

PROTESTANTS MARKET CATHOLICISM

Richard Bennett of “Berean Beacon”

Dear Friend,

When the Catholic blueprint for false ecumenism appears in Evangelical circles, it is time to sound the alarm. The Emerging Church movement has become such a toxic and dangerous threat at the present time that I see it will take three articles to analyze it. In this first article I will deal with the methods employed by Brian McLaren, a chief leader of the movement. In the second article I will address the tenets of doctrine that the movement holds. In a third article, with the help of Ken Silva and Virgil Dunbar, I will write on the mystical aspect of the whole association. All three articles will be posted on here on our website: www.bereanbeacon.org/The_Emergent_Church_Markets_Catholicism.htm

Yours in the grace of the precious Savior, Richard Bennett

The Emergent Church Markets Catholicism

“Not since the Jesus Movement of the early 1970s has a Christian phenomenon been so closely entangled with the self-conscious cutting edge of U.S. culture. Frequently urban, disproportionately young, overwhelmingly white, and very new—few have been in existence for more than five years—a growing number of churches are joining the ranks of the “emerging church.” Thus declared *Christianity Today* in its article, “The Emergent Mystique.”¹ While this new movement is permeating modern Evangelical circles in the Western world, few seem to understand its essential *modus operandi*. Careful analysis shows it to be a theory that repudiates any single defining source for truth and reality beyond the individual.

Emergent Church in Its Larger Context

The Emergent Church movement did not start and does not operate in a vacuum. Hence to evaluate its function in the larger context, it is essential to understand that thirty-five years ago, the Roman Catholic Church published its non-negotiable agenda on ecumenism in its Post Vatican Council II documents. A crucial passage states, “...ecumenical dialogue is not limited to an academic or purely conceptual level, but striving for a more complete communion between the Christian communities [churches], a common service on the Gospel and closer collaboration on the level of thought and action, it serves to transform modes of thought and behavior and the daily life of those communities. In this way, it aims at preparing the way for their unity of faith in the bosom of a Church one and visible: thus ‘little by little,’ as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning.

“This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose...”²

Thus rather than looking for unity based on truth, the Papacy, as ever, is seeking to secure visible outward conformity through the compromise of others. This is the larger context into which the Emergent Church is set.

A Man for the Ecumenical Season

Brian McLaren is the pastor of the non-denominational church he founded in the late 1980's and a leading spokesman for Emergent-US, a dominant group within the Emerging Church movement. As such, he is a prime example of the success of the Catholic ecumenical agenda, a fact is well demonstrated by the strategy of this particular leader. McLaren's website bio states that he obtained both a B.A. and an M.A. in English from the University of Maryland. He has had no formal degree from any seminary, other than an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Carey Theological Seminary in Vancouver, BC, Canada in 2004. His academic interests, listed as including "Medieval drama, Romantic poets, modern philosophical literature, and the novels of [Roman Catholic] Dr. Walker Percy," have fitted him well for the task at hand.

Leaning heavily on Roman Catholic writers, particularly G. K. Chesterton and his book, *Orthodoxy*,³ McLaren has written a book entitled *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Here he moves beyond Chesterton's censure of Calvinism and sponsorship of mysticism to present what he thinks is a whole new method of knowing Christian truth, i.e., through Eastern mysticism. But to sell this mindset to the Protestants with their memory verses intact and their Bibles in hand, his approach to them is pitched on a strongly subjective level. This subtle tactic is part of the methodology of ecumenism spelled out in 1970 in Post Vatican Council II documents.

Bitterness Against His Heritage

At the outset, McLaren classes his book as "confessional," which gives him latitude to express his opinions without the necessity to give any formal argument.⁴ Indeed, he states, "you should know that I am horribly unfair in this book, lacking all scholarly objectivity and evenhandedness." Excusing himself on the basis of his heritage, he goes on, "I am far harder on conservative Protestant Christians who share that heritage than I am on anyone else. I'm sorry. I am consistently over sympathetic to Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, even dreaded liberals, while I keep elbowing my conservative brethren in the ribs in a most annoying—some would say *ungenerous*—way. I cannot even pretend to be objective or fair."⁵ Here the author shows by his own admission what amounts to bitterness against his conservative Protestant heritage and the personal context out of which *A Generous Orthodoxy* arises. While this same book is being hailed by many admirers as the "manifesto" or public declaration of the Emergent Church movement, the larger context in which it is set is the ecumenical movement of the Roman Catholic Church—as the Papacy moves to regain the loss of her political empire, i.e., the Holy Roman Empire, which loss she suffered at the hand of the Reformation three and a half centuries ago. Since the Papacy thinks in terms of centuries rather than decades, it is not too much to think that among Protestants, Brian McLaren (and Rick Warren as well) could be very useful to the larger papal cause.

McLaren says his book is addressed primarily to those who are ready to give up Christianity altogether, but encourages them not to do so. The basis on which he encourages them, however, first involves insulting the conservative Protestants' and Pentecostals' view of Jesus with their insistence on individual salvation or "a personal savior." He then points them approvingly to his definition of the Roman Catholic "Jesus," including the Liberation Theology "Jesus" and liberal Protestant "Jesuses."

Next, McLaren is bold enough to re-define the Holy God. He does this by making a distinction between "God A" and "God B" via the present gender pronoun dispute. He writes, "Think of the kind of universe you would expect if 'God A, created it a universe of dominance, control, limitation, submission, uniformity, coercion. Think of the kind of universe you would expect if 'God B' created it a universe of interdependence, relationship, possibility, responsibility, becoming, novelty, mutuality, freedom" (p. 76).

By this fictitious contrast he entices his readers to choose between two highly subjective conceptions of a god of his own imagination. That done, he has set his standard of truth, which is not the inerrant Word of God, but rather his own current theory.

Harmful, Offensive Tactics Disclosed

McLaren also informs the reader that, “as in most of my other books...I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated.”⁷ Further, he fully intends that “shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue”⁸ are all to be a part of the style of his book. His tone is also highly reflective of Roman Catholic Chesterton’s own style. The springboard of permissive subjectivity laid, McLaren demonstrates his understanding of Christianity in the major section of his book, “The Kind of Christian I Am.” He claims to be many kinds of Christian simultaneously.

His method is usually to launch his bitterness against conservative Protestants by carefully assigning a major focus of his own choosing to that particular group and then redefining whatever words or terms delineate the target group. Under the new definition, which usually is nearly totally opposite of the original definition, he then declares himself to be one of that group, as “Fundamentalist/Calvinist,” “Methodist,” “Evangelical,” “Charismatic/Contemplative,” “Liberal/Conservative,” “catholic,” “green,” “biblical,” “(Ana)baptist/Anglican,” “Mystical/Poetic,” “incarnational,” “missional,” etc. An instance of his tactic is when he defines Calvinists by their acrostic TULIP, which he clearly detests. Using the same letters, he makes a parody of the acrostic—which totally redefines it in a way antithetical to what TULIP commonly means—and on the sole basis of his redefinition calls himself a Calvinist.

Another group he dislikes is the Fundamentalists, or “fighting fundies,” from whom he says he will take the term, “fighting.” He now claims that this word is his legitimate heritage from them, and therefore he can “fight” for his own cause under the name of Fundamentalist—although what he is fighting for is directly opposed to Fundamentalists. Hence he has defined himself as a “Fundamentalist /Calvinist,” but what he means by those terms is totally different from what is commonly meant by them. In this way, he shows how his unbiblical method deliberately foments confusion and division. By contrast, however, he does not basically re-define the terms of the groups he likes, such as the liberal Protestants, Catholics, mystics, and environmentalists, all of which he also claims to be, except Roman Catholic. There is good reason for this: he claims to be “Post /Protestant,” retaining then in the larger ecumenical debate the legitimacy of his heritage to protest—but not to protest Roman Catholicism, as classically the term Protestant has meant in its historical context, but rather to protest against the conservative Protestants of his own day. It should be noted that his chief sources of authority in nearly every chapter are Roman Catholic, particularly G. K. Chesterton.

Relative and Qualified Compromise

Although McLaren denies that he is a relativist, his explanations give him away. He states, “How do you know if something is true?... First, you engage in spiritual *practices* like prayer, Bible reading, forgiveness, and service. Then you see what happens; you remain open to *experience*. Finally, you report your experience to others in the field of spirituality for their *discernment*, to see if they confirm your findings or not.”⁹

In another place, McLaren redefines theology. He does this by drawing heavily from Vincent Donovan, a Roman Catholic missionary priest. Donovan came to the conclusion that “praxis [practice] must be prior to theology” and that *his* theology would be derived from *his* theory that was derived out of *his* experience with pagans.¹⁰ McLaren enlarges Donovan’s (and others’) definition to “rather than seeing missiology (the study of missions) within

theology, theology is actually a discipline within Christian mission. Theology is the church on a mission reflecting on its message, its identity, its meaning.”¹¹ McLaren has thus redefined theology. In short, McLaren says that mission defines theology rather than theology defines mission. His standard is pragmatism, or “what works,” rather than the absolute authority of Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, “*The scripture cannot be broken.*”¹² “*Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*”¹³ McLaren’s assertion that theology is actually a discipline within Christian mission is an utter denial of absolute truth as it is revealed in Scripture. Like the existentialists before him, McLaren has clearly denied biblical faith.

Adding Fuel to His Relativism

McLaren also shows that he is denying biblical authority when he states, “The earliest Protestants [meaning those of the Reformation of the sixteenth century] transferred the fulcrum or center of authority from the church to the Bible (which the...invention of an improved press facilitated greatly). But the Bible requires human interpretation, which was a problem...”¹⁴ Here McLaren totally ignores the fact that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, as Psalm 36:9 explains, “*for with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.*” God’s truth is seen in the light of God’s truth, “*Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*”¹⁵

Having left Scriptural truth behind, McLaren now lays the groundwork for his theory by which he hopes, in the words of Vatican Council II, to remove one of “the obstacles to ecclesial communion.” His theory is that both Conservative and Liberal Protestants have trouble accepting the authority of the Bible in the “post-evangelical” or “post-modern” or “post-liberal” world in which their civil, political views are based in their religious convictions, causing a polarization between them. Of this, he says, both groups must repent because “[both] having survived in different ways the rough waters of modernity, they are now facing a new challenge: working together to save the village which we call planet Earth.”¹⁶ His own religion-based solution to what he casts as a civil and political problem that liberal and conservative Protestants have made is to say that times have changed and it is now necessary to change the norm of biblical interpretation accordingly. This is most interesting, since this is the same *modus operandi* as Papal Rome. In the beginning of her latest *Catechism*, the Vatican states, “Read the Scripture within the ‘living Tradition of the whole Church.’”¹⁷ Then Rome goes so far as to reprimand those who stray because she states there is “...the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.”¹⁸ McLaren is in the early stages of presenting the same protocol as Papal Rome. But then, Rome said that the induction of Protestant churches was to be “little by little” as their thinking was changed by dialogue with Catholics.

McLaren Reshapes History

In trying to lump liberals and conservatives together, McLaren also shows his prejudice against Evangelicalism by strongly insinuating that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was the beginning of believers placing their trust in the written Word of God.¹⁹ He is wrong about this, as the history of the Vaudois, Albigenses, and Waldenses show. His point is that there is a shift today away from the emphasis on the authority of the Bible (he leaves out the word “alone”), just as in the time of the Reformation there was a shift away from the authority

of the Roman Catholic Church to the Bible. His attack on Martin Luther is to show him only as an individualist who would not bow to Catholic authority—but that is not why Martin Luther is important in church history. He states that in the context of “Martin Luther’s famous individualistic statement, uttered before the Catholic authorities with whom he disagreed, expresses this shift perfectly: Here I stand. That sentence might be understood as the first statement uttered in the modern world.”²⁰ Here McLaren uses historical fact to chip away at individual salvation, which will dovetail nicely into his argument for emphasis on universal salvation. He totally neglects the content of Martin Luther’s historic position—which was to stand for justification by faith alone based in the authority of the Bible alone. In this way, he is able to use Martin Luther as simply a man of another time, not relevant for today because that time, which he calls modern, is now over. What he has failed to comprehend is that the biblical truth that justification is by faith alone is timeless. But McLaren’s opinion falls directly in line with the 1999 concordat between the Roman Catholic Church and the German Lutheran Federation in which it was declared that Lutherans and Catholics now agree on the issue of justification by faith alone and that the Reformation was a mistake.

McLaren Mum on the Inquisition

What McLaren never tells is that the authority of the Roman Papacy was not well established until near the end of the eleventh century, when by crusades and the Inquisition, the Papacy by coercion forced people to submit to her ecclesiastical dictates. Many refused. Uncountable millions were robbed, tortured, and martyred because they held to the authority of the Bible in those bloody centuries and refused to accept Roman Catholic doctrines and traditions. At one point, McLaren admits that he is being unfair in his presentation of English history, but he does not apologize or correct his illicit revision of historical fact.

Nor does McLaren mention that it was the Papacy that locked away the Bible from the common people during the Middle Ages with their version in Latin, which only the clergy could have.²¹ Nevertheless, it is a well established historical fact that even in the fourth century, the bishops of Milan of Northern Italy were in no way subject to the bishops of Rome. The historical record shows that they used the Bible alone as their authority, having only two sacraments, baptism and communion, prayed to God alone, and allowed no images of the Deity.²² The Vaudois of the Cottian Alps in that same area were by the ninth century known for their apostolic faith in the Bible alone, as Claude, bishop of Turin makes clear. The tenants of these ancient churches of the Alps were well demonstrated by their faith and practice to be essentially the same as those proclaimed by the Reformers of the sixteenth century. The same is true of the Albigenses, against whom the Papacy sent its first domestic crusade in the twelfth century. Thomas M’Crie gives an amazingly similar report of historical facts regarding the pre-Reformation believers in Spain in the sixth century.²³ The historical facts show that from early on the Church of Rome was the schismatic. It remains the same today. Her *corruptions become traditions*, spread by the Papacy during the centuries of the Holy Roman Empire, are now flowering in that same Papacy’s new tactic of “ecumenical outreach.” It is an entirely logical development that the open welcome of Eastern mysticism by Vatican Council II²⁴ into this four-hundred- fifty year old apostate system²⁵ should transfer a yet more potent strain of mysticism through her ecumenical outreach to those who have not received a love of the truth.

McLaren Plays by Vatican Council II Rules

In adopting this all inclusive format, McLaren is certainly playing by the rules for dialogue laid out by Vatican Council II, which states, "Each partner [in the dialogue] should seek to expound the doctrine of his own community in a constructive manner, putting aside the tendency to **define by opposition**, which generally results in certain positions becoming overstressed or unduly hardened."²⁶ "The partners [in the dialogue] will work together towards a **constructive synthesis**, in such a way that every **legitimate** contribution is made use of, in a joint research aimed at the complete assimilation of the revealed datum."²⁷ McLaren is well versed in Catholic literature. In this book, the approach to his subject of dealing with conservative Protestantism is a pristine demonstration that he has successfully assimilated Vatican Council II methodology and doctrine. Rather than defining by opposition, as Bible based public discussion would require, McLaren has followed the Vatican II tactic of presenting subjective opinion in a subtle attempt to pervert biblical authority and historical fact through fictitious contrast, revisionist history, and "constructive synthesis." He has redefined commonly understood Protestant terminology in order to claim his compromises of truth as a "legitimate contribution" that Vatican II dialogue requires of its participants. These Catholic dialogue parameters, which are the working orders of the larger context in which the Emergent Church is set, work well for both the Catholic Church and McLaren because they sow confusion and discord among believers and unbelievers alike. The Papacy is most likely the bigger winner, for McLaren will be gone in a few decades, but the walls of doctrinal separation between the Catholics and the Protestant world will have been further damaged through McLaren's assistance. And McLaren for his part, fueled by bitterness and informed and protected under the rules of the larger context agenda, is able to implement his own goal of moving the religious global village toward a new knowledge of God through mysticism. In Part II and III we will explore these things in more detail. McLaren claims to be a true prophet by bringing in his new ideas of emergent thinking.²⁸ The infallible Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul warned Christians about "*grievous wolves...not sparing the flock.*"²⁹

Christ Jesus said, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*"³⁰ Good spiritual fruit shows the nature of the doctrines that have been taught. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruits in those who are truly born again. There are fruits of repentance, personal faith, and deep fellowship with God and His people. New birth bears fruit in an awareness of God's absolute Holiness, and in awareness of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. When Christ Jesus saves a person, He saves from hell and the power of sin. The Lord also delivers the true believer from the dominion of Satan and from the love of and the ways of the world. When we see in a person neither the conviction of sin, nor the fear of God, but rather both a love for the world and its methods, we "*know them by their fruits.*" Thus it is with McLaren. Not only do his tactics, methods, relativism and rewriting of history reveal whom he is following, but also we see much more is he revealed by what his message is missing. The Holiness of God, the conviction of sin, the fear of God, and the Gospel message are major parts of what is missing from *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Rather than compromise these precious tenants of the faith, the believer is to separate from those who promote such heresy by "*earnestly contend[ing] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*"

Endnotes:

- ¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html> 1/18/06.
- ² Vatican Council II Document No. 42, "Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue," S.P.U.C., 15 Aug 1970, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery, ed., New Rev. Ed., Vol. I, Sec. II, pp. 540-541.
- ³ G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) has been very influential in literature of the twentieth century. His book, *Orthodoxy*, is considered by many to be the centerpiece of his writings. McLaren's work largely reflects both the content and style of Chesterton, who was staunchly Roman Catholic and who is aggressively promoted on the Internet and elsewhere by Catholics.
- ⁴ John Henry Cardinal Newman in the nineteenth century did the same thing in his well-known treatise, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, in which he presented his arguments in the form of a testimonial. Newman started out as an Anglican prelate who wanted to become a Catholic, but in 1844 was persuaded by the Papacy to remain an Anglican. From his position, inside the Anglican Church, he was to use all his influence and power to move the Church of England back into the Roman Catholic fold. It has proven to be a very effective strategy. See Walter Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London, 1898).
- ⁵ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), p. 35 (emphasis in original).
- ⁶ A primary example of one of the Papacy's long range plans has been its Oxford movement to reclaim England from Henry VIII's defection in the sixteenth century. Papal plans were put in motion in 1844, using John Henry Newman as their point man within the Church of England for the express goal of subverting that body to Catholicism and thereby regain England as a Catholic country. The group Newman succeeded in establishing within the Church of England became known as Anglo-Catholics, to which belonged the famous Wescott and Hort. That movement is still progressing, although not now known by the same name.
Another example is the Papacy's snaring of the German Lutheran Federation in a concordat signed October 31, 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. Four hundred forty-four years prior to this signing was the signing of the Treaty of Augsburg (September 25, 1555) in which Germany ratified the Peace of Passau of 1552. This completely established the Reformation by confirming the Protestant Churches of Germany in all their rights and possessions, making them entirely independent of the Pope. The basic issue was justification by faith alone, which Martin Luther had so clearly published on October 31, 1517. The basic issue of the 1999 concordat was the same issue but in 1999 it was declared that the Reformation was a mistake and that the Lutherans and Catholics now believe the same on justification. Nothing could be further from the truth; but after thirty years of dialogue with the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans compromised their historic stand for the biblical truth. The October 31st 1999 concordat, which overturned Martin Luther's historic stand of October 31, 1517, was signed in Augsburg, the same place where the Treaty of Augsburg, declaring liberty of worship for Protestants, had been signed in 1555. In light of these historical facts, the significance of dates and places is hard to miss.
- ⁷ McLaren, *Op cit.*, pp. 22-23.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ McLaren, *Op cit.*, p. 199 (emphasis in original).

- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 12 John 10:35.
- 13 Jeremiah 23:29.
- 14 McLaren, *Op cit.*, p. 133.
- 15 I Corinthians 2:13.
- 16 McLaren, *Op cit.*, p. 143.
- 17 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), Para. 113 (emphasis in original).
- 18 “DOMINUS IESUS” September 5th 2000 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html
- 19 McLaren, *Op cit.*, p. 133.
- 20 McLaren, *Op cit.*, pp. 132, 133.
- 21 Thomas M’Crie recounts that in the sixteenth century in Spain, Archbishop Fernando de Talavera wanted to translate the Bible into Arabic in order to win the Moors to Christ. Cardinal Ximenes, who carried enormous influence with the Spanish government, was strenuously opposed to this because in his opinion to do so was to throw pearls before swine. Therefore, his solution was that “the sacred scriptures ought to be exclusively preserved in the three languages in which the inscription on our Saviour’s cross was written.... This opinion, of Rome, that ignorance is the mother of devotion, has met with the warm approbation of his biographer.” Further, of the vulgar or common people, the cardinal was of the opinion that “they were in danger of wresting the Scripture to their destruction... Therefore, the books which the Cardinal had promised as a substitute for the Gospels and Epistles made their appearance, consisting of treatises of mystic or rather monastic devotion, and the lives of some of its most high-flying zealots, both male and female.” Thomas M’Crie, *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Wm Blackwood; & London: T. Cadell, 1824) Reprinted by Hartland Publications, 1998; pp. 46-47.
- 22 Peter Allix, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and of the Albigenses* (1619, 1690, 1692, 1821). Reprinted by Church History Research & Archives (CHRA), 1989. Ch. III, IV. See also Jean Paul Perrin, *History of the Ancient Christians Inhabiting the Valleys of the Alps* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Simon, 1847). Reprinted by CHRA, 1991. Perrin, a Waldensian pastor from whom Allix got his information, attended a very important meeting which drew up six articles condemning the church of Rome as the whore in the book of Revelation and clearing the Albigenses and Waldenses of the charges of Manicheanism.
- 23 M’Crie, *Op cit.*, Ch. I & II.
- 24 Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”, Para. 2.
- 25 Council of Trent, Session XI, Jan. 13, 1547, “If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema [cursed].” Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Tr. by Roy J Deferrari from *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 13th ed. (B. Herder Book Co., 1957) #822, Canon 12.
- 26 Vatican Council II Document No. 42, V. Method of Dialogue, (b), p. 548, in Flannery.
- 27 *Ibid.*, (c), p. 548.

²⁸ McLaren, *Op cit.*, p. 285.

²⁹ Acts 20:29.

³⁰ Matthew 7:16.