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The Kingdom of Emergent Theology

by Gary E. Gilley

It has been claimed that Sigmund Freud enjoyed telling his followers a story of a pastor who visited an atheist insurance agent who was on his deathbed. The family had asked the pastor to share the Gospel with their dying loved one as they waited in another room. As the conversation continued longer than expected there was hope that the pastor was being successful in his mission. When the pastor finally emerged from the bedroom it was discovered that the agent had not converted to Christ, but he had been able to sell the pastor an insurance policy.

While Freud used the illustration to warn his fellow psychoanalysts to stay true to their beliefs, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, from whom this account has been obtained, has another application to offer. Although an unlikely source (in this writer's opinion) to offer the following warning, Mouw writes:

"In rejecting the very real defects of fundamentalism during the past few decades, evangelicals have begun to take very seriously their responsibilities to the larger culture — and with some obvious signs of success. The questions we must face honestly



are these: Have we sold a new policy to the culture — or has the culture sold us a policy?"¹

This is a thought-worthy question in light of the emergent church movement's recent inroads into evangelicalism, and in some cases, even fundamentalism. The emergent church is a movement deeply concerned with having an impact on culture. But evidence is mounting to the effect that culture is having more of an impact on the emergent movement than the other way around. As a matter of fact, emergent seems to be chasing, even imitating culture, rather than changing it. The reason this is true has to do with its understanding of the kingdom of God.

Mark Driscoll defines the emerging church as "a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who

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Editorials

WHEN THE CHURCH IMITATES SCIENCE FICTION

It is intriguing that Jude labels those who teach things that are false as “wandering stars” (Jude 13). Plainly and simply, they are all over the map and, at times, one can’t even get a fix on them. They are here and there. If that is true of anything, it is true of what is called the emerging church movement.

The emerging church movement is reminiscent of one of those gross and scary science fiction movies. As the camera zooms in on a big ball of slime, all of a sudden it begins to move as the music gets creepier. Then, on cue, you can discern a mutant creature struggling to free itself from the ugly mass. Of course, the suspense of what it will look like or be like is part of the whole experience. You just know that whatever emerges, it won’t be good.

The ECM is really not so new, but the repackaging of very old and aberrant ideas. The ECM is just that — emerging. No one knows what it will look like or be like two, five, or even ten years from now. It may not even exist a decade from now.

We can trace the beginnings of the ECM to what was called the Leadership Network and Bob Buford. Buford had absorbed the writings of Peter Drucker. Drucker, in turn, talked of a paradigm shift and formless religious

experience and mysticism based on the 19th-century writings of Søren Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, was a strange character and a study all by himself. He was very critical of his Lutheran Church and confused the State Church with *the Church*. In essence, he rejected Church and creed and taught that the person was an isolated and solitary individual alone with God. Community was meaningless in his view. Religion was an individual thing largely based on subjective experience. The word “existential” is connected to Kierkegaard, who further taught that existence was realized based on the inner decisions of the individual. He was more interested in individual freedom and autonomy rather than a set of doctrines. He proposed that truth was subjective. The term “leap of faith” is attributed to him.

From these ideas Kierkegaard concluded that there was no way to obtain objective certainty about any doctrinal truth. One could only hope that the leap was in the right direction. In the end, man becomes the captain of his own soul. It is interesting to note that both liberal and neo-orthodox theologians draw heavily from different parts of Kierkegaard. Few realize the large and continuing impact of this man, even though some scholars say his writings are largely incoherent. This Kierkegaardian philosophy would appeal to a self-disciplined and self-driven climber like Drucker. Though one’s experience with Christ may be personal, it is never private. It

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ORU FINANCIAL WOES ALLEVIATED

In 1987, a race track owner came to the rescue of a financially strapped Oral Roberts University. Two decades later, the founder of a craft and educational supply store chain has offered to help extricate the Tulsa-based university from its current fiscal woes. Last October, ORU announced it was \$52.5 million in debt. In November, Mart Green and his family pledged \$70 million to the debt-ridden institution. Green is the founder of Hobby Lobby, an arts and craft chain of 395 locations in 32 states, and Mardel, a Christian office and educational supply chain of stores in six states.

Green provided an immediate gift of \$8 million in late November, with the additional \$62 million to be given subsequent to a review of the university's financial records. Following major changes to ORU's governing board and adjustments as to its operation procedures, the university's board of regents voted unanimously to accept the additional funds.

According to an Associated Press report, "Green said he has never attended the university and had no ties to the Oral Roberts family. He said he has been following the university's story in the media in recent weeks and decided he wanted to help."

Amidst the initial announcement of ORU's fiscal deficit last year came charges of financial malfeasance by Richard Roberts, the university's president and son of the school's founder and namesake. Roberts resigned as president in November and was later voted unanimously as "president emeritus." Oral Roberts will be a lifetime trustee. The AP report also stated that "Roberts and his father will remain 'spiritual regents,' who cannot vote on university matters."

—MKG

HINN TIGHT-LIPPED ON FINANCES

Controversial faith healer Benny Hinn ignored the initial deadline of a Senate investigation calling for documents pertinent to his personal and ministerial financial activities. Last November, Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, asked a half-dozen religious mega-ministries for information concerning their monetary compensation,

perks, and board oversight. Other ministries that were asked to disclose information were Paula and Randy White, Joyce Meyer, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, and Eddie Long. Grassley is the top Republican member of the Senate Finance Committee.

Grassley said that his investigation resulted from complaints from the public and news reports exposing lavish spending by televangelists. He said that he wanted to discover if the heads of the ministries being examined are complying with IRS regulations, which prohibit excessive personal gain through tax-exempt work, and that the inquiry "has nothing to do with church doctrine."

Dollar also spurned Grassley's request, saying that the matter "should be referred to the IRS or the Senate panel should get a subpoena for the documents," an Associated Press report stated. At the Dec. 6, 2007, deadline only Joyce Meyer had provided the requested details.

Repercussions from the Senate inquiry and Hinn's refusal to comply appear to have cost the televangelist his board position at Oral Roberts University. Amidst its own indebtedness and allegations of financial abuse by its president Richard Roberts, ORU in December stripped Hinn of his voting privileges on its board and named him a "regent emeritus." The following month, Hinn resigned as a business regent according to an ORU press release. Prior to Hinn's resignation, it was announced that Dollar had resigned from ORU's board of regents.

—MKG

FREEMASONS LIFTING VEIL OF SECRECY

Once marked by a history of mystery, controversy, and suspicion, today Freemasons are beginning to remove the veil of secrecy which has shrouded their fraternal organization. Movies such as *National Treasure* and its recent sequel, *Book of Secrets*, along with a surplus of educational programs on broadcast and cable networks, have all brought welcomed attention to the once-secretive society.

"When people don't know an organization, they fear it. If people don't know what you're doing they fear the worst," George Seghers, executive director of the Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Va., told the *Washington* (continues on page 22)

Shopping with Tony Campolo at His Religious Supermarket

A Marketplace of Ideas for Everyone

by G. Richard Fisher



Tony Campolo is no stranger to controversy. At times he seems to enjoy it and often sounds deliberately provocative. It is part of his style. He gained some popularity in the 1970s with the release in film of his sermon, "It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'." In the past when he made statements or claims that were over the top and he was hammered by the press he would go back and massage the words, nuance the meaning, and come up with a more acceptable spin.

However, more recently Campolo has gone on record with very fixed statements and positions in his book, *Letters to a Young Evangelical*.¹ To any evangelical — young or old — it is a very disturbing and frightening book. It is disturbing because of the positions taken and frightening because it could lead untaught believers far astray. It is replete with Scripture-twisting of the worst kind.

It might help us to know that Campolo is a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Eastern University, St. Davids, Pa. He is a graduate of Eastern College and Eastern Baptist Seminary and has earned a Ph.D. from Temple University. He is ordained in the American Baptist Church and lives in Philadelphia. His beliefs have echoes of Augustus Hopkins Strong and Walter Rauschenbusch.² Both Strong and Rauschenbusch were at Rochester Theological Seminary and were prominent around

1900. Both men believed that the kingdom of God could be realized on earth through human effort. These kinds of ideas give support to Liberation Theology. These two men died just three years apart, Rauschenbusch in 1918 and Strong in 1921. Yet, their effect and influence live on.

STARTING WITH THE KEY

The key to deciphering Campolo's many contradictory statements is his dialectical thinking. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectical philosophy is the most well-known form, but there are many variations. In dialectical philosophy there is belief in the interpenetration of opposites, that is, nothing can be seen as either/or. Opposites must be reconciled and fused, and so black can be made into white and vice versa. There is also the acceptance of contradictions. One must be for and against something at the same time. This is seen throughout Campolo's book. He says in effect, "I was against it before I was for it."

The Bible, on the other hand, presents antithetical thinking. This means there are opposites that can never be reconciled or merged. Things such as light and darkness, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, God and Satan, and heaven and hell were never meant to be — and cannot be — reconciled. The book of Proverbs is replete with antithetical thinking, such as the contrast between the

fool and the wise. There cannot be a wise fool.

Karl Popper strongly rejected dialectical thinking in the 1930s. He said we should not put up with contradictory thinking, and if we do, it is basic dishonesty. The Prophet Isaiah denounced dialectical thinking when he said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). Understanding the willingness to merge opposites and fuse contradictions gives us insight into Campolo's confusion. However, at times, he will inconsistently abandon dialectical thinking when he wants a point of his to be right or he wants to oppose conservative evangelicals. On those occasions he will bend Scriptures out of shape.

ILLUSTRATION FROM THE PAST

Years ago a television show was created called "To Tell the Truth." At the beginning of each game three persons are introduced, all claiming to be a certain individual with a peculiar profession or special skill. A panel would question each of the three persons in an effort to try to guess who truly was the featured individual. As the game drew to a conclusion, the panel made their judgment as to who was "telling the truth," and the contestants were instructed, "Will

the real (name) please stand up." And so it seems, in *Letters to a Young Evangelical*, the real Tony Campolo has finally stood up.

Campolo's stated purpose for the book is as follows:

"Imitating Paul, I will address the letters in this book to an imagined young Evangelical named Timothy. My hope is that these letters might provide young readers in today's world something like the helpful advice and instruction that Paul gave to his Timothy many years ago."³

How well he succeeds remains to be seen. Many would say he is a very poor imitation of Paul.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In spite of the title of his book, Campolo objects to the word "Evangelical" and does not want to be called that. After going back and forth about the religious right, conservative evangelicals, progressive evangelicals, and other designations, he identifies his constituency of evangelical writers and speakers as "Red-Letter Christians."⁴ The origin of that title is strange, Campolo admits:

"After much discussion, we enthusiastically decided to call ourselves Red-Letter Christians. Strangely enough, this name was suggested to us by a secular Jewish country-and-western disc jockey in Nashville, Tennessee. When he heard about our intense desire to be faithful to the words of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament, he said, 'Oh! You folks are into those verses in the Bible that are in red letters!' Of course, he was referring to the old King James Version Bibles that had all the words of Jesus printed in red."⁵

Campolo draws some controversial interpretations, applications, and conclusions about what it would be like for Christians to live by the red letters:

"As I will explain in these letters, the teachings of Jesus run contrary to many of our current policies, lifestyles, and beliefs.

The red letters challenge Americans' justifications for accumulating wealth, support of capital punishment, ready endorsement of war, rampant consumerism, rebellion against sexual prohibitions that have sustained purity and modesty for generations, and arrogant use of economic power to fulfill national self-interests to the detriment of other nations. Some will accuse me of radicalizing Jesus by distorting his message. I am constantly reflecting on that judgment, trying to figure out whether that criticism is valid. But I contend that a true and careful reading of the red letters in the New Testament can radicalize any honest reader."⁶

However, one can be negatively radicalized by focusing on the red letters while ignoring the beautiful balance of the rest of the New Testament. This is what Campolo seems to do. Know it or not, Campolo is suggesting something that is true of cults.

A TRUNCATED BIBLE

Not all would agree that Christ's words lead to the interpretations offered by Campolo. That is not the biggest problem or biggest issue. The larger difficulty is that in majoring totally on only one part of the New Testament — the Gospels — distortion results without the enhancement and enrichment of the rest of the New Testament. For instance, Jesus predicted the building of the Church, but left the details and structure to Paul, Peter, John, and others. A clear ecclesiology could never be developed from the Gospels alone. The book of Acts and the Epistles record that development. Atonement is accomplished in the Gospels, but explained in the Epistles. Building theology and practice from only one segment of the New Testament would be like the blind men who identified an elephant simply from the one part they happened to touch. The elephant is not just the leg or the tail or the trunk or its side.

In fact, Paul asserts that he was called to elaborate and teach themes by inspiration not taught by Jesus, but

subsequently revealed (1 Corinthians 7:12). Should a believing husband or wife stay in a marriage with an unsaved mate? Christ left no specific answer to that question whether in red or black letters, but Paul under the inspiration of God gives a clear answer. Paul does not disclaim inspiration, rather he invests his reply with the very same authority as that of Christ's earlier commands. Paul means that he has no word from the Lord Himself to quote, but he has specific inspired directions to give, "but to the rest I, not the Lord, say."

The Apostle Peter spoke of his (and the other apostles') teachings as commands from God (2 Peter 3:2). Paul spoke of his Words being the commands of God (1 Corinthians 14:37). The New Testament is clearly progressive and doctrine increasingly developed throughout. The Gospels are clearly foundational, but a foundation needs a building to be complete. In the plan and design of the Lord, John the Revelator was allowed to give more detail about the future than had been previously given. While Campolo is not a cult leader, he may be unaware that cult leaders often develop their confused teachings by majoring on one part of the Bible removed from the larger context of other balancing verses. This is called segmented biblical attention. It can be dangerous.

It is also of interest to know that the Red Letter Bible was instigated by German immigrant Louis Klopsch. Klopsch was a successful editor and publisher in New York. In June 1899, he was reading a sermon of DeWitt Talmage (in preparation for publishing it) and thought as he read Luke 22:20 ("This cup is the New Testament in my blood"), that it might be helpful to print the words in red. This led to the idea of putting the words of Jesus in the Gospels in red and the first printing of 60,000 Bibles in red letter editions. The Bible was a huge success with accolades from all over the world. Klopsch used the profits for famine victims globally. Though Klopsch decided to exclude coloring the messages of Old Testament Christophanies and the quoted words of Jesus in Acts and Revelation, nothing

indicates that he thought the Gospels were more important than, or superseded, the rest of the New Testament. We must hold the words of Jesus in highest esteem, as well as hold the rest of the inspired New Testament in highest esteem.

WHOSE GOSPEL?

Campolo lays out some of what he believes in his chapter entitled, "The Gospel According to Us."⁷ In truth, the Gospel is the Gospel and it must be the Gospel according to Scripture. Paul says that if anyone (even an angel) preaches another Gospel, he is accursed (Galatians 1:7-9). The Gospel is clearly defined in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and the good news is that salvation and all that comes with it is based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So there really is no "Gospel according to us."

It is rather startling to read Campolo's statement of the inerrancy of the autographs of Scripture:

"Personally, I think the question of the inerrancy of the original manuscripts is irrelevant because the originals are not available to us."⁸

This view, first held by Augustus Hopkins Strong, has been called "purposive inerrancy" and is a form of limited inspiration. With this view, we are left unclear as to which Scriptures are true and binding and convey the purpose of God for our lives. One could never be sure. How would we know even if the red letters are based on faulty copies and skewed originals that are errant?

The original autographs were available to the early believers as well as the early Church Fathers and early copyists. Many saw them. Jesus Himself commanded the Apostle John to give an original of the book of Revelation to the seven churches, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia" (Revelation 1:11).

It is hard to believe that Campolo would be ignorant of Baptist history, or perhaps he may just be turning his back on it. One of the strongest Baptist theologians of the 18th century

was John Gill. He was said to have trod the whole circle of human learning and went to the bottom of everything in which he engaged. In his *Body of Divinity*, he speaks of the inerrancy and infallibility of the original autographs of Scripture. His view is summarized by Russ Bush and Tom Nettles:

"The fourth prior consideration asserts that only the Scriptures in their original languages, the 'original exemplar,' are to be considered given by inspiration of God. Every translation is to be brought to the original and by it to be examined, tried, judged, corrected, and amended."⁹

Bush and Nettles go on to quote Gill's *Body of Divinity*:

"And if this was not the case, we should have no certain and infallible rule to go by; for it must be either all the translations together, or some one of them; not all of them, because they agree not in all things: not one; for then the contest would be between one nation and another which it should be, whether English, Dutch, French."¹⁰

Gill's point is that if we did not have an infallible standard, we would have to spend our time debating which translation was the absolute standard. Baptist Reformer Dan Taylor (1738-1816) was consistent with Gill:

"Taylor joins with his other Baptist brethren in affirming unhesitatingly the inspiration and thus the infallibility of Scripture, its status as divine revelation, and thus its inerrancy in 'the originals.'"¹¹

Inerrancy of the originals may be irrelevant to Campolo, but not to former Northern Baptist Seminary Professor Harold Lindsell. In his book, *Battle for the Bible*, he is dogmatic in stating:

"I regard the subject of this book, biblical inerrancy, to be the most important theological topic of this age. ... And silence on this matter would be a grave sin. ... Of all the doctrines connected

with the Christian faith, none is more important than the one that has to do with the basis of our religious knowledge. ... When all has been said and done, the only true and dependable source for Christianity lies in the book we call the Bible. ... Anyone who professes a faith founded on a source that cannot be trusted is a fool, is naive, or is deluded. Certainly no thinking or honest person would embrace, recommend, or propagate a religion based on what he knows to be untrue. ... I do not for one moment concede, however, that in a technical sense anyone can claim the evangelical badge once he has abandoned inerrancy. The label 'evangelical' has traditionally stood for a series of doctrinal convictions of which one has been biblical infallibility. ... he who denies the doctrine of infallibility — the only sure guarantee that these other doctrines are true — cannot truly be an evangelical."¹²

Lindsell traces the historical decline of seminaries, denominations, and institutions that abandoned inerrancy. Doctrine was the first thing to go and with that everything else. These are undeniable facts.

It is hard to know how closely Campolo has studied in the field of textual transmission or perhaps has absorbed the teachings of Bart Ehrman.¹³ Many believe it is possible to say that the originals are within our grasp with the discoveries of what are called "P" manuscripts in North Africa (the area of Alexandria), Oxyrynchus, Egypt, and the quotations of the earliest Church Fathers who may have held the very originals. Campolo's skepticism is not warranted. Professor Philip Wesley Comfort in his book, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, boldly states:

"I am optimistic because we have many early manuscripts of excellent quality and because our view of the early period of textual transmission has been getting clearer and clearer. I believe

it is possible to recover the original text of the Greek New Testament. ... There were scribes who copied the text faithfully and reverently — that is, they recognized that they were copying a sacred text written by an apostle or eminent church leader.”¹⁴

Comfort pointed out that the originals and early manuscripts were held in such high esteem that to change even one letter was considered sacrilegious.¹⁵ However, those who hold to limited inerrancy need to produce the fallible originals about which they presume to know. Randall Price sums it up well as he speaks about what are called archetypes. Archetypes are ancient manuscripts which are very close to the originals in time and text:

“While it cannot be proved that this archetype is the original, neither can it be proved that it is not. Therefore, skepticism about the ability to recover the original text is at best a preference — which may in turn be determined by other, external presuppositions.”¹⁶

CONFUSION OF CONVERSION

Campolo does not hold to the generally held understanding of conversion to Christ. He does not see conversion as a crisis moment of repentance and commitment. The sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts show a pattern of preaching with a call to repentance and a decisive commitment to Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Savior (e.g., Acts 2:29-39, 13:38-39, 48). Campolo’s view is decidedly a progressive view of salvation with heavy doses of medieval Roman Catholic mysticism. He may be mixing salvation and sanctification, which is a common error. This would certainly align him with trends in what is called the emerging church movement. We will let him explain in his own words:

“When I was a boy growing up in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in West Philadelphia, my mother, a convert to Evangelical Christianity from a Catholic Italian immigrant family, hoped I would have one of those dra-

matic ‘born again’ experiences. That was the way in which she had come into a personal relationship with Christ. She took me to hear one evangelist after another, praying that I would go to the altar and come away ‘converted.’ But it never worked for me. I would go down the aisle as the people around me sang what was called ‘the invitation hymn,’ but I just didn’t feel as if anything happened to me. For a while I despaired, wondering whether I would ever get ‘saved.’ It took me quite some time to realize that entering into a personal relationship with Christ does not always happen that way. In my case, intimacy with Christ has developed gradually over the years, primarily through what Catholic mystics call ‘centering prayer.’ Each morning, as soon as I wake up, I take time — sometimes as much as a half hour — to center myself on Jesus. I say his name over and over again to drive back the 101 things that begin to clutter up my mind the minute I open my eyes. Jesus is my mantra, as some would say. The constant repetition of his name clears my head of everything but the awareness of his presence. By driving back all other concerns, I am able to create what the ancient Celtic Christians called the ‘thin place.’ The thin place is that spiritual condition wherein the separation between the self and God becomes so thin that God is able to break through and envelop the soul.”¹⁷

Whatever this experience is, Campolo says he is able to create it, which should give us pause. We should note also that a “Jesus mantra” and a “thin place” are not found anywhere in the Bible. Campolo admits it comes out of Catholic mysticism and ancient Celtic practice.

GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

A “Jesus mantra” qualifies as a vain repetition, which is condemned in Matthew 6:5-8 along with parading

one’s piety. The new birth is not a mantra of any sort but “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). The question that really needs to be asked and confronted is, can so-called “centering prayer” be called prayer at all? No one seems to be asking this question. The concept of centering prayer (often connected to imagination and visualization) is also called contemplative prayer. The idea is to get quiet and mindless and go within oneself where supposedly God can speak from our inner being. We also mystically merge with God, we are told. To many, the inner voice is more important than the fixed voice of God in Scripture. However, it is clear that this is not prayer at all and in no sense can it be construed as such. Prayer is addressed to God and is offered in the name of Jesus. It is asking (James 4:2).

The major Greek words for prayer are as follows. *Euchomai* which is translated “wish” or “desire” is addressed up to God. *Proseuchomai* is a mind-engaged activity and discipline directed upward and outward to God. Another word is *erotao* which carries the idea of making requests to God. Then there is the word *deomai* translated “call upon” or “entreat.” We can come boldly to the throne of grace — not down into our innards — and find mercy and grace in time of need. Prayer is always directed upward and outward to our Father who is in heaven. Going in any other direction cannot rightly be called prayer at all. We are to let our request be made known to God (Philippians 4:6). Centering or contemplative prayer — which isn’t prayer at all — goes in the wrong direction. We can create in our minds an imagined highland which is in fact a dark lowland.

A THIN EXPERIENCE

Is Celtic Christianity something to be desired? Celtic Christianity is a subset of Roman Catholicism and practiced by the ancient people of Ireland and Wales. They had strong commitments to the adoration of Mary, the rosary, purgatory, transubstantiation, and confession to a priest. They were committed to a host of saints, and held to a form of theosis

(merging into God) and human perfection. They practiced various penances for sins, one of which was standing in cold water for long periods.

As far as Campolo's "thin place" is concerned, it does not take much to see through the whole concept. It is closely connected to the word "Taize" which has to do with a contemplative worship service. Taize originated in France and is a word literally meaning "thin place." This unscriptural idea is that there is a veil between God and us and it takes certain mystical practices to thin it out or remove it. If we are unsaved there is more than a veil between us and God. Paul says our sins have separated us from God (Romans 3) and that we are dead in trespasses and sins (Romans 6:23). If we are saved there is nothing that separates us from God as Romans 8 affirms and "we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30). We are in eternal and unbroken union with Christ. Once we try to establish an imaginary veil, then it is up to us to work to remove it.

The emphasis in this false teaching is not to get to know God and His will as revealed in Scripture, or to study God's wonders, works, and attributes. But it is simply to get a better experience for ourselves. As we have stated, there is no "thin veil" teaching anywhere in Scripture. There is a mention of the Temple veil being completely torn in two, from top (God's initiative) to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51), which assures us that we have full access to God through Christ. The last and only veil is done away. The throne room of God is wide open to any and all who will simply come through faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16).

How regrettable that some are trying to reconstruct veils and obstacles which we have to find and negotiate. If the veils that have to be made thin are fictional — and they are — then the practices are nonsense and a waste of time. The Catholic Church has even gone further, setting up human veils such as Mary and the saints.

Campolo is thoroughly committed to mysticism and Taize:

"They are absolutely essential. Without them, you will not be able to grow spiritually into the kind of people God wants you to be. It will be only a matter of time before you drift into spiritual deadness."¹⁸

So, according to Campolo, with the Bible alone (and apart from mysticism), one sinks into spiritual deadness.

IT ONLY GETS WORSE

Campolo appears to reveal himself as more aligned with Catholicism than with evangelicalism. As he again addresses the subject of centering prayer,¹⁹ he equates it with being born again:

"I learned about this way of having a born-again experience from reading the Catholic mystics, especially *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*. Ignatius, a founder of the Jesuit order ... developed an intense desire to experience a 'oneness' with God."²⁰

Campolo is unhappy with the Reformers and believes that they should not have left the Catholic saints behind.²¹ We could say his motto is: "no saint left behind," as he stands up and declares his dependence on the medieval mystics:

"The methods of praying employed by the likes of Ignatius have become precious to me. With the help of some Catholic saints, my prayer life has deepened. Ignatius and other Catholic mystics such as Teresa of Avila have been of incredible help to me in developing a kind of praying in which God becomes a real and felt presence. It's hard to describe just what happens in this centering prayer. No words are spoken, and none are heard. Mother Teresa once explained to an interviewer that when she prayed, she often said nothing to God. She just listened. When asked what God said to her as she prayed, she answered,

'Nothing! God Listens!' Then she added, 'If you don't understand what I am talking about, I can't explain it to you.' I *do* know what she was talking about."²²

It is hard to think of Jesus after being asked by His disciples to teach them to pray, saying, "If you don't understand what I am talking about, I can't explain it to you."

That Campolo could think that Spanish Jesuit Ignatius of Loyola is a role model is mind-boggling. Ignatius opposed the Reformation, was fiercely loyal to the Pope, experienced mystical visions of the Virgin Mary, and "practiced severe mental and physical mortification, including flagellation and fasting."²³ Some rightly would question the sanity of Ignatius. He violated the Scriptures and was involved in harsh practices clearly condemned by the Bible (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-5).

It is also unthinkable that Campolo could think that Teresa of Avila is an example to follow. The idea of being engulfed in the divine taught by Teresa is straight out of the playbook of the ancient Greek and Egyptian pagan mythologies. Female oracles believed they were taken over and absorbed into the deity they were seeking.²⁴ Teresa believed that she was partially healed "through the intercession of St. Joseph."²⁵ In truth, Teresa was confused, fragile, and somewhat mentally disturbed. She claimed visions along with some kind of extremely painful and literal piercing of her heart. Added to that, she believed she entered into "the spiritual espousals, and the mystical marriage" with Christ.²⁶

This set of beliefs has been referred to as "erotic mysticism." Teresa lived with the fear of hell as she continually sought a perfect life. Some of the other troubled and tormented passion mystics cut themselves in their hands and feet to imitate the wounds of Jesus.²⁷ In a macabre postscript, the Catholic Church has the body of Teresa of Avila (which they report cannot decompose) on display in Alba and the pierced heart exposed for all to see. Her story from beginning to end is tragic and gruesome. People

such as Teresa may need to be pitied, but not promoted.

IS IT READING OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Campolo does encourage his readers to read the Bible. However, in the midst of his encouragement to read the Scriptures, he undermines this sound direction by minimizing their literal meaning:

“The literal meaning of the words will become secondary to what you read between the lines under the influence of your imagination. ... But it is even more important to let the Spirit speak to you through Scripture and mystically teach your heart what reason alone can never know.”²⁸

So the reader is told to imagine what is between the lines mystically and somehow their hearts will know what reason cannot. While the illumination of God’s Spirit in the understanding of Scripture cannot be downplayed, the idea of “mystically teach your heart” without reasoning is foreign to the Bible. All through the book of Proverbs we read that wisdom is gained through understanding (Proverbs 1). Loving God with all our minds is, after all, a command of Jesus. Campolo’s problem here is that he is confusing what is known as dynamic understanding with some kind of mystical mindless encounter.

UNDERSTANDING DYNAMIC UNDERSTANDING

Bible reading is always first and foremost cognitive (done with the mind). Some are moved to repentance and change, while others read the Bible and are unmoved. The difference is in dynamic understanding. When understanding takes place dynamically, there is transformation as Gerhard Maier explains:

“Dynamic understanding occurs where revelation addresses the person directly and transforms him. The addressee grasps that he must change his ways, or has the opportunity to make major changes in himself.”²⁹

In Luke 15, there was both cognitive and dynamic understanding on the part of the prodigal son. He came to himself in repentance and reasoned what he had to do to get home to his father. People make conscious commitments to change when they understand dynamically. There is no understanding in a state of ecstatic excess and there can’t be. No one understands literally with the heart. We understand cognitively and then are changed when the Holy Spirit applies truth dynamically. Dynamic understanding has nothing to do with mysticism, but rather the action of the Holy Spirit on the mind and will. Perhaps Campolo has missed this because his field is sociology, not theology or homiletics.

WITNESS ABOUT WHAT?

Campolo says we should witness or share our faith, which is certainly a good suggestion. His take on it is that witnessing helps us have more certainty about our own beliefs and he describes witnessing as “telling others about the role that Christ plays in your life.”³⁰ The biblical benchmark for witnessing is about all that Jesus has done for us in His death, burial, and resurrection and all He can do for us now if we will only commit our lives to him in repentance and faith (Romans 10:9-13). Campolo often uses words that we all identify with, but often his definition and understanding of these words are just a bit off the mark biblically.

It is hard to get a handle on how seriously Campolo takes the doctrines of the fall, sin, and lostness. He tells of a recurring dream of German Pastor Martin Niemöller. In this dream, Jesus steps from His judgment throne and places His arm around Hitler and asks him why he did the evil things that he did. Hitler simply replies, “Because no one ever told me about your love for me and what you did for me.”³¹ Campolo then speculates, “What might have happened to Adolph Hitler and to the world had Martin Niemöller carried out the Great Commission?”³²

The whole concept of this dream is faulty in terms of three things. First, in a country like Germany, with its

Reformation and Lutheran heritage, Hitler certainly had heard the Christian message, even if only nominally. Jesus Christ was no stranger to Hitler. Second, how would Niemöller or Campolo know that Hitler would have responded positively if only he had heard of Jesus’ love? And third, Scripture assures us that people are not just eagerly and innocently waiting to hear about Jesus’ love. In fact, Romans 1:18 assures us that lost men and women “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Jesus informs us that, “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19-20).

This fantasy of an almost innocent Hitler, just waiting to hear about Jesus, is a simplistic, error-filled reduction. Campolo sets up a scenario where Hitler becomes the “victim.” Hitler has only one place to look for his depravity and lostness, and that is into his own wicked and depraved heart. Jeremiah explains it well, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

ARE THERE REALLY SUCH PEOPLE?

Campolo also introduces a group he calls “Evangelical Universalists.” He later links them to the so-called emerging church. Some would seriously question if the two words (Evangelical and Universalists) can be used together, but in a day of imprecision and confusion, this seems to matter little. Of course, if you are thinking dialectically it does not matter. This group, Campolo says, believes that in the end, “everyone gets saved.”³³ He then tells a fable of Peter at the gates of heaven handling admissions. Paul, who is taking monthly counts, is tallying far more than Peter. The punch line of the anecdote is that Jesus is sneaking people over the wall. While Campolo does not admit to being an Evangelical Universalist, he is close by his own admission:

“When asked what I really believe, I’m a bit shaky. I believe what Evangelicals traditionally have believed, but I somehow feel, on a gut level, that God’s grace reaches beyond the narrow confines of my theology. I have extreme difficulty accepting that those who have never had a chance even to hear about Jesus — for instance, those who live in remote places such as Nepal or in isolated tribes in the Amazon — are doomed by a just God to eternal damnation. I know that, even here in America, some people grow up in such adverse settings that coming to know about God’s love as expressed in Christ is near impossible. In spite of what Evangelical theology prescribes, I struggle with the belief that their fate is eternal separation from God.”³⁴

Campolo is good at raising questions, but not at giving solid answers. In his dialectical world, his contradictory statements need no explanation. Campolo stands up to say that he is not quite a Universalist, but he is very close. Campolo also suggests that a Buddhist can possibly know Christ as a Buddhist, even though they do not know Him by name.³⁵

Buddhists do not believe in a supreme God, and they believe sin is simply ignorance. They teach reincarnation and that hell is only a temporary state of mind. For them salvation is attained through occult meditation. As for Jesus, He is an enlightened being and all other ideas about Him are Christian myths and lies. Buddhism is a false religion of self-reliance.³⁶

The kind of syncretism suggested by Campolo is no better than Israel adopting the Canaanite pagan system around them. Quasi-Universalism can never be found in the Bible, but there are stern warnings about hell and judgment.

Campolo is honest to say this is what he “feels” and this is what his “gut” is telling him. The above assumes that people are innocent and somehow deserve salvation, rather than sinners who suppress truth as

Romans 1 says. Jesus said the lost hate the light. The above inclusive position, as put forth by Campolo, determines that the worst thing that could be done is to send missionaries to these people. Leaving them as they are would be much better than giving them the truth which they may reject. Witnessing to them would do them a great disservice and may render them lost, rather than saved in their ignorance.

Christians should not back away from exclusive-truth claims. All religions make them. They should not be afraid to put forth the truth that God insists that we worship Him based on what is true (John 4:22-24). We cannot blunt the Gospel and the demand for repentance and faith in Jesus alone. Pretending that somehow everyone is worshiping Jesus without really knowing it is preposterous.

DEAL OR NO DEAL?

Campolo’s witnessing style has more in common with the watered-down messages of Joel Osteen. Campolo writes:

“I think that starting off by telling people that they are lost sinners in danger of eternal punishment seems contrary to the tone of the Bible. ... Instead of focusing on God’s judgment, I start by explaining that I believe that God has a specific and significant purpose for every person, and that our surrendering to Christ is the beginning of our living out that purpose.”³⁷

With this one-sided message, we could ask what are we being saved from if it is not our sin? One of the — if not *the* — greatest evangelists and church planters in all of Church history is the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Romans, he spends the first three chapters on the subject of sin. Jesus called attention to the sins of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. To say that calling attention to sin is contrary to the tone of Scripture is, in effect, to say that Scripture is contrary to itself.

Campolo suggests we share Ephesians 2:10 and relate that God has a purpose for us.³⁸ While that may be

true, the second chapter of Ephesians starts with, “you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (v. 1), and moves to the fact that we need to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus and not of ourselves and not of works (vv. 8-9). The purpose of God for our lives can only be realized when the sin and guilt issue is dealt with. We would do well to know that we can’t improve on the witnessing methods of the Apostle Paul.

Campolo though speaks of “closing the deal,”³⁹ by which he means pressing people to make a decision or a commitment to Christ. That is wonderful advice if people know what the “deal” is. It seems that Campolo’s book is written to try to please almost everyone and hardly anyone is left out. Campolo sets the book up like a religious supermarket with something for every religious shopper. There is Catholic mysticism, Universalism, syncretism, the emerging church, as well as crisis evangelism; all of which are particularly short on the doctrine of sin. This is dialectical thought on speed. As we will see, there will even be accommodations for those with very questionable lifestyles. Campolo has beliefs for every religious taste.

A TONGUES TWISTER

Campolo alleges that Romans 8:26-27 is a reference to praying in tongues. The verse mentions that the Holy Spirit assists us in prayer, and it is He who makes “intercession” with “groanings which cannot be uttered.” Here again is another example of Campolo’s cavalier misuse of Scripture. Something that cannot be uttered and which is done by the Holy Spirit cannot be attributed to us. Praying in tongues has to do with our uttering unintelligible sounds.

As mysterious as it is, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit in sighing and sympathizing with us even though we do not hear Him. This simply means that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us even though His groaning or sighing is not audible and heard by us. Romans 8:27 explains, “He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” While not claiming to be a Pentecostal, Campolo is clearly in their camp with

such teaching.⁴⁰ However, that may not make them real happy, given his other unorthodox views.

Surprisingly, Campolo does speak negatively about prosperity theology and exaggerated claims of healing.⁴¹ He also takes issue with Pat Robertson. Yet, what is hard to fathom is his conclusions about Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart when he confesses that, "I am convinced that these men were not evil."⁴² If, in Bakker's case, adultery and conviction and jail time for fraud, and, in Swaggart's case, the procuring of prostitutes are not evil, we are going to have to rewrite Scripture. Campolo again establishes a "victim" mentality and concludes that these men were so idolized by their fans that they were seduced and set up by the adoring followers. Because Swaggart's and Bakker's peers did not hold them accountable, they too may be responsible for their fall.⁴³

EVIL RAPTURE TEACHING

Campolo also launches into a denunciation of dispensationalism. He is quick to say that the ideas of the future and the rapture of the Church put forth by John Darby, C.I. Scofield, and Tim LaHaye can only bring harm to the Church.⁴⁴ While Christians can and do hold to a diversity of eschatological views, Campolo does not explain how looking for the imminent return of Christ can be wrong. He further errs in his belief that these dispensational views equate to a loss of interest in social justice, fail in the pursuit of world peace, and drain the desire to end poverty. Such thinking does not square with reality because many of the large churches that are premillennial and dispensational have vigorous social and outreach programs. While dispensationalists are not Arab haters (but rather wary of Islamic extremism), Campolo totally skews the picture leveling these false accusations:

"The dispensationalist interpretation of biblical prophecy holds that the Second Coming of Christ is contingent on exclusive possession by the children of Israel of the land promised to Abraham's seed in Genesis 12. For this to

occur, all Arab peoples now living in Israel and Palestine would have to leave the Holy Land, freely or by force."⁴⁵

First of all, there are not two nations — Israel and Palestine. Palestine was the ancient Roman name given to Israel after the time of Emperor Hadrian in an effort to re-identify the land as the land of the Philistines or Palestina (Latin). Historically the Turks continued the ancient Roman name Anglicized as Palestine, as did the British. The entire State was re-named Israel (its ancient name) when Israel declared itself a nation in 1948. The center of Israel (Samaria) was kept, ruled by, and named Jordan (or Trans-Jordan) until the Six Day War in 1967 when Israel annexed it. It was then a part of Israel. As far as the ethnic cleansing of all Arabs from Israel, Campolo provides no written documentation, though he says this view is common.⁴⁶

Campolo is being slanderous as he makes such malicious and unfounded statements. Campolo would be hard-pressed to find where any true dispensationalist would ever suggest that all Arabs have to leave Israel freely or by force. For example, Dallas Seminary is a leading dispensationalist school. Campolo could have easily contacted them for information rather than twist facts and spread lies and untruths. His statements are reckless.

Here is yet another example of being the "victim." Perhaps he misunderstands Israel's constant need to take every step necessary to guard against suicide bombers and their horrific acts of terrorism. Campolo sees Israel's safety measures as "ill treatment of Palestinians."⁴⁷ He says nothing of Hamas or Hezbollah, but says of "Evangelical Zionists," that their "extremist views" may prevent peace with all the Arab nations.⁴⁸ It seems that Campolo has turned reality on its head and is unaware of who the enemy really is. Islamic extremists are given a pass and dispensationalists and Israel are being bashed as evil. All in all, Campolo actually believes that dispensationalism is a great danger that is impeding Mideast peace and creating just about every

other social evil in the world. It stands in the way of our government from protecting forests and deceives presidents into arming with "an overload of atomic weaponry."⁴⁹ The reductionism and paranoia here are stunning.

THE ENEMY IS EVERYWHERE!

Campolo likewise levels his pop-gun at "fundamentalist" Christians. For some reason his dialectical thinking ceases when it comes to trying to fit them in. These fundamentalists are strange, angry people who actually think that Genesis may present a six-day creation rather than teach theistic evolution or progressive creationism (days seen as long ages).⁵⁰ Again, Campolo suggests a Bible with a reliable "salvation story," but deficient as an "historical account." Fundamentalists are spun as anti-intellectual and legalists.⁵¹ Negative stereotypes and caricatures seem to be Campolo's forte. His bashing of any that disagree with him is relentless and inexcusable. He equates Darby's theology with fundamentalism.⁵² He even confesses a fear of fundamentalists.⁵³ He can embrace all kind of questionable doctrines and people (Hitler and Buddhists for instance), but not Christians who may differ with him a bit.

I DISAGREE, BUT NOT REALLY

Campolo also speaks against same-sex marriages. He admits that his wife does not agree with him and so they attend different churches. She attends a church where homosexual marriages are performed and he where they are not. His wife regards the prohibitions in Romans 1 as being only against homosexual orgies connected with pagan idol worship. In her view, Paul did not oppose "loving commitment of same-sex couples."⁵⁴

Here is yet another example of a rut into which Campolo has steered his paradoxical wagon. He claims to be against homosexual marriage, but then not quite when he says, "I fail to see how such lifelong commitments by gays hurt the rest of us."⁵⁵ Does he not think they may hurt the younger generation by the example and suggestion that this way of life is normal

and proper? How does a lack of biblical morality help anyone? He then adds:

“I hope you can understand how one could contend that both civil unions and same-sex marriages could actually strengthen the institution of marriage.”⁵⁶

Any Bible believer should not be able to “understand” how any form of immorality can strengthen homes, families, or the Church. Campolo then says that “gay couples could seek out churches that would bless their civil unions and make these unions into marriages.”⁵⁷ Again, no true Christian could “bless” immorality of any kind. We cannot “bless” adultery, fornication, and other forms of immoral behavior. He does not believe that churches should split over the issue and says that “homosexuality is not the dominant concern of Scripture.”⁵⁸ However, neither is murder. Yet all forms of immorality are addressed and condemned in Scripture, and that very forcefully. To say something is not “the dominant concern” does not mean it is not a concern at all or unimportant. How Christians conduct themselves is a major concern of the New Testament.

So by his own admission, Campolo is agreeable with two male homosexuals or two lesbians living together (and all that goes with it) and calling it marriage. It seems obvious that Campolo’s tolerance has reached a point of acceptance and hearty endorsement. Only dialectical insanity could suggest we have it both ways.

As a sociologist, Campolo must know that these moral perversions are not new. Sexual sin is as old as mankind. Paul knew exactly what he was condemning in Romans 1 and in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

Campolo believes that homosexuality is genetic and therefore incurable. Because the Bible labels it sin, we could conclude then that all sin is incurable. The Bible says that all confessed sin is forgivable and that the Holy Spirit and grace give us the power not to practice that sin. How is it that Paul can address homosexual-

ity and other sinful lifestyles and say “such were some of you” (1 Corinthians 6:11). Apparently some had given up the lifestyle.

Everyone is predisposed and has some inclination to some kind of sin. We are this way by nature. However, predisposition is not determination. We may be inclined by genes, but we are not fatalistically determined. Genetic predisposition to any kind of sin (drugs, alcohol, immorality, etc.) does not give license to sin. As Joe Dallas points out, unchangeable does not mean legitimate and unchangeable does not mean acceptable.⁵⁹ The genetic argument, no doubt, soon will be used to justify pedophilia and other bizarre lifestyles because it is working so well with homosexuality. Dallas further observes that “resisting sin, no matter how difficult or how weary we grow resisting it, is better than taking it upon ourselves to decide that it isn’t a sin.”⁶⁰

Campolo either has no doctrine of sin or does not take sin seriously. However, true evangelical writers do:

“Indwelling sin works like this — enticing, threatening, even bullying. So Paul calls it a law to get us to see that it is powerful even in the lives of believers and that it constantly works to press us into its evil mold. ... sin is sin; its nature and purpose remain unchanged; its force and success still grab us by the throat.”⁶¹

How about the married man who has a genetic inclination toward another woman? Is that man forced and driven to adultery by inner drives beyond his control? The Bible says that we must flee lust, not cater to it. Genetic disposition to any kind of sin is never license to sin. “I could not help myself” or “It’s just the way I was born” are poor excuses.

TWISTING MORE VERSES

Campolo goes on to tell his readers why he is against the Iraq war. He again trifles with Scripture and uses Jesus’ statement about turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). This verse clearly has nothing to do with the issue of just war and is clearly a

prohibition against an individual who seeks to take personal and private revenge for a wrong done. Jesus is opposing those who saw in the principle of “an eye for an eye” (v. 38), grounds for personal vengeance. To buttress his view, Campolo appeals to Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi.⁶² Yet, once again, Campolo admits feeling conflicted and tries to have it both ways:

“I remain troubled by my own position. I must acknowledge that my freedom to express these very views has been paid for with the lives of many heroic American patriots.”⁶³

Campolo takes up the issue of women and the Church. He says that what is hidden from evangelicals is that “Jesus was a radical feminist!”⁶⁴ In saying this, Campolo is actually creating another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4). He takes all that Jesus did to verify His Messiahship and reach women spiritually and turns it into some kind of social agenda. Campolo is caught in his own illogic. If, as he suggests, some Scripture is time-bound in the first century,⁶⁵ then the radical feminism of Jesus must be time-bound there as well.

Then Campolo tries to support his position using Galatians 3:28, that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Today though, male and female distinctions certainly have not ceased. Gender distinctions have not been obliterated. The verse simply means that in salvation (“one in Christ Jesus,” it says) both men and woman are regarded as equals. It really has nothing at all to do with gender issues, job distribution, or roles within the Church. Campolo’s argument is weak, and out of context. The verse also says there is “neither Jew nor Greek.” However, there are Jews and Greeks when we speak of ethnicity. It means that in Christ there are no racial barriers. No human distinctions are impediments to salvation, but it is obvious that salvation does not produce a removal of all social distinctions. Men are still men; women are still women, just as Jews are still Jews here on earth.

It gets stranger still as Campolo floats the idea that “the Holy Spirit can be understood as being feminine.”⁶⁶ Where does he get this idea? His justification is that in the Hebrew Bible the word “spirit” is in the feminine. It is hard to believe he does not know better. In Hebrew, nouns are not necessarily gender specific. The gender is incidental and even words for inanimate objects can be feminine. All through the Gospel of John (esp. chapters 14-16), God’s Holy Spirit is referred to as “He” in Greek, not “She.” Romans 8:16 is rendered the “Spirit Himself.” While space forbids getting into adequate discussion on the masculine references to God, we can feel safe abiding by the terminology of Scripture and the reasons why God inspired that terminology. The Bible does not have to be rewritten.

THOU SHALT RECLAIM THE EARTH

Campolo has bought into the forebodings of Al Gore, including global warming and environmentalism. He also wants to save the whales. And Campolo is certainly free to believe anything he wants about these issues. What is offensive is that he reverts again to a distortion of Scripture to sustain his views. He says that Romans 8:10-22 is telling us that “those who are imbued with the Holy Spirit are expected to reclaim nature from its spoiled condition.”⁶⁷ This is certainly not what Romans 8 is all about.

This section of Scripture speaks to the reality of the fall of Adam and its effect on the created earth and humanity. It then offers believers hope for the future by reminding them of God’s ultimate deliverance in resurrection. We will be glorified (v. 17). Future glory will be revealed (v. 18). Creation waits for this revealing (v. 19). We are waiting for the resurrection of our bodies and the restitution of all things (v. 23). All things ultimately will work together for good to those that love God (v. 28). Here is a faithful summary:

“The glory to be revealed (v. 18) will appear as the sons of God are revealed in their new nature

(v. 19), and the creation is liberated from its present state of imperfection and decay (vv. 20, 21). The revelation of this glory will more than wipe out all the harm and loss (‘futility,’ v. 20) that the created order has suffered as a result of Adam’s fall (Gen. 3:17). The regeneration of all things (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rev. 21:1) in the created order corresponds to the freedom in glory (vv. 17, 18) enjoyed by the children of God. ... The present condition of creation is not its final one; it is like a mother groaning in labor pains. The entire creation has a destiny planned by God, and longs to be fulfilled, much as believers do (vv. 23, 26). Our salvation has begun — we have the Holy Spirit as a down payment — but it will not be consummated until the resurrection (the full realization of adoption in Christ, v. 23). Inevitably, therefore, the Christian life involves patient waiting in hope.”⁶⁸

Romans 8 is not a present earthly mandate, but a comforting future hope.

CORRUPT SOURCES CAUSE POLLUTED SPRINGS

Picture a beautiful pristine spring flowing from a mountain source. This spring brings life, health, and nourishment to all who live in the valley below. Imagine a large group of campers creating a permanent camp site near the source of the spring and over time recklessly polluting and poisoning the spring with large amounts of trash, debris, and waste at their location. The poor people in the valley below would wonder what was beginning to happen as their livestock became unhealthy and irrigated crops began to fail. Would they ever guess it was coming from the ignorant and indifferent campers? (After all, they were having a good time up there.) It might even make the people in the valley believe that the mountain source for the spring was corrupt.

The polluted springs of medieval mysticism, asceticism, and monasticism are sickening and wasting the

Church today. Twisted Scriptures are creating toxic waste. Strange, eccentric, and occult techniques are creating deadly poisons. Dialectical thinking is embracing everything but biblical Christianity. The streams of that pollution are being further fostered by books, teachings, and teachers indifferent to the damage and chaos they are creating. For too long the campers have been corrupting the springs of living water. There is no doubt that Campolo is one of the many campers. He has finally stood up and there is now no guessing.

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EMERGENT THEOLOGY

(continued from page 1)

bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures."²

Thus defined, the emergent church sounds like a welcomed addition to the Christian community. However, all is not as it seems. Whatever the intentions of the original founders of the movement (or conversation, as they call it), it has rapidly morphed into a serious threat to the faith. Today, while the emergent community is barely a decade old, it has permeated churches, Bible colleges, seminaries, and parachurch organizations throughout the world. It is a movement that is difficult to define because it is not monolithic or static. However, at least two basic wings have become discernable.

One wing calls itself "emerging," claiming to have solid theological credentials, having only adopted methods more in tune with postmodern mindsets. The other wing is termed "emergent" and is composed of those who not only are adopting new methodologies, but who also challenge the most sacred of doctrines. This wing is obviously the most worrisome to us and is even under fire from the emerging wing. For example, Driscoll, who was one of

the originators of the conversation, but has since distanced himself from prominent emergent leaders such as Brian McLaren, writes:

"The emergent church is part of the Emerging Church Movement but does not embrace the dominant ideology of the movement. Rather, the emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity."³

PFO has published articles on the emergent church movement in previous journals and will not review that information here.⁴ However, it should be mentioned that, while the "emergent" movement is far more disturbing, the "emerging" element is not without its doctrinal and philosophical problems. Both, for instance, embrace errant views of the kingdom of God which in turn lead to a misunderstanding of the role of the Church (a role emerging leaders call missional), which in turn has a distorting affect on the Gospel message. Because both emerging and emergent camps have the same view of the kingdom, the term "emergent" will be used throughout this article to refer to both wings.

EMERGENT ESCHATOLOGY

Emergent and emerging leaders may differ over any number of issues, but they present a united front when it comes to the kingdom of God — and the kingdom of God plays the pivotal role in their theology and purpose. At a conference last year in Baltimore — "The Big Event 2007, Imagine a World ... a New Vision for God's Kingdom on Earth" — advertisements for the event assured us "God's Kingdom, which is *here* and available to all."⁵

The idea that the kingdom is here now, is the one doctrinally unifying factor in emergent theology, yet some in the "conversation" have been honest enough to admit that even they are not always sure what is meant by the term. Mark Scandrette confesses:

"A central and reoccurring theme of conversation has been a renewed fascination with the present availability of the kingdom of God. ... The term *kingdom of God* has become so popular, and its usage so varied, that it is difficult to know if we are even talking about the same thing. ... There is a tendency to see the kingdom of God as whatever is progressive, exotic, foreign, and obscure."⁶

Nevertheless a consensus by both emerging and emergent leaders is expressed by Sherry and Geoff Maddock:

"...our principle [sic] desire is to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. We believe this happens when God's people are renewed around God's mission of love and justice in the world."⁷

The conversation apparently views the kingdom as being on earth now, but progressively becoming like the kingdom in heaven as Christians live missionally on earth. Such an understanding of the kingdom of God is obviously at odds with premillennialism, yet the Maddocks' view is reflected by many in or on the fringes of the movement. Tony Campolo represents many emergent thinkers as he contrasts dispensationalism with emergent theology:

"This is a theology that — with its implicit threat of being left behind, of time running out — is used by Dispensational preachers to great evangelistic effect. It has been a very effective goad to conversion. To the contrary, the history of the world is infused with the presence of God, who is guiding the world toward becoming the kind of world God willed for it to be when it was created. Human history is going somewhere wonderful."⁸

N.T. Wright, the primary link between the "New Perspective on Paul" (which claims we have misunderstood Paul and, in turn, the Gospel since the foundation of the Church) and evangelicalism, has the same eschatological underpinnings:

"[Paul] was to declare to the pagan world that YHWH, the God of Israel, was the one true God of the whole world, and that in Jesus of Nazareth he had overcome evil and *was creating a new world in which justice and peace would reign supreme.*"⁹

Jim Henderson, co-author of *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, is also interested

in bringing the kingdom of God to earth:

"I want to make this world a better place. I want to see Jesus' prayer answered that his Kingdom would come on Earth as it is in heaven. I want to see the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ."¹⁰

To Brian McLaren, the most prolific emergent writer, the ultimate goal of Jesus (and God) is the kingdom of God, brought to earth.¹¹ Just how is the kingdom brought to earth? Through our good works. McLaren states:

"I hope that both they [his neighbors] 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.*"¹²

What does this kingdom that we are to bring through our good works look like? Rob Bell has some thoughts:

"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."¹³

And:

"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."¹⁴

Emergent theology sees the kingdom of God as present now with future culmination as we (the subjects of the kingdom) restore justice, eliminate poverty, clean up the ecosystem,

tame global warming, and the like. Of course the issue is not whether Christians ought to be involved in finding solutions to these earth-related concerns (we should be and have been and are), but whether this is the mission of the Church and whether doing so will more quickly bring in the kingdom.

It can be argued that Scripture does not teach either, but Robert Webber, in his book *Ancient-Future Faith*, differs:

"The result of the cosmic work of Christ is that the kingdom of God, God's rule over all things, is now manifest."¹⁵

By Christ's "cosmic work" Webber means, among other things, that "Christ Has Bound Satan and All Demonic Powers."¹⁶ While Webber admits to a future in which a more complete binding of demonic forces will prevail, demons are limited enough at this time to allow for a "secular salvation" (that is, the salvation of the planet and culture) within society. Webber is confident that due to the present binding of demonic forces, and God's kingdom rule now, believers can and should expedite massive social and cultural changes. As a matter of fact, it is the mandate of the followers of Christ to be focused on this "secular salvation." He writes:

"Faith in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate ruler over all of life, can break the twisting of political, economic, social, and moral structures into secular salvation. Because those structures that promise secular salvation are disarmed, they can no longer exercise ultimate power in our lives. The powers have been dethroned by the power of the cross."¹⁷

The Church, given this paradigm, becomes the change agent in society. "The church," writes Webber, "as a transforming presence in the world stands in the tradition of those Scripture passages that emphasize the power of the gospel to change not only the life of an individual but also the life of culture."¹⁸

It is thought within emergent circles that when the Church operates as this type of change agent, the world can't help but get better. Carla Barnhill, former editor of *Christian Parenting Today* magazine, assures us that emergent-style parenting, a style in which it is more important to teach creativity than obedience, "is about celebrating the goodness of life with God, a life that looks more like the kingdom with every generation."¹⁹ Prominent emergent leader Tony Jones, in the process of poking fun at the dispensational understanding of this age and the one to come, states, "But those of us represented in this book take the contrary view. God's promised future is *good*, and it awaits us, beckoning us forward."²⁰ To both Barnhill and Jones the world is becoming a better place to live as time goes by and it is our job to hasten its rejuvenation.

If there is one thing the emergent conversation has closed ranks around, it is that the kingdom of God is on earth now and it will progressively resemble God's kingdom in heaven as Christians understand their true mission, *which is to make this world a better place for all*. The emergent movement sees itself as a wakeup call to those who would follow Jesus. It is our task to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven by aggressively challenging injustice, fighting poverty, aiding the sick, working on ecological concerns, and, in general, saving this planet and everything on it. Emergent leaders believe that people are catching on to this new vision of the kingdom and, as a result, are optimistic about the future. No doomsday tribulation period is on their radar screen, nor is Jesus coming in judgment upon the wicked. The kingdom, while already here, will progressively become like heaven as we attend to the social ills and needs around us. Tomorrow looks bright and the day after that looks brighter still.

WE HAVE HEARD THIS BEFORE

All of this stirs hope within our hearts. Maybe the emergent leaders are right, maybe the world is getting better and better and, if we Christians

would just get more involved, eventually earth will be like heaven. While it is an appealing notion, it isn't biblical.

It is helpful to know that the Christian community has been down this trail before. Emergent eschatology is by-and-large identical to liberal postmillennialism, which flourished prior to the mid-twentieth century. In general, postmillennialism is the view that Christ will return after the millennium, or the kingdom age, which is presently on earth. Conservative postmillennialists believe that, "Through the proclamation of the gospel in the present age, an unprecedented number of people in the world — in fact, a vast majority — will turn to Christ and be saved."²¹ The focus of God's people in this kingdom age then is to expand the kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel. As the world is increasingly evangelized, it will become a place of "spiritual prosperity, universal peace and righteousness, and economic well-being."²² In conjunction with the spread of the Gospel is the progressive binding of Satan. As the world is Christianized, Satan will gradually lose his hold over its inhabitants. Loraine Boettner, a postmillennial theologian, summarizes:

"Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium."²³

Theologically liberal postmillennialism shares some of the same optimism as its conservative counterparts, but directs its attention to social enhancement of the planet:

"Liberal postmillennialism focuses on societal transformation rather than personal conversion. Their 'social gospel' sees the

saving of society from social evil as the great purpose of the church. The mission of the church is not to preach the gospel to sinners in need of God's great salvation but, rather, to liberate mankind from poverty, racism, disease, war, and all kinds of injustice."²⁴

The similarity between liberal postmillennialism and emergent philosophy is striking. It is worth noting that the postmillennial system, which was nonexistent in the early days of Church history, was originally systematized by Unitarian minister Daniel Whitby (1638-1726). His system grew legs due partly to the optimism of the age, but lost steam when the two world wars of the twentieth century shattered dreams of the world progressively improving. Since that time, a more realistic understanding of human development has set in and most recognize that the earth is not only *not* moving toward utopia, but is more likely closer to annihilation.

Emergent kingdom theology, like its liberal postmillennial predecessor, is based not so much on the observation of an improving world, but on feelings of desperation. McLaren admits that many might see his kingdom views as a mere pipe dream but, if that is so, "what do [we] have to look forward to if they're right? Simply more of the same in human history."²⁵

But truth does not emerge from groundless optimism or "what if" desperation; it emerges from the Scriptures. What God says about the future, the kingdom, and life now is what matters. In answer to McLaren's question, we have much to look forward to, for Christ will one day bring His kingdom to earth, at which time the very social and earthly issues that concern emergent people will be corrected and made right. But this kingdom will come through the power of Christ, not the good deeds of men. It will come when He returns, not as a prelude to it. It will not only remedy societal wrongs, but it will also usher in the world-wide right-

eousness and justice of Christ. We have much to look forward to when the kingdom comes, but it will come about because of God's actions, not ours. It is right that we seek to correct social ills, but those corrections will not usher in Christ's kingdom.

THE EFFECT ON THE GOSPEL

It is not surprising with this understanding of the kingdom of God that David Gushee, in a *Christianity Today* article, asks, "Is it permissible to reopen the question of salvation?" While Gushee follows up his question with some things worth pondering, he states that, "when Jesus was asked about the criteria for admission to eternity, he offered a fourfold answer: love God with all that you are, love your neighbor (like the Samaritan loved his neighbor), do God's will by obeying his moral commands, and be willing, if he asks, to drop everything and leave it behind in order to follow him."²⁶

While Gushee is confusing salvation with sanctification — the free gift of righteousness with its effects on our lives — at least he is still talking about salvation. Brian McLaren, on the other hand, is not concerned about these matters. In reply to his own question about who is in heaven and hell, he neatly sidesteps the whole issue by asking another series of questions:

"Isn't it clear that I do not believe this is the right question for a missional Christian to ask? Can't we talk for a while about God's will being done on earth as in heaven instead of jumping to how to escape earth and get to heaven as quickly as possible? Can't we talk for a while about overthrowing and undermining every hellish stronghold in our lives and in our world?"²⁷

It would be hard to imagine a more arrogant statement. McLaren speaks as if Christianity began yesterday and we are just now getting around to asking basic questions pertaining to life and eternity. But this is no problem for McLaren who boldly states that we do not have even the Gospel

right yet. "What does it mean to be 'saved'? ... None of us has arrived at orthodoxy."²⁸ More than that, we have virtually no truth nailed down:

"Sit down here next to me in this little restaurant and ask 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."²⁹

Samir Selmanovic, in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, goes so far as to totally distinguish Christianity from the kingdom of God. "The emerging church movement," Selmanovic writes, "has come to believe that the ultimate context of the spiritual aspirations of a follower of Jesus Christ is not Christianity but rather the kingdom of God."³⁰

What is Selmanovic's point? Simply that the message of Christ and salvation as found in the biblical record is incomplete. God "place[s] his truth in others [religions] too."³¹ Therefore salvation is obtainable without a relationship with Christ:

"If a relationship with a specific person, namely Christ, is the whole substance of a relationship with the God of the Bible, then the vast majority of people in world history are excluded from the possibility of a relationship with the God of the Bible, along with the Hebrews of the Old Testament who were without a knowledge of Jesus Christ — the person. The question begs to be asked: would God who gives enough revelation for people to be judged but not enough revela-

tion to be saved be a God worth worshipping? Never!"³²

As a result of this type of thinking, the emergent church has become a champion of inclusivism, the idea that while salvation (whatever that means to the emergent crowd) may be based on the person and work of Christ, people who may have never heard of Christ can be saved by responding to God on the basis of the revelation they have received. With this understanding, a Hindu, Muslim, or animist, while not a follower of Christ, could nevertheless be in the kingdom of God because he has followed the light he has been given in nature and in his religious system. These individuals would not be Christians as such, but they would occupy a place in the kingdom every bit the same as Christians, perhaps more so because citizenship in the kingdom is predicated more on what we do rather than on what we believe. Theoretically, a kind-hearted spirit worshipper from New Guinea would occupy a greater place in the kingdom than the dreaded fundamentalist, foundationalist, dispensationalist, who, according to emergent thinking, has in his exclusivism declared those of other religions lost and bound for hell.

It is because people from all religions and all walks of life (people who are in the kingdom now) are working together to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth through their efforts of love and missional living that Rob Bell can say, "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."³³

According to McLaren, our concern should not be about who is saved, but how to be blessings:

"...my missional calling: blessed in this life to be a blessing to everyone on earth. ... 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."³⁴

All of this blessing is for the purpose of helping "our world get back

on the road to being truly and wholly good again, the way God created it to be."³⁵ In other words, by our good deeds to mankind and the planet we will usher in the final stage of the kingdom. Recall McLaren's desire that, "I hope that both they 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."³⁶

A positive response to the emergent message concerning the kingdom would result in the "new world ... promised by the prophets. Jesus' secret message tells us, then, that this new world is so possible it is at hand, within reach. ... We can be part of God's dreams for planet Earth coming true."³⁷

The emphasis on this world is partly because of the belief that this world will not be destroyed but transformed, not replaced but fulfilled. McLaren dreams of this world becoming "*a place God is at home in, a place God takes pride and pleasure in, a place where God's dreams come true.*"³⁸

As can be deduced by now, many within the emergent movement equate "eternal life" or salvation with the kingdom of God. To be in the kingdom is "a life that is full and overflowing, a higher life that is centered in an interactive relationship with God and with Jesus. Let's render it simply 'an extraordinary life to the full centered in a relationship with God.'"³⁹ While this is a truncated understanding of the kingdom and of eternal life at best, it gets more complicated when we are informed that the kingdom is really within us. McLaren writes:

"...the secret message, the mystery of the kingdom of God: that Christ the King indwells you, which means that his kingdom is within and among you here and now."⁴⁰

In the emergent gospel, salvation, in the sense of forgiveness of sin, redemption, and being given God's righteousness because of the finished

work of Christ, plays a minor, often nonexistent, role. McLaren believes that most planet dwellers are in fact already in the kingdom:

"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. ... But it's hard for me to imagine somebody being more stubbornly ornery than God is gracious."⁴¹

If McLaren's understanding of the citizens of the kingdom is on target, we should not be surprised to find that people from all religions are in the kingdom and possibly more advanced in that kingdom than many Christians.⁴²

No wonder Heather Kirk-Davidoff echoes McLaren's idea of evangelism by asking, "What would evangelism look like if we ... 'counted conversations rather than conversions'?"⁴³ Such an evangelistic transformation is predicated on the perceived purpose of the Gospel. Kirk-Davidoff goes on to explain:

"It is a change in the reason we engage in evangelism, shifting the focus from recruitment to the cultivation of relationships that are an end in themselves, indispensable to our spiritual journeys. ... We want to be human beings, and we want to build relationships with other human beings. Because of that, we're willing to give up just about everything we've ever learned about how to grow a church or spread the gospel."⁴⁴

Sherry and Geoff Maddock flesh out this understanding of salvation:

"Through practices such as caring for AIDS sufferers, feeding the homeless, protesting the wanton destruction of the environment, or welcoming newly arrived refugees, we find salvation that is closer to the *shalom* of Scripture."⁴⁵

True to its liberal postmillennial roots, the emergent gospel has been reduced to social betterment of culture and physical improvement of the planet. There is little discussion or

interest in the true spiritual needs of mankind; instead, the focus is on physical, and perhaps emotional needs. If we can relieve suffering, care for the ozone layer, correct injustice and racism, we can save the planet and make this a better place to live for all. This is the same agenda used by old liberalism which thrived under modernity. All that has changed is making adjustments for the same theology under postmodernity.

If we would protest that none of this is biblical, the emergent leaders have a retort: God is doing a new thing, something not revealed in Scripture. Selmanovic opines:

"It would not be the first time that God has broken out of religion, which carries his message, and made something new. If God found it good for his followers to break out of the confines of a religion two millennia ago, why should we expect God not to do such a thing in our time? Maybe Christianity should be thinned out and broken up, spent like Christ who gave himself for this world."⁴⁶

Of course, in response, Hebrews 1:1-2 comes quickly to mind, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (NASB). When God chose to replace the dispensation of Law with that of the Church age, that change was communicated to us through His Son and those who wrote the New Testament (Hebrews 2:1-4). Why should we not expect God to dump the Christian faith and give us something new? Because God "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." The final revelation to mankind has been given. There is no further revelation forthcoming, no new era to be started by the actions of men; rather the next era will be initiated by the return of Jesus Christ.

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE KINGDOM

Acts 1:3 informs us that during the 40 days in which Jesus was making

appearances following the resurrection, He spoke to the apostles concerning the kingdom of God. We are uncertain about exactly what He said, but we know the kingdom was at the heart of His discussions with them during that time. In verse six, Jesus is preparing to depart the earth and they have one question for Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

While we do not know precisely what Jesus had told them about the kingdom, we do pick up on a couple of important pieces of information.

First, the kingdom was still coming. Whatever Jesus told the apostles about the kingdom, it had not dampened their expectation that it would be eventually "restored to Israel." This, of course, implied that the kingdom had not yet come. If the kingdom was on earth at that moment, whether in their hearts or in another form, they would not have asked such a question. The only thing they did not know was the timing. In Jesus' reply, He does not deny that the kingdom is coming. The disciples were on target and Jesus did not deny this in any way. This is important to observe for, as John MacArthur states, "If they were mistaken about such a crucial point in His kingdom teaching, His failure to correct them is mystifying and deceptive."⁴⁷ Jesus had promised earlier that the kingdom would come in the future (Luke 21:25-31; 22:18, 30) and all the apostles wanted to know was when.

Second, the kingdom would take form as promised. Throughout the Gospels it was obvious that the Jewish people were expecting the Messianic kingdom as foretold in the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus never contradicted their basic understanding of that kingdom, and as a matter of fact repeatedly told them in the early years of His public ministry that the "kingdom was at hand" (Matthew 4:17). That is, Jesus made a legitimate offer to establish the kingdom at that time, but to do so they would have to accept Him as their King, something they ultimately refused to do. The kingdom, therefore, was postponed

until Christ would return, but it was never withdrawn altogether. This is the obvious understanding of the apostles as Jesus prepares to ascend. The promised kingdom was still on the agenda — but when?

What tends to confuse the interpreter of Scripture at this point is that the term "kingdom of God" does not always refer to the same kingdom.⁴⁸ To get a handle on this, we first must recognize three essential elements of any kingdom:

- There must be a ruler.
- There must be a realm to rule.
- There must be the exercising of authority.

With these elements in mind, we turn to the Scriptures and there we can identify six unique kingdoms as related to God:

- *The universal kingdom of God.* This is God's rule over the entire universe. He is the eternal, sovereign ruler over all creation.
- *The spiritual kingdom of God.* This is God's rule over all believers. Anyone who is born again is part of this kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Therefore during this dispensation, the Church could be called the spiritual kingdom of God in the sense that God has a special ruling relationship over the Church, His subjects.
- *The theocratic kingdom.* This was God's rule over Israel in the Old Testament, which was to be ruled directly by God, not by kings. It is for this reason that when Israel demanded a king they were in rebellion against the monarchy of God. This kingdom ceased in practice with the establishment of earthly kings and in totality with the rejection of Christ.
- *The mystery form of the kingdom.* Matthew 13 explains that when Israel rejected its King it also rejected the promised Messianic kingdom. As a result it was temporarily replaced by a mystery form in which both good

and evil are present. It is what we might call today Christendom; that is, all who would claim to be Christians are in this mystery form of the kingdom but not all are regenerated. Therefore it is not equivalent to the Church.

- *The Messianic kingdom.* This was the kingdom promised to Israel in the Old Testament. It was to be an earthly kingdom with Christ (the Messiah) sitting on David's throne ruling the earth in righteousness. It was postponed due to Israel's rejection of Christ, but will come at the end of the Church age and, according to Revelation 20, will last for 1000 years.
- *The eternal kingdom.* This is God's rule throughout eternity following the Millennial kingdom.

It was the Messianic kingdom about which the apostles were inquiring in the first chapter of Acts. They specifically wanted to know when the Lord would restore the "kingdom to Israel." If the Lord was not intending to restore the kingdom to Israel, with all of its physical and land promises, would not this have been a great time to say so? If the Lord intended to take the promises of Israel away from it and roll them over into the Church, why did He not tell the disciples? Instead, He clearly implies that the kingdom will be restored to the people of Israel, but the timing is not for them to know.

Alva McClain makes a compelling argument in his *The Greatness of the Kingdom* that the kingdom is actually offered again to the Jews in Acts 3:19-21. But as it was rejected when Jesus was on earth, so it is rejected under the ministry of the apostles and therefore it is postponed until a later date.⁴⁹

It is interesting to note that the kingdom is prominent in the Gospels, but begins to fade in the book of Acts and the Epistles. The word "kingdom" is found only five more times in Acts (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Each of these passages references the

kingdom, but none gives us any more details about the kingdom than we already processed from the Old Testament and the Gospels.

Of the 18 references to a kingdom in the Epistles, most are referring to a future kingdom (either the Messianic or the eternal). However, a few passages (only four clearly) such as Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:13, show that God's kingdom is what McClain calls a mediatorial kingdom. That is, a kingdom already chartered, but which will have its manifestation in the Millennium when the Messiah comes and literally restores the kingdom to Israel and sits on David's throne.

CONCLUSION

The emergent church has badly misunderstood the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God. Actually, it has chosen to ignore what the Scriptures teach and has chosen to impose its own understanding of the kingdom in order to set forth its own agenda for the Church and the world. One is reminded of Jesus' warning to the Pharisees in Matthew 15:3, 6, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" Then He said, "Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." Without question, the emergent church is doing something very similar today.

In fact, the Messianic kingdom of God is not on the earth today, but awaits the return of Christ. People's good deeds toward one another and the planet are welcomed, but they do not form the kingdom, advance the kingdom, or hasten the kingdom. The Church's mandate is not to clean up the planet, wipe out illness, eradicate poverty and injustice, and call for peace treaties, as worthy as these actions are in their place. Our mandate is to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). We are not to set up Christ's kingdom on earth; that is His job. We are instead to call sinners to Christ that they might join us in proclaiming "the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His

marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). By rejecting the biblical teaching on the kingdom, a teaching dispensationalists have long championed, the emergent thinkers are leading their followers down a path Christ does not choose to take us. In so doing, they have wrapped the emergent movement around a superimposed doctrine of the kingdom that agrees neither with Scripture nor reality.

Endnotes:

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5. This included a web site advertisement along with a bulletin insert for local churches which could be downloaded from The Presbytery of Baltimore web site. *Italic* in original.
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7. Sherry and Geoff Maddock, "An Ever-Renewed Adventure of Faith" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, op. cit., pg. 80.
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17. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.
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 25. Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson, 2006, pg. 128.
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 27. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 112.
 28. McLaren cited by Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, November 2004, pg. 40.
 29. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 293, italics and ellipsis in original.
 30. Samir Selmanovic, "The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, op. cit., pg. 192.
 31. *Ibid.*, pg. 194.
 32. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.
 33. *Velvet Elvis*, op. cit., pp. 166, 167.
 34. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, op. cit., pg. 113.
 35. *Ibid.*, pg. 223.
 36. *Ibid.*, pg. 263.
 37. *The Secret Message of Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 181, 183.
 38. *Ibid.*, pg. 203, italics in original.
 39. *Ibid.*, pg. 37.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.
 41. Brian McLaren, *The Last Word, and the Word After That*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005, pg. 138.
 42. See further, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 86-89.
 43. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, "Meeting Jesus at the Bar" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, op. cit., pg. 35.
 44. *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.
 45. "An Ever-Renewed Adventure of Faith" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, op. cit., pg. 82, italic in original.
 46. "The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, op. cit., pg. 199.
 47. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Acts 1-12*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, pg. 20.
 48. This outline is a summary of the excellent presentation found in Paul N. Benware's book, *Understanding End Time Prophecy*, op. cit., pp. 185-195. See also John Walvoord, "Biblical Kingdom Compared and Contrasted" in Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, general editors, *Issues in Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, pp. 75-91.
 49. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1974, pp. 403-406.

is always communal and guided by the external objective truths of Scripture. God is transcendent (wholly other), but He has bridged the gap through Jesus.

Plainly, what was emerging from the Leadership Network was not based on the Bible or systematic theology. The Leadership Network provided the venue for rethinking Christianity and the Church and opened the way for the radical thought and writings of the ECM. It only took Zondervan Publishing House getting on board to be the spigot for the new flow of the old — repackaged as new — ideas. The movement, though vastly divided on many issues, seems to agree that belonging is more important than believing, and that asking questions was more important than getting answers. Experimentation and subjectivism are in compliance with pluralism and ecumenism, except when it comes to those who insist on doctrinal correctness. The faulty logic is that because God is so vast, so great, and even incomprehensible, how can we know anything for sure?

The straw man that is tossed out is: “God can’t be put in a box.” But in Exodus 25:21-22, God put Himself *on a box* called the Ark of the Covenant and said, “I will meet you there.” God then put Himself in a body — Jesus Christ and, in effect, said, “I will meet you *there*.” God also put Himself in a Book and meets us there. Though we cannot understand everything, there are many things God has given us to know and understand (Deuteronomy 29:29). One may not be able to consume a whole spring, but he can partake of it and be refreshed a drink at a time. Besides, if according to the ECM, one can really know and understand next to nothing, one cannot believe or understand anything they say. If they really believed we were all that dim-witted, they would not be selling their books. Their rage against understanding does not hold up because the Holy Spirit is giving illumination to comprehend God’s Word.

In the vast and varied spectrum of the ECM, there is a lot of confusion. One idea is contextual theology, which does not mean the Bible in its context. It means shaping verses to fit into the culture rather than conforming the culture (and lives) to the Bible. Apparently, the command of Paul — not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2) — matters little. Another idea within the ECM is that the Roman Catholic mystics had it all and we have missed it. Thus some advocate heavy ancient liturgies and mystical meditation. The New Testament is full of admonitions against self-imposed ascetic practices (Colossians 2:16-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-11).

No one appears to be running the ECM show and there is no official ECM spokesperson, so the creature is still emerging. Still other strains of the ECM teach that the issue is building utopia, global peace, and the kingdom

of God on earth, and so advocate a huge dumbing down of doctrine for the sake of ecumenicity and togetherness. Roger Oakland has done an admirable job of showing many of the conflicting and contradictory strains of the ECM in his book *Faith Undone*. (Though a few small corrections could be made to the book, it is a good introduction to the disturbed and disturbing world of the ECM.)

What is emerging in the ECM is something really old, with some parallels to the ancient pagan priesthood of Egypt, just before the time of Jesus.

One of the most neglected periods of history for Bible believers is what is called the Intertestamental Period. It is also called the “400 Silent Years,” the time between Malachi and Matthew. Everything in that period helps us understand more fully the world of Judaism and Jesus, and how and why the Gospels and Gospel history developed as they did. In that timeframe, between the Testaments, Egypt was run by a family dynasty (Greek in origin) called the Ptolemys (named after Alexander the Great’s Senior officer and successor in Egypt). The Ptolemys successfully merged Greek paganism with the pagan priesthood of Egypt. For a time (300-200 B.C.), they ruled Israel benignly, but Ptolemaic wealth and influence affected God’s people in a very real and harmful way. The Pharisees and Essenes were the major resistors and holdouts against what is also called Hellenism. The Sadducees took more kindly to it.

In an excellent book, *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria*, Justin Pollard and Howard Reid lay out the intricacies of the Egyptian priesthood under the Ptolemys. Their interest is purely historical and they make no parallels to today. But obvious and disconcerting parallels are there.

The first distinctive of the Egyptian priesthood was that, “Philosophy can be used for spiritual purification” (pg. 100). The confusion in the ECM is very apparent. Kierkegaard was first and foremost a religious philosopher. In the ECM, there are philosophies, theories, ideas, experiments, experiences, unending unanswered questions, and speculations. All of these dynamics are seen within the movement to be of great value and the way to develop spiritually. It is called the emerging *church*. “Church” indicates something religious and spiritual. Nothing but the Bible is debated within the ECM. The above confusion, at least, tacitly is seen as a more spiritual way. Of course, the real spiritual way is repentance from sin and a turning to Christ. The grace that saves sets us on the biblical path of sanctification and character change. Ungodly philosophy cannot produce godly results and outcomes.

The second paradigm of the Ptolemaic priests was, “The soul can ascend to union with the divine” (pg. 100). This is why within the ECM we see the emergence of mysticism, contemplative prayer, Eucharistic worship, labyrinths, and monastic disciplines. Historically these things bled into the medieval Church via Greece and

Egypt. All of these practices are based on centering down within ourselves: meditating with the use of a mantra (saying a word or sentence over and over) so as to somehow connect and merge with God. There is a subtle (and at times, not so subtle) disregard of the Scriptures while one looks and listens for the voice of God within themselves. Prayer now becomes trying to hear voices within. Some of these practices shade off into occultism as journaling of these “messages from God” are recorded. It used to be called automatic writing. Our connection with the divine is through Christ and the Bible, not from within our own corrupt being.

PFO has written numerous articles on the dangers of mysticism and the people who promote it. When Tony Campolo wrote about the conversion experience he had, he said, “In my case, intimacy with Christ has developed gradually over the years, primarily through what Catholic mystics call ‘centering prayer.’ Each morning, as soon as I wake up, I take time — sometimes as much as a half hour — to center myself on Jesus. I say his name over and over again to drive back the 101 things that begin to clutter up my mind the minute I open my eyes. Jesus is my mantra, as some would say” (*Letters to a Young Evangelical*, pg. 26). Some would also argue that this classifies as vain repetitions.

Another important foundational item for the Egyptian priests pointed out in Pollard and Reid’s book was, “Certain symbols have special, mystical significance” (pg. 100). Segments of the ECM are rushing to liturgy, incense, candles, vestments, and sacraments in the belief that these objects can enhance worship and create something special with God. The heart, not accoutrements, is what God is looking at. All the God-given symbols, types, and aids to worship in the Old Covenant were all fulfilled in Christ. Our bodies are the temple of God if we are believers. God allowed the Old Testament trappings (tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, menorah, etc.) to be lost to time as He knew the propensity of the human heart for superstition, fetishes, and talismans. These lead one away from real worship. The emphasis of the Reformation was to disengage from priest craft and sacerdotalism. Segments of the ECM teach that the *parousia* of Christ (His presence at His literal second coming) is actually fulfilled in the host at communion. They have turned the “glorious appearing” into a secret special presence in a piece of bread! The writings of Roman Catholic Peter Kreeft are replete with ideas about worshipping the “Eucharistic Christ.” It is just amazing.

Of course, there are other things within the Egyptian priesthood which do not directly parallel the ECM, but the ones that do show us that old heresies are often just dressed up in new clothes. What is emerging is really nothing new. It is a repackaging of serious errors. How the monster will finally “emerge” no one knows, but it is shaping up as a very interesting trend that must be watched and warned against.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Post. Seghers and other Masonic leaders now want to project the image of an organization that has shed its covert disposition in the hope of reversing membership declines.

A spokesman for the Freemasons indicated that membership of the group reached its highest level in 1959 with 4 million, but recent figures place the number at 1.5 million. According to Margaret Jacob, an historian from UCLA, “The lodges are in deep decline. It’s no longer a vital societal organization, so it has become the subject of myth and legend.”

Despite their declining numbers, Masons continue to donate about \$2.5 million a day for children’s health care, medical research, education, and other philanthropic concerns.

—MKG

MORMON LEADER HINCKLEY DIES

Gordon B. Hinckley, the man who led the Latter-day Saint church as its 15th president and prophet for nearly 13 years, has died. Hinckley died Jan. 27 at his apartment in Salt Lake City. He was 97 and became the church’s oldest president.

During Hinckley’s tenure as the Mormon’s top leader, the church saw significant expansion, growing to more than 12 million members worldwide. Over 60 percent of the church’s 124 temples were built and dedicated under Hinckley’s leadership, with another 12 temples planned or already under construction.

Funeral services were held Feb. 2. The day following the burial, Thomas S. Monson, 80, was named as Hinckley’s successor. The LDS church’s custom is to name the most-senior member of its Council of Twelve Apostles as its new president and prophet.

—MKG

CBN REINS PASSED

Like John Osteen, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Paul Crouch, Kenneth Copeland, Robert Schuler, and even Billy Graham — all of whom have passed the reins of their ministries to their sons in one degree or another, for one reason or another — Pat Robertson announced last December that his son Gordon was succeeding him as the chief executive officer of the Christian Broadcasting Network. While the younger Robertson will serve as the CEO, his father will remain chairman of the ministry as well as the president of Regent University.

The elder Robertson founded CBN in 1960, building the worldwide television network from a defunct UHF station in Portsmouth, Va., with initial capital of \$70. The catalyst for the network's success was its daily program, *The 700 Club*. However, according to J. Michael Lindsay, a sociologist at Rice University, CBN's influence is not as significant as it was in the 1970s and 1980s due to various competition.

Pat Robertson has been a continual object of ridicule by the media with his ongoing rash political statements, bogus prophecies, and peculiar business enterprises. In 2006, he said God told him that possibly a tsunami would crash into America's coastlines. Last year, his claimed divine revelation included that in the final few months of 2007, a horrific terrorist attack — akin to a nuclear strike — would occur on United States soil resulting in "mass killing." This year his message from God was a bit more restrained, predicting worldwide violence, a recession in the United States, and an increase in oil to \$150 a barrel.

—MKG

TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR

A pilgrimage to Lourdes this year can reduce the time one will spend in purgatory, says Pope Benedict XVI. However, buyer beware — this offer is good only until Dec. 8, 2008.

Last December, the Roman Catholic pontiff offered "plenary indulgences" to those who make a trip to the shrine in France. The pope's invitation will coincide with the 150th anniversary of when the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirious, from February to July 1858. In 1933, Soubirious was canonized St. Bernadette. The shrine is famous for its purported miraculous healings and draws millions of pilgrims annually.

The "plenary indulgences" are said to help remove the temporal punishment in purgatory for sins of those whose guilt has been forgiven. Purgatory, or the final purification, is where those who die in God's grace go to achieve the sanctification and holiness necessary to enter heaven, according to Roman Catholic teaching.

Those who are unable to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes had the opportunity to partake of the "plenary indulgences" by praying at a specified place of worship dedicated to the "Madonna of Lourdes." However, this was a limited 10-day offer, being good from Feb. 2 through Feb 11. Those with severe handicaps and medical conditions could be granted the indulgences under special conditions, according to the Vatican.

—MKG

BOOK OF MORMON INTRODUCTION REVISED

Genetic scientific evidence apparently has caused the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to make a solitary but substantial revision in the introduction of *The Book of Mormon*. For years, DNA testimony has contradicted the Mormon belief that American Indians are descendants of ancient Israelites. Anthropologists have said that the American Indians migrated from Asia. DNA evidence now confirms that belief, and further discloses that American Indians have no Hebrew genetic markers.

For more than 25 years, the introduction to the primary Mormon scripture stated that a tribe of Israelites, known as the Lamanites, were "the principal ancestors of American Indians." The newly published editions of the volume will claim that the Lamanites "are among the ancestors of American Indians."

Officials for the Mormon church contend that the revision is but a minor detail and that the historical reports within *The Book of Mormon* are not impugned by DNA findings. Critics and former members disagree, saying the editorial change is significant and that the genetic evidence available is another impasse in LDS theology and historical accounts recorded in its scripture.

—MKG

IT'S NOT A \$23,000 TOILET

Following details of excessive spending in a series of critical articles which first appeared in the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* in 2003, televangelist and author Joyce Meyer has been dogged by the report that she spent \$23,000 for a marble-top commode. But the item in question is not a toilet, Meyer said recently. And it didn't cost \$23,000.

The issue of the lavish latrine again resurfaced when Sen. Charles Grassley made public his formal requests to six evangelical television ministries for financial information. Grassley, R-Iowa, wanted to know the tax-exempt purpose behind such an expensive article.

Meyer's ministry sought to set the record straight: "While many have mistakenly associated this piece of furniture with a common household toilet, this particular term actually refers to the classic definition of commode identified by Webster's Dictionary as, 'a tall elegant chest of drawers.'" The ministry also contends that the \$23,000 figure was an "errant value assigned by the selling agent."

In spite of the clarification, the ministry acknowledged that the commode was one item of a 68-piece furniture purchase made in 2001 which total cost was \$261,498 — an average of more than \$3,800 per piece.

—MKG



Books in Review

SEARCHING FOR THE ORIGINAL BIBLE

by Randall Price

Harvest House Publishers, 293 pages, \$12.99

This is a dynamite book at an unbeatable price. Randall Price, a Professor of Jewish Studies and Archaeology and President of World of the Bible Ministries, is pre-eminently qualified to address the topic of the Bible's origins.

In the Introduction, Charles Ryrie says: "Thorough research, informative sidebars, charts, photographs, and clear writing all combine to make this book a significant, up-to-date defense of the inerrancy and reliability of our Bible. How anyone could read this book without having more confidence in the accuracy and dependability of the biblical text we have today would be a mystery to me" (pg. 11).

We have been bombarded by books such as *The Da Vinci Code* and the writings of Bart Ehrman (who overstates his case), and have been told that Gnostic heretical books such as the so-called gospels of Thomas and Judas belong in the Bible. A book such as Price's is an effective response.

Price describes very technical subjects such as textual transmission, textual criticism, and manuscript study in terms that can be understood by anyone. Every seminary and Bible college should make this book mandatory reading.

A sample of his chapter titles give a preview of the subject matter: "Why believe the Bible?," "What do we mean by the original Bible?," "Can we trust the text of the Old Testament?," "Can we trust the text of the New Testament?," "Are books missing from our Bible?," "Who decided what books went into the Bible?," "Has the truth about Jesus in the original Gospels been lost?," "Do we have now what they had then?," and "Can the original Bible be recovered?"

There is important information throughout the book. For example: we could construct almost the entire New Testament (except for 11 verses) just from the Patristic (the Church Fathers from about A.D. 180-400) citations

(pp. 111-126). The reverence of the early Church Fathers for the text shows an implied canonicity.

Price describes points in favor of the Apocrypha, Jewish writings between the Old and New Testaments (pp. 132-136), and then explains why they do not belong in the Bible. He then explains the Pseudepigrapha (about 100 texts and fragments), which are largely legendary and states why these are not cited by or included in the New Testament (pp. 136-138).

Price deals with the historical issue of how the Canon of Scripture was progressively recognized by the Church. Men did not create the Canon, they simply recognized, accepted, and submitted to it. The idea that Constantine had anything directly to do with the process is shown to be completely false. He also shows the many steps and tests to determine which books were the inspired books.

Price also gives an interesting and instructive overview of early heresies that threatened the Church and introduces the readers to the Gnostics and their beliefs. He addresses the Gnostic gospels and the issue of so-called "alternate Christianities." He also discusses how we go about recovering and restoring the original Bible. Price also shares what may have happened to the original autographs and speculates as to whether they might ever be discovered. He also shows how scribal tendencies produced variants in various texts revealing the human way that the Bible was preserved and transmitted down to us. Understanding the difference between inspiration and preservation is most helpful. Price then discusses why the old "telephone game" analogy applied to the Bible does not work and is faulty (pg. 220).

Price quotes Harold Greenlee to describe textual criticism at its best: "the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text" (pg. 223).

Price's section on "Ten Reasons Why We Don't Need the Original Bible" (pp. 251-259), having to do with the question of why the originals have disappeared, is worth the cost of the book alone. The book also has a great index and a bibliography.

Price's book could be subtitled "All You Will Ever Want to Know and Need to Know About How Our Bible Came Down to Us." This is a timely and important book. It is ammunition for the apologetic arsenal. You will be glad that you purchased and read it.

—GRF

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