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## There's No Place Like Rome? Understanding the Ancient-Future Faith Movement

by Gary E. Gilley

Rumors are starting to circulate that the emergent church movement is running out of steam. After making the biggest splash and the most noise of anything in the Christian community for many years, it appears to be approaching exhaustion. Some such as Rob Bell and Erwin McManus who are clearly in the "emergent conversation" have denied their involvement. And people seem a bit tired of hearing about postmodernism, its rejection of universal truth, and its promotion of relativism. These things play out nicely in philosophy class and college coffee shops, but have serious limitations in the real world.

But the emergent church has not died; it is just morphing. Emergent has largely been a backlash against the seeker-sensitive movement with its slick programs, high-octane entertainment, and superficial worship.

Where the seeker-sensitive movement attempted to make the Church look like the world, emergent youth



want a sense of the sacred. Where the seekers wanted to offer everything the world offered in purified form, the emergents want experiences the world cannot offer. Where the seekers repudiated Church history and behaved as if the Church had been born yesterday, the emergents want not only a link to the past but a return to the past. These elements have always been present in emergent but are just now rising to the top of the conversation. It is not enough to complain about the modern Church or to brush aside all claims of truth as relative. Roots of some kind must anchor the movement if it is to last. What gives this conversation a point of reference and at the same time

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# Editorials

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## COME OVER TO MY HOUSE

All believers need to be in a house church, according to pollster George Barna and church planter Frank Viola. Anything else is, according to these two, absolutely pagan. In their view, meeting in buildings rather than houses all started with Constantine, who is cast as the villain. Church buildings — even pulpits — are bad. House churches are good.

All of this reconstructed history and claims of a new restoration of the Church by Barna and Viola can be found in their book *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practice*. The book is a rewrite of Viola's 2003 book, *Pagan Christianity*.

Viola's views are not new, but are recycled from Gene Edwards. Edwards is all over the doctrinal map and has even appeared on Benny Hinn's telecasts. He was ordained in the Southern Baptist Church, but became enamored with the ideas of Frank Laubach, which set him on a mystical course. He then became interested in Watchman Nee, and even went to China to study the house church movement. Even after he fell out with Nee's followers and moved on, he never abandoned the idea that house churches were the only acceptable kind of congregation. It seems like Edwards hardly knew where to land theologically.

For a time, Edwards ran a publishing house of his own and published the writings of medieval Catholic mystics such as Madame Guyon. In the 1990s, he worked hard to establish the house church model in the United States, though it has always remained a small minority and a subculture. Edwards bases his house church structure on the total equality of everyone involved. He opposes pastoral oversight. This is unlike both the structure for the Christian home and the Epistles' view of churches, which included pastoral and deacon oversight and leadership. Further, Edwards teaches that organization and administration are the result of the fall and that egalitarianism is in.

Edwards also is committed to the teaching called Baptist Secessionism, which proposes that there is an unbroken line of Baptists from New Testament times until the present. In his attempt to create historical continuity, he takes heretical groups throughout history and declares them to have been Baptists.

History and archaeology are the enemies of Barna and Viola's house church mandates. Scripture reports that early believers met in homes, but never mandates it.

The use of buildings does not constitute an evil in itself, otherwise Paul would have never met in a hall as reported in Acts 19:9-10. Paul used the school hall of one Tyrannus to gather and teach his disciples. He spent two

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## WEBSITE OFFERS POST-RAPTURE MESSAGING SERVICE

Worried about getting caught up in the Rapture and not being able to bestow to your unsaved family members one last call to the Gospel — or, at the very least, a means for them to recover all your earthly treasures? A new website may well be the answer to such concerns. YouveBeenLeftBehind.com identifies itself as a “Document storage and ‘Rapture’ triggered email messaging system,” and says its “purpose is to get one last message to the lost, at a time, when they might just be willing to hear it for the first and last time.”

Subscribers to the online service will be able to store encrypted documents containing personal private correspondence, including essential information about financial holdings and other assets. Six days following the Rapture, the documents will be emailed to a dozen of your closest family and friends — those who have been “left behind.” A second, unencrypted, level of files will be dispatched to another 50 email addresses of your choosing. The initial cost is \$40 for the first year, but the cost for resubscriptions is expected to decrease as more subscribers sign on to the service.

According to the website, the company is “programmed and run by Christians, for Christians.” An overview of the services says the corporation has “set up a system to send documents by email, to the addresses you provide, 6 days after the ‘Rapture’ of the Church. This occurs when 3 of our 5 team members scattered around the U.S. fail to log in over a 3 day period. Another 3 days are given to fail safe any false triggering of the system.”

—MKG

ministry and your life.” All of this sounded quite impressive; however, the only thing missing from the conference was the Word of God.

“It was the exception and not the rule when God’s Word was referred to in any way. A few speakers mentioned the need of receiving Jesus Christ, but very few. The subjects of ‘sin’ and ‘Hell’ apparently were off-limits,” said Ralph G. Colas, Executive Secretary of the American Council of Christian Churches.

Schuller, who is described as “the godfather of doing church differently,” acquired acclaimed speakers for the three days of meetings including former president George H.W. Bush, broadcaster Larry King, emerging church leaders Erwin McManus, Dan Kimball, and Miles McPherson, pollster George Barna, clinical psychologists Henry Cloud and John Townsend, apologist Lee Strobel, economist Ben Stein, former heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman, Nancy Ortberg, former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, and Kay Warren, wife of Rick Warren of Saddleback Church.

Colas described the event as “a mishmash of liberalism, New Age teaching, self-esteem philosophy with a lot of psycho-babble thrown into the mix.” It was reported that 2,500 attended the conference, with tens of thousands of others viewing via satellite simulcast to 44 cities in the U.S.

“Believers do not need to ‘rethink’ God’s truths but should ‘rethink’ accepting the multiplied errors offered by those like Robert Schuller,” Colas said.

—MKG

## PORN FILM GETS “THUMBS UP” FROM CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

For many believers, the thought of a Christian publication giving an enthusiastic review to a movie laced with all types of debauchery is unthinkable. Yet that’s just what *Christianity Today* magazine did for the summer theatrical release of *Sex and the City*, the big-screen version of the HBO television series.

In the critique, posted on the magazine’s website in late May, the film was given three stars out of a possible four. Camerin Courtney, who wrote the review, opined that the cable network series, which ran for six seasons

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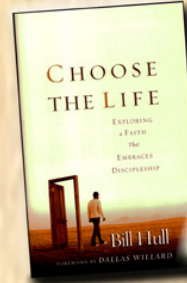
## STRANGE — AND NOT SO STRANGE — BEDFELLOWS

Robert Schuller pledged that his “Rethink Conference,” held last January, would be “an unprecedented convergence of influential Christian and global leaders” where attendees would learn from cultural icons and experience “30 Aha! Moments from 30 Leading Influencers.” It was “about getting into the minds of the most influential thinkers, innovators and leaders” to develop “fresh perspective and new directions for your work, your

# Discipleship Deterioration



## Bill Hull's Mad Rush to Rome and Mystical Disciplines



by G. Richard Fisher

"Until just a few years ago evangelicals wouldn't touch the spiritual formation movement because of its liberal and Catholic roots," writes Bill Hull in his book, *Choose the Life*. "I am thrilled that now, thanks to Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, James Houston, and many others, the call to lifelong spiritual transformation is being restored to the church."<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s Hull, of the Evangelical Free Church, was known for his books on discipleship. He built a paradigm of discipleship based on Jesus' dealings with His Apostles in a book titled *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*.

Hull's approach was not new and one could argue that Hull's suggested phases of discipleship were contrived and formulaic. Given the diversity and complexity in humans, there is no one size to fit all. But, regardless of how on or off target Hull's earlier books were, evangelicals welcomed the idea of keeping salvation and sanctification tightly connected. After all, Jesus commanded that we make disciples and not just converts.

### THIS TIME THIS IS REALLY IT

Hull now says he was only part way there with his earlier writings and in his new work tells what he

believes should be the content given out to disciples. In *Choose the Life*, he pulls out all the stops. Hull, like others, made a fairly good start and had discipleship running along the line of Matthew 28:20 regarding our teaching disciples what Jesus had commanded. But now the new party line is that we are to teach our disciples what the mystics of the Dark Ages taught and practiced. There needs to be a blend of the old and the new, Hull says. But these mystical practices (now called "spiritual formation") cannot be found in Jesus' teaching. Jesus was a disciple maker, not a mystic maker. The words "spiritual formation" may sound good, but it depends on who is doing the forming and what is being formed.

Hull's new book has a foreword by Dallas Willard and an endorsement by Brian McLaren, both leading lights in what is called the emerging church movement. They love Hull's new digression and his race to Rome. In the emerging church our experiences are king and doctrine gets little or no notice. We should not question our emotions, but by all means question our beliefs. Rituals are cool and doctrine is passé.

### NO LESS THAN GOD HAS SPOKEN

Hull makes a strange claim early in the book about a time when the church he was pastoring was in decline:

"It was the most painful experience of my pastoral life, and so many times I wanted to run away. But God spoke to me very powerfully one morning as I lay prostrate on my office floor: 'Bill, I am going to break you. Don't run.'"<sup>2</sup>

Hull also wrote, "God encouraged me through words of prophecy that he would bless our church."<sup>3</sup> Even more startling is Hull's claim about the origin of this new book: "I wrote this book because I couldn't hold it in. More than any other book I have written, God called me to this one."<sup>4</sup> If God truly called — even inspired — Hull to write this book, then we must assume that it would square with Scripture because God cannot contradict Himself. However, Hull's book does not.

Hull wrote that we can hear God's voice and get direction from somewhere other than Scripture. He tells us that meditation and centering are the route to hearing the voice of God,

“This requires a commitment to set aside time to study, pray, and meditate in order to hear the voice of God and to take on the mind of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> He went so far as to write that if we do not do the above we “are practicing a Christ-less Christianity.”<sup>6</sup>

### LEAPING WHERE?

Hull indicates he is taking a leap. “I invite you to jump with me. You won’t be sorry,”<sup>7</sup> he says. Where he is going or jumping becomes clear early on as he repeatedly cites Henri Nouwen.<sup>8</sup> Before his death, Nouwen, a Catholic theologian, combined universalism with Hinduism. Nouwen’s writings attempt to blend Christianity and medieval mysticism with Buddhist and Hindu thought.<sup>9</sup> Nouwen’s best-known quote is from his book, *Sabbatical Journey*:

“Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.”<sup>10</sup>

Then in Nouwen’s book, *Here and Now*:

“The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being.”<sup>11</sup>

### BEATING UP BELIEVERS

Early on in *Choose the Life*, Hull writes what he thinks is wrong with the Church at large. We can agree with Hull when he writes, “The whole point of the gospel is to be transformed into the image of Christ,”<sup>12</sup> but his plan for transformation is not the way to go.

Hull writes, “Those who are well-read and highly educated can experience spiritual transformation through reading *The Confession of Saint Augustine*, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila, or more contemporary works by Henri Nouwen or Thomas Merton.”<sup>13</sup>

Though Hull acknowledges that while the above will not work for everyone in exactly the same way as the ancient mystics, “our quest is to find ways to practice spiritual disciplines in different ways and levels.”<sup>14</sup> It is like the old idea of throwing everything in but the kitchen sink to see if it works.

Citing Merton is a dead giveaway as to where Hull is trying to lead us. In a prior issue of *The Quarterly Journal*, PFO tried to sound the alarm regarding Merton and others in an article on the marriage of evangelical-

formerly evangelical bookstores. It is amazing that nearly no one objects when Merton is quoted favorably by one considered evangelical, namely Richard Foster.<sup>16</sup>

### WHO IS DOING THE LEADING?

Hull asserts that discipleship is “an intention to live the way Jesus lived.”<sup>17</sup> The above, that is the example of Nouwen and Merton, is clearly not the way Jesus lived or taught. Mysticism and all that goes

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**God leads us through His Word, not through the meanderings of mystic teachers such as Nouwen and Merton. Hull’s major flaw becomes obvious. In the end discipleship is not just about following Jesus, but is rather, according to Hull, “following someone who can teach you to follow Jesus.”**

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ism to Catholic mysticism.<sup>15</sup> On Merton in particular we pointed out:

“Not surprisingly, the books of Trappist monk Thomas Merton began to sell briskly. Merton, who died in 1968, became the new spearhead of Catholic mysticism. He had been making forays into eastern mysticism for years. He was a profound mystic who ultimately became a recluse. His ideas were so old that many thought they were new. Merton merged Buddhism and Hinduism with non-violence and Christianity, although Christianity got short shrift. His *The Seven Storey Mountain* (a spiritual autobiography) ‘became a world best-seller.’ Marketing pushed Merton into

with it is clearly a departure from the faith and true discipleship. Hull writes, “I humbled myself and asked God to lead me.”<sup>18</sup> God leads us through His Word, not through the meanderings of mystic teachers such as Nouwen and Merton. Hull’s major flaw becomes obvious. In the end discipleship is not just about following Jesus, but is rather, according to Hull, “following someone who can teach you to follow Jesus.”<sup>19</sup>

We need teachers who are godly and biblical. We need mentors. People need others to disciple them. The Apostle Paul said, “Be followers of me as I also follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The heavy implication there is that we can follow and imitate Paul *only as far as he follows and*

imitates Jesus. As noted in the *New Geneva Study Bible*, "The apostle does not set himself up as an absolute example; he is to be imitated to the extent that he imitates Christ."<sup>20</sup> It appears Hull is pointing us to models who are not biblical models, but mystics and universalists. He can speak all he wants of finding the right kind of models in the Church, but he undermines his own advice by endorsing and quoting all the wrong people.

### IMITATION CHRISTIANITY

Hull also cites the work of Thomas à Kempis, a 14th century monk. While à Kempis' authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* is under debate, most believe he is the writer. Born Thomas Hammerken in 1380, he and those of his era were strongly influenced by German mystic Johannes Eckhart. Eckhart taught that people could be absorbed into the Divine Unknown.

Thomas à Kempis lived in the seclusion of a monastery his whole life. *The Imitation of Christ* was written by à Kempis for monks and the monkish life. It is hardly related to the world most of us have to face every day. He definitely believed that human merit was the way to heaven, as all good Catholics did. He was committed to what every monk and priest of that era was committed to: the celebration of the Mass, the priesthood, and the priests' ability to turn the communion bread into the physical body of Christ (transubstantiation).

*The Imitation of Christ* crossed over into the evangelical world — thanks to John Wesley — in spite of the fact that it is not orthodox in key areas and its mysticism deviates from central issues related to Christ and the Gospel. In Wesley's defense, one might argue that he did not fully understand Catholicism and read into the language of à Kempis his own understanding of certain words and concepts. Perhaps Wesley read his own understanding, rather than the Catholic meanings, into the words. Also, Wesley had a mystical bent and also held to at least a form of

perfectionism, which helped him resonate with à Kempis.

### À KEMPIS CRITIQUED

Lorne Zelyck has made an in-depth study of à Kempis and his book *The Imitation of Christ* and concludes:

"I do not believe that every component of *The Imitation of Christ* is erroneous; I appreciate his attempt to take discipleship seriously. Yet I do believe that there are enough problematic statements which cause me to question its benefit to the Christian community. While Jesus bestows value upon humanity, à Kempis seems to eradicate it. While Jesus calls us to follow Him, à Kempis calls us to mortify ourselves. While Jesus calls us to complete, undivided devotion to God which expresses itself through acts of love, à Kempis calls us to sinless perfection, and views it as attainable. Moreover, while Jesus assures His followers of eternal life through believing in Him, à Kempis provides no assurance of eternal life, for the infusion of grace can be lost. In conclusion, I believe *The Imitation of Christ* was simply a product of its times. Honorably, à Kempis sought to understand God the best he could, and apply his knowledge to his context. McBrien notes that the Middle Ages were, '...wrought with mysticism. The lack of intellectual and theological substance produced numerous problems: superstition, ignorance of the Bible, fascination with reports of visions, exaggeration of the value of relics, emotionalism, inordinate fears of the after-life and of God's judgment, and devotional excesses unrelated to the central mysteries of Christian faith.' Whether or not the Christian community has made any progress in these areas, I can not say. What does seem apparent is this: the Christian community needs to be diligent in reading its

authors carefully, filtering everything through the clear teachings of Jesus as found in the Scriptures, and applying it to our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. I believe that in doing this, we would truly imitate Christ."<sup>21</sup>

### LIVING IN THE DARK PAST

A bit further into his book, Hull actually proposes some helpful things. There he writes about habits, habit formation, and perseverance. These things can be of help if one is able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Yet right in the midst of some good advice, Hull throws in the following:

"This is where the spiritual formation movement comes in. It has now emerged from behind the walls of monasteries and out of the neoorthodox seminary classrooms to become a force in the mainstream. It brings a rich history of great contemplative writers, scholarship, and an emphasis on spiritual disciplines. ... There is also a resistance by evangelicals to Catholic teaching and liberal theology that has been the home for the spiritual disciplines for the last few hundred years. The interesting development of the last ten years is the emergence of a very healthy spirituality from those traditions."<sup>22</sup>

Hull tries to make this a bit more palatable by throwing in the caveat that we cannot view these medieval mystical practices as earning salvation, but otherwise the mystics are fine. Many would disagree strongly and for good reason.

Hull's view is that whatever we have been doing in the past — including reading his past books — is deficient and incomplete:

"Much good has been done through the content and structure approach, but it has lacked the depth and mystical element in the faith that the historic spiritual formation movement has provided. Spiritual formation

has been largely a product of the monastery and the academy, but now it is coming out of those closed environments and is joining forces with the classic disciple-making movement. ... I believe this combination created by the Holy Spirit will sweep the nation and transform the church in America."<sup>23</sup>

Hull claimed to have the answer before, but now he is informing us that it was the wrong answer or at least deficient. Given the evaluation of his new system so far, a strong suspicion that he may be wrong again is warranted.

Hull also throws in the following suggestions as he speaks of what he perceives as God's external activity:

"God also works outside in when we serve or fit into a prescribed external regime such as church worship, service projects, and even the wearing of special clothes (i.e., clerical robes, choir robes, monks' or nuns' attire, and religious school uniforms that all have religious significance)."<sup>24</sup>

It is hard to fathom how anyone could think that clerical robes reflect God's external activity. Jesus condemned all the religious and external paraphernalia of the Pharisees (Matthew 23). Choir robes are simply benign and may be nice for appearance and uniformity, but can in no way identify spirituality in a person. Hull's premise is simply foolish as he tries to sanitize some aspects of the liturgical Catholic tradition. "Special clothes" mean absolutely nothing.

### **BULIMIA, ANOREXIA, VISIONS, AND STUPORS**

There seems to be no limit to Hull's imagination:

"Much like Teresa of Avila's interior castle analogy, Jesus draws me further and further in, toward the center room of his presence. The less I fear, the easier it will be for me to follow him."<sup>25</sup>

Hull's argument here is very misleading. He prefaces his introduction to "Saint" Teresa by talking about the Apostle Paul not being afraid to follow Christ (even if it meant suffering). However there are many things we should be afraid to follow, especially if they are heretical and wrong. Pushing through the fear to follow Jesus, at least in Hull's view, means we should not be afraid to follow the mystical meanderings of Teresa of Ávila. God-given fear of wrong ideas and teachings is to be ignored from what Hull says. Healthy fear can be God's fire alarm of discernment and protection.

In a footnote, Hull explains at least a bit of Teresa's *The Interior Castle*:

"This is based on a *vision* she had on Trinity Sunday, 1577. She saw a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of a very clear crystal in which there were many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. Each room moves us closer to the center where the King of Glory dwells in the greatest splendor."<sup>26</sup>

So now discipleship means following the visions of others. This removes us far from the discipleship command of Jesus and His teachings. Nowhere in Hull's book does he tell us to read and reread the Gospels, which contain all that Jesus taught and commanded. Jesus Himself said that all he commanded was to be the context and content of discipleship (Matthew 28:20).

We need to look further at Teresa of Ávila and really understand who and what is being recommended and who and what we are dealing with:

"**Saint Teresa of Ávila**, known in religion as **Saint Teresa of Jesus** and baptized as **Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada**, (born March 28, 1515 at Ávila, Old Castile, Spain, died October 4, 1582 at Alba de Tormes, Salamanca, Spain) was a prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun,

and writer of the Counter Reformation. ... She claimed that during her illness she rose from the lowest stage, 'recollection,' to the 'devotions of peace' or even to the 'devotions of union,' which was one of perfect ecstasy. ... Around 1556, various friends suggested that her newfound knowledge was diabolical, not divine. She began to inflict various tortures and mortifications on herself. But Francis Borgia, to whom she made confession, reassured her of the divine inspiration of her thoughts. On St. Peter's Day in 1559, Teresa became firmly convinced that Christ was present to her in bodily form, though invisible. This vision lasted almost uninterrupted for more than two years. In another vision, a seraph drove the fiery point of a golden lance repeatedly through her heart, causing an ineffable spiritual-bodily pain. The memory of this episode served as an inspiration throughout the rest of her life, and which motivated her life-long imitation of the life and suffering of Jesus, epitomized in the motto usually associated with her: 'Lord, either let me suffer or let me die.' ... Her plan was the revival of the earlier stricter rules, supplemented by new regulations like the three disciplines of ceremonial flagellation prescribed for the divine service every week, and the discalceation of the nun, or the substitution of leather or wooden sandals for shoes."<sup>27</sup>

Today, someone this mentally unbalanced would be put on medication and perhaps institutionalized. It is difficult to conceive of such a person being held up as a model for Christian discipleship.

### **TORTURED INTO SPIRITUALITY**

Teresa dreamed up four levels of devotion that she described as the ascent of the soul:

“The fourth is the ‘devotion of ecstasy or rapture,’ a passive state, in which the consciousness of being in the body disappears (2 Corinthians 12:2-3 ... ). Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are also absorbed in God or intoxicated. Body and spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation, intermitted sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. This after half an hour is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. From this the subject awakens in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, productive of the trance. (Indeed, St. Theresa herself was said to have been observed levitating during Mass on more than one occasion.)”<sup>28</sup>

This sounds like a combination of a drug high, altered states of consciousness, and demon possession. No wonder Joseph Breuer referred to her as the patron saint of hysteria.

In regard to the seraph and spear we find in her biography that Teresa claims an angel came to her with a spear that had a fiery tip and “he plunged this into my heart several times, so that it penetrated all the way to my entrails,” and she says that the intense pain united her to God.<sup>29</sup> She turned sadomasochism into a spiritual art. Teresa, like many of the passion mystics of her day, was both anorexic and bulimic and induced vomiting with twigs from an olive tree.<sup>30</sup> She claimed visions and went into stupors, having visions of the devil.<sup>31</sup> She was a pathetic creature who did automatic writing, believing her penings were inspired by God.<sup>32</sup> She also claimed ecstatic states and what she described sounds like an out of body experience.<sup>33</sup> At one point there was even a claim that she was “literally swept off her feet during Mass”

and that the host (or communion wafer) “was miraculously transported to her lips.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps some of her hallucinations were produced by the frequent bloodletting practiced in those days.<sup>35</sup> There were visions of hell and a “spiritual marriage” said to be “the permanent union of her soul with God.”<sup>36</sup> The erotic bridal motif was a bizarre stock in trade for female mystics.

The sick, sinful, and macabre nature of that era is illustrated by Jerónimo Gracián, the head of Teresa’s order. On Teresa’s death, Gracián used a hacksaw to remove her left hand, which was then taken to churches as a “relic” capable of curing stomach ailments.<sup>37</sup>

How anyone could not condemn all this activity, but rather affirm it or ignore it, is a real mystery. Hull probably would say he does not affirm all that the mystics say or do. These mystics were not in their right mind. People like this should not be promoted, but strongly denounced.

#### BUT FAITH IN WHAT?

Hull’s view of faith is a bit misleading as he says, “we have defined *faith* as action based on confident belief.”<sup>38</sup> The idea of confident belief conveys more the word “hope.” Hope (*elpis* in Greek) is confident expectation. “Faith as action” is a description of what genuine faith does, not what it is. Genuine faith will issue out in works. Hull’s idea of confident belief is so generic he illustrates it in a subjective way: taking a basement apartment over a more desirable one higher up. Biblical faith is not about subjective choices on any given day.

The word faith (*pisteuo* in Greek) means “trust.” That trust is directed to God and His Word. God and the Scriptures are the object of my trust (my faith). As New Testament lexicographer Joseph Henry Thayer points out, faith is “to trust in Jesus or in God ... the credence given to God’s messengers and their words ... joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>39</sup>

More importantly:

“Faith in God involves right belief about God. The word faith in ordinary speech covers both credence of propositions (‘beliefs’) and confidence in persons or things. ... for trust in a thing reflects a positive expectation about its behavior, and rational expectation is impossible if the thing’s capacities for behavior are wholly unknown. Throughout the Bible, trust in God is made to rest on belief of what he has revealed concerning his character and purposes. In the NT, where faith in God is defined as trust in Christ, the acknowledgement of Jesus as the expected Messiah and the incarnate Son of God is regarded as basic to it.”<sup>40</sup>

Hull also introduces Madame Guyon into his gallery of mystics and refers to one of her books, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. Perhaps Hull is ignorant of who Guyon really was and what she believed and taught. The book he refers to is possibly more benign and less revealing of the real Guyon. Like Teresa of Ávila, Guyon taught and practiced some frightening things that were far outside the Bible and a healthy spiritual life. PFO did a thorough investigation of her, drawing from her autobiography.<sup>41</sup>

Madame Guyon’s real name was Jeanne Marie Bouvier De La Motte. She lived from 1648-1717. The main culprit for spreading her lunacies happens to be Moody Press. D.L. Moody would be horrified to have his name attached to such madness. Guyon practiced essence mysticism (a form of deification), believing that one could sink into a mindless state and literally merge with God. This heresy confuses the Creator with His creatures. Other forms of it taught that one could go into mindless meditative states and merge with and almost become Jesus. This is also referred to as Theosis or Christological fusion.

At age 15, Guyon married a man who was 37. By her own telling, things were miserable. She was

abused by her mother-in-law. Extremely unhappy and depressed, she sought mental withdrawal by imagining she could meditate her way into release by perfect oneness with God. At times, she even convinced herself she had been absorbed into God. Today we would see her as a very confused teenager in need of help and counseling. She would carry these dark ideas into her adulthood. In a day when Roman Catholic legalism was not being countered by the balance of the Bible, many fell into unrestrained and extreme subjectivism and sought experiences for experience sake.

After the death of her husband, Guyon, who was then about 27, fell under the sway of a mystic named Father LaCombe. After joining his group, Guyon ate and slept little, which triggered mind-altering delusions. She believed that she could plunge her soul “wholly into His own divine essence.”<sup>42</sup> Once one loses the understanding that humans are totally different than God, heresies will abound. People cannot become divine. That error was introduced by Satan in the garden when he offered to Eve the possibility that she could become like God (Genesis 3:5).

Guyon believed for a time that she and LaCombe could communicate by mental telepathy. In trance states she was unable to speak or communicate for days. She believed that her writings were inspired by God and practiced occult automatic writing. She claimed she had within her all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge thereby usurping the place of Jesus (Colossians 3:3).

Another promoter of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, referred to Guyon as a medium who exhibited clairvoyance, prophecy, and telepathy. So far afield was Guyon that she was imprisoned by the Catholic Church for 10 years.

### EXPERIENCING ME

Many parts of *Choose the Life* are about Hull’s feelings and experiences.

He even refers to himself in the third person:

“I would be happy to be remembered as a writer, but there is something even more important about Bill Hull. The writing speaks of my perseverance, drive, and ability to think, but it leaves out my personal influence on others. As I like to tell my friends, it is wonderful to be honored but even better to be loved. An even more important legacy than my writing is Bill Hull the person and how other people experience me.”<sup>43</sup>

It is really troubling to read that Hull will follow the Catholic mystics anywhere they take him:

“As part of my quest to understand more of the history of spiritual formation, I read *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. I didn’t think much of the exercises that called for contemplation of bodies burning in hell, the wearing of hair shirts or chains, or flogging myself with a whip. But there was a passage that struck me as helpful, even though it goes further than Scripture requires.”<sup>44</sup>

The passage from Ignatius had to do with saving one’s soul through sickness and poverty — in essence teaching salvation by works. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuits and fiercely loyal to the pope and the Virgin Mary. Hull is willing to overlook it all and writes, “One must make allowance for excessive theological beliefs and practices suitable only to such a time as they wrote.”<sup>45</sup>

Hull provides a recommended-reading list. It includes a number of medieval mystics, writers for the emerging church, and Quaker mystic Richard Foster.<sup>46</sup> Foster recommends mystics such as Madame Guyon and French priest François Fénelon. In Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, he advises occult techniques including visualization and meditation. He

refers to this new age in which we can relish fantasy games, visions, and dreams. He endorses mindless meditation and occult centering, which produces altered states of consciousness. He also advocates a form of out of body experience. These things are far beyond the pale of the Bible and Christianity, and would dovetail more with Hinduism and heresy than they would evangelicalism.<sup>47</sup>

### VAIN REPETITIONS

Hull also recommends Bruce Demarest’s teaching on what is called *lectio divina*.<sup>48</sup> *Lectio divina*, which means “sacred reading” in Latin, is an ancient Roman Catholic practice that surely qualifies as vain repetition. *Lectio divina* seems to begin well as one is advised to open the Bible. However, one does not read the Bible in context, trying to understand the sense and apply it to life but rather:

“When you find a word or phrase or sentence that speaks to your heart, pause in your reading. ... meditate or mull over the word or words. ... The final stage is resting in the Lord’s presence.”<sup>49</sup>

Other practitioners call this centering prayer and describe it as an art or technique. Chanting the mantra (a word or words from the Bible) is supposed to create oneness with God and fuse the soul with the Divine. It is supposed to end in wordless rest.<sup>50</sup> Real Bible reading should result in comfort, assurance, prayer, and praise. It provides direction as we become doers of the Word.

*Lectio divina* is a deceptive substitute for reading and studying the Bible. It has parallels in mysticism, occultism, and Buddhism. It is more about how we feel than it is about God’s glory. Stoking our emotions is not the primary purpose of the Scriptures; telling us how to live is (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

*Lectio divina* can only leave one empty, confused, misdirected, and malnourished. It would be like going to a favorite restaurant and having a

steak dinner set down, but being told to cut only a tiny piece of steak from one corner and roll it in your mouth for a while without swallowing it. Meals are meant to be eaten. Nourishment comes from the whole meal. Satan is stealing the food and replacing it with junk food doctrine or even poison.

### HOW DID THIS ALL START?

What has puzzled many is how and why extreme asceticism was able to thrive in the medieval Church. While as early as the third and fourth century of the Church men began to withdraw to the deserts of Southern Israel and Egypt, it certainly was the opposite of "go into the world and preach the Gospel."

Paul condemned those who teach such things:

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own consciences seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

The ascetics recommended by Hull are the very ones Paul refers to. Their practices are morbid and self-destructive.

The deserts of Egypt and Israel were, for the most part, conducive to reclusive living. These practices may have started innocently enough as some had to flee to the wilderness areas during times of persecution.

Consider the following religious and historical reasons for many accepting the abnormal lifestyles of those who became known as anchorites (a recluse who is alone, most often dwelling in a cave) and cenobites (withdrawal with others into a convent or monastery). These practices began as early as A.D. 270. Paul

of Thebes, Anthony and Pachomius from Egypt, and Hilarion from what was then Palestine seem to be the key figures.

In that era there was an imbibing of Greek philosophy from Alexandria, Egypt. Some of it was left over from the Hellenism of the B.C. era, which looked at the body as evil. If the body was worthless, then it made sense, at least to some, to starve it, mortify it, beat it, and deny it. Punishment of the body was seen as good and even godly. The Greek mindset made anorexia, masochism, and self-torture appealing to some, even though it was a form of slow suicide. Once the practice and tradition set in, the philosophy that triggered it was forgotten. This laid the groundwork. The following erected the structure:

I. There was a growing belief that as the cities were "Christianized," Satan had been driven out and therefore began residing in deserts, the wilderness, and other remote places. Therefore if one were to encounter and defeat Satan one would have to go out to his turf. It was an early form of geographical spiritual warfare or territorial demonology. This made all the more sense to the ancients because Jesus Himself went to the wilderness to encounter Satan. What they failed to remember was that Jesus talked of Satan's activity in the Pharisees in Jerusalem (John 8:44) and even in Peter while in Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:23). Christ's temptations did not limit Satan to the wilderness.

II. There was a growing celebrity status of the reclusive class that affirmed that lifestyle. City folk would go out and observe the austerity, which gave it a higher honor than it deserved. Some considered the monks entertaining, but some took them far more seriously.

III. Withdrawal from normal life was now seen as the one major way to obtain deep spirituality. As well, it recaptured the old martyr's spirit. A belief grew that a reclusive lifestyle could recapture Adam's innocent condition before the fall. It followed in

many minds that if these people were willing to sacrifice so much and be homeless and destitute they had to be a saintly class.

IV. The next step was the growing belief that desert living was the only way to be really spiritual. With a growing ignorance of the Bible more than 200 years after its completion and an acceptance of a perverted form of sanctification, this lifestyle was seen as the genuine way to salvation.

V. If then these monks and hermits were the closest thing to God on earth, it made sense that they could pray for and intervene for the less spiritual both in life and in death.

VI. The claim of frequent visions and voices affirming the lifestyle was not investigated or questioned. Sleep loss, starvation, and isolation, which are sins against the body and a violation of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, could easily account for the "supernatural" occurrences, but these destructive and negative effects were not known then.

This last step locked all the above into place. The only way out was a return to a biblical understanding of salvation and sanctification.<sup>51</sup>

### OFF THE TRACKS

Hull's earlier writings may have at one time appeared evangelical and on track, but no longer. Apparently his earlier writings did not work well or he would not be moving on into this new direction. He has left the pastoral ministry after an admittedly bumpy career. He is endorsed by and is now aligning himself with the emerging church movement. His new relational and emotional emphasis seems more important than truth and doctrine.

Hull obviously reads and recommends without care and discernment. He may sincerely believe he is helping people with this new direction, but in the light of the Bible he is sincerely wrong. If a writer, no matter what his or her background, says something that appeals to Hull, then that is all that matters. No author is

held to a biblical standard. Hull's new discipleship content is a mixed bag of mysticism and visionary hallucinations. Hull is moving in the wrong direction.

Going back to old errors is not discipleship. It is not choosing life, but confusion. It is amazing that the emergent church leaders accuse conservative evangelicals of being out of touch. One cannot be more out of touch than when trying to revert to pre-Reformation practices that spawned error upon error. One is much safer choosing another discipleship author who is more concerned about staying on a biblical track rather than the track of the so-called emerging church. The Church needs to go forward, not backward. The rush to Rome is a race into the dark.

### Endnotes:

1. Bill Hull, *Choose the Life*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007, pg. 44, note 2.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 19.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 202, 210, 215, 221.
9. See further, Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2002, pp. 64-65, 134-136.
10. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing

- Company, 1998, pg. 51.
11. Nouwen cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*. Silverton, Ore.: Lighthouse Trails, 2007, pg. 90.
12. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 24.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 48.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 49.
15. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "What a Marriage! Why Did Evangelicalism Marry Catholicism's Stepchild?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2005, pg. 16.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 35.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
20. *New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, note on 1 Corinthians 11:1, pg. 1812.
21. Lorne Zelyck, "An Evaluation of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 2005, pg. 88, ellipsis in original.
22. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pp. 62, 68.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 130.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 96.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 100.
26. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
27. "Teresa of Ávila," from Wikipedia, bold in original. Document available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Teresa\\_of\\_Avila](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Teresa_of_Avila).
28. *Ibid.*
29. Cathleen Medwick, *Teresa of Avila*. New York: Doubleday, 1999, pp. ix-x.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 32.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 61, 63-64, 185-186, 204-205.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 104.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 126.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 127.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 169.

37. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.
38. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 94, italic in original.
39. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1966, pg. 511, italics in original.
40. Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-chief, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973, pg. 209, italics in original.
41. G. Richard Fisher, "The Mindless Mysticism of Madame Guyon," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1997, pp. 4, 12-15.
42. Madam Guyon, *Madame Guyon An Autobiography*. Chicago: Moody Press, no date, pg. 239.
43. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 203.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 217.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.
47. See further, "What a Marriage!," op. cit., pp. 17-18.
48. *Choose the Life*, op. cit., pg. 218.
49. *Ibid.*
50. See further, Gary E. Gilley, "The Lure of Mysticism," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2005, pp. 18-19; and Gary E. Gilley and Brian E. Gilley, "The New Mystic Youth: No Longer Just Pulp Fiction," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2007, pp. 8-10.
51. For a well documented and in-depth treatment of the desert monks and desert communities from a favorable perspective, see Derwas James Chitty, *The Desert A City, An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999).



## NO PLACE LIKE ROME?

(continued from page 1)

launches it into the next stage is what some call "ancient-future faith."

### ORIGINS AND LEADERS

The themes found in ancient-future faith have always been part of emergent but are taking on additional weight as the movement matures. The term seems to have been coined by the late Robert Webber, professor at Wheaton College and Northern Seminary. Webber wrote a number of works that are foundational to emergent philosophy, including his 1999 *Ancient-Future Faith, Rethinking Evan-*

*gelicalism for a Postmodern World*. *Christianity Today* calls Webber the "father of the ancient-future movement" and mentions the Robert E. Webber Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future, which he founded.<sup>1</sup> Chris Armstrong, associate professor of Church history at Bethel Seminary, says the movement "exploded in a 24-month period in 1977-1978, which saw the publication of Richard Foster's bestselling *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* and Robert Webber's *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*."<sup>2</sup>

Armstrong documents other evangelical leaders during this same period who came to similar

conclusions. Among them were Bethel College and Seminary president Carl Lundquist, Campus Crusade leader Peter Gillquist, Drew University's Tom Oden, and theologians Donald Bloesch and Thomas Howard. The latter two were instrumental, along with Robert Webber, in penning "'The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals,' whose prologue declared evangelicals' 'pressing need to reflect upon the substance of the biblical and historic faith and to recover the fullness of this heritage.'"<sup>3</sup>

In 1982, *Christianity Today's* sister publication *Christian History* (now *Christian History & Biography*) began to encourage interest in Church history

and works of the Church Fathers (in itself a good thing). In 1988, Renovaré was founded by Richard Foster to introduce Roman Catholic mystics to Protestants and advance a mystical approach in evangelicalism.

A wide range of evangelicals now identify with A-F. In the February 2008 issue of *Christianity Today*, several of its editors, including Mark Galli, David Neff, Ted Olson, and Tim Morgan, owned up to their involvement with the movement. Anyone who has read *CT* in recent years is not

Webber believes the Church has traveled. This is important because Webber writes, "you can best think about the future of the faith after you have gone back to the classical tradition."<sup>4</sup> In other words, he is not trying to reinvent Christianity; he just wants to "carry forward what the church has affirmed from its beginning."<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, Webber looks back and sees six stages of Church history: primitive (the first century) ancient (or classical) (100-600), medieval (600-1500), Reformation (1500-1750), modern (1750-1980), and postmodern (1980-present).<sup>6</sup>

to say that Webber dismisses the Apostolic age altogether, referring to it as "primitive Christianity."

However, to grasp the issues it is necessary to realize that A-F advocates begin from a different point of reference than many evangelicals. They do not argue that their views in the areas of mysticism and ritual are based on New Testament teaching or example, for they cannot. This does not deter them, however, for they are reaching back to what they consider the "rich" traditions and practices developed in the classical stage of Church history. It is their contention that it was during this era that Christianity reached its zenith, and therefore for Christianity to regain its spiritual health it is essential to return to the ancient stage with its emphasis and observances.

The argument that we should look to the New Testament for our ecclesiastical model falls on deaf ears among the A-F community, for they are convinced that the richest expression of the Christian faith is not found in the Bible but in the post-biblical early Church. It is the desire of the A-F/emergent movement to mold the future Church into the shape of the ancient Church.

An article in *Christianity Today* summarizes Webber's tri-fold breakdown of evangelicalism since 1950 as found in his book *Younger Evangelicals*. Webber sees the years between 1950 and 1975 as the era of "traditionals," who focused on doctrine or, as Webber complains, "being right." "They pour their resources into Bible studies, Sunday school curricula, and apologetics materials."<sup>8</sup>

The traditionals were followed by the "pragmatics" who "'do' church growth, spawning the culturally engaged (and hugely successful) seeker-sensitive trend, with full-service megachurches and countless outreach programs."<sup>9</sup> The pragmatics have been superseded by the "younger evangelicals" who "seek a Christianity that is 'embodied' and 'authentic' — distinctively Christian. ... The

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**It is vital to note that the starting point for A-F is not the apostolic era of the first century, nor the New Testament documents. A-F does not return directly to Scripture for its practices and beliefs; it returns to the ancient stage of the second through seventh centuries.**

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surprised to find its editors in sympathy with emergent-related views. Now they have clearly staked out their position.

Virtually all those involved with any aspect of the emergent conversation, as well as a growing number of mainstream evangelical leaders, are embracing A-F practices and ideas. One internet ministry, Lighthouse Trails, is dedicated to bringing to the awareness of Christians the vast number of evangelical leaders who are immersed or at least dabbling in mysticism.

### OUTLINING THE STAGES

An attempt to understand A-F can begin with examining the stages of Church history through which

In Webber's view, this final stage (postmodern) is a return to the second stage (ancient/classical) which he sees as the purest form of Christianity. He writes, "Thus, it may be said broadly that the story of Christianity moves from a focus on mystery in the classical period, to institution in the medieval era, to individualism in the Reformation era, to reason in the modern era, and now, in the postmodern era, back to mystery."<sup>7</sup>

It is vital to note that the starting point for A-F is not the apostolic era of the first century, nor the New Testament documents. A-F does not return directly to Scripture for its practices and beliefs; it returns to the ancient stage of the second through seventh centuries. It would be unfair

younger evangelicals seek a renewed encounter with a God beyond both doctrinal definitions and super-successful ministry program."<sup>10</sup>

While elements of all three types of evangelicals can be found today, according to Webber and *CT*, it is the younger or emergent evangelical who dominates the 21st century and is the superior form of Christianity. Evangelicalism has finally grown up, having left behind the need for doctrinal correctness and outward success, and has evolved into the ancient faith of the early Church. The Church has returned full circle and this is for the best, so say the A-F people.

### THE ROMANS ROAD

Those wondering where A-F is taking the Church should look to Rome, or at least its suburbs. This is evidenced not only in the adoption of Rome's religious practices or in embracing Catholic and Eastern Orthodox dogma, but also in the direct statements and actions of those leading the movement. For example, there has been the steady trickle of noted evangelical leaders who have openly converted to Rome or Orthodoxy. We think of Thomas Howard and Frank Schaffer of some years back. Frank Schaffer, the son of Francis Schaffer, has been seen on television saying he grew up being taught that Roman Catholicism was the "whore of Babylon," but he now has seen the light and worships in an Orthodox church, has strong leanings toward Rome, and finds little good to say about the Reformed theology of his father or evangelicalism in general.

More recently, it has been the celebrated defection of the president of the Evangelical Theological Society, Francis Beckwith. Beckwith was willing to lay down his coveted position with ETS in order to join the Catholic Church. Indeed, some see no choice. John Henry Newman, of the old Oxford Movement (a mid-19th century move toward Rome), stated, "to read deeply in history is to cease being Protestant."<sup>11</sup> And, as Chris Armstrong notes, "At least some

evangelicals have concluded that therefore, the only option left is to jump [the Protestant] ship."<sup>12</sup>

Others do not want to go that far, but are open to a deeper ecumenicalism than in the past. Armstrong, in his article for *Christianity Today* summarizes, "In short, the search for historic roots can and should lead not to conversion, but to a deepening ecumenical conversation, and a recognition by evangelicals that the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox are fellow Christians with much to teach us."<sup>13</sup>

Apparently many agree with this sentiment. InterVarsity Press has released the *Ancient Christian Commentary* series to draw modern believers of all stripes back to the views of earlier Church leaders; the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference chose as its theme "The Ancient Faith for the Church's Future"; and as mentioned earlier the editors of *Christianity Today* have come out as supporters of A-F. Liberty University observed the liturgical season of Lent; and Thomas Nelson is just now publishing a series of eight books on "The Ancient Practices," the first written by Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again, The Return of the Ancient Practices*.

The movement probably owes as much to Richard Foster as anyone. When Foster wrote his bestselling *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* in 1977, it hit the evangelical community like a bombshell. Here was a card-carrying evangelical (although a Quaker) urging believers to return to the mystical teachings of ancient Roman Catholicism to unearth the "great treasures of spiritual reformation." Foster introduced numerous mystics, most, but not all, from the monastic and Counter-Reformation periods, to modern evangelicals who had never heard of them. He then propounded that following the practices of these "spiritual masters of the past" was essential to spiritual development.

Since that time, Foster and his many followers have flooded the evangelical

community with mystical practices that promise a deeper level of spiritual life than witnessed since the Reformation disastrously (in their opinion) convinced believers of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. And the race has been on to return Protestants to the Mother Church. The distinctions that have been recognized between conservative Protestant and Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox churches since Luther and Calvin have been rapidly disappearing.

The mood of the moment is not only that the three traditions can learn from each other, but that they can be reunited. This reunion will not take place by returning to the Bible, because "doctrine divides." But if we can put our doctrines on the back burner, seeing them as secondary issues at best, and return to the ancient practices and creeds, we can recognize our commonality in the ancient Church. We will therefore be able to identify each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, despite insurmountable doctrinal differences. Unity between the major traditions will never be found as long as we adhere to our theological distinctives. But if we can lay these aside and unite over our experiences, common ancestors, and ecumenical creeds, we revitalize the Christian faith. It should be observed that most, if not all, of the moving is being done from the Protestant side, not the Catholic/Orthodox side. This is because the A-F movement sees the Reformation as an unnecessary schism perpetrated by Protestants. Because it was the Protestants who split and went astray, it is necessary for them to come home. Of course, some in the emergent conversation want to take this further and roll into community those of other religions as well. But that is another story.

### MONASTICISM

Hand-in-hand with the A-F movement is a revival in traditional monastic and religious orders. What is most interesting is that this resurgence is not unique to Christianity or any

particular branch of Christianity. A recent article in *U.S. News and World Report* documents Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant interest in more traditional and liturgical forms of worship, especially among young adults.<sup>14</sup> But an almost inexplicable aspect of all this is an attraction to monastic practices. The term “new monasticism” is becoming common on the internet and among emergent and mystical-oriented writers such as Richard Foster, Tony Jones, and Brian McLaren.

The winter 2007 issue of *Christian History & Biography* is devoted to the monasticism of sixth century monk St. Benedict and states, “No topic touches young evangelical students more than monasticism.”<sup>15</sup> This fragmented, success oriented, materialistic age is running out of gas for many. Something more is needed, something with depth, something beyond the superficial entertainment-oriented Christian tradition that many have grown up with. There also has been a whole line of books (the writings of Richard Foster, Kathleen Norris’ *The Cloister Walk*, and Eugene Peterson’s *Eat This Book*) and numerous promotions of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer, along with the general rise of mysticism and the emergent church which has pushed these concepts into the minds of young people.

Between the combination of restlessness/disillusionment and the promise of better things in solitude, asceticism, and a life of spiritual discipline, monasticism has a certain draw. To be sure, this is a “new monasticism” with a 21st-century twist. The origin of early Christian monasticism came in the fourth century following the legalization of Christianity. Until then martyrdom was “the ultimate test of devotion.” But in a post-Constantine world, Jennifer Hevelone-Harper writes, “The Christian ascetic inherited the mantle of the martyr ... Monks sought to live an angelic life on earth, neither marrying nor having children. By refusing to participate in the continual process of physically repopulating the earth, they recognized that

Christ’s coming had initiated a new age and believed that their lives could help usher in his kingdom.”<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary young people attracted to monasticism are not likely to abandon conventional life and live as hermits in caves or even monasteries. More likely they will continue to keep their jobs, live in standard dwellings with family or friends, and carry out the normal activities of modern society. But they are yearning for some sense of serenity, quiet and simpler times, and therein lies the pull of monastic and ancient practices. Whether they are the answer to these problems and whether they are biblical are the real issues.

### THE PRACTICES OF A-F FAITH

In a recent sermon dealing with the emergent/emerging church, Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill in Seattle and self-described emerging church leader, identified four lanes in which the emergent/emerging movement is traveling. In the first lane are emerging evangelicals who believe in basic Christian doctrine, such as the Bible being God’s Word and Jesus dying for our sins. They also tend to form the “hip, cool church,” according to Driscoll. Pastors who may fall in this category include Dan Kimball and Donald Miller. It is debatable whether Miller is a supporter of basic Christian doctrine. Kimball, on the other hand, does hold to certain doctrinal positions such as the three ancient ecumenical creeds, but would not want to drift much beyond them.

Traveling down the second lane are the house church evangelicals who are doctrinally Christian brothers and sisters, Driscoll said. They do not support creating large churches and instead form little house churches or churches in other smaller settings such as coffee shops. Driscoll places himself and Mars Hill in the third lane that he calls emerging reformers, who believe in all of the evangelical distinctives and embrace Reformed theological traditions.

Emerging reformers also try to find ways to make the Church relevant, accessible, and culturally connected; they tend to be charismatic and many are involved in church planting.

In the fourth lane is a group of emergent liberals whom Driscoll says have “totally gotten off the highway and is lost out in the woods.” Although Driscoll was initially connected to this group, which also tries to find innovative ways to do church, he left, “citing that they call into question many parts of the Christian doctrine.” Some of their questions include: “Do you need Jesus to go to heaven?” “Is anybody really going to hell?” “Is sex outside of marriage including homosexuality sinful?” Leaders in this lane include Brian McLaren and Rob Bell.<sup>17</sup>

Like most movements, the emerging church has changed form and is becoming increasingly difficult to define. Many, in all of Driscoll’s four lanes, are distancing themselves from the emergent label itself since it has become somewhat pejorative. What all lanes of emergent/emerging have in common is the desire to be relevant to the postmodern culture. Some have sacrificed the faith in this effort; others have been more biblically sound. But out of this junk drawer category (as Driscoll calls it) springs the Ancient-Future Faith emphasis that is common to most of those in all of the emergent lanes. This is the belief that the purest expression of Christianity was found in the ancient period of Church history (100-600), and it is to this era that we must return.

The appeal of this era to emerging church Christians is that the early church rituals, traditions, and liturgies were developed at that time along with the notion that mystical practices began to define spirituality and close encounters with God. This is the era of Church history which many believe we must appropriate to our times if we are to experience authentic Christianity. Let’s take a look at some of the specific practices which are

returning to favor through the A-F resurgence.

### LECTIO DIVINA

This term and practice is increasingly popping up in evangelical circles. Many who have been told that *lectio divina* is nothing but a devotional, contemplative reading of Scripture, have been little concerned. However, a closer look is warranted. According to Wikipedia, "**Lectio Divina** is Latin for *divine reading*, spiritual reading, or 'holy reading,' and represents a traditional Christian practice of prayer and scriptural reading intended to engender communion with the Triune God and to increase in the knowledge of God's Word. It is a way of praying with Scripture that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, pray from God's Word."<sup>18</sup>

Given this benign definition one could be justified in asking what is wrong with slowly reading and meditating on Scripture. Scriptural meditation has been practiced and prescribed throughout biblical times to the present. Eugene Peterson (author of many evangelical books and the paraphrased Bible, *The Message*) published *Eat This Book* in 2006 to promote *lectio divina*. Peterson writes, "*Lectio divina* is not a methodical technique for reading the Bible. It is a cultivated, developed habit of *living* the text in Jesus's name. This is the way, the *only* way that the Holy Scriptures become formative in the Christian church and become salt and leaven in the world."<sup>19</sup>

If *lectio divina* is in fact the *only* way that the Scriptures become formative in the Church, and the *only* way they become salt and leaven in the world, as Peterson claims, it would be wise for us to understand and become practitioners of *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* can be traced back as far as Origen (A.D. 220). Various monastic rules have practiced *lectio divina*, most notably those of Benedict and Ignatius of Loyola, although 12th century monk Guigo II is credited with systematizing the method as it is currently used today. Pope Benedict

XVI recently recommended its use as a means of promoting spiritual formation.

Mike Yaconelli, a strong proponent of this ancient tradition, tells us, "When we engage in *lectio divina*, we are not seeking to read the Bible for knowledge or instruction (although both of those may come), nor are we seeking the escape of a good story. Instead we come to the words of the Bible seeking to be with God."<sup>20</sup> Ken Boa, another recent promoter of mystical Christianity, explains that

"*Prayer (Oratio)* ... is a time for participation in the interpenetrating subjectivity of the Trinity through prolonged mutual presence and growing identification with the life of Christ."<sup>24</sup>

And finally:

"*Contemplation (Contemplatio)* ... is a theological grace that cannot be reduced to logical, psychological, or aesthetic categories. ... it is best for us to stop talking and 'listen to Him' in simple and loving attentiveness. In this

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**Yaconelli tells us that one technique to help in this process is take a word or phrase (in essence a mantra) and "repeat it to yourself, allowing the rest of the text to fall away. As you prayerfully repeat it, different thoughts, feelings, and images may arise."**

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*lectio divina* involves four movements.<sup>21</sup> Boa maps out these actions:

"*Reading (Lectio)* ... Since *lectio divina* engages the whole person, your bodily posture is important. A seated position that is erect but not tense or slouched is best ... Remember that unlike ordinary reading, in *lectio* you are seeking to be *shaped* by the Word more than *informed* by the Word."<sup>22</sup>

"*Meditation (Meditatio)* ... Meditation is a spiritual work of holy desire and an interior invitation for the Spirit to pray and speak within us (Romans 8:26-27) ... Meditation will do you little good if you try to control the outcome."<sup>23</sup>

strange and holy land we must remove the sandals of our ideas, constructs, and inclinations, and quietly listen for the voice of God."<sup>25</sup>

Boa points out that to the uninitiated, contemplation often is confused with meditation, but they are not the same. In ordinary circles, meditation describes deep thinking and analyzing with a rational mind, and some may use contemplation as a synonym for this activity. But in mystical circles contemplation and meditation are considerably distinct.

Yaconelli tells us that one technique to help in this process is take a word or phrase (in essence a mantra) and "repeat it to yourself, allowing the

rest of the text to fall away. As you prayerfully repeat it, different thoughts, feelings, and images may arise." And by this methodology, Yaconelli further tells us, you can "Pray yourself empty" and "Sink into God beneath all your thoughts and feelings."<sup>26</sup>

As can easily be seen, *lectio divina* is not a devotional method of Scripture reading, but a highly mystical approach. The reader does not encounter Scripture in order to grasp the understanding of what God has communicated to us and apply it. Instead, a super-rational experience is sought in which God speaks to an individual beyond the written page in imaginative and non-cognitive ways.

It is also instructive to note that this method of Bible reading is not drawn from the Scriptures themselves, but from medieval monks during a period when the Church of Rome was abandoning the clear understanding of the Word of God and seeking alternatives. The Ancient-Future Faith movement is not going back to Scripture for its teachings, but to the practices and traditions of men.

### DIVINE OFFICE AND THE NEW MONASTICISM

The best known of the monastic rules is that of Benedict. Benedict's Rule, which is receiving renewed attention today, was written for 6th century monks who entered Benedict's monastery with a goal of hearing from God. The first word of Benedict's Rule was "listen." So Benedict structured each day around two activities which were designed for listening to the voice of God. Four hours a day were devoted to the *lectio divina* and four hours were spent in the "Divine Office." The Divine Office consisted of praying over the 150 psalms each week, plus other readings from Scripture, the writings of Christian authors, hymns, and prayers. The Divine Office comprises eight set times of prayer (one nocturnal and seven Offices of the day) in which certain prayers are recited.

Robert Benson, author of *In Constant Prayer*, which is part of Thomas Nelson Publisher's "The Ancient Practices Series," assures us that the Divine Office reaches back to the beginning of the human race, has been practiced by the people of God ever since, and now is even being prayed by Jesus to the Father at this time.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the Divine Office, as practiced throughout Church history, is the product of men's imagination. Our Lord has certainly called us to be people devoted to prayer, but He neither gives us, nor demands from us, a prescribed set of prayers to be recited by rote at set times of the day.

Until recently, few outside of the Roman Catholic clergy paid much attention to the Office, but there has been a renewed interest in such things swirling around the "new monasticism." The older form of monasticism and religious orders has been on the decline for a long time. The number of men in such orders has declined 46% in Europe and 30% in the Americas since 1978.<sup>28</sup> Chris Armstrong observes, "Yet most suggest that new and powerful forms of the monastic impulse may even now be arising."<sup>29</sup>

These new forms, found in both Protestant and Catholic circles, consist of those who have connected themselves to some aspect of monastic living while remaining in the world. What we are finding is an increasing attraction, especially among young people, to incorporate these ancient practices into their lives. Perhaps as the world speeds up and disappoints, there is a desire for a connection with the past when things were perceived to be slower and simpler.

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Eugene Peterson tells us, "Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* is one of the most influential guidebooks for directing us in listening."<sup>30</sup> Gregory Boyd goes further, "I and many others have found Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* to be the most powerful tool for helping us grow in our walk with

God."<sup>31</sup> These are powerful endorsements by well known evangelical spokesmen.

Ignatius was a Roman Catholic monk during the time of the Counter-Reformation of the 16th century. He is known today primarily as the founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, and for his Spiritual Exercises. The Spiritual Exercises are a method of contemplative meditations. According to the Jesuits' website:

"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola are a month-long program of meditations, prayers, considerations, and contemplative practices that help Catholic faith become more fully alive in the everyday life of contemporary people. It is set out in a brief manual or handbook: sparse, taciturn, and practical. It presents a formulation of Ignatius' spirituality in a series of prayer exercises, thought experiments, and examinations of consciousness — designed to help a retreatant (usually with the aid of a spiritual director) to experience a deeper conversion into life with God in Christ, to allow our personal stories to be interpreted by being subsumed in a Story of God."<sup>32</sup>

The Spiritual Exercises are basically a means to expedite the experience of classical mysticism. Mysticism, as found in Eastern forms, the Kabbalah (Jewish), New Age, or Roman Catholicism, all follow the same pattern: purgation, illumination, and union. Purgation is an emptying of ourselves, and so the purpose of the first Ignatian movement is to create "a space within us that the Lord can fill."<sup>33</sup> In illumination we are filled up with images of God which is accomplished in the exercises "by imaginatively contemplating scenes in the four Gospels."<sup>34</sup> Through these practices unmediated union with God is supposedly accomplished. Ignatius' Exercises are now being adapted for use by Protestants in books such as *Sacred Listening* by James L. Wakefield

and promoted heavily by everyone from Richard Foster to Eugene Peterson.

### LITURGICAL WORSHIP

James K.A. Smith, author of *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, informs us that postmodern religion will be liturgical in nature for "the rhythms of ritual and liturgy are gracious practices that enable discipleship and formation. ... Properly postmodern worship resists such reductionism by reclaiming the holistic, full-orbed materiality of liturgical worship that activates all the senses."<sup>35</sup> With this concept as foundational there is a wholesale rush to liturgical practices which originated in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Although not found in Scripture, practices such as the prayer ropes, Stations of the Cross, icons, incense, making the sign of the Cross, use of crucifixes, labyrinths, respiratory prayer, and more are encouraged as accepted forms of worship in the A-F church.<sup>36</sup>

As can easily be seen, there is a major push for ancient (but not New Testament) liturgical practices in order to anchor the A-F faith of the emergent church. All of this takes the adherents a step back to Rome and Orthodoxy on a practical basis.

### THE BELIEFS OF A-F FAITH

So far we have looked at the origins, leaders, basic ideas, and practices of the Ancient-Future Faith paradigm. We need to press on now to an examination of the underlying beliefs within the movement. What will be documented is that this system, claiming evangelical roots, is by-and-large in line with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodoxy doctrine.

In his most recent book, *Finding Our Way Again, The Return of the Ancient Practices*, Brian McLaren, the most recognizable name in the emergent church movement, signals a shift, or at least a new emphasis within the emergent conversation, toward ancient practices of earlier periods of

Church history. As usual, McLaren believes the Church has lost its way because of its refusal to follow God's leading. The Church has become "proud and unteachable," but fortunately a few "humble and teachable" people are pointing out the right path:

"...when the community of faith realizes it has lost its way, it begins moving forward by looking back ... It looks to its ancient practices to help it reset its future course."<sup>37</sup>

This means that the Church, in order to find its way again, must look to and adopt the early Church — not New Testament Church — traditions and rituals, especially the "seven ancient practices" of "Fasting, pilgrimage, common daily prayers, a weekly day of rest, annual holy days and seasons, tithing, and the sacred meal." These, McLaren tells us, "find their fulfillment in the ways they contribute to our purgation, illumination, and union with God."<sup>38</sup> What seems to have precipitated this renewed interest in ancient practices and mysticism is recognition that the emergent movement is in need of roots.

McLaren writes, "More and more of us feel, more and more intensely, the need for a fresh, creative alternative — a fourth alternative, something beyond militarist scientific secularism, pushy religious fundamentalism, and mushy amorphous spirituality."<sup>39</sup> One can assume that McLaren means the emergent church, having already rejected modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism must now move beyond a "mushy amorphous spirituality" and put down some anchors. These anchors are sinking into the soil of "ancient spiritual practices."<sup>40</sup>

*Finding Our Way Again* is the introductory volume in a series of eight titles published by Thomas Nelson and edited by Phyllis Tickle. The other seven works will each develop one of the seven ancient practices deemed important for the emerging church. It would seem that this series of books marks the official marriage

of the Ancient-Future Faith movement with the emergent movement.

### AN ENLIGHTENMENT BACKLASH

As with most emergent church related material, the Enlightenment is framed as the great evil of modern times, and postmodernity as the welcomed rescuer from Enlightenment thought. Then, even though the true evangelical Church has always opposed many Enlightenment teachings, it is subsequently painted as the stooge of the Enlightenment. Robert Webber provides one of the clearest presentations:

"This Enlightenment paradigm produced three convictions shared equally by Christians and non-Christians: foundationalism, structuralism, and the notion of the metanarrative. Foundationalism is 'the philosophical theological conviction that there are beliefs or experiences that are in themselves beyond doubt and upon which systems of belief and understanding can therefore be constructed with certainty.' Structuralism is the belief that societies construct texts to make meaning out of life and that the meaning which is in the text can be commonly agreed upon by its interpreters through the use of reason. The metanarrative consists of the stories of the text. These stories make sense out of life by providing an interpretation of the world from its beginning to its end."<sup>41</sup>

While this is not the place to carry on a philosophical debate with Enlightenment theory and influence, suffice it to say that postmodern Christianity (emergent and A-F) reject all three convictions. Of course, evangelicalism also rejected the secularized form of these convictions as well. For example, evangelicals did not accept the idea that truth can be found with certainty through reason alone and, therefore, always subjected reason to the revelation of Scripture. But evangelicals have believed that

the revelation of God (the Word) could be understood through reason and proper interpretative tools (hermeneutics) resulting in foundational truth. This is rejected by the postmodern church, which would say that (at least most) truth cannot be known with certainty, and therefore the views of evangelicals of the past, shaped as they claim by the Enlightenment, do not relate to the postmodern culture. Webber asks, "Where do we go to find a Christianity that speaks meaningfully to a postmodern world?" To this he answers, "The classical tradition [2nd-7th centuries] appears to be the most productive. ... Therefore, our challenge is not to reinvent Christianity, but to restore and then adapt classical Christianity to the postmodern cultural situation."<sup>42</sup>

### RULE OF FAITH

Webber does not break completely from the Enlightenment himself, believing that the metanarrative of Christianity is the correct one<sup>43</sup> however limited. And many within Ancient-Future would accept a level of certainty as found in the so-called "rule of faith." Webber writes, "This 'rule' was regarded as a summary of the salient features of the Christian faith, a framework for the essential truths confessed by those who stood in the tradition of apostolic teachings."<sup>44</sup> The problem lies in determining the content of the "rule of faith."

According to Webber, various rules of faith began popping up in early Church history in attempts to define Christian teachings in light of various heresies such as Gnosticism. "Eventually, the rule of faith became universally summarized in the Apostles' Creed,"<sup>45</sup> which is "the end-product of the gradual development of Western creeds. ... Today's version dates from the sixth or seventh century."<sup>46</sup>

The Apostles' Creed, in its general summary of Christian thought, is limited in scope, however, so between 300 and 600 A.D. the universal Church formulated two other ecumenical creeds to explain what it

believed. These were the Nicene Creed (begun at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, but actually formulated at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381), and the Chalcedonian Creed in A.D. 451. Between these three creeds a number of doctrines were established as orthodox, including the deity of the Son (Nicene), the Trinity (Nicene), and the two natures of Christ (Chalcedonian).

According to the A-F understanding, other confessions and statements of faith have been developed over the years that express the belief of particular groups or denominations, but none of these carries the weight of the three ecumenical creeds. As a result, A-F thinkers believe the Church can be certain of the doctrines expressed in the creeds, but must be willing to compromise on all other points of theology. Webber writes, "We need to recognize that confessions do not meet the criteria of universality, antiquity, and consensus. ... Their value is not for the whole church, but for a part of the church. ... These confessions are all secondary to the creeds and are not binding upon the whole church."<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately for Webber's view, even the three "ecumenical" creeds have not received "universality and consensus." According to Church historian Tony Lane, "The Apostles' Creed has always enjoyed wide acceptance in the West ... It has never been in general use in the Eastern Church, though it is treated with respect."<sup>48</sup> Concerning the Chalcedonian Creed, Lane writes, "The emperor intended this document to cement unity with the Eastern Church. Its effect was more like dynamite than cement. Egypt and other areas have never accepted Chalcedon to this day."<sup>49</sup>

The Nicene Creed has been the most ecumenical of the creeds, yet the East and West have one important difference, "In the East the belief was and is that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. In the West, however, the belief grew

that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son."<sup>50</sup>

While this might seem a matter of little importance to us today, it was a major factor in A.D. 1054, bringing about the Great Schism, the final dividing point between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church.

The fact is that even these creeds have never been given a universal consensus by the whole Church. The finger is often pointed at the Protestant church for its lack of unity and many doctrinal distinctions, but Rome and Orthodoxy have to be hypocritical to do so. Webber is either a bit naive or perhaps ill-informed when he writes, "I sense that evangelicals in the postmodern world need to affirm what the church has always believed, *everywhere and by all*, and give greater authority to the common tradition and less weight to the theology of a particular tradition."<sup>51</sup>

### NON-CREEDAL DOCTRINES

Other important doctrines that fall outside the boundaries of the three ecumenical creeds present a problem when one considers the A-F system. In essence they are nonbinding, unimportant, and open to compromise. Take the crucial doctrine of salvation. No universal creed touches this issue and therefore how one becomes a Christian is up for grabs. Webber writes:

"Although the entire church is united in its belief that all are sinners and that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection procure salvation, there exists a number of explanations about our sinful nature and the means of receiving the benefits of Christ's death."<sup>52</sup>

No wonder Brian McLaren states, "I don't think we've got the gospel right yet. What does it mean to be 'saved'? When I read the Bible, I don't see it meaning, 'I'm going to heaven after I die.'... None of us has arrived at orthodoxy."<sup>53</sup>

This does not mean that A-F has no concept of a gospel. As is predictable A-F reaches back to the "ancient" Church, rather than Scripture, for a gospel message. Webber writes, "Evangelism in the early church was associated with the victory of Christ over evil and the establishment of the kingdom of God."<sup>54</sup> He then turns to a fourth century ritual in which an individual is taken through a number of stages, lasting up to three years, and leading to baptism and entrance into the Church.<sup>55</sup>

What is most instructive is that this tradition is not taught or found in the New Testament, but some 300 years later. It is typical of A-F to reach back to the traditions of men rather than the inspired text of Scripture. This takes us to A-F's understanding of the Bible.

### A-F AND SCRIPTURE

Webber writes, "A new feature of evangelicals in the postmodern world is the growing awareness that the Bible, which takes us to Christ, belongs to the church. The church preceded Scripture in time."<sup>56</sup> As can be seen, the A-F movement rejects the *sola Scriptura* position of the Reformers and adopts Rome's view in regard to authority. The Church presides over Scripture — final authority rests in the Church.

How this actually works out is more involved. Which church, for example, has the final word, Rome, Orthodox, Lutherans, etc.? Webber never really answers this, but seems to be looking toward Rome. As for the role of tradition and the pronouncement of the Church Fathers and the ancient councils, Webber's response is most interesting:

"Any writing of a Father of the church, or any council or assembly of the church that stood in the apostolic tradition, was an extension of the principle of inspiration. Therefore, while the apostles were the original authority in the church, a writing of Augustine or another Father of the church, or a creed or council

that extended or expounded an idea in keeping with apostolic teaching enjoyed a kind of apostolic authority. Because the church was viewed as the one true interpreter of the faith, the authority of the church grew greater and greater through time as more and more Fathers and councils were regarded as espousing teachings in line with the apostles. Finally, the church established a magisterium for the proper interpretation of truth and positioned the pope as the true spokesperson of truth."<sup>57</sup>

As might be expected, placing final authority in the pope did not set well with everyone and paved the way for the Reformation in which the Reformers rejected the authority of the pope and the Roman Church and placed it in Scripture alone. In response, Webber writes, "The Reformers pulled Scripture away from the church, separated it from tradition, set it over against popes and councils, and made it stand on its own."<sup>58</sup>

Webber summarizes well the A-F position, "The postmodern challenge to authority is best met, not by returning to *sola scriptura*, nor by the modern evangelical defense of the Bible, but by returning to the origins of authority in the Christian faith. The church possesses, interprets, guards, and hands down truth."<sup>59</sup>

### A-F AND MYSTICISM

As with other streams within the emergent movement there is a keen interest in mysticism. Webber highly recommends reading the so-called "spiritual classics" that Richard Foster has introduced to the Protestant church. This includes mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, George Fox, William Law, and Thomas Merton. Webber concludes, "The value of all these books as well as many not mentioned are indispensable to spirituality. Those who neglect these works do so to their harm, and those who read them do so for their inspiration and spiritual growth."<sup>60</sup>

McLaren devotes three chapters in his book *Finding Our Way Again* to the "threefold way" of purgation, illumination, and union,<sup>61</sup> which is common to all forms of mysticism, Christian or otherwise. However, McLaren does not describe the "threefold way" as his mentors and the ancient mystics (such as St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila) do. He either does not understand his subject (highly unlikely) or he is using his winsome pen to make these approaches much more attractive than they normally would be to many people. But he definitely promotes contemplation (a mystical form or prayer), *lectio divina* (a mystical form of Scripture reading), and the daily office (a ritualistic form of prayer).

The ancient mystics, to whom the movement looks, were not afraid to state their case. For example, in his famous work, *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross informs his reader that the first stage of the "threefold way," that of purgation, is a stage in which the senses, affections, and intellect are all purged or killed. He writes:

"When, therefore, the four passions of the soul — which are joy, grief, hope and fear — are calmed through continual mortification; when the natural desires have been lulled to sleep, in the sensual nature of the soul, by means of habitual times of aridity; and when the harmony of the senses and the interior faculties causes a suspension of labour and a cessation from the work of meditation ... these enemies cannot obstruct this spiritual liberty."<sup>62</sup>

The purpose behind the deadening of our senses is preventing them from hindering the way of the spirit:

"The reason of this is that the soul is now becoming alien and remote from common sense and knowledge of things, in order that, being annihilated in this respect, it may be informed with the Divine."<sup>63</sup>

Teresa of Ávila, in her *Interior Castle*, concurs by saying, "the person who does most is he who thinks least and desires to do least."<sup>64</sup> This is because the whole goal of mysticism is to experience something in a super-rational way. Teresa further writes, "it is quite a common experience in such cases for the understanding to be less apt for meditation. I think the reason must be that the whole aim of meditation is to seek God, and once He is found, and the soul grows accustomed to seeking Him again by means of the will, it has no desire to fatigue itself with intellectual labour."<sup>65</sup>

The goal of mysticism is to purge the senses and intellect in order to be filled up with a nonsensical form of illumination which leads to an unexplainable experience of ecstasy which culminates in union with God. The "threefold way" is never taught in Scripture, but is a vital component of A-F and the emerging church.

Although A-F is a move back toward Rome, rather than a move back toward Scripture, Chris Armstrong assures us that it is none other than the Lord who is leading this parade:


"That more and more evangelicals have set out upon it is reason for hope for the future of gospel Christianity. That they are receiving good guidance on this road from wise teachers is reason to believe that Christ is guiding the process. And that they are meeting and learning from fellow Christians in the other two great confessions, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, is reason to rejoice in the power of love."<sup>66</sup>

Contrary to what the proponents of the Ancient-Future Faith movement want us to believe, Christ is not "guiding the process" of this realignment with Rome and its practices. No matter what stage of Church history, true believers are those who know the Word, love the Word, live the Word, and passionately proclaim the Word. The Church needs Christians who

hunger and thirst for God's truth — not through the medieval mystical practices of Rome, but through Scripture alone.

### Endnotes:

1. Mark Galli, "Ancient-Future People," *Christianity Today*, February 2008, pg. 7.
2. Chris Armstrong, "The Future Lies in the Past," *Christianity Today*, February 2008, pg. 24.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 25.
4. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999, pg. 7.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 13.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.
8. "The Future Lies in the Past," op. cit., pg. 26.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Newman cited in *ibid.*, pg. 28.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 29.
14. Jay Tolson, "A Return to Tradition," *U.S. News & World Report*. Online edition posted Dec. 13, 2007.
15. Jennifer Trafton, "Rediscovering Benedict," *Christian History & Biography*, Winter 2007, pg. 6.
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17. Lillian Kwon, "Mars Hill Pastor Ditches 'Emerging' Label for Jesus," *The Christian Post*. Online edition posted Feb. 27, 2008.
18. "Lectio Divina" from Wikipedia, bold and italics in original. Document available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio\\_Divina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina).
19. James L. Wakefield, *Sacred Listening*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2006, pg. 22. This quote is taken from Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006, pg. 116, italics in original).
20. Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pg. 85.
21. Kenneth Boa, *The Trinity, a Journal*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001, pg. 13.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14, 15, italics in original.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16, 17, italics in original. Boa here recommends incorporating the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola for meditation.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19, italics in original.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 20, italics in original.
26. *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, op. cit., pg. 86.
27. Robert Benson, *In Constant Prayer*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008, pp. 3, 20-26, 27-42, 113, 115-116.

28. Chris Armstrong, "Re-Monking the Church," *Christian History & Biography*, Winter 2007, pg. 34.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
30. As quoted in *Sacred Listening*, op. cit., pg. 1.
31. As quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
32. "The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" from Society of Jesus, Oregon Province. Document available at: [www.nwjesuits.org/JesuitSpirituality/SpiritualExercises.html](http://www.nwjesuits.org/JesuitSpirituality/SpiritualExercises.html).
33. *Sacred Listening*, op. cit., pg. 17.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
35. James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006, pg. 140.
36. These practices are commonly recommended in emergent and A-F literature today. For documentation see Mike King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pp. 87, 95, 97, 121-126, 129-134, 170.
37. Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008, pg. 146.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 148.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 6.
41. *Ancient-Future Faith*, op. cit., pg. 19.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 24.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 176.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 184.
46. Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006, pp. 62-63.
47. *Ancient-Future Faith*, op. cit., pg. 194.
48. *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, op. cit., pg. 63.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 62.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 41, italics in original.
51. *Ancient-Future Faith*, op. cit., pg. 200, emphasis added.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 193.
53. Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, November 2004, pg. 40.
54. *Ancient-Future Faith*, op. cit., pg. 146.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-149.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 189.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 177.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, pg. 201, italics in original.
60. *Ibid.*, pg. 135.
61. *Finding Our Way Again*, op. cit., pp. 151-179.
62. St. John of the Cross (translated and edited by E. Allison Peers), *Dark Night of the Soul*. New York: Image Books, 1990, pg. 87.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 123.
64. Teresa of Ávila (translated by E. Allison Peers), *Interior Castle*. New York: Image Books, 1989, pg. 88.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 173.
66. "The Future Lies in the Past," op. cit., pg. 29. 

years doing that and there is no indication he was doing anything wrong. It may not have been Sunday church, but it was religious church activity.

Long before Constantine, early Church Fathers like Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 195) said clearly, "It is not the place but the assemblies of elect that I call the church." It could not be much clearer than this. To the early Church where they met was not the issue, but rather who met. The Church was the people and the gathering place inconsequential and unimportant.

We know that in Cappadocia early Christians met in cave structures, which are neither a house nor a large building. All of that history and those meeting places can be viewed in Ray VanderLaan's DVD series, *In the Dust of the Rabbi*.

One of the early — and documented — Christian complaints before Constantine was that Rome prohibited, for a time and in certain areas, the construction of churches. Apparently someone forgot to tell the early Christians they were forbidden to meet anywhere but in house churches.

Barna and Viola also have missed the Jewish milieu into which the Church was born. The early Church throughout Israel — and especially in Jerusalem — was Jewish to its core. These were children of the synagogue and it can be established that some early churches were simply converted synagogues. The Church was born in the synagogue and in some cases remained.

There have been early buildings excavated and it can be shown that a church either existed in or was built over a synagogue by Christians and used as a church. These were buildings and not homes. This precedes Constantine and was accepted in the spirit that it is not the place but the people. These facts have been commented on by Dr. Jack Finegan in his *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, and in Hershhal Shanks' *Judaism in Stone*.

The house church movement is elitist and therefore divisive. Christians should have no problem with those who wish to meet in homes or have house churches, but should never say it is the only way or that it is the more spiritual way. Where the body of Christ gathers is inconsequential. The leadership structure of the Church is mandated in the New Testament, but there is liberty as to the place of meeting, whether it is a home, a converted synagogue, a school hall, or a building built for the purpose of meeting.

Charges of paganism against those who do not meet in homes is wrong and unbiblical. True, there were pagan elements and heresies that infiltrated the Church after Constantine, but where people met was not one of them.

The exclusivity of house churches is a view that will always remain in the subculture. Hopefully, most Christians know too much to be taken in by it.

—GRF

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

and provided a continued plotline for the movie, was "a phenomenon even for many Christians." She went on to write, "For years, good churchgoing friends of mine secretly raved about *Sex and the City*. They told me that I, a 30-something single woman (and a singles columnist to boot), would appreciate the randy little show. I was a late adopter [to viewing the show] only because I didn't have cable. ... it was refreshing to have a single woman's sexuality acknowledged."

Courtney further applauded the movie's central characters, while demeaning "many Christians," saying that the women depicted in the film "show how challenging it really can be for intelligent, accomplished, and admittedly neurotic women to find lasting love. They, unlike many Christians, don't insult my intelligence."

Courtney apparently was an avid fan of the television series, observing that in the movie one particular character "As usual ... offers the weakest plot line." She further admitted the program to be "soft-core porn" and that "many viewers were no doubt drawn by the sex."

The magazine's review drew a firestorm of response from its readers; however, less than half of the posted letters were critical. One, who chided the review, said the periodical "should either abandon [its] stated Christian aims and mission statement, or stop condoning pornography." Another asked, "Are you guys really serious about Jesus, the Bible, holiness, and biblical truth?" The magazine countered with: "to slam us for *reviewing* the film makes no sense. Our mission statement is to help readers make discerning *choices* about movies — not to make the choices *for* people." *CT* also offered, "But we'd like to again reiterate that our star ratings do NOT imply an 'endorsement' or 'recommendation.' The star ratings have nothing to do with the film's 'moral value,' because such an assessment can vary widely from person to person."

The *CT* review also informed readers that the movie contains "several scenes with nudity, including a brief glimpse at frontal male nudity, a brief guy-to-guy kiss, and several graphic sex scenes, including a threesome. The language is colorful at times, but not as problematic as the sex and nudity. This isn't a movie for children or teens, and due to the content, not even for some adults."

—MKG

## D&D REMAINS POPULAR

In the high-tech world of virtual reality and computer games, one could easily think that Dungeons & Dragons, the popular fantasy role-playing game of the 1970s and 1980s, may have gone the way of some of its mythical dragons, but not so, according to a report last summer in *The Wall Street Journal*. Scott Rouse, a senior brand manager for the game, says it “is alive and well,” and estimates that there are still 4 million people who engage in the literal battle of minds.

Wizards of the Coast, a subsidiary of Hasbro toys, continues to publish the three core rulebooks for D&D, recently going to press with a large second printing of the fourth edition of the game’s manuals.

*The Wall Street Journal* argued that, “In reality, D&D was no more harmful than a Harry Potter book. It inspired kids to do many of the things for which J.K. Rowling’s novels are widely praised, such as turning off television sets and picking up books.” PFO maintains that D&D is harmful for four reasons: it emphasizes violence, it emphasizes occultism, it emphasizes paganism, and it can be addictive.

D&D began with meager sales of nearly \$50,000 in 1975, but by the 1980s sales escalated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The game’s primary inventor, Gary Gygax, died in March.

—MKG

## A HAZARDOUS MOON LANDING

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, escaped serious injury when a helicopter he was aboard crashed into a mountainside and burst into flames near Seoul, South Korea. The aircraft had 16 people on board, including Moon and 12 other church members.

An investigation is underway to determine the exact cause of the crash; however, according to an Associated Press report, the Sikorsky S-92 helicopter was attempting to make “an emergency landing due to bad visibility during heavy rain.”

Also hurt in the accident were Moon’s wife and other members of his family. All were treated at the church-affiliated Cheongshim Hospital, about 37 miles northeast of Seoul.

No specifics as to Moon’s injury were given, although a hospital official said Moon received an X-ray and his condition was not serious. He was released from the hospital the day following the July 19 crash. The church’s website posted a corresponding announcement stating that Moon and the others were “safe.”

Moon, 88, claims that Jesus failed in His earthly mission, maintains he has come to complete what Jesus left unfinished, and boasts himself to be the Messiah. He officially founded the Unification Church in May 1954 in Seoul.

—MKG

## SCIENTOLOGY FOUNDER SAID “THERE WAS NO CHRIST”

A confidential audio recording made in 1968 by L. Ron Hubbard, the late founder of Scientology, was recently uploaded to the Wikileaks website. The 48-minute “classified recording” reportedly has Hubbard claiming that “There was no Christ,” and maintaining that “the stories of Christ are alien mind implants.”

According to the website’s summary statement about the disclosed lecture, Scientology believes that the earth was populated by an evil “Galactic overlord” known as Xenu and that “human beings are parasitized by alien spirits called ‘body thetans’.” This teaching, the website explains, is told to fewer than 10% of its followers and is publicly denied. The leaked recording repudiates these denials and is argued to run contrary to Scientology statements that it is compatible with Christianity.

The website earlier had been threatened by Scientology with legal action over the posting of related printed material which included handwritten notes by Hubbard.

Wikileaks is described as “a website that publishes anonymous submission and leaks of sensitive religious, corporate and government documents, while taking measures to preserve the anonymity and untraceability of its contributors.”

—MKG

## “ANGELS & DEMONS” NOT ALLOWED IN CHURCHES

Movie director Ron Howard, producer and author Dan Brown, and actor Tom Hanks have hit a roadblock for filming some of the interior locations for their forthcoming film, *Angels & Demons*, the prequel of the blockbuster novel and motion picture, *The Da Vinci Code*. The local diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome recently reiterated that two of its churches, Santa Maria del Popolo and Santa Maria della Vittoria, are “off limits” to film crews for the movie, which is now under production. In 2007, the diocese first denied access to the churches; however, at that time production was stalled due to the writers’ strike in Hollywood.

The diocese underscored that the theme of Brown's fictional novels "does not conform to our views" and "treats religious issues in a way that contrasts with common religious sentiment." Brown, in his highly entertaining — yet grossly inaccurate — narratives, undermines the very foundations of Christian history and belief. He weaves corrupt and misguided church leaders, religious fanaticism, secret societies, and conspiracy theories into his best-selling thrillers.

While the ban will keep film production members from working inside the two structures, exterior photography of the churches will not be prohibited. The movie is scheduled for a May 2009 release.

—MKG

## BENTLEY LEAVING FLORIDA OUTPOURING

On April 2, Todd Bentley launched what was to be a one-week series of revival meetings at Ignited Church in Lakeland, Fla. The services, marked with alleged "signs and wonders," quickly drew crowds in the thousands and continued for months. Thousands more watched by television or over the internet. The success of the revival, which came to be known as the "Florida Outpouring," captured not only the attention of Christian publications, but also the national secular media. The latter viewed Bentley with a more critical and proof-demanding lens.

Now, the revivalist who claims to have experienced all types of supernatural encounters and professes to be a conduit for healing and miracles — including more than a dozen resurrections from the dead — has said it's time for him to move on. In a July 21 post on his ministry's website, he stated, "Where once the revival hubs seemed to stay put, sometimes for years, — the Lord is telling us, 'Move, walk the land, move the Ark of My Glory.'" He announced that, "Our final day will be August 23rd, in Lakeland."

Less than two weeks prior to Bentley's post, *ABC Nightline* had spotlighted the revival on its programs. According to the network, "When asked to present evidence of the healings, Bentley promised to give 'Nightline' the names and medical records of three followers who would talk openly about his miracles. He never delivered. Instead, his staff gave 'Nightline' a binder filled with what he says are inspiring miracles, but with scant hard evidence. It offered incomplete contact information, a few pages of incomplete medical records, and doctors' names were crossed out." The Associated Press met with the same unsuccessful results as it tried to follow up on a list of more than a dozen names provided by Bentley's ministry which supposedly represented healings with medical evidence.

Bentley alleges that God has shown him 38 "potential wells to uncap," which include "key" U.S. cities and Birmingham, England.

—MKG

### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



# Books in Review

## **NINE MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**

by Mark Dever

Crossway Books, 287 pages, \$15.99

In evaluating aberrational persuasions such as liberal, seeker-sensitive, and emerging churches, the attention often centers on the negative aspects of these groups. Mark Dever's volume, on the other hand, targets the characteristics of a sound biblical church. And while it is important to know what makes for an unhealthy church, it is even more essential to know what makes for a healthy church. As such, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is a book that every Christian needs to read.

Dever states at the beginning of his work that although he proposes nine marks, there can certainly be more marks of a healthy church. The nine marks that Dever addresses are Expository Preaching, Biblical Theology, The Gospel, A Biblical Understanding of Conversion, A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism, A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership, Biblical Church Discipline, A Concern for Discipleship and Growth, and Biblical Church Leadership. Each one of these chapters is important.

Expository preaching, Dever tells us, is one of the most important marks of a healthy church, as it increases trust in the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Word of God. Moreover, expository preaching is a powerful antidote to false teachings. A biblically sound theology will help the believer to formulate a proper worldview.

From there Dever moves to a definition of the Gospel — telling us what it is, and what it isn't. While this may seem trivial, it is amazing just how distorted the pronouncement of the Gospel has become in so many churches today. Many churches also suffer from a flawed understanding of conversion, which encapsulates that which is true repentance, resulting in a change in the old nature and a putting on of the new.

Two more links in Dever's chain for a healthy church are evangelism and local church membership. Here

again, both are vital; evangelism "is following Christ's agenda, giving out the news about Him," and membership is important because it shows a step toward commitment as well as a desire for accountability.

One of the most important chapters is the one on church discipline. This is a biblical mandate that we hear little about in the church today and the local church suffers because it is not taught and practiced. One reason is because discipline takes a lot of work. We need to have discipline, not only in our personal lives, but just as importantly, in the life of our church. Dever stresses, "God Himself disciplines us and, as we will see, He commands us to do the same for each other. The local church congregation has a special responsibility and a special competence in this regard" (pg. 174). Those who join a local church need to be told that the church will be there to help them in their walk with God and that can mean disciplining them — for restorative purposes — if needed.

Discipleship toward growth and maturity in the faith is another mark that we generally don't see much of in the church today. This, like discipline, takes a lot of time and effort to accomplish. The church tends to get lazier and lazier. We think we don't have "time" to disciple or to help the church to grow, but, as Dever points out, "A healthy church is characterized by a serious concern for spiritual growth on the part of its members. In a healthy church, people want to get better at following Jesus Christ" (pg. 198).

Finally, Dever proffers biblical church leadership, which he defines as members guiding and directing the local church in the way that is pleasing to God.

Each of the "nine marks" chapters start with a preview page of "What's Coming Up" to whet the reader's appetite. The book also has three very helpful appendices, along with general and scriptural indexes.

We need to remember that there is no perfect church, but that does not mean that we can't strive to do what God wants us to do. We should also keep in mind that the church is to change the world and the world is not to change the church. This means that the church that truly stands for God is a healthy church. Dever's is a much needed volume. We can highly recommend *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* to others.

—MG

**Editor's Note:** The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.