Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 2001, Tape #R1433, side 1.
40. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer, editors, *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988, "God," pp. 276-277, italics in original.
41. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pp. 7-8, italics in original.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
43. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Islam*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1998, pg. 23.
44. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 31.
45. Amanda Roraback, *Islam in a Nutshell* (Nutshell Notes Series). Santa Monica, Calif.: Enisen Publishing, 2004, pg. 19.
46. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 85.
47. Patrick O. Cate, *Understanding and Responding to Islam: Insight on the September 11, 2001, tragedy*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001, pp. 3, 15. Dr. Cate, who has taught on Islam at Dallas Theological Seminary, lived for five years in Egypt and four years in Iran, and is an expert on the subject of Islam.
48. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 32.
49. *The Facts on Islam*, op. cit., pg. 10, emphasis added.
50. E.g., *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, op. cit., pp. 123-124.
51. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Patrick Cate for my understanding of sources of Islamic authority. Not only is the information contained in this section derived from him, but some of the material in it is verbally dependent on his conversation with me. At the same time I absolve him of any possibly erroneous understanding of mine from our discussion of this subject, which took place in a phone conversation on August 31, 2005.
52. A term similar to the *hadith* is the *sunnah*. Although these terms are used somewhat interchangeably, technically, the *sunnah* are the actual sayings and deeds of Muhammad and his contemporary followers, while the *hadith* are the written record of the *sunnah*.
53. George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996, pg. 82.
54. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Fast Facts on Islam*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2001, pg. 38, italic in original, citing Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion*, op. cit., pp. 137-158.
55. *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, op. cit., pg. 197.
56. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 16.
57. E.g., *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, op. cit., pp. 46, 122. On page 46 is quoted surah 4:31. Regarding man's inherent weakness, see surah 4:28.
58. N.J. Dawood translation of *The Koran*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999.
59. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 29.
60. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 16.
61. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
62. See further, *A Christian's Response to Islam*, op. cit., pg. 45.
63. Account by Ravi Zacharias in *Questions About God: Is God Fair?* Atlanta, Ga.: Intown Community Church, June 14, 1992, Tape #9222C, side 1.
64. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., Tape #R1433, side 2.
65. Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith*. San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1980, pg. 117.
66. James A. Beverley, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", *Christianity Today*, Jan. 7, 2002, pg. 32.
67. *Understanding and Responding to Islam: Insight on the September 11, 2001, tragedy*, op. cit., pg. 11.
68. R.C. Sproul and Abdul Saleeb, *The Dark Side of Islam*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003, pp. 83-84.
69. Ravi Zacharias, *Light in the Shadow of Jihad*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2002, pg. 48.
70. *Ibid.*, pg. 36.
71. Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book: Over 4,500 Illustrations and Quotations for All Occasions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1997, pg. 292.
72. *Understanding and Responding to Islam: Insight on the September 11, 2001, tragedy*, op. cit., pp. 12-14, brackets and ellipsis in original.
73. *A Christian's Response to Islam*, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
75. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., Tape #R1433, side 1.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 17, italic in original.
78. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 38.
79. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 57. Also, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", op. cit., pg. 37.
80. "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", op. cit., pp. 32-34.
81. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., pg. 86.
82. *Understanding and Responding to Islam: Insight on the September 11, 2001, tragedy*, op. cit., pg. 12.
83. Ernest Hahn, *How to Respond: Muslims*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995, pg. 11, italics in original.
84. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., Tape #R1433, side 1.
85. *Understanding and Responding to Islam: Insight on the September 11, 2001, tragedy*, op. cit., pg. 15.
86. *Ibid.*, pg. 16, ellipsis in original.
87. *Light in the Shadow of Jihad*, op. cit., pg. 41, italics in original.
88. *Ibid.*, pg. 42, italics and ellipsis in original, citing John Gilchrist, *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*. Geoffrey St., Roodepoort, Republic of South Africa: Mission Press, 1986, pg. 65.
89. *Light in the Shadow of Jihad*, op. cit., pg. 42.
90. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., pg. 86.
91. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 84.
92. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., pg. 96, citing Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols. (Al-Medina: Islamic University, n.d.), surah 4:55.
93. "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", op. cit., pg. 37, italics in original.
94. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, translation, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: Mentor Books, n.d.
95. *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 83.
96. *Islam & Christianity*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
97. *A Christian's Response to Islam*, op. cit., pg. 95.
98. "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", op. cit., pg. 40.
99. *The Dark Side of Islam*, op. cit., pg. 85, italics in original.
100. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 48.
101. Dawood translation of *The Koran*, op. cit.
102. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, op. cit., pg. 49.
103. "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?", op. cit., pg. 40.
104. *Ibid.*
105. *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs*, op. cit., pg. 49.

churches are the very things [postmodern] nonbelievers want to experience if they attend a worship service."⁷

The postmodern wants to reconnect with the past. They want traditions and religious symbols rather than slick excellence, polished performance, and state-of-the-art structures found in modernity. It is not likely that one will find a sign along the highway pointing to the "First Baptist Emergent Church." Names such as "Baptist" and denominational ties are too modern. Popular emergent church names are "Solomon's Porch," "House of Mercy," "The Rock," "Jacob's Ladder," "Circle of Hope," "Ikona," "Vintage Faith," "New Beginnings," and "Mosaic." They sponsor web sites such as vintagefaith.com, emergentvillage.org, and theooze.com. The emerging church appears to be the latest flavor of the day in a church age which allows itself to be defined by its culture rather than by Scripture. D.A. Carson reminds us:

"What drove the Reformation was the conviction, among all its leaders, that the Roman Catholic Church had departed from Scripture and had introduced theology and practices that were inimical to genuine Christian faith. In other words, they wanted things to change, not because they perceived that new developments had taken place in the culture so that the church was called to adapt its approach to the new cultural profile, but because they perceived that new theology and practices had developed in the church that contravened Scripture, and therefore that things needed to be reformed by the Word of God. By contrast, although the emerging church movement challenges, on biblical grounds, some of the beliefs and practices of evangelicalism, by and large it insists it is preserving traditional confessionality by changing the emphases because the culture has changed,

and so inevitably those who are culturally sensitive see things in a fresh perspective. In other words, at the heart of the emerging reformation lies a perception of a major change in culture."⁸

The Christian community chases down the culture either through methods or message. The emerging church does both. Beginning with methodology, the leaders of the movement view the under-30 generation as profoundly spiritual. They are interested in religious experiences and feelings. They want a sense of the supernatural. They are not interested in systematic theology, tightly woven apologetic arguments, or logical reasoning. But they are attracted to spiritual mystery.

Kimball quotes Garrison Keillor, who makes no claim of being a Christian, as saying, "If you can't go to church and at least for a moment be given transcendence, if you can't pass briefly from this life into the next, then I can't see why anyone should go. Just a brief moment of transcendence causes you to come out of church a changed person."⁹

Despite the fact that Keillor could not be more wrong if we are interested in true biblical transformation, the emergent leaders see this as the gateway to reaching the postmodern generations. The Baby Busters (born between 1965 and 1983) and Mosaics (born between 1984 and 2002) are tired of "church-lite," consumer spirituality, church buildings that look like warehouses or malls, CEO pastors, educational programs structured like community colleges, and church services that are reminiscent of a Broadway musical. They want the transcendent, as Keillor says. So the emergent church loads up on such things.

There is a return to what Kimball calls the "vintage church," which combines some excellent things such as singing of hymns, display of the cross, and reading of Scripture with (questionable at best) medieval ritual, prayer stations, labyrinths, candles, incense, icons, stained glass, contemplative prayer, mantras, Benedictine chants, and darkness. Kimball makes

the point that postmoderns want to experience God with all five senses — as the vintage church did.

It should be pointed out, however, that the vintage church to which Kimball refers is not a return to the New Testament Church. The vintage church has been waylaid by medieval Catholicism, which we must remember may have experienced the spiritual through the senses, but nevertheless was an apostate religion. Simply providing an unbeliever with a religious experience, which they might interpret as an encounter with God, may do them more harm than good. But just as the seeker-sensitive church saw felt-needs as the means of linking with unbelievers, so the emerging church sees spiritual experience as that means. The philosophy is basically the same, just the methods have changed.

Emergent leader Leonard Sweet describes the emergent church with the acronym EPIC. "E" stands for "experiential" because postmoderns desire more than listening and thinking. They want to enter into worship as an experience of the senses. This is why medieval rituals appeal to them. "P" speaks of "participatory" as opposed to observers. They want an active faith. Rather than a sermon they might hold a "conversation." "I" relates to "image-based." Projected images, artwork, film, and video are all attractive to this generation. They are sight-oriented. "C" means "communal." They desire a strong sense of community. They are "people" persons. Instead of going to church, they want to be the Church.¹⁰

If this were the end of the story we might even find comfort in what is basically a reaction to the stripped-down model of Christianity that the seeker-sensitive church has given us for the last few decades. But as Rob Bell is quick to inform us, "This is not just the same old message with new methods. ... We're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life."¹¹

This is something new in the culturally identifying churches. The seeker-sensitive church loudly proclaimed

that it was fine-tuning the methodology but was not tampering with the message of the evangelical church — even though it was. The emergent church is concerned about methods, but is even more concerned about the message. Emergent church leaders believe that doctrinally evangelical Christianity has it all wrong. From the Scriptures to essential doctrines to the Gospel itself, the Church so far just doesn't get it. And the emergent people include themselves in the same camp. As Brian McLaren states, "I don't think we've got the gospel right yet. What does it mean to be 'saved'? ... None of us has arrived at orthodoxy."¹²

EMERGENT PHILOSOPHY

Truth claims are held with suspicion within postmodernism and we find a precarious juggling act in emergent circles as leaders try to reach a wary culture with the claims of Christ. The emerging church is concerned about presenting genuine Christianity in a way the postmodern culture understands. Because the very heart of postmodernity is rejection of absolute, authoritative truth, yet Christianity claims to be the proclamation of absolute authoritative truth, a head-on collision is inevitable. Something has to give and that something seems to be truth. McLaren presents the view:

"[A]sk me if Christianity (my version of it, yours, the Pope's, whoever's) is *orthodox*, meaning *true*, and here's my honest answer: *a little, but not yet*. Assuming by *Christianity* you mean the Christian understanding of the world and God, Christian opinions on soul, text, and culture ... I'd have to say that we probably have a couple of things right, but a lot of things wrong, and even more spreads before us unseen and unimagined. But at least our eyes are open! To be a Christian in a generously orthodox way is not to claim to have the truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall."¹³

This is almost a complete capitulation to postmodernity's concept of

truth. After nearly 2000 years of the study of the completed Canon, Christians find ourselves in a position of having maybe a "couple" of things right — and I am sure that those couple of things would be up for grabs. This uncertainty about the truth carries over to the Scriptures themselves, of course. Rob Bell and his wife Kristen, in an interview with *Christianity Today*, reflect this view. They started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself, "discovering the Bible as a human product."¹⁴ "I grew up thinking that we've figured out the Bible," Kristen says, "that we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again — like life used to be black and white, and now it's in color."¹⁵ To the postmodern mind, it is more important to, as Rob Bell says, "embrace mystery, rather than conquer it."¹⁶

A truly postmodern Christian lives by creating his own reality. McLaren would "help students construct their own model of reality, their understanding of the universe and story we find ourselves in. And — this is SO important — we'd teach them that their model isn't reality; it's just a model. It must always be open to correction, adjustment, improvement, even revolution."¹⁷ Experience, not Scripture, becomes the basis for truth. Leonard Sweet writes that "people today are starved not for doctrines but for images and relationships and stories."¹⁸

There is no absolute truth or ultimate reality under the emergent agenda. Even Scripture is appreciated for its mystery, not its presentation of truth. Yet one has to wonder what Jude had in mind when he wrote, "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (verse 3).

The emergent church leaders are asking us to embrace a faith without truth, a Bible which has value due to its mystery, and a reality that is individual, subjective, and changeable. This is touted as a new and improved version of Christian living.

DECONSTRUCTION

The scholar would define deconstruction as Carson does:

"It has to do with a literary approach, under the hermeneutics of suspicion, that hunts down tensions and inconsistencies in a text (those who deploy deconstruction insist that all texts have them) in order to set them at odds with each other and thus *deconstruct* the text, to generate new insights that might actually contradict what a text ostensibly says."¹⁹

At the other end of the spectrum, Humpty Dumpty gave his version, "When I use a word, ... it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."²⁰ In everyday language deconstruction means that we can never be certain that we have the right interpretation of words. What matters then is not what the author or speaker said, because that doubtfully can be discerned; rather the important thing is, "What did the reader/listener experience?" Deconstruction guts words of their meaning and redefines them according to one's own preference. This is obviously convoluted, but it is a central piece in postmodern thought.

To be consistent with absolute truth (or, more accurately, lack of truth) the emergent thinkers must dispose of dogmatic truth claims (i.e., doctrines). They must purge the Church of an exclusive Gospel,²¹ an authoritative Bible, and irritating doctrines such as hell.²² Also on the cutting room floor is the doctrine of original sin. McLaren writes:

"The church latched on to that old doctrine of original sin like a dog to a stick, and before you knew it, the whole gospel got twisted around it. Instead of being God's big message of saving love for the whole world, the gospel became a little bit of secret information on how to solve the pesky legal problem of original sin."²³

Before the emergent church leaders are done, all the essential teachings of

the Bible have been deconstructed, redefined, or dismissed. They have been replaced with mystery and questions. Even McLaren admits, "What will appear beyond the deconstruction remains to be seen. Perhaps something better will emerge — that is my hope and prayer, but the outcome is by no means certain even now that I have finished writing this book."²⁴

PLURALISTIC RELATIVISM

If nobody is right then everybody is right. This is the logical conclusion of the postmodern worldview. The emergent church thinkers are reluctantly willing to accept this concept, at least for a time. McLaren states:

"...because I and others, while we aren't 'for' pluralistic relativism, do see it as a kind of needed chemotherapy. We see modernity with its absolutisms and colonialisms and totalitarianisms as a kind of static dream ... In Christian theology, this anti-emergent thinking is expressed in systematic theologies that claim (overtly, covertly, or unconsciously) to have final orthodoxy nailed down ... Emergent Christians (post-liberal, post-conservative) see pluralistic relativism as a dangerous treatment for Stage 4 absolutist/colonial/totalitarian modernity (to use language from cancer diagnosis), something that saves a life by nearly killing it."²⁵

Because truth and Scripture have been deconstructed, all that is left is relativism. Until we figure out where to go from here, we will have to be content with that. We may or may not arrive at a better place some day, but at least objective truth claims are being eradicated — and that is a good thing. So says the emergent church leaders.

Our worldview will determine how we process information and, in turn, what we believe. In theory, at least, Christians should possess a biblical worldview shaped by the study of Scripture. Too often our worldview is formed by other forces around us, including our culture. This is an accusation often cast at the evangelical church by emergent church lead-

ers. They say that evangelicalism has been shaped by modernity — that what we believe is not drawn so much from Scripture as it is from the Enlightenment.

This indictment should not be cast aside too quickly; there is some truth to it. We must ever be careful that we trace our beliefs to Scripture and not take detours constructed by men. But most allegations from the emerging camp do not hold water and are thrown out more to put us on the defensive and justify their beliefs than to accurately portray the teachings of the conservative church.

When the smoke has cleared, we discover that our fundamental doctrines find their basis in Scripture after all. But the same cannot be said for emergent teachings. Their doctrines have been more than tainted; they have been fashioned by postmodernity.

EMERGENT DOCTRINE IN GENERAL

Albert Mohler, theologian and president of The Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky., provides this scathing comment:

"The worldview of postmodernity — complete with an epistemology that denies the possibility of or need for propositional truth — affords the movement an opportunity to hop, skip and jump throughout the Bible and the history [of] Christian thought in order to take whatever pieces they want from one theology and attach them, like doctrinal post-it notes, to whatever picture they would want to draw."²⁶

Most emergent church leaders claim fidelity to the Scriptures as well as the historic Church doctrines and creeds. It sounds good on the surface — but then they force these things through the filter of postmodern deconstruction and what comes out are distorted and unrecognizable understandings of theology. Dan Kimball says that the Church must "*Deconstruct, reconstruct, and redefine biblical terms.*"²⁷ Brian McLaren would agree, saying that our old theological systems are flawed and something new is needed:

"I meet people along the way who model for me, each in a different way, what a new kind of Christian might look like. They differ in many ways, but they generally agree that the old show is over, the modern jig is up, and it's time for something radically new. ... Either Christianity itself is flawed, failing, untrue, or our modern, Western, commercialized, industrial-strength version of it is in need of a fresh look, a serious revision."²⁸

Rob Bell chips in to make certain we understand that these men are talking about more than methodology, "By this I do not mean cosmetic, superficial changes like better lights and music, sharper graphics, and new methods with easy-to-follow steps. I mean theology: the beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, the future. We must keep reforming the way the Christian faith is defined, lived, and explained."²⁹

Bell is willing to go pretty far in his "reformation." He writes that it would not bother him to discover that we have been wrong all along concerning the basic elements of the faith. For example, if it could be proven "that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and ... that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in ... Could you still be a Christian?"³⁰

Bell doesn't see a problem. He says that if our faith depends on such doctrines, "then it wasn't that strong in the first place, was it?"³¹ Doctrines that Bell regards as dispensable include the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the hypostatic union of Christ, and the inspiration of Scripture (because the Gospel writers lied about the person of Christ). Of course, like dominoes, as these doctrines fall they take others with them, not the least of which would be the substitutionary atonement because a mere man could not die for our sins.

Bell has undermined the whole Christian faith, but he sees that as a non-issue. To Bell and other emergent

leaders, Jesus is not the Way and the Truth, if by that we mean He is the embodiment of truth and the only way to God. To these men, "the way of Jesus is the best possible way to live."³² We could continue to live the "Christian life" without the truth of Scripture. We could still love God and be a Christian, because what we believe is not important. The only question is, "Is the way of Jesus still the best possible way to live?"³³ It is not about what we believe, Bell insists, "Perhaps a better question than who's right, is who's living rightly?"³⁴

McLaren reinforces this major tenet of emergent "theology:"

"...we place less emphasis on whose lineage, rites, doctrines, structures, and terminology are *right* and more emphasis on whose actions, service, outreach, kindness, and effectiveness are *good*."³⁵

A "turn from doctrines to practices"³⁶ is one of the four legs that the emerging church stands on, according to McLaren. Being, rather than believing, is a major component in the emergent philosophy. The New Testament, on the other hand, does not sacrifice one for the other. We are called in Scripture to live godly lives, but first we must believe (John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9). Christlike living is a fruit of salvation, not the cause. We can "be" moral and decent people and not be Christians, but we cannot deny or ignore the true historic, biblical person and work of Jesus Christ and be saved. The emergent church has turned this truth on its head. Mark Oestreicher, president of Youth Specialties, makes these comments in *The Emerging Church*, which essentially deny the Gospel:

"But does a little dose of Buddhism thrown into a belief system somehow kill off the Christian part, the Jesus-basics? My Buddhist cousin, except for her unfortunate inability to embrace Jesus, is a better 'Christian' (based on Jesus' descriptions of what a Christian does) than almost every Christian I know. If we were using Matthew 26 as a

guide, she'd be a sheep; and almost every Christian I know personally would be a goat."³⁷

A FEW SPECIFICS

The doctrine of God: Even though Jesus has come to reveal and explain the Father (John 1:14, 18), McLaren insists, "God can't ever really be an object to be studied."³⁸ To emergent leaders, theology is not a matter of knowing God, but a quest for beauty and truth.

The doctrine of original sin: McLaren writes, "Many of us have grown uneasy with this understanding of 'the fall' (and with it, an exaggerated understanding of the doctrine of 'original sin'). We are suspicious that it has become a kind of Western Neo-Platonic invasive species that ravages the harmonious balance inherent in the enduring Jewish concepts of creation as God's world."³⁹

The substitutionary atonement: One of the characters in McLaren's book, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, goes beyond questioning the purpose and need of Christ's death for us, or even the unfairness of one dying for others. McLaren writes, "That just sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?"⁴⁰

The TULIP: One doesn't have to be a Calvinist to find ridiculous McLaren's deconstruction of the famous TULIP. The acronym has historically stood for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. McLaren says he too is a Calvinist, but he comes up with his own TULIP: Triune love, Unselfish election, Limitless reconciliation, Inspiring grace and Passionate, persistent saints.⁴¹

When deconstruction and reconstruction takes place at this level, it is not hard to understand the difficulty involved in communication. As Albert Mohler wrote recently on his blog:

"[McLaren] claims to uphold 'consistently, unequivocally, and unapologetically' the historic

creeds of the church, specifically the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. At the same time, however, he denies that truth should be articulated in propositional form, and thus undercuts his own 'unequivocal' affirmation."⁴²

The doctrine of hell: So odious is the doctrine of hell to the emergent community that McLaren devoted his latest book, *The Last Word and the Word After That*, to the subject. McLaren introduces his subject with an exaggerated distortion of the evangelical position, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, and if you don't love God back and cooperate with God's plans in exactly the prescribed way, God will torture you with unimaginable abuse, forever — that sort of thing. Human parents who 'love' their children with these kinds of implied ultimatums tend to produce the most dysfunctional families."⁴³

In response to the argument that Jesus taught about hell, McLaren concocts a fanciful view that the Jews during the intertestamental period wove together the mythological views of the Mesopotamian, the Egyptian, the Zoroastrian, and Persian religions and created hell. When Jesus came on the scene, the Pharisees were using hell as a club to keep the people in line. Through the threat of hell the Pharisees could motivate sinners to stop sinning and then perhaps God would send the Messiah along with His kingdom. Jesus takes the Pharisees' club and turns it on them. Jesus didn't really believe in or endorse hell, as we understand it; He just used it as a "truth-depicting model."⁴⁴

McLaren says Jesus used hell "to threaten those who excluded sinners and other undesirables, showing that God's righteousness was compassionate and merciful, that God's kingdom welcomed the undeserving, that for God, there was no out-group."⁴⁵

This convoluted argumentation leads to there being "no out-group." If there is no out-group, does that mean McLaren is a universalist? While he flirts with this possibility stating, "Universalism is not as bankrupt of biblical support as some sug-

gest,"⁴⁶ he never firmly lights on it.⁴⁷ But McLaren does hold to the doctrine of inclusivism, which teaches that while salvation has been made possible by Jesus Christ, it is not necessary to know who Jesus is or the precise nature of what He has done.⁴⁸

Emergent church leaders follow the reasoning of missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin's position concerning Christ and salvation, which runs along these lines:

"[My] position is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation."⁴⁹

In other words, salvation is not exclusively found in the Gospel, therefore there are saved Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and so forth. Soon hell becomes a moot issue because no one seems to be going there, anyway.

The doctrine of salvation: The doctrine of hell is determined to a large degree by the all-important understanding of the Gospel. The emergent leaders see a wide gate opening to eternal life. "It bothered me to use *exclusive* and *Jesus* in the same sentence. Everything about Jesus' life and message seemed to be about inclusion, not exclusion,"⁵⁰ writes McLaren. He adds later in his discussion, "Maybe God's plan is an opt-out plan, not an opt-in one. If you want to stay out of the party, you can. Nobody will force you to enjoy it. But it's hard for me to imagine somebody being more stubbornly ornery than God is gracious."⁵¹

The clear implication is that we are all "in" unless we want "out." But the next question is (and this is where it gets tricky) in or out of what? The short answer is "the kingdom of God." But the short answer leads to a

long explanation that leaves us scratching our heads, which is appropriate because the emergent people prize mystery over clarity.

The Gospel, according to the emergent thinkers, is not about individual conversion. It is not about how to get people "in." It is about "how the world will be saved from human sin and all that goes with it."⁵² This sounds close to the mark until we examine more thoroughly what is meant by the terminology. Their concept of "world" does not simply involve humans who don't believe in Christ. The emergent gospel is not just bringing unbelievers to the Savior for the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of God's righteousness. There is more, as Rob Bell informs us:

"Salvation is the entire universe being brought back into harmony with its maker. This has huge implications for how people present the message of Jesus. Yes, Jesus can come into our hearts. But we can join a movement that is as wide and deep and big as the universe itself. Rocks and trees and birds and swamps and ecosystems. God's desire is to restore all of it."⁵³

McLaren continues the thought:

"Is getting individual souls into heaven the focal point of the gospel? I'd have to say no, for any number of reasons. Don't you think God is concerned about saving the whole world? ... No, it's the redemption of the world, the stars, the animals, the plants, the whole show."⁵⁴

You see, "the church exists for the world — to be God's catalyst so that the world can receive and enter God's kingdom more and more."⁵⁵ When asked to define the Gospel, Neo (the main philosophical character in McLaren's novels) replies that it could not be reduced to a little formula, other than "the Kingdom of God is at hand."⁵⁶ Narrowing this definition is not easy, but McLaren gives some insight when he writes:

"I am a Christian because I believe that, in all these ways,

Jesus is saving the world. By 'the world' I mean planet Earth and all life on it, because left to ourselves, un-judged, un-forgiven, and un-taught, we will certainly destroy this planet and its residents."⁵⁷

As we are discovering, the emergent church is very concerned with the planet, with the ecosystems, pollution, and the environment; so much so that apparently in some sense Christ died for the physical planet and it is the job of the follower of Christ to help restore and protect this world. He is also concerned with injustice. McLaren asks, "And could our preoccupation with individual salvation from hell after death distract us from speaking prophetically about injustice in our world today?"⁵⁸

Emergent leaders have a deep concern that if we are preoccupied with who is "in" and who is "out," who is going to heaven and who is not, we will ignore present physical needs of the planet and social issues like injustice, poverty, and AIDS. McLaren argues:

"When Matthew, Mark, and Luke talk about the Kingdom of God, it's always closely related to social justice. ... Their gospel of the kingdom is about God's will being done on earth for everybody, but we're interested in getting away from earth entirely as individuals, and into heaven instead."⁵⁹

Martin Luther King is given by McLaren as an example of one who had the right emphasis.⁶⁰ He faults the evangelical church for being too wrapped up in eternity to care about what is happening right now on planet earth and with being too anxious over who is saved from sin to notice who is suffering from man's inhumanity to man. It does not seem to be an option to the emergent church that both can be and have been attended to by God's people.

But, despite opinions to the contrary, the priority of Scripture is on man's relationship to God. It is because men are alienated from God that they mistreat one another. The

spiritually redeemed and transformed person should and will care about social sins. But, again, the Gospel is about man's alienation from God and what He has done through Christ to reconcile us to Himself (Romans 5:6-11), not about the ozone layer and elimination of poverty.

Neither Jesus nor the Apostles made these latter things the focus of their ministries; it was the reconciliation of souls to God that was at the heart of their message. Once we begin to draw our "gospel" from the culture, no matter what culture that might be, we have altered the true Gospel.

Emergent leaders are not wrong to be concerned about the environment and social injustice; they are wrong to confuse it with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

How those professing to be believers understand the Gospel will determine how they view their mission in this life. Because the emergent church sees the Gospel not merely as the redemption of lost souls, but also as the restoration of the planet and salvation from man's inhumanity to man, they comprehend their task as Christians differently from that of most evangelicals. They call it "missional."

EMERGENT MISSION: MISSIONAL

The term "missional" seems to be drawn from the writings of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, who pops up all over emergent literature. It seems to mean that Christians exist to serve. We serve by loving and living in such a way that we bless those around us. But more than that, we are to be engaged in changing and even creating culture as we bring the kingdom of God to earth.

Rather than calling people out of this world system and into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13), we are to bring the kingdom to them. It would appear that the goal of the missional Christian is to transform the "domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13) into the kingdom of God. McLaren tells us

that his missional calling is summed up as "blessed in this life to be a blessing to everyone on earth."⁶¹ He adds, "But my mission isn't to figure out who is already blessed, or not blessed, or unblessable. My calling is to be blessed so I can bless everyone."⁶² Further:

"From this understanding we place less emphasis on whose lineage, rites, doctrines, structures, and terminology are *right* and more emphasis on whose actions, service, outreach, kindness, and effectiveness are *good* ... [In order] to help our world get back on the road to being truly and wholly good again, the way God created it to be. ... We're here on a mission to join God in bringing blessing to our needy world. We hope to bring God's blessing to you, whoever you are and whatever you believe, and if you'd like to join us in this mission and the faith that creates and nourishes it, you're welcome."⁶³

We get a better understanding of where McLaren is headed when he writes, "I hope that both they (people everywhere) and I will become better people, transformed by God's Spirit, more pleasing to God, more of a blessing to the world, so that God's kingdom (which I seek, but cannot manipulate) comes on earth as in heaven."⁶⁴ And what kind of people will populate this kingdom? Apparently, McLaren tells us, it will be people from all faiths and religions:

"...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 or 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."⁶⁵

It doesn't take long to realize that the kingdom of the emergent community is not the kingdom of God, nor the Church, as described in Scripture

— unless the missional mandate is to fill the kingdom with tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). But once this unbiblical view of God's kingdom is accepted, the question becomes, "How do we live missionally?"

Rob Bell writes, "For Jesus, the question wasn't, how do I get into heaven? but how do I bring heaven here? ... The goal isn't escaping this world but making this world the kind of place God can come to. And God is remaking us into the kind of people who can do this kind of work."⁶⁶

Dan Kimball adds, "our faith also includes kingdom living, part of which is the responsibility to fight locally and globally for social justice on behalf of the poor and needy. Our example is Jesus, who spent time among the lepers, the poor, and the needy."⁶⁷

These quotes give good examples of half-truths twisted into distorted vision. Jesus did show compassion and minister to the poor, but neither Jesus nor the Apostles after Him fought for social justice on behalf of the poor and needy. While Jesus, through the transformation of lives, began a process that would revolutionize much of the world in regard to injustice, He never made these things a central platform of His ministry nor that of the Church.

Jesus said virtually nothing about the environment, political tyranny, eradication of poverty and illiteracy, elimination of deadly disease, or other social ills. This does not mean that these things are not important, but they are obviously not the heart of His ministry, which was to save us from our sins and enable us "to become the righteousness of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus could have started a social revolution without going to the cross, but without the cross we could not be redeemed from sin. Our mission is to call people "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

But the missional agenda is different. Here we are to bless people, for that is why God has chosen us — to be a blessing to others.⁶⁸ What does it mean to be a blessing? Apparently it

does not mean coming to saving faith in Christ, because Bell tells us that "God blesses everybody. People who don't believe in God. People who are opposed to God. People who do violent, evil things. God's intentions are to bless everybody."⁶⁹

This blessing comes, missional teaching says, as the Church gives up its efforts to convert people to Christ and simply serves them. Bell writes, "the most powerful things happen when the church surrenders its desire to convert people and convince them to join. It is when the church gives itself away in radical acts of service and compassion, expecting nothing in return, that the way of Jesus is most vividly put on display."⁷⁰ In this way, he tells us "the gospel is good news, especially for those who don't believe it. ... If the gospel isn't good news for everybody, then it isn't good news for anybody."⁷¹

But is the Gospel good news for everybody? It may very well be a blessing to have Christian people treat you with the love of Christ, but Jesus and the Scriptures could not be more clear that those who do not know Christ are under the wrath of God (Romans 1:18ff), will perish (2 Thessalonians 2:9), are eternally doomed (Luke 12:46-48), and will spend eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15) — hardly good news to those who reject Him.

EMERGENT SCRIPTURE

Many of the unusual positions held by the emergent leaders stem directly from their theology of the Scriptures as well as their hermeneutical approach. First, insiders of the emerging church "conversation" are fond of expressing their fidelity to the Word of God, even as they undermine it. McLaren says, "I want to affirm that my regard for Scripture is higher than ever."⁷² Bell tells us that for more than 10 years he has arranged his life "around studying, reading, teaching, and trying to understand the Bible."⁷³

One would have to wonder why Bell devotes so much time to understanding the Bible because he apparently agrees with his wife, who stated

in a joint interview that she has "no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again."⁷⁴

To press home their views, the emergent leaders must perform some interesting gymnastics with the Scriptures. First, they question inspiration. Wondering out loud about Paul's epistles, Bell writes, "A man named Paul is writing this, so is it his word or God's word?"⁷⁵ McLaren pulls out the old Jesus versus Paul card, "We retained Jesus as Savior but promoted the apostle Paul (or someone else) to Lord and Teacher. ...and/or by deciding that Jesus' life and teachings were completely interpreted by Paul."⁷⁶

Bell, in complete ignorance of history and the doctrine of biblical preservation, informs his readers that the Canon came about as a result of a vote of the Church Fathers:

"In reaction to abuses by the church, a group of believers during a time called the Reformation claimed that we only need the authority of the Bible. But the problem is that we got the Bible from the church voting on what the Bible even is."⁷⁷

McLaren said he once believed that the Scriptures were inerrant, infallible, or authoritative. But he no longer believes "the Bible is absolutely equivalent to the phrase 'the Word of God' as used in the Bible. Although I do not find the term *inerrancy* useful, I want to affirm that my regard for Scripture is higher than ever. I would prefer to use the term *inherency* to describe my view of Scripture."⁷⁸

By the use of "inherency," he is dusting off the neo-orthodox view of the Scriptures, which taught that the Bible becomes the "Word of God" but is not the completed Word of God, for God's Word can be found in anything He "inspires." Anyone with any confidence left in Scripture can be relieved of it when McLaren and friends say that we have all been misreading the Bible. He writes that, "there is more than one way to 'kill' the Bible. You can dissect it, analyze it, abstract it. You can read its ragged stories and ragamuffin poetry, and

from them you can derive neat abstractions, sterile propositions, and sharp-edged principles."⁷⁹

To the emergent people, the Bible was never intended to be studied and analyzed; it was meant to be embraced as art, to be read as a story. The proof is that it is written as narrative and poetry and story. While much of it is in this genre, much of it is also "law, lament, instruction, wisdom, ethical injunction, warning, apocalyptic imagery, letters, promise, reports, propositions, ritual, and more. The easy appeal to the overarching narrative proves immensely distortive."⁸⁰

Regarding Scripture, Carson leaves us with a powerful warning that "at some juncture churches have to decide whether they will, by God's grace, try to live in submission to Scripture, or try to domesticate Scripture."⁸¹

EMERGENT HERMENEUTICS

With such an understanding of the Scriptures, how can the emerging church claim to be in any sense devoted to the Bible? This is done by developing new hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation involving rules and principles that enable us to interpret anything we read, from the newspaper to the Bible, although the word is used almost exclusively in reference to Scripture.

The hermeneutic used by most of us all of the time in extrabiblical literature could be called "normal" or "literal." That is, we believe that words make sense, can be understood, and can communicate a message that the author wants to convey. When we read tax laws, as confusing as they might be, we approach them through normal hermeneutics, believing that we can and must understand what they say.

When we turn to the sports page of a newspaper and read that such-and-such team just won the championship, we naturally believe that a fact has been communicated (the team won) and that we can understand what the author of the article has said, all because we use normal

hermeneutics. But when it comes to Scripture, many are not content to use normal hermeneutics (called grammatical-historical by theologians). Rather, many approaches to interpretation have been invented.

We have allegorical and devotional hermeneutics, which add supposed hidden meanings to words and texts; liberal hermeneutics, which deny the supernatural and anything that is not politically correct at the moment; and neo-orthodox hermeneutics, which say that anything that “inspires” us is the Word of God to us. More recently, new hermeneutical approaches have been invented, each attempting to circumvent the clear teaching of the Word. At least three new hermeneutics are making the rounds in emergent circles:

1) Postmodern hermeneutics (or hermeneutics of suspicion). Because postmodernism is laced with deconstructionism, and the emergent church is the postmodern church, it is only natural that a postmodern hermeneutic of Scripture would be developed and employed in this movement. McLaren explains it well:

“But the Bible requires human interpretation, which was [is] a problem. ... How do ‘I’ know the Bible is always right? And if ‘I’ am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation, I’ll also ask how I know which school, method, or technique of biblical interpretation is right. ... What good is it, liberals would ask conservatives, to have an inerrant Bible if you have no inerrant interpretations?”⁸²

2) Rhetorical hermeneutics. McLaren defines this as:

“It’s an approach to Scripture that among other things tells us that we normally pay too much attention to what the writers are *saying* and not enough to what they’re *doing*. Rhetorical interpretation would ask, ‘What is Jesus trying to do by using the language of hell?’”⁸³

In other words, because we can’t understand words, by postmodern necessity we are free to ignore words and try to interpret actions. This is hardly a step in the right direction, as anyone who tries to interpret body language could testify.

3) Redemptive Hermeneutics. This is a methodology invented by Dallas Theological Seminary graduate William Webb and endorsed by Dallas professors such as Darrell L. Bock and Stephen R. Spencer, originally to provide justification for the egalitarian movement.

Unlike many egalitarians, Webb concedes that if the Bible is read using normal hermeneutics, men and women are given different roles and functions in the home and in the Church. Webb’s solution is to move beyond the written words to the spirit of the words, which will allow accommodation for the views and attitudes of our age:

“While Scripture had a positive influence in its time, we should take that redemptive spirit and move to an even better, more fully-realized ethic today.”⁸⁴

Why is this important? Because “Christians have to reevaluate their beliefs due to changing attitudes toward women and toward homosexuals.”⁸⁵

McLaren uses this hermeneutic to teach that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us to new truth beyond the written Word:

“I can’t see church history in any other way, except this: *semper reformanda*, continually being led and taught and guided by the Spirit into new truth.”⁸⁶

Bell uses the same hermeneutic to make this comment on Matthew 16:19 and 18:18: “[Jesus] is giving his followers the authority to make *new* interpretations of the Bible.”⁸⁷ These new interpretations led to a new Church. Bell urges, “It is our turn to step up and take responsibility for who the church is going to be for a new generation. It is our turn to redefine and reshape and dream it all

up again.”⁸⁸ But they are wrong. It is not up to us to define and shape the Church; God has done this already.

What these new hermeneutics have in common is the deliberate movement away from the words and message of Scripture to a new message beyond the pages of the Word. In the process, the Bible becomes nothing more than a shell or perhaps a museum piece to be admired but ignored. Scripture as handed down by God has been replaced with the imaginations of man in order to fit better with our culture. But if we have no authoritative word from God, the Church has nothing left but mystery and mysticism.

MYSTERY

The emerging church is not excited about truth (it, in fact, rejects truth claims), but it is enamored with mystery. Donald Miller wrote his book, *Blue Like Jazz*, to develop this very theme. He summarizes his thoughts:

“At the end of the day, when I am lying in bed and I know the chances of any of our theology being exactly right are a million to one, I need to know that God has things figured out, that if my math is wrong we are still going to be okay. And wonder is that feeling we get when we let go of our silly answers, our mapped out rules that we want God to follow. I don’t think there is any better worship than wonder.”⁸⁹

When Rob Bell is faced with giving answers to the pertinent issues of life such as heaven, hell, suicide, the devil, God, love, or rape, he has no answers — just hugs. He writes that, “Most of my responses were about how we need others to carry our burdens and how our real needs in life are not for more information but for loving community with other people on the journey.”⁹⁰ But the classic answer belongs to McLaren, who virtually closes his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, with this statement:

“Consider for a minute what it would mean to get the glory of God finally and fully right in your thinking or to get a fully

formed opinion of God's goodness or holiness. Then I think you'll feel the irony: *all these years of pursuing orthodoxy ended up like this — in front of all this glory understanding nothing.*"⁹¹

There we have it. Ultimately, we know nothing. Even though Jesus was clear that we worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), in the emergent church there is no truth, no theology, no understanding of God. However, this does not stop them from embracing the presence of God, or so we are told. How does such a "faith" survive? It survives on the basis of mysticism.

MYSTICISM

Peter Rollins, emergent leader with Ikon in Northern Ireland, says, "at Ikon we are developing a theology which derives from the mystics, a theology without theology to complement our religion without religion."⁹² Emergent leaders can say such things because of their overbearing emphasis on experience. Kimble has it backwards when he asserts, "The old paradigm taught that if you had the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching."⁹³

Carson is correct, "For almost everyone within the movement, this works out in an emphasis on feelings and affections over against linear thought and rationality; on experience over against truth."⁹⁴

The emerging church is a movement in search of an experience, not the truth. They seem to have little realization that an experience based on anything but truth is a mirage. The Scriptures never deny the proper place of experience, but our Lord says, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The emergent church is a movement that is in bondage to its own imagination, not one held captive to the truth of God.

Endnotes:

1. Recognized, but not official leaders of the movement at this time include: Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Leonard Sweet, the late Mike

Yaconelli, Spencer Burke, Erwin McManus, Tommy Kyllonen (aka Urban D), and Donald Miller. Some see Richard Foster and Dallas Willard as key mentors for the movement.

2. Some of the promoters of the emerging church include Youth Specialties, The Ooze, and The Emergent Village.

3. See Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, November, 2004, pp. 36-41. This article described the excitement and chaos at the April 2004 Emergent Convention in Nashville.

4. *Ibid.*, pg. 39.

5. Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001, pg. 19. In many ways the emergent church can trace its birth to the publication of this book.

6. Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003, pg. 60.

7. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.

8. D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005, pg. 42.

9. *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 143.

10. See "Interview: Brian McLaren," *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, July 15, 2005. Document available at: www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week846.interview.html.

11. "The Emergent Mystique," op. cit., pg. 38.

12. *Ibid.*, pg. 40.

13. Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004, pg. 293, italics and ellipsis in original.

14. "The Emergent Mystique," op. cit., pg. 38.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *A New Kind of Christian*, op. cit., pg. 162, upper case in original.

18. Leonard Sweet, Editor, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004, pg. 35.

19. *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 84, italic in original.

20. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. White Plains, N.Y.: Peter Pauper Press, Inc., 1984, pg. 106, italic in original.

21. *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 175.

22. Brian McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005. This volume is primarily a deconstruction of the doctrine of hell.

23. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 134.

24. *Ibid.*, pg. XVIII.

25. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pp. 286-287.

26. Quoted by David Roach, "Leaders Call 'Emerging Church Movement' a Threat to Gospel," BP News, March 23, 2005. Document available at: www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=20420.

27. *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 178,

italics in original.

28. *A New Kind of Christian*, op. cit., pg. XV.

29. Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005, pg. 12.

30. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.

31. *Ibid.*, pg. 27.

32. *Ibid.*, pg. 20, (cf. pg. 21).

33. *Ibid.*, pg. 27.

34. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

35. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 223, italics in original.

36. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 197.

37. Mark Oestreicher cited in *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 53.

38. *A New Kind of Christian*, op. cit., pg. 161.

39. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 235.

40. Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, pg. 102.

41. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pp. 195-197.

42. Albert Mohler, "'A Generous Orthodoxy' — Is It Orthodox?" Document available at: www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/?adate=2/16/2005#1313087.

43. Brian McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. XII, italics in original.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-64, 71-79.

45. *Ibid.*, pg. 74.

46. *Ibid.*, pg. 103, (cf. pp. 182-183).

47. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 37.

48. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

49. *Ibid.*, pg. 183, brackets in original.

50. *Ibid.*, pg. 35, italics in original.

51. *Ibid.*, pg. 138.

52. *Ibid.*, pg. 69.

53. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

54. *A New Kind of Christian*, op. cit., pg. 129.

55. *Ibid.*, pg. 84.

56. *Ibid.*, pg. 106.

57. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 97.

58. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 84.

59. *Ibid.*, pg. 149. McLaren has adopted N.T. Wright's understanding of the Gospel, which is termed the New Perspective. The New Perspective says that we have misunderstood the New Testament and that the real issue of such books as Romans is not to explain the Gospel, but how to bring Jews and Gentiles together in the kingdom of God (see pp. 149-152).

60. *Ibid.*, pg. 153.

61. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 113.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 224.

64. *Ibid.*, pg. 263.

65. *Ibid.*, pg. 264.

66. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pp. 147, 150.

67. *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 224.

68. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pg. 165.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, pg. 167.
 71. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 167.
 72. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 111.
 73. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pg. 41.
 74. "The Emergent Mystique," op. cit., pg. 38.
 75. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pg. 42.
 76. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 86.
 77. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pp. 67-68.
 78. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 111, italics in original.
 79. *A New Kind of Christian*, op. cit., pg. 158.
 80. *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 164.
 81. *Ibid.*, pg. 172.
 82. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pp. 133, 134.
 83. *The Last Word and the Word After That*, op. cit., pg. 81, italics in original.
 84. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001, pg. 247.
 85. *Ibid.*, pg. 25.
 86. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 193, italics in original.
 87. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pg. 50, italic in original.
 88. *Ibid.*, pg. 164.
 89. Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, pg. 206.
 90. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pg. 30.
 91. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 294, italics in original.
 92. "Pete Rollins [Ikon, Belfast, Northern Ireland] pops in for a drop of the black stuff," *Stories from the Virtual Cafe* on the emergingchurch.info web site. Document available at: www.emergingchurch.info/stories/cafe/peterollins.
 93. *The Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 188.
 94. *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, op. cit., pg. 29.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

these two returned to Jerusalem and were once again witnesses of the resurrected Savior (vv. 33-49). And then, even more fatal for Hinn is verse 18, "And one of them, named Cleopas... ." It does not take a doctorate of theology to cut through Hinn's pretense of grand Bible knowledge.

And while the above two examples may merely send one down a dead-end path, his interpretation of Isaiah 53 and other such verses, wherein he claims physical healing is guaranteed in the atonement of Jesus Christ, comes with much more serious consequences. These unorthodox proclamations are the ones that can place his followers on a deadly — both physical and spiritual — drift.

Self-proclaimed occult experts Rebecca Brown and husband Daniel Yoder also arouse their readers with strange and harmful interpretations. In a recent article posted on the couple's web site, Brown writes, "For years I sought the Lord for an answer to anger." Brown, instead of drawing her answer from Scripture (exegesis), introduces her own ideas into Scripture (eisegesis). And, of course, God gets the credit — or more accurately, the blame — for her bizarre interpretation as she writes, "God gave the answer to Daniel and me directly."

This answer came as Daniel drove to town to pick up the couple's mail. Brown narrates the events:

"As he was driving through the center of town on the highway, he witnessed an incident. He was not involved in it in any way; he simply witnessed the incident. He was driving along, and a young man in a pick-up truck was driving along on the road going the same direction some distance in front of him. Suddenly, an old man in an old car pulled right out onto the highway directly in front of the young man and proceeded to drive about 15 miles per hour. The old man never looked to see if anyone was coming! The young man in the truck had to slam on his brakes and skidded all over the road trying to keep

from hitting the old man in the back. When he finally got his truck under control he was obviously furious! He pulled up beside the old man and honked his horn, rolled down his window and shouted and shook his fist at the old guy."

Brown then uses the occurrence to present her teaching on anger:

"Now Daniel was not involved in this incident at all. However, when he arrived at the place in the road where it had happened, suddenly, he realized that he was furious. He was so mad he wanted to hurt someone or something! But he didn't have anything to be mad about! As he thought about this Daniel prayed. He said, Lord, why am I so furious? ... As Daniel asked the Lord that question, immediately the Holy Spirit flashed into Daniel's mind the scripture...: **'Be angry and do not sin. ... nor give place to the devil.'** Eph. 4:26-27. The Lord went on to show Daniel that that word "place," is a geographical term. Your home is a "place." The spot in the road where the young man nearly had the accident was a "place." When we get angry, and sin in our anger, such as that young man did, we give demon spirits the legal right to inhabit that "place." So here is the key: Demon spirits are cruising around all the time looking for a place where they can cause trouble. *The instant we have the emotion of anger rise up in us, this emotion acts as a magnet for demon spirits of anger. ... In less than one second, when we get angry, spirits of anger come flying and attach themselves onto us, on the outside of us. These spirits have the ability to inject more anger into us. They do this immediately, in a matter of seconds. ... The goal of these spirits is to make you so angry that you lose control and sin.* When you do, then they have the legal right to come inside you. When they come inside you, they then attempt to take you over and control your actions. ... Let's go back to Daniel for a moment. The young man in the pick-up truck sinned in his anger at the old man. As a result, he gave spirits of anger the legal right to that "place" in the road. *When Daniel arrived at that place in the road, he literally drove*

into a cloud of anger demons. As soon as he arrived, those demons attached themselves to Daniel and injected anger into him. That's why, suddenly, Daniel was furious even though he had no reason to be mad at anything. The Lord showed Daniel that he must rebuke those spirits of anger and command them to disperse and get off of him. As soon as Daniel did this, his anger went away. Have you ever been walking outside, and suddenly walked into a cloud of little insects hovering in one spot? That's the way anger demons do. When someone sins, they give these spirits the legal right to inhabit a place, and they hover in that spot in a cloud, just waiting for someone to come along. They can be hovering anywhere — a spot in the road, at a table in a restaurant, a seat in a bus, train or plane, or a motel room, etc. How many times have you suddenly become angry for no reason at all? You just entered into a cloud of anger demons. Rebuke them and send them on their way!" (bold and italics in original)

With such wretched eisegesis, no wonder Christians struggle in vain and are easily conquered in their battle with anger. An unbiblical understanding of anger gives way to unbiblical remedies, such as Brown's, leading to unbiblical habits and confused and defeated Christians.

Uncontrolled or sinful anger is a matter of learned behavior, not magnetic demons. God calls us to control our temper and use this powerful force for good. Scripture instructs: "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but the wise man, holding it back, quiets it" (Proverbs 29:11). As Jay Adams points out, "because [uncontrolled anger] is a matter of learned behavior, there is hope for change. What has been learned can be unlearned, as a new way of responding that is pleasing to God is relearned in its place." It is a matter of expressing our anger "in a manner that is consistent with the principles of the Scriptures and used for the purposes that God has set forth in that Book," Adams writes. It is not a matter of rebuking anger demons and sending them on their way, as Brown purports.

While many Christians (new and old) do not have the ability or discernment to sort through all the heresy and nonsense, they can gain that ability with the help of the "seasoned guides" and, more importantly, the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the written Word (John 16:13).

God has provided His Word in a way that those who desire to know Him and live a life that is pleasing to Him may do so. Christians do not need teachers like Hinn and Brown who express an atmosphere of unquestioned authority — remember their peculiar interpretations come to them as a result of claimed divine revelation or intervention — to supersede the work of the Holy Spirit. It may be hard work, and the enemy of our souls may discourage us at every front, but the earnest believer can search the Word, discern its meaning, and apply it to his life.

—MKG

dream." In 2002, he moved to Africa from his home in Georgia to establish "Dream for Africa," an organization directed to conquering the HIV/AIDS epidemic in that country. Now, apparently, that dream has fizzled. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, "In October, Mr. Wilkinson resigned in a huff from the African charity he founded. He abandoned his plan to house 10,000 children in a facility that was to be an orphanage, bed-and-breakfast, game reserve, Bible college, industrial park and Disneyesque tourist destination in the tiny kingdom of Swaziland."

According to *Christianity Today*, a factor in Wilkinson's decision was what he regarded as a "personal snub" from Swaziland's King Mswati III when Wilkinson desired to meet and discuss with the king plans to build homes for AIDS orphans. Shortly thereafter, Wilkinson announced he was stepping down, leaving Africa, and retiring from active ministry at age 58.

—MKG

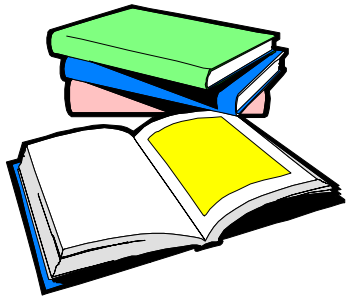
CHO DELAYS RETIREMENT

The Rev. David (Paul) Yonggi Cho promised he would retire in February 2006 upon his 70th birthday. At a New Year's Day service, however, he retracted that pledge and stated he would continue on as pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. The decision met with overwhelming support from his congregation of around 750,000, said to be the world's largest church. In November, a vote was taken requesting that Cho delay his retirement. Cho received almost unanimous endorsement with 155,316 of the 155,617 votes (99.8 percent) cast in favor of him remaining pastor. Cho now plans to continue as pastor until age 75.

Yet not all are avid proponents of Cho's choice to stay on. According to *The Korean Times*, "some Christian groups, which have been monitoring what they claim [is] the megachurch's wayward leadership, denounced Cho's retraction as an attempt to prolong his reign over the church." Pointing to what has been labeled "shady internal financial transactions," some said they will "take the charismatic pastor to court over some alleged irregularities," the newspaper reported. The Christian Alliance for Church Reform claims that money from Cho's church has found its way into companies owned by the pastor's oldest son, Hee-jun.

Protestant groups are also dismayed at the decision, saying that within the Full Gospel Church, Cho is idolized and almost deified and eclipses God. One unnamed Full Gospel Church insider said that many are concerned that once Cho does step down, the megachurch will swiftly disintegrate.

—MKG



Books in Review

ANSWERING THE OBJECTIONS OF ATHEISTS, AGNOSTICS, & SKEPTICS

by Ron Rhodes

Harvest House Publishers, 294 pages, \$12.99

Christians should not fear the challenges thrown their way by critics, skeptics, or unbelievers — not with a publication like apologist Ron Rhodes' latest offering.

Rhodes first establishes that what a person believes really does matter, then provides for the reader a brief understanding of atheism, agnosticism, and skepticism. He then systematically tackles the prevalent attacks against the biblical faith, including naturalism, evolution, morality, and the problem of evil. The evidence for the person of Jesus Christ, His deity, His exclusive claims, and His resurrection make up other chapters. Two chapters are singularly devoted to an examination and apologetic for the reliability of Scripture — for any skeptic knows that if he can nullify the Bible, the Christian's faith will begin to topple like a house of cards.

Many of the chapters are made up of a variety of common objections that the Christian might find presented to him. Rhodes, in his concise and methodical — yet thorough and comprehensible — style, responds to these many criticisms. The final chapter, "The Character Assassination of God," examines a few of the misconceptions aimed to impugn the absolute holiness and justice of God. He concludes with a brief call to believers to exercise gentleness in responding to objectors; and, to unbelievers, an invitation to become a believer, along with instructions on how to become a Christian.

Scripture mandates our response to questions and outright attacks on the Christian faith (1 Peter 3:15, Jude 3, Titus 1:9). This book will help to equip and encourage the believer to be ready to give an answer and defend his faith against even jaded critics and skeptics. It is a great resource for inspiring reading or reference.

—MKG

ROSE BOOK OF BIBLE CHARTS, MAPS & TIME LINES

Rose Publishing, 192 pages, \$29.99

Over the past several years, some of the more helpful resources for apologists and Bible students are the pamphlets and wall charts produced by Rose Publishing. The extent of topics presented in these outlines and histograms are useful for personal study, Sunday school, Bible classes, and homeschoolers.

Much of the collection has been assembled and is now available in a single volume under the title *Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps & Time Lines*. This oversized, hardcover book contains 35 different items previously published individually by Rose as pamphlets and/or charts. Included are Old and New Testament overviews; the inspiration and canonicity of the Bible; prophecies fulfilled by Jesus; biblical archaeology; numerous maps of the Middle East, the Holy Land, and Paul's missionary journeys; temple illustrations; charts detailing the Trinity, Creation, eschatology, Bible feasts and holidays, Christian denominations, cults, and Islam; and much more. In all, if these resources were purchased separately, one could expect to pay nearly ten times the amount of this single volume.

Two other items that make this a great work are, first, the book is bound with a "concealed" spiral binding. On your bookshelf, it appears as a normal spined volume. However, when opened, the book will lay completely flat for study or for photocopying. The second "plus" is that the purchaser is allowed to make up to 300 copies of any chart free of charge for use in one church (and not for resale) for Sunday school or Bible classes. Such permission is unparalleled in the publishing world. Kudos to Rose Publishing.

Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps & Time Lines is a wealth of rich Bible facts, figures, and visuals presented in "Technicolor." It is a compilation which helps one to see important aspects of the Bible in clear, accurate, and graphic detail. It will enhance the Bible for any — young, old, novice, or seasoned — student of Scripture.

—MKG

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