

DEADLY CULT STORIES IN THE NEWS

By L.L. (Don) and Joy A. Veinot

It was one of those "What-is-this-world-coming-to?" news days. A man walked into a church with a gun and blasted away, killing seven people, including the pastor of the church and his son, while critically wounding the pastor's wife. The shooter was identified as Terry Ratzmann, a member of the Living Church of God (LCOG) in suburban Milwaukee, WI. He was not a Satanist or a Nazi, nor was he some obviously crazed individual. According to those who knew him, he was a good neighbor and seemingly a very generous and godly man.

According to newspaper reports:

Two weeks after Terry Ratzmann shot to death seven people before killing himself during a church service, his friends struggled to connect the gentle gardener they knew with the madman who took aim at the pastor, his family and other worshippers ... why he showed up at a March 12 church service at the Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel in suburban Milwaukee with a gun instead of a Bible remains unclear.¹

The use of the word "**madman**" to describe Ratzmann on that day is interesting, because it is very obvious that he was a very *mad* man, indeed.

Robert Geiger, one of the eyewitnesses to the attack, told his father that he "**looked at Ratzmann and saw fury in his eyes.**"²

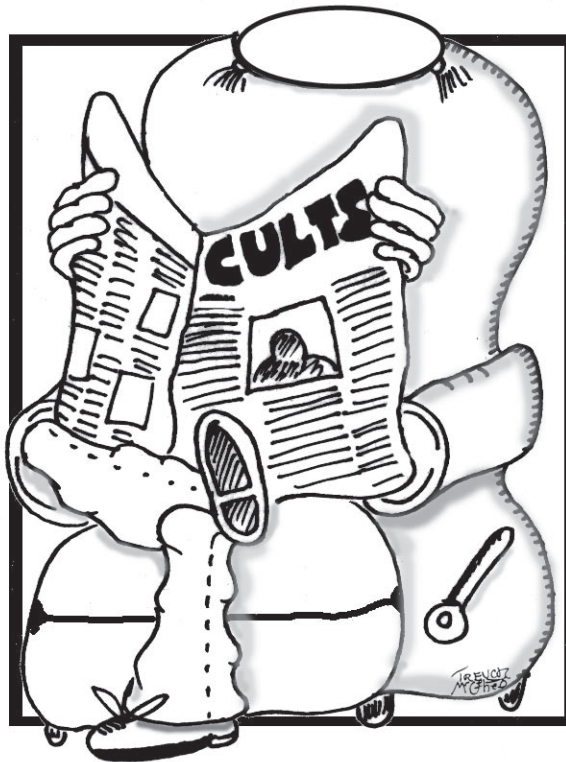
What was Ratzmann so furious about? Why did he do what he did? As far as we know, the secular news media and members of the church, who were quoted in the papers, still do not know what to make of the killer's cold-hearted rampage. Some church members said that Ratzmann seemed upset about a ser-

mon given at the church a few weeks before the tragedy, where he left the church in the middle of the service; but other members claimed they couldn't think of anything in the sermon that would've upset him.

When we heard the news, we immediately guessed that the "church," which was presumed by the media to be a Christian church, was instead an autocratic non-Christian cult. The newspapers duly reported that the LCOG congregation heavily emphasized end-times speculations, but a secular person likely would not realize that, while eschatology is certainly a legitimate topic for sermons in a Christian church, pseudo "Christian" groups—such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Branch Davidians under David Koresh, doomsday killer cult Aum Shinrikyo, among many others—are far more likely to make that issue "the biggest enchilada" of their group's teaching.

In actuality, far from being an evangelical group, LCOG is a hard-line breakaway sect from the Worldwide Church of God (WCOG, a.k.a. Armstrongism) which formed

after the WCOG leadership miraculously embraced true biblical Christian teachings following the death of founder Herbert W. Armstrong. We were excited witnesses to that turbulent era when the new leaders of the WCOG courageously sought out Christian apologists and seminaries to bring that authoritarian cult in line with true Christian doctrine. The move to orthodoxy cost the sect many members who chose to stay with Armstrongism (albeit under new organizational names) and still persist in their denial of all the basic Christian teachings. These breakaway groups continue to reject, as Armstrong did, such essential Christian teach-



The
Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

Journal

is the quarterly publication of:
Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
P.O. Box 455, Lombard, IL 60148-0455
Phone: (630) 627-9028
Fax: (630) 627-6829
E-mail: info@midwestoutreach.org

Don Veinot President
Joy Veinot Director
D.L. McGehee Editor
S. Todd McGehee Layout/Art
Trevor I. McGehee Cover Art

ADVISORY BOARD

Dr. Norman L. Geisler
President,
Southern Evangelical Seminary
Charlotte, NC

Janet Brunner
Layman,
Winston-Salem, NC

Kurt Goedelman
Director,
Person Freedom Outreach
St. Louis, MO

Dr. Jerry Buckner
Senior Pastor,
Tiburon Christian Fellowship
Tiburon, CA

Jhan Moscowitz
Midwest Regional Director,
Jews for Jesus
Skokie, IL

Ray Kollbocker
Senior Pastor,
Parkview Community Church
Glen Ellyn, IL

Dr. Ron Rhodes
President,
Reasoning From The Scriptures Min.
Frisco, TX

Bill Honsberger
Director,
Haven Ministries
Aurora, CO

Gino Geraci
Senior Pastor,
Calvary Chapel South Denver
Littleton, CO

Phil Ballmaier
Senior Pastor,
Calvary Chapel
Elk Grove, IL

*Your response to this publication
would be greatly appreciated!!!
Please send all correspondence and
subscription inquiries to the above address.
Thank you for reading the Journal.*

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
*is a non-profit organization.
Financial donations are welcomed
and make this ministry possible.*

"News" Continued from Page 1

ings as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, and Hell, among others, and believe that salvation comes about by one's own works (contrast Romans 4:4, Ephesians 2:8-9), rather than trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross to secure their eternal destiny (1 John 5:12-13). They are law keepers who put their faith in their own strength, their own goodness, and their own righteousness, rather than in God's Son, Jesus Christ, upon Whose substitutionary death and righteousness we can depend to bring us into God's family (2 Corinthians 5:21). Nevertheless, rather than accept the change, many of the WCOG split off from the group and held onto their cultic teachings. LCOG is one of those offshoots.

It is a tragic story but serves to accentuate the fact that cults and the false doctrine they teach are dangerous—destroying lives in the here and now as well as for all eternity. It *does* matter greatly what one believes and who one listens to. Jesus Himself warned us to watch out for false prophets, who would appear to be Christians, dressed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly would be ferocious wolves (Matthew 7:15). No one is safe, not even children, or perhaps, we should say *especially* children!

Andrea Yates

On June 20 of 2001:

Andrea filled the tub with water and beginning with Paul, she systematically drowned the three youngest boys, then placed them on her bed and covered them. Mary was left floating in the tub. The last child alive was the first born, seven-year-old Noah. He asked his mother what was wrong with Mary, then turned and ran away. Andrea caught up with him and as he screamed, she dragged him and forced him into the tub next to Mary's floating body. He fought desperately—coming up for air twice, but Andrea held him down until he was dead. Leaving Noah in the tub, she brought Mary to the bed and laid her in the arms of her brothers.³

A mother methodically murders her dear children in cold blood? It is unthinkable, is it not? What in the world could have brought her to commit such a heinous act? It is a little-known fact that Andrea's *religious* views led her to kill her children. It was her *cultic* view of God's grace and salvation that fueled her despair and prompted her rampage. According to her written confession, she had drowned her children because "**she had been a bad mother and they were clearly destined to go to hell.**"⁴

The children were going to Hell because *she* had been a bad mother (contrast Deuteronomy 24:16, Jeremiah 31:30)? Where would she get such an idea? From the writings of the so-called "prophet" Michael Woroniecki (MW), whom she and her husband Rusty followed:

On the newly released video, Woroniecki tells followers that "multitudes are going to hell. God doesn't give a hoot about your little selfish affluent self-oriented world." At the time Andrea Yates drowned her children, she and Rusty were still devoted followers. A former follower of Woroniecki says his heart sank when he heard the Yateses were connected to the preacher. "I dropped the receiver and my heart sank because I knew immediately what happened," said David De La Isla, who had followed Woroniecki for 12 years. De La Isla says Woroniecki was a powerful influence on the vulnerable mind of Andrea Yates. "In her thinking she was doomed to hell, her kids were going to go to hell, and that the only way she could save them was by killing them."⁵

According to Charles Montaldo, Michael Woroniecki taught, "**the role of women is derived from the sin of Eve and that bad mothers who are going to hell create bad children who will go to hell.**"⁶

Hopelessness and false guilt led Yates to kill her children. Again, false views of God and His love and forgiveness often have deadly consequences.

Mark Barton

In August of 1999, Mark Barton, who had been studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs), killed his wife and children and then went on a shooting rampage at his workplace in Atlanta, GA.

The *Washington Post* reported that Barton's explanation letter "**referred twice to 'Jehovah,' reflecting what acquaintances and a relative described as Barton's recent attraction to the Jehovah's Witnesses and decision to leave his Baptist church**

... the couple had fought about Mark's recent insistence that Leigh Ann become a Jehovah's Witness, which she refused to do."⁷

Listen to the language he used to describe his inner turmoil:

I have been dying since October. I would wake up at night so afraid, so terrified, that I could not be that afraid while awake. It has taken its toll. I have come to hate this life in this system of things. I have come to have no hope. I killed the children to exchange for them five minutes of pain for a lifetime of pain. The fears of the father are transferred to the son. It was from my father to me and from me to my son. He already had it. I had to take him with me ... I really wish I hadn't killed [Leigh Ann] ... She really couldn't help it. I love her so much anyway. I know that Jehovah will take care of all them in the next life ... Please know that I love Leigh Ann (Barton's wife), Matthew, and Mychelle with all my heart. If Jehovah is willing, I'd like to see them all again in the resurrection to have a second chance.⁸

He bludgeoned his wife and kids to death with a hammer, and yet, he believed he had done them a favor—protecting them from a lifetime of fear and pain and offering them hope of a resurrection. He believed that his wife (by her refusal to become a JW) and children were doomed to a life of misery and headed for imminent destruction along with “this system of things.” He believed that he had failed to “make the grade” with God, and that his children would fare no better in this life. What a terrible view of God!

Are all JW's violence-prone maniacs? Should you make sure little Johnny is safely out of range the next time they visit at your door? No. Not at all. We'd have to guess that the JW's we know personally are about as bloodthirsty as Jimmy Carter and not nearly as vicious. ☺ It would be terribly unfair to fault all JW's for the actions of one, just as it would be unfair to blame all born-again Christians for the sorry antics of some supposedly born-again televangelists, as the WTBS always *does!* ☺

But again, it is fair to note the man's inner anguish, while he outwardly presented a “normal face” to the world around him. From what ex-JW's have told me, his inner despair and hopelessness is far from unique among JW's. Rather than being Jehovah's “happy people” as they boast, many JW's are dragging their sagging spirits from door to door right along with their bloated book bags.

Jim, Marshall, and Shoko: Dial three for murder

Just about everyone remembers the murders and mass suicide of Jonestown, and who could forget the suicide of Marshall Applewhite's Heaven's Gate Cult in San Diego—the largest mass suicide on American soil. They believed they were doing what God wanted them to do, but in reality, they died for their faulty belief system. The Bible teaches that death is not the end of conscious existence, but the beginning of eternity (see 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23). So sadly, they have to live with their decision forever. And then there was the Japanese-terrorist cult, Aum Shinrikyo led by Shoko Ashahara, who in 1995 put poison gas into the subway system in Tokyo—killing 12 innocent people and injuring hundreds of others.

Concerning Aum Shinrikyo, Kyle B. Olson reports on the Centers for Disease Control web site that Aum's attack on the subway “**would serve as a wake-up call to the world regarding the prospects of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.**”⁹

Far from being simply madmen, as most people might be tempted to believe, the actions of this doomsday cult flow directly from their false beliefs. As Olson notes:

Millennial visions and apocalyptic scenarios dominate the group's doctrine, evidenced by the prominent role of Nostradamus as a prophet in Aum Shinrikyo teaching. Ashahara has, on many occasions, claimed to be the reincarnated Jesus Christ, as well as the first “enlightened one” since the Buddha. He has frequently preached about a coming Armageddon, which he describes as a global conflict that would, among other things, destroy Japan with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. According to Ashahara, only the followers of Aum Shinrikyo will survive this conflagration.

Aum's actions were perfectly logical within the context of their value system. They were a self-legitimized group that had rejected and, ultimately, felt obliged to confront society. Outnumbered as they were by Japanese police and military might, one can argue that developing and even using an asymmetric capability was a logical consequence of their situation. Unable to achieve their objec-

—Continued on page 4

MCOI Branches

MAIN OFFICE:

Lombard, Illinois

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 455

Lombard, IL 60148-0455

Phone: (630) 627-9028

E-mail: Info@midwestoutreach.org

President: L.L. (Don) Veinot, Jr.

Director: Joy A. Veinot

Spring Hill, Florida

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

3338 Landover Blvd.

Spring Hill, FL 34609-2619

Phone: (352) 684-4448

E-mail: dgholson@atlantic.net

Director: Diane Gholson

Pontotoc, Mississippi

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

170 Hester Ln.

Pontotoc, MS 38863

Phone: (662) 840-5873

E-mail: jkmiles@olemiss.edu

Director: Jonathon Miles

Lohrville, Iowa

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

408 Main Street

Lohrville, IA 51453-1004

Phone: (712) 465-3010

E-mail: mco@cal-net.net

Director: Jeff Hauser

Scranton, Kansas

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 201

Scranton, KS 66537

Phone: (785) 793-2143

E-mail: mcoscranton@usa.net

Co-Directors: Randall Birtell

Randal Ming

Cape Coral, Florida

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 150743

Cape Coral, FL

Phone: (239) 542-1914

E-mail: ronhenzel@msn.com

Director: Ron Henzel

"News" Continued from page 3

tive—political power—through legitimate means, they determined that a preemptive strike was necessary.¹⁰

Olson goes on to say that, even though Shoko Ashahara is in prison, and the Japanese government has taken steps to eradicate this deadly group, the threat posed by Aum Shinrikyo may not be over.

The cult's legal status in Japan as a church has been revoked, but many of its assets are unaccounted for ... Today, Aum Shinrikyo is once again soliciting donations, collecting tithes, selling materials to members, holding seminars, conducting training, and selling computers. Active recruiting is under way. Aum Shinrikyo is holding 50 "educational" seminars a month for current and potential members. The cult has offices throughout Japan, around Tokyo and other cities, and, according to Japanese sources, they maintain 100 hide-outs throughout that country as "safe houses." These sources estimate that at least 700 members are live-in, fully committed devotees.¹¹

These deadly cult stories (and there are so many others) tend to grab headlines due to the violent nature of the deaths and the ability to point to an individual who committed the heinous act(s) (Terry Ratzmann; Andrea Yates, David Koresh, Jim Jones, et. al.); but the Jehovah's Witnesses are one of the deadli-

est killer cults in the world today, as they champion the death of innocents—one victim at a time, week after week, and year after year—around the world through their unbiblical teaching on blood transfusions. In their case, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS) even *brags* about these needless deaths in the feature article of the May 22, 1994 issue of *Awake!** entitled "Youths Who Put God First." Their proud declaration is:

In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.¹²

The first story they tell is that of 15-year-old Adrian Yeatts who, they tell us, "... felt that his Biblical hope of eternal life would be threatened"¹³ if he took a blood transfusion. So rather than tick off an angry (JW) god, Adrian died without even really having lived.

Of course, today, though politically correct folks may not want to categorize it this way, the Wahabi sect of Islam has to be the most dangerous and murderous religious cult of all. They fulfill Jesus' words in John 16:2:

... a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

Why are Wahabi Islamists willing to kill themselves just to kill you and me? Yes, they hate us, but the explanation goes much deeper than that. They are hoping to earn their god's favor by their supreme sacrifice—"offering a service" to him just as Jesus foretold they would. This is a far easier road to Paradise rather than earn their passage through prescribed Islamic holy living over the course of their lives. Muslims have no understanding of God's grace and are trying to earn their salvation.

Quiet Despair

Most members of cults, while seemingly living godly lives, are actually living lives of desperation—trying very hard to be "good enough" to earn God's favor. Are there any among humankind that can be "good enough" to merit eternal life? No!

As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God, all have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

(Romans 3:10-12, NIV)

But sadly, cultists, even those who profess to follow the Bible, have somehow missed, ignored, and denied the Bible's teaching of the universal depravity of mankind, and they think they are capable of earning God's acceptance based on their own merit. And not only cultists, but even many Atheists—who claim belief in no God—still convince themselves that, if by chance there *is* a God Whom they shall stand before some day, they will be "good enough" to merit His favor as compared, of course, in their own minds, to "really bad" serial killers and genocidal maniacs like Hitler and Stalin. But Atheists and their beliefs are a topic for a different day. ☺

Ratzmann and Yates reportedly suffered from severe, long-term depression. We believe that the cultic emphasis on works and self righteousness, and the frustration and despair many sink into when they try to be "good enough," is the key to understanding what fueled their despair.

WORLD, a Christian news magazine, had a much better handle on why the Ratzmann situation occurred than did the secular news sources.

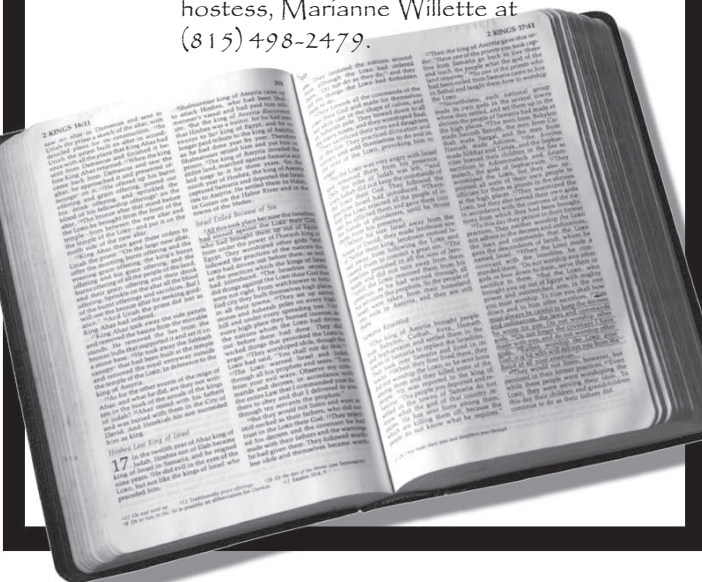
Join Us For

BIBLE STUDY

Every Tuesday Night at 7:15 pm

200 S. Maple
Somonauk, IL 60552

For directions please call the hostess, Marianne Willette at (815) 498-2479.



LCOG doctrine now mainly mirrors Armstrongism, mixing Jehovah's Witness-style "works" theology with Old Testament legalism, onerous tithes, and sometimes complete ministerial control over member's life decisions, particularly financial ones. "These people are subjected to incredible pressures to perform 'works' ... [and] are always unsure of their status before God," said Bill Hohmann, a former WCOG member for more than 25 years who now works to "deprogram" others who leave that and similar groups. "If you have to live ... every day, wondering if you are good enough ... [under] a ministry that constantly emphasizes you are on probation with God, then you can see how there is no surprise. There have been quite a number of suicides in these groups. The pressure is enormous."¹⁴

WORLD also sheds some light on the "problem" Ratzmann might have had with the sermon that he walked out of.

Police are focusing on a Feb. 26 incident in which Mr. Ratzmann was scheduled to deliver the closing prayer. Instead, he walked out early after hearing a sermon on how bad circumstances befall people who make ungodly choices.¹⁵

Seems like a harmless enough belief—that people, by making ungodly choices, cause the bad circumstances that befall them. It's even biblical! Remember Job's friends, who believed and promulgated the same notion. ☺ Of course, Job's friends were rebuked by none other than God, Himself, for their harsh and unfeeling judgment of Job, as he sat crushed beneath a load of grief and pain. Rather than being harmless, the effrontery to judge a person's spirituality by his life's circumstances is a presumption of utmost arrogance, it seems to us. And this judgmental sermon must have been extremely galling to Ratzmann, who was a depressed individual, struggling with the circumstances in which he found himself. He had lost his job and was also very unhappily single—a man in his forties who had been unable to win a wife. But instead of finding solace and understanding and support from his "church," he finds rebuke. We have no way of knowing whether the "pastor's" sermon was "aimed" specifically at Ratzmann, or if it just felt that way to him; but we can imagine how it must have hurt and enraged him.

Is Ratzmann to be excused for his murderous reaction? Of course not! People in cults are hurt and provoked every day by the mistreatment of their spiritual masters and the despair they foster; yet, they do not resort to bloodshed. In fact, considering all the abuse that is heaped upon cult members, it is, indeed, amazing that we do not see more violence by cult members against their leaders and against society as a whole. But unlike Ratzmann, Barton, and Yates, most cult members, instead, just turn their pain and anger inward and suffer the abuse in relative silence.

Measuring Up?

Measuring our lives or standing before God is not only unwise, it is unbiblical. Job's plight was not brought on because he was in some disobedience or lack of measuring up. The Apostle Paul cites a number of his own difficult life circumstances which many of the aforementioned groups would point to in their followers today as punishments from God:

Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments,

*beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*¹⁶

In responding to his "friends," Job pointed out that "**The tents of the destroyers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure**"¹⁷ External circumstances tell us little about a person's spiritual condition but are often used by false teachers and evil shepherds to instill fear and foster strict obedience within the ranks of the browbeaten. While it is true that some of life's trials are due to our own bad decisions and sometimes as a direct consequence of sin, it is all too easy, when one feels that one's life is under control, to cast haughty eyes on those who are struggling—often through no fault of their own. Christians can also fall into this trap; but we should mightily fight this temptation—either to feel rejected by God because of our own difficulties or to look down on others for theirs.

If God Is For Us, Who Can Be Against Us?

Life is hard and full of sorrows and disappointments. However, our circumstances *do not* indicate God's portioning out our

—Continued on page 14

Sept. 23-24
KC, Missouri

Know it

Faith

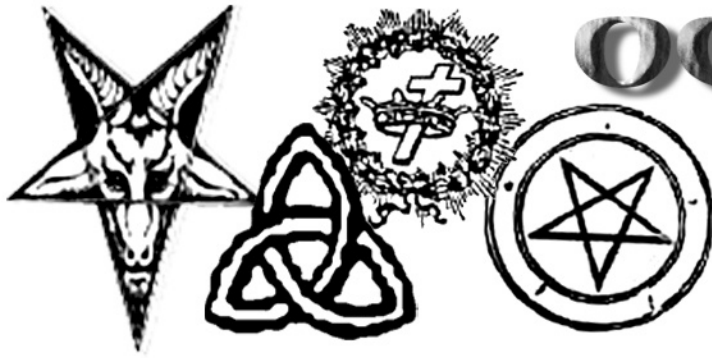
Share it

Heart, Soul, & Mind

Women Equipping Women to Know and Share Their Faith

A unique Women's conference that ministers to the total woman - Heart, Soul and Mind.

Call Midwest Christian Outreach at 630.627.9028 or visit www.heartsoulandmind.com for more information



OCCULTISM IN THE CHURCH?

By John Ferrer

Part 1 in a 2-Part Look at Occultic-like Practices Within The Church and Modern Christianity

"What's wrong?"

"I can't let go of it, man."

"Let go of what?"

"The occult, man. It won't let go of me."

The conversation went from dark to black. My friend was talking with me on the phone about his struggle with the occult. Soon after, I found myself driving over to his house to pray with him and throw out every bit of occult literature and paraphernalia he had in his possession. It was a somber cleansing time.

The lure of the occult is strong. In addition, it is subtle in its strength. My friend took a big step that day to get away from this destructive phenomenon that is the occult. However, what may be most scary about that incident was how much occult literature we had to throw out. That literature had dug its talons into his life and bloodied him with occult thinking. Much of that literature was by Christian authors and Christian publishers. When we understand what the occult really is, we can see its shades spackled across most every theological backdrop. But this is not an attempt at alarmism, because the answer is not frenzied hysteria or a retreat to a Christian bomb-shelter. Rather, knowing the pervasive and subtle nature of the occult gives us all the more motivation to heighten our field training. Should we be alarmed? Perhaps. But more importantly, we should be discerning, because one of the most confounding things about occultism is that one can be a practitioner and not even know it. Sadly, many Christians, while still Christian, are unknowingly dabbling in occultism. They may not be taking astrology classes or playing with voodoo dolls, but they are, nonetheless, sliding into occultism by assuming certain beliefs and practices which the culture of Christendom permits.¹ In short, the sharp clear dividers between Christianity and the occult have, in their minds, been dulled. What they think is the occult, are only the most blatant forms of it; while what they think is Christianity is a far cry from the real thing. In this article, I will attempt to explain some of the main problematic beliefs that bridge between Christianity and occultism. In a subsequent article, I will do the same but with special consideration regarding the practices stemming from those beliefs.

Understanding Occultism

Understanding occultism hinges on the fact that it is not like "cult," "new religion" or "world religion." In fact, the phrase "the occult" is itself misleading. It is misleading; because by say-

ing "the occult," one gives the indication that occultism is a singular entity—a monolithic category that is easily distinguished in reality from "the cults" or "world religions." In fact, "occult" is better understood as an adjective rather than a noun.² That is, "occult" is descriptive (be it of Satanism, Christianity, or anything in between) and comes from the Latin term *occultus* meaning "secret" or "hidden." It refers to the presence of secret or otherwise hidden knowledge and powers.

These secrets can be further divided into three broad categories of occultism: divination (fortune-telling), sorcery (magic), and spiritism (communication with spirits).³ While these categories are proudly displayed in many recognized occult groups such as Wicca, Satanism, and among New Age practitioners; they are also to be found in trace elements in many world religions, Christianity included.⁴ It may seem odd that occultism can be found crossing lines between new religions, cults, and world religions leading right into the living room of Christian households.

Nevertheless, entering the occult is not like joining a political party or choosing to be a vegetarian. Those are clearly definable categories—without blurry edges. Entering the occult, for many Christians, is more like drifting in the ocean without realizing you have drifted. Take any living example of Christian-turned-occultist and we may ask, "At what point did they slip into occultism?" Certain occult practices may be identified, but the point of slipping more likely will be at the toleration of an occult worldview (perhaps even with skepticism, but toleration, nonetheless) until its affect has grown so pervasive that occult practice was inevitable.

What is clear is that being a Christian is no safeguard against the dangers of occultism. The occult is not something neatly and safely sidelined from mainstream Christianity. It is no respecter of boundaries; and it is very dangerous. In Deuteronomy 18:10-12 (NASB), we see:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. [underline mine]

Scripture strictly prohibits occult practice and promises God's oppressive force against those who even dabble in it. This command can also be found in Exodus 22:18; and in Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27. This directive is maintained in the New Testament as well. In Acts, every example of occultism—be it sorcery, divination, or spiritism—sets that person at odds with Christianity so that they either have to remain a non-Christian or forsake their witchcraft to convert to the true faith (Acts 8:9-14; 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 19:13-17). In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul characterizes "*sorcery*" as being self-evidently evil calling it "*deed[s] of the flesh*" in contrast to the "*fruit of the spirit.*" In Revelation 21:8, sorcery is shown to be a road to damnation; and in Revelation 22:14-15, sorcerers are described as being outside of the fellowship of God. Scripture clearly teaches that true belief permits no room for occultism.

Yet, if Christianity does not theologically permit occultism and if occultism is no respecter of such boundaries, what are we to make of the possibility of occultism in the church? To broach this answer, let us first consider *how* occultism may seep into the church. There are at least three subtle shifts in perspective which may not be "occult" in any formal sense, but they are anti-Christian tracks upon which occultism easily enters the otherwise guarded Christian life.

Occult Beliefs MAGICKAL THINKING

If you have ever interpreted unrelated events or things as having some supernormal connection, then you are guilty of magical thinking. Aleister Crowley, notorious forefather of the modern Satanist movement, explains: "**Magic is the Art and Science of causing changes to occur in conformity with will.**"⁵ Anton LaVey, founder of the Satanic Church in San Francisco, California, would second that motion by saying that magic is "**the change in situation or events in accordance with one's will,**" but he adds "**which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangable.**"⁶ The underlying belief that supports this willful manipulation of nature is the idea that everything is intrinsically related being ultimately reducible to a single principle, force, or element. Therefore, no two things would ever be unrelated. For the active magician, this would mean that otherwise unrelated spells, rituals, and activities might actually be effective for manipulating changes in the world. But for the passive magician, that is, the fortuneteller, this means that nature's interrelatedness can be interpreted to communicate any number of messages that would not naturally be evident.⁷

To be fair, classical Christianity could rightly view the whole of creation as being related through a common Creator. And in that sense, everything is connected. Nonetheless, these things are not necessarily related otherwise: A constellation shift does not mean that you are about to find true love. A black crow on your doorframe does not mean death is eminent; and walking under a ladder has nothing to do with your good or bad fortune.

Within Christendom, charms, spell casting, and divination are often translated into icons, prayer, and prophecy (respectively).

While I am no fan of the use of icons, I am willing to accept that the traditional Catholic use of icons is not occult, but it is problematic nonetheless. However, many people today employ icons in a magical way as if the article itself can ward against dangers or bring good luck. Likewise is true of prayer and prophecy. These elements do have their place in Christian belief and application, but the use of repetition of rote phrases with the hope of manipulating unseen forces by their intrinsic power is not prayer—that is spell casting. When unrelated events, in and of themselves, are interpreted subjectively as spelling out past, present, or future realities, that is not prophecy—that is divination.

Many more chilling examples of magical thinking have been committed under the guise of "throwing out a fleece." This gross misapplication is built upon Judges 6:36-40 wherein Gideon, in doubt, questions God's prior revelation by asking Him

for two additional, supernatural proofs of God's guaranteed success in battle—namely the dampening and drying of a fleece which he laid out in a field. This idea of "throwing out a fleece" was problematic back then, and it is errant now. First of all, this account is *descriptive* and not *prescriptive*. Gideon's practice does not translate directly into modern-day scenarios, just as any narrative (i.e.: descriptive) passage would not directly translate today. To apply this practice in modern-day terms, one must first identify what *Biblical* principle Gideon was applying. Doubt? Fear? Forgetfulness?

These could hardly be called "Biblical" principles. God had already promised victory (Judges 6:14). Second: Gideon had already shown fear and doubt by having questioned God earlier (Judges 6:19-21) and had operated in fear with his first instructions (Judges 6:27). Third: Considering the whole story of Gideon, the lesson seems to be more about God's power and patience amidst Gideon's ineptitude and weakness rather than about anything particularly laudable in Gideon. That Gideon threw out a fleece means Gideon doubted God's revealed word. For Christians today, to test God's revealed word by asking for unrelated signs or prophetic confirmations is an insult to God and His Word.

SELF-DEIFICATION

Another worldview element that easily transports occultism is self-deification and self-worship. These concepts are nothing new, for they date back to the lie of Satan in Genesis 3 and the humanism at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Simply stated, the occult thrives on man's preoccupation with self. For the occultist, this usually stems from the belief that mankind is innate deity. New-Age philosophy almost universally espouses either pantheism or panentheism, that is, the theological beliefs that

—Continued on page 8

“Occult” Continued from page 7

everything *is* divine or *is in* the divine (respectively).⁸ Norman Geisler and Yutaka Amano say that **“self-deification is the gospel of the New Age.”**⁹ Likewise, witchcraft largely operates under the basic premise that man and nature are together divine.¹⁰ As could be expected, self-worship naturally follows when each person is seen as divine. But even when man is not considered to be deity, self-worship still may result by being preoccupied with self, and thus, self-deification takes place. Satanism, for example, while it may or may not espouse pantheism or panentheism (depending on what form of Satanism is being considered) encourages its participants to be hedonistic, that is, self-indulgent. LaVey, of the Church of Satan, said, **“Life is the great indulgence—death, the great abstinence. Therefore, make the most of life—HERE AND NOW!”**¹¹

The appeal of self-worship is no mystery, since mankind is by nature selfish and self-centered (Isa. 53:6). Self-worship can crop up in the form of pantheism or panentheism, where one’s worship may be deliberate and religious. It may trickle out of humanism, where one exalts mankind as the highest achievement of nature. But, perhaps, the most common case is when man, seeking to fulfill his natural, and even, Godly desire for both pleasure and love, chooses the ungodly shortcut of self-worship rather than exercising the patience and faith to find ultimate pleasure and love in God-worship (Jer. 2:13).

What does self-worship look like? Whenever a person believes their comfort is more important than God’s glory—that is self-worship. Whenever a person believes that God wills their happiness over their holiness—that is self-worship.¹² Whenever a person acts as if God is their servant boy—that is self-worship. This error may come in the form of self-centered prayers. It may come in the form of “name-it and claim-it” theology. It may come through the “health and wealth” prosperity gospel. Whenever Christianity is seen as man-centered rather than God-centered, self-worship is looming. He is truly inverted who bows down to himself.

DEPERSONALIZED GOD

Along with magickal thinking and self-deification comes the depersonalization of God. The connection is simple: If man is deity and nature is magickally interconnected, then man has no need to appeal to a personal God. One can super normally manipulate and interpret nature without need for a personal communicative deity. In coping with reality and finding answers to man’s existential plight, the occultist looks deeper inside himself for an impersonal operative force rather than looking above for a deeply personal and caring God. One may still hold to some diminished sort of god, but this god is seen rather as a principle or a force—something depersonalized. This ultimate reality in the occult is variously interpreted as “the collective unconscious” (Carl Jung), “Mother Nature” (Wicca, Witchcraft, and Paganism), “the Universe” (New Age), “the life force” or “Chi” (eastern philosophy), “prana” (Hinduism), “bioenergy” (LaVey’s Satanism), “the right brain” (pop psychology) and “the force” (Star Wars). In every case, the place of God is filled with something impersonal.¹³ This depersonalization may not seem immediately dangerous. However, it is absolutely devastating to Christianity, even though its aroma can be found in many segments of Christendom.


First, if God is less than personal, then worship is absurd. One may adhere to the laws and forces of nature, but worship is an interpersonal act—a relationship of reverence that is a class beyond mere “adherence.” Second, if God is less than personal, then He cannot love. To love requires emotion and will, both of which are facets of personhood. If God has not loved the world, then the Gospel is destroyed by a cold unfeeling wave of disinterest, and God is all-the-less glorious. Third, if God is less than personal, then Christian living reduces to robotic duty. In essence, the relationship with God reduces to something mechanistic—where God is seen not as our beloved but as a vending machine to be manipulated for desired effects. In contrast, the life of the believer should be profoundly relational. But if God is impersonal, then man’s religion is but adherence to principles. In the Christian faith, it is a personal relationship that provides the context wherein all of Christianity finds its meaning. The Ten Commandments, for example, are given only after God reminds Israel of His active personal involvement in their escape from Egypt (Exodus 20:1-2). His relationship with them provides the context for the Law. The Psalms portray worship through prayer and song all directed toward God, even while inviting other people to join in worship. Ecclesiastes is, perhaps, even more explicit in elaborating how relating with God provides the only hope of meaning in life. God’s relationship with man provides the context for the poetic books. The prophets, such as Hosea, further demonstrate that God’s demand for obedience is a call to relational fidelity, albeit spiritual. God’s relationship with man provides the context for the Prophets. All of Scripture testifies to the relational nature of the faith, and thus, to the personality of God.

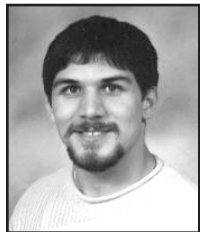
To depersonalize God is a supreme insult to Christianity. However, Christians do this all the time: whenever our prayers reduce to grocery lists, our tithing to an investment in the “ten-fold return,” or when we “put faith in faith” (i.e.: Word Faith movement) rather than putting faith in God. God is not a vending machine. Rather than deal with a personal God Who is liable to have a will of His own and is likely to disagree with us, we prefer to treat Him like a controllable machine. To depersonalize God is one way to put God in a box. He might be easier to control and understand that way, but He can hardly be called God.

The aforementioned beliefs of magickal thinking, self-deification, and a depersonalized view of God—are just a representative handful of beliefs that can bridge between occultism and Christianity. These do not necessarily mean that a Christian guilty of these things is involved in the occult. Much less do they suggest anything about losing salvation. Nonetheless, these are dangerous and schismatic beliefs that inevitably undermine the quality of one’s Christian faith even as they threaten to disqualify, incapacitate, or otherwise ruin his or her ability as a Christian minister. Moreover, these beliefs make specifically occult belief and practice even easier.

Conclusion

My friend who had struggled with the occult has found out firsthand just how subtle and attractive occultism can be. Moreover, like many other believers who have dabbled in the occult, that struggle may continue for many years. To effectively fortify ourselves against the influence of occultism, Christians need to recognize occult thinking such as the examples mentioned here. But sometimes, the mode of thinking comes only after we are

first introduced to the practices. For that reason, look in the coming *MCOI Journal* issue for Part Two of this article dealing with occult practices in the church. Some of this information may surprise you, but hopefully, it will do more than that by inspiring you to heighten your discernment and strengthen your resolve as a Biblical Christian. 



John Ferrer is a student at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, NC where he is studying for his M.Div. in apologetics. He is also an associate pastor at North Rock Hill Church. John has written several articles for *MCOI Journal*.

ENDNOTES

1. Christendom, because it is the socio-cultural manifestation of Christianity in a particular era, may represent any number of schismatic and otherwise problematic elements which culture and society permit though Biblical mandate does not. For example, can a Christian practice homosexuality? According to Biblical Christianity, they could only do so hypocritically and at their own peril (Rom. 1:26-32; 1 Tim. 1:10-11; Jude 1:7; 1 Cor. 6:9). But pockets can be found within Christendom which see no conflict between Christian faith and homosexual practice.
2. I owe this simple observation to Dr. Richard Howe, formerly of Southern Evangelical Seminary and currently a writer for Christian Research Institute.
3. See also, Marcia Montenegro, "Occult" *Christian Answers for the New Age* [Web site] (Arlington, VA: Christian Answers for the New Age, January 26, 2003) http://cana.userworld.com/cana_occult.html accessed January 15, 2005.
4. Much occultism creeps in under the cloak of what anthropologists and philosophers term "folk religion," wherein the normative and otherwise classical standards of a given religion are adapted by laity to suit the personal, cultural, and otherwise subjective elements of that territory. Catholic Christianity in some South American cultures, for example, is syncretized with native religions so that icons become charms and idols, while pagan festivals such as the Day of the Dead are openly celebrated within Christendom. Lest we scoff, the North American would do well to consider just what place Halloween serves in Christian faith and practice. For more on folk religion see Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 37-38.
5. Quoted in Amber K. *True Magick: A Beginner's Guide* [9th printing] (St. Paul, MN: Lewellyn Publications, 1999), 4. For a short biography of Crowley's life, see his respective chapter in Colin Wilson, *The Occult: A History* (New York: Vintage, 1973).
6. Anton S. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon, 1969), 110.
7. This nomenclature of "active" and "passive" magician is not standard (as far as I know) and is used here as a convenient distinction between the person who, because of their magickal thinking, physically practices magick (sorcery) versus the person who is merely interpreting things according to their magickal thinking (divination)
8. See J. Yutaka Amano and Norman Geisler, *The Infiltration of the New Age* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), 15-29, 51-62 and for a critique of both pantheism and panentheism see Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 576-83.
9. Amano and Geisler, 51.
10. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and other Pagans in America Today*, rev. and exp. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), ix, 24-38, 166-67, 173, 202. referenced in Craig S. Hawkins, *Witchcraft: Exploring the World of Wicca* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 34.
11. LaVey, 33.
12. Happiness is not to be mistaken for joy. Happiness, as used here, refers to temporal pleasure rather than the sublime peacefulness of joy that is found only in a holy relationship with God (Isa. 61:7; Matt. 25:21).
13. Richard G. Howe, "A Christian Perspective on the Occult" [Teaching Outline] (Unpublished, 2005).

Upcoming Events

July 24-29

UNDERGROUND SUMMIT

**Rally on Sunday 24 from 5:00 - 9:00 PM at:
Laurelton Park Baptist Church
1595 Rt. 88
Brick, NJ**

Sessions will be from 6:30 - 9:30

July 25-30 at:

**Ardena Baptist Church
593 Adelpia Rd.
Howell, NJ**

For more info call:

**Tom Detamore @ (732) 845-1765
or**

Mike Stanislawski @ (732) 892-7518

August 14

TOPIC TO BE ANNOUNCED

8:30, 9:45 & 11:10 AM

**Parkview Community Church
764 St. Charles Rd]**

Glen Ellyn, IL

Phone: (630) 469-4306

There Are Still Dates Available!

MCOI is currently taking requests for the fall and winter speaking schedule. If you would like to have Don Veinot visit your church please contact us for details and to make arrangements. Whether it's for one day or several nights, Don and his staff have a variety of topics to choose from all of which are relevant to the Church today.



THE EMERGANT CHURCH: Emerging From What?

By Peter Simpson

What should the relationship be between the church and culture? How should the constancy of the church adapt to the fluidity of culture? The church must find some way to communicate God's message within the cultural contexts in which it finds itself. These concerns provide impetus for thought-provoking conversation in today's church. The emergent church claims many changes need to be made to the modern church's perspective and approach if the church is to have a meaningful impact on the emerging culture. How do these suggested changes help the solution? And which of these changes could bring further problems?

Our brothers and sisters in the emergent church are to be admired for their desire to live out Jesus' example of love and acceptance. But I am troubled by the point of view some have of truth, Scripture, and salvation. It seems that in attempting to reach a postmodern culture they have adopted too much of the postmodern perspective.

In the ensuing pages, I will take a brief look at the emerging culture and then give an evaluation of the emergent church's perspective of postmodernism, truth, Scripture, and salvation. Please keep in mind that, just as in any diverse group, the emergent church has advocates with differing points of view. I have attempted to represent the views of a few of them. However, I have also placed a heavy emphasis on the ideas of Brian McLaren, since his writings seem to have great influence among the rest.

The Emergent Church's Perspective of the Emerging Culture

... an emerging and developing worldview and culture pursuing what is beyond modernity. It holds there is no single universal worldview. Therefore, truth is not absolute and many of the qualities embraced by modernism no longer hold the value or influence they once did.¹

William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland delineate it as:

... a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self and other notions.²

It is important to note that none of the writer's for the emergent church whose materials I read claim to hold this particular form of postmodern philosophy. But this is the situation in which the emergent church finds itself.

The postmodern approach to learning differs from a modern, linear, logical method. Experience, instead of knowledge, becomes the basis for truth. Leonard Sweet expresses the dis-

similarity this way, "People today are starved not for doctrines but for images and relationships and stories."³ The differences between the two mindsets can be seen in the following sequences of learning: modern=facts influence belief which influences behavior; and postmodern=experience influences behavior which influences belief. This paradigm shift is most vividly seen in the change from spectator/television to interactive participant/internet.⁴

In stark contrast to modernism, the postmodern world readily accepts spirituality and the existence of God, but unfortunately its perspective is often unbiblical and indiscriminately syncretic. While this may permit conversations that would not be possible with, say, an Atheist, there tends to be the additional barrier of an overarching distrust of organized religion.

The Emergent Church's Response to the Emerging Culture

First and foremost the emergent church is concerned about presenting genuine Christianity in a way the postmodern culture understands. They see their task like that of any culturally-sensitive missionary who endeavors to translate and embody God's Word in another community.

In an effort to restore trust, the church's main apologetic is love and authenticity. Dan Kimball says, "We need to realize that our primary form of evangelism will be the church's [sic] simply being what the church should be." They desire to be churches that are "known for their love, for the way they pray, for how they share Jesus, instead of being known merely for a style of preaching, music, artwork, or candles."⁵

Love and authenticity are the means through which they live out their purpose: to be missional, that is, to exist to serve, to infuse their communities with the good news of God's kingdom.

If you were to attend an emergent church "gathering" (a term they prefer instead of "service") you might first notice candle light and the subtle aroma of incense. As you enter the main room, you may find that the chairs or pews are arranged in a circle. Perhaps there is a stained-glass depiction of Jesus' baptism projected on a screen, and some people are praying in the corner. And whether you take this to be common or strange, the experiential elements are not to be taken as an end in themselves. They are to aid each person to genuinely worship and encounter God.

Before looking at the "doctrinal" side of things, there is an additional objective of the emergent church that is worth mentioning. They are convinced that the church should be a creator of culture. Erwin McManus, pastor of Mosaic in Los Angeles, says,

Our intention is not simply to relate to culture but to create culture ... Without realizing it we have slipped into the view that the world creates culture and that the church reacts to it...But is it possible that the church was intended to be the cultural epicenter from which a new community emerges, astonishing and transforming cultures through the power of forgiveness, freedom, and creativity?⁶

What a tremendous vision he gives us: Christians who bring beauty to their communities while reflecting the creativity of God in whose image they were made, and remade!

Pertinent Aspects of the Emergent Churches' Philosophy and Doctrine – Are They *In* Postmodernism But Not *Of* It?

I suspect that up to this point you find little in the emergent church's response with which you disagree. So now let us consider their perspective on the more fundamental issues of postmodernism, truth, Scripture, and salvation. Please remember that the positions I am about to describe represent only the views of a few key leaders. Many of those whom I read said little that disagreed with my conservative, evangelical, mostly-modern conceptions. That said, much of what follows can be attributed to Brian McLaren. And although I will disagree with this brother on many points, it is not my intent to make McLaren the bad guy. He is grappling with some complex ideas in crucial areas of Christian faith and practice at what very well may be a pivotal point in history. I am grateful for his courage and humility; they have been an inspiration to me.

There is a thread which unifies the emergent church's perspective in each section that follows. It is that of epistemological [epistemology is the study of knowledge and how we justify that and what we know] humility and, perhaps, even uncertainty. (I say *perhaps* because I suspect that most of the emergent church authors are much more certain than they admit.) Generally speaking, their uncertainty seems to have two motivations. First, it is a response to the perceived arrogance and indifference of the modern church. And second, it is part and parcel of being affected by the unhealthy skepticism of postmodern thought.

Postmodern Philosophy

Since there are many different understandings of what postmodernism is, McLaren takes special care to define his version as **"emerging postmodernism."** The addition of *emerging* emphasizes McLaren's ideas concerning the current transition from modernism. He purports the common assumption that postmodernism is the opposite of modernism (i.e. irrational as opposed to rational,) is not accurate. Postmodernism should not be thought of as "antimodernity" but as moving beyond modernism. Instead of discarding rationality, it unites it with imagination and faith. The long, arduous debate between the two is declared a stalemate and more important issues can be addressed. Postmodernism does not reject the progress and optimism that modernism promised; but it is both optimistic and pessimistic about progress. McLaren believes this change of paradigm is an excellent opportunity for Christians to influence an era.⁷

McLaren distinguishes his version of postmodernism from two others. It is not the neo-nihilistic and relativistic postmodernism that denies the existence of truth. Nor is it a second ver-

sion (which he denominates "adolescent postmodernism") which adds consumerism and political correctness to the relativist pluralism of the first version.⁸

Emergent postmodernism, then, is not analogous with that of Derrida, Lyotard and others. Rather than calling it a philosophy, McLaren prefers to call it a **"formative spirit and mentality."**⁹ It sees relativist pluralism—the idea that all opinions are valid—as a type of chemotherapy (a radical treatment to stop the growth of "modern reductionistic rationalism"). Afterward, the resulting "emergent thinking" will be better than both rationalism and relativist pluralism. Additionally, emerging postmodernism hopes to provide a better alternative to consumerism, thus improving all life on the planet. It pays special attention to marginalized minority groups by striving to break down the many cultural barriers that have hindered their progress and kept their voices from being heard. However, emergent postmodernism does not see this political correctness as an end in itself but seeks to move beyond it.¹⁰

Truth and Knowledge

Part of emergent postmodernism's move beyond modernism includes a move away from epistemological certainty, a notion that is resisted by postmodernists. While this may strike terror in those of us with a modernist bent, McLaren sees this as an excellent opportunity for a return to faith and spirituality.

McLaren clearly states that he does not adhere to absolute relativism. He does not maintain that truth is a construct of language; but he does hold that while absolutes do exist they cannot be proclaimed unequivocally. This uncertainty is demonstrated in our incomplete knowledge of a transcendent God. The recognition of this is part of what he calls a generous orthodoxy. **"A generous orthodoxy ... is humble; it doesn't claim too much; it admits that it walks with a limp."**¹¹ But this is okay; uncertainty is not to be feared. Since absolute certainty is unattainable and we are only capable of relative certainty; therefore, to some degree, we all live by faith.¹² Here McLaren sees one of the benefits of postmodernism. The secularism of the Enlightenment separated reason and religion; postmodernism will let religion back into the conversation. It brings dignity back to spirituality.¹³

Another facet of the emergent church's understanding of truth is in response to modernism's tendency to objectify or impersonalize truth. Instead, as Erwin McManus sees it, truth is personal, something that goes beyond both modern and postmodern conceptions.

Truth is neither relative nor objective. The biblical view is that truth is personal, relational, and subjective. The critical difference, of course, is that we are not the subject. God is. Jesus stated emphatically that he is the truth ... He is the source of all truth. Our experience of an objective reality is the result of the very character and nature of God.¹⁴

McLaren also appreciates this personal aspect of truth.

The kind of knowing that applies to God is not simply a matter of objective neutrality plus proper tools of research, plus the right text to be researched, plus due diligence. Knowledge of God involves being transformed into the kind of person—humble, inquisitive, teachable, obedient, practiced—who is capable of knowing the holy.¹⁵

Continued on page 12

“Church” Continued from page 11 seems to expose the real motivation for many of his comments about truth and knowledge. The kind of knowledge characterized by objective, sterile research cannot replace a vibrant relationship with God.

RESPONSE - TRUTH

What concerns should we have about the concept of knowledge that the emergent church espouses? Is there a problem with a preference for relational knowledge over detached knowledge? There does not seem to be, so long as the personal character of that knowledge is not wholly founded on the subjective.

What is more troubling is the emergent church’s uncertainty. G.K. Chesterton succinctly diagnoses this epistemological ailment:

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition ... [and] settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed.¹⁶

In this same way, McLaren believes he is doing religion a favor by declaring a stalemate between rationality and imagination and faith. But instead of raising imagination and faith to their place of proper respect, he demotes rationality with uncertainty.

Not all proponents of the emergent church make this claim of uncertainty; and many have found the emerging culture is open to truth. Kimball notes:

I am finding that emerging generations really aren’t opposed to truth and biblical morals. When people sense that you aren’t just dogmatically opinionated due to blind faith and that you aren’t just attacking other people’s beliefs out of fear, they are remarkably open to intelligent and loving discussion about choice and truth. When Jesus and his teaching are offered as solid truth in the midst of a confusing and shifting world, people actually respond positively and with great relief.¹⁷

Scriptures

With all that said about truth, what is the emergent church saying about the Scriptures? Everyone that I read believes that God’s Word is the truth. McLaren reflects on a lifetime of studying the Bible and says that, “[his] regard for the Bible is higher than ever.”¹⁸ Of course, *regard* can mean many things.

Regard does not mean treating the Bible like a textbook or encyclopedia. According to McLaren, the modern church often approaches the Bible scientifically by seeking to dissect propositions from it. The modern church has often confused knowledge of the Bible with knowledge of God, as it suffers from the delusion that information can save and transform.¹⁹

McLaren cautions us not to regard our interpretations too highly. He points out occasions in church history when Christians have used their interpretations of Scripture to sanction cruelty and slavery. So our interpretations cannot be infallible. If our interpretations are fallible, then the authority must reside elsewhere. The real meaning of the text must be God’s intended meaning; hence, the ultimate authority resides in God. Perhaps the main issue is the authority of God, not the authority of the text, with God’s will, intent, desire, wisdom, and kingdom being of greater importance.

McLaren also disapproves of a liberal interpretation which strips the Bible of what is unwanted and conforms it to a contemporary worldview. The hermeneutic he promotes sees the Bible’s value to teach and inspire us through the old stories and experiences of wise people. Its different cultural perspectives help us to distinguish flaws in our contemporary culture.

But he admits the Bible does leave us with a few problems. Is the biblical account of Creation literal? Are we to continue to promote male-dominated social and ecclesiastical structures? **“Does the Bible recommend sanctions against homosexuals, and if so, what sanctions and why?”** Do we have to believe the entire Bible to avoid Hell, or are there parts which are optional?²⁰

Furthermore, the Bible tells our family story. It communicates identity and mission. Giving answers is not the point. It should be seen as narrative, a multi-faceted, multi-versioned, multi-themed story about the person of Jesus Christ. Great value is found in the growth which comes through struggling and interacting with it. You could compare it with a math textbook (ironically) which has the answers in the back. While the mastery of the content is important, it is not the end. The goal is the acquisition of skills for use in real-world applications.²¹

RESPONSE - SCRIPTURES

The fact that our interpretations can be fallible does not imply that they must be incorrect. Certainly, we need to realize that we can be wrong and should temper our claims with humility and love. However, McLaren’s position seems to assume that God does not give us the ability to get at his intended meaning. Is this not a part of what Paul means by **“accurately handling the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB)?

McLaren admits there are certain parts of the Bible which in some situations cause us problems. Now wait a minute! This sounds suspiciously like what he accused the liberals of doing. Is it fair to single out evolution, feminism, homosexuality, and deconstruction as valid areas for questioning? Or is he just doing this to appease probable objections? Instead of conforming to contemporary culture, he seems to be conforming to the interpretive community. At one point he says: **“Where we can’t reconcile contemporary experience and the Bible, we can honestly admit that we just don’t know, having confidence that we will be led in time to better understanding.”**²² Again! I thought that the Bible was valuable for getting an outside perspective on our contemporary experience. Are we to claim ambiguity until our culture changes and the conflict with biblical teaching goes away? I do not see how this does not entail the liberal approach to which he objects?

Before proceeding to the next section I must make one more observation. At many times in his writing, McLaren (and others) attribute to modernism the tendency to neatly classify things as *either-or*. In contrast, he prefers the more inclusive postmodern tendency of *both-and*. Yet, in McLaren’s presentation of the Gospel as story in *The Church in Emerging Cultures: 5 perspectives*, he wants to focus on the story and not the propositional truth contained therein. Why cannot this be an instance of *both-and*?

Salvation

The emerging culture tends to have a pluralistic view of salvation and cannot fathom how (in the Christian perspective) “good,” spiritual people—Gandhi, the Dali Lama and oth-

ers—would not go to Heaven. How does the emerging church respond?

McLaren claims the Gospel of the modern church is too exclusive and individualistic and, hence, does not accurately reflect Jesus' teaching. **"The way conservative Christians talk about 'personal salvation' seems to me to try to persuade by exclusion."** He claims Jesus' message to the Jews was that their **"view of salvation is entirely too narrow ... nationalistic. God's vision is global ... to all nations."** Hence, there is something lacking in the modern emphasis on the salvation of individuals. The emphasis should not be on who is right and who is wrong, but on a willingness to share what we have found and experienced with others who are interested.²³

He also rejects a universal "everyone's in" salvation. While the exclusive view can cause division, prejudice, and war, the universal view can lead to an apathetic response to injustice and evil. But the Good News of the Kingdom is for everyone. It is a continuation of God's original covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12) **"I will bless you ... and through you, all nations will be blessed."** Everyone is blessed. McLaren qualifies this: **"I am not saying it brings equal benefits to both. Nor am I saying that all Christians avail themselves equally of the benefits"** [italics his]. But when Christians live loving and generous lives, their neighbors and communities benefit.²⁴

But who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell? God knows the answer. McLaren would rather emphasize the task of living out God's will on earth.²⁵

RESPONSE - SALVATION

I commend McLaren for his desire that none should be lost. Nevertheless, the New Testament seems to be quite clear about the responsibility of the individual before God within the greater community. And while each Christian should be a blessing to his neighbor during this life, there is still a great difference between being warmed and filled and being adopted as God's child.

His desire to not drive anyone away from Jesus is admirable. However, we cannot forget that Jesus will at times be a stumbling block, an offense, no matter how He is truthfully presented.

Conclusion


In concluding our one-sided conversation, Erwin McManus' comments serve us well:

We must never allow ourselves to be deluded by our own sense of accuracy or rightness. Whatever the culture, era, or generation, it is essential that we examine our practices, rituals, dogmas, and traditions and measure them against God's intent as communicated through the Scriptures.²⁶

This is an intent I believe we can know.

We must remember that God has given us a mind and a heart. And we are to use them equally. In doing so, we can emphasize the value of story and be opposed to the dehumanizing aspects of modernism without having to resort to postmodernism.²⁷

I do think that an adjustment in our apologetic strategy is in order. The apologetic approach to people of a modern perspective focuses on helping them past intellectual barriers. It seems that in many cases the barriers the people of the emerging culture face are the very Christians themselves—you and I perhaps. Therefore, we must be careful that we are not the offense. Should Christ be the offense, then so be it. This is expected. But we

should not deceive ourselves into thinking that aspects of our lives never hinder unnecessarily. 



Peter Simpson invests his life in the youth of Siguatepeque, Honduras where he and his wife, Maileen, have been serving as missionaries with World Reach, Inc since 1996. In developing leaders among the Hondurans, he seeks to affect a change in thinking that is broad in scope and Christian in quality.

ENDNOTES:

¹Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 58.

²J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003) 145.

³Leonard Sweet, Andy Crouch, et al., *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, Leonard Sweet ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 35.

⁴Dan Kimball, 186-187.

⁵Dan Kimball, 205, 15, 17.

⁶Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 240, 246.

⁷Brian McLaren, "Why I Still Use the Word Postmodern," Emergent Village [http://www.emergentvillage.com/index.cfm?PAGE_ID=797&EXPAND=\(accesses May 27, 2004\)](http://www.emergentvillage.com/index.cfm?PAGE_ID=797&EXPAND=(accesses May 27, 2004)).

⁸Brian McLaren, "The Three Postmodernisms: A short explanation," Brian McLaren [http://www.anewkindofchristian.com/archives/000071.html \(accessed May 27, 2004\)](http://www.anewkindofchristian.com/archives/000071.html (accessed May 27, 2004)).

⁹The ideas of philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Ludwig Wittgenstein are the backbone of postmodern philosophy. Basically (and certainly overly simplified) they hold that meaning, knowledge, and truth reside in and hence find their derivation in language. This has at least two consequences. First, meaning, knowledge and truth do not have an objective basis that transcends language and culture. And second, the definitions that each culture/sub-culture has for these three are legitimate, i.e., there is no overarching, objective truth.

¹⁰"The Three Postmodernisms" 2004

¹¹Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 155.

¹²Brian McLaren, *Finding Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 54.

¹³Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 191, 194.

¹⁴Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, quoting Erwin McManus on p.256.

¹⁵Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, quoting Brian McLaren on p.158.

¹⁶Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, quoting G.K. Chesterton on p.135.

¹⁷Dan Kimball, 76.

¹⁸Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 159.

¹⁹Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 249-254.

²⁰Brian McLaren, *Finding Faith*, 242-243.

²¹Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) 52-53.

²²Brian McLaren, *Finding Faith*, 243.

²³Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 124-131, 62.

²⁴Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 109-111.

²⁵Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 112-114.

²⁶Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 244.

²⁷J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, 152.

“News” Continued from page 5

“just desserts.” If we all got what we deserve, we all would be dead (Romans 6:23). ☺ The Bible makes it clear that God is on our side, that He loves us and will not desert us in times of trouble (Psalm 37:39). In fact, our sufferings here lead to our glory later.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are God’s children, then we are heirs—indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we might share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:15-18, NIV)

In our humanity, we cannot understand the “whys” of everything that happens to us; but *as believers*, we can trust the all powerful God Who loves us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38, NIV)

That confidence in the fact of the love of God, friends, is what separates you from the cultist at your door. 🗨️

**Awake!* and *THE WATCHTOWER* magazines are the bimonthly publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses).

ENDNOTES

¹Lisa Black, “Motives Remain a Mystery” *Chicago Tribune*, March 29, 2005, Metro Section p1.

²Ibid., p4.

³Charles Montaldo, “Profile of Andrea Yates”, *Crime/Punishment*, <http://crime.about.com/od/current/p/andreayates.htm> (accessed 06/08/05).

⁴Review by Carol Fitzgerald of Suzanne O’Malley’s *ARE YOU THERE ALONE? The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates*, <http://aolsvc.bookreporter.aol.com/reviews/0743244850.asp> (accessed 06/08/05).

⁵http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ridge/8616/Yates_Spiritual_Adviser.html (accessed 06/08/05).

⁶Charles Montaldo, “Profile of Andrea Yates ...”.

⁷Amy Goldstein, Sue Anne Pressley and Hanna Rosin, “Killer Wrote of Fear, Hopelessness” *Washington Post*, July 31, 1999, pA01.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Kyle B. Olson, “Aum Shinrikyo, Once and Future Threat?” *Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal* <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol5no4/olson.htm> (accessed 06/08/05).

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²“Youths Who Put God First” *Awake!*, May 22, 1994, Vol. 75 No. 10; (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., Brooklyn, NY), p2.

¹³“He Remembered His Creator in the Days of His Youth” *Awake!*, May 22, 1994, Vol. 75 No. 10; (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., Brooklyn, NY), p5.

¹⁴Lynn Vincent, “On probation with God” *WORLD*, March 26, 2005, Vol. 20, No. 12, , p20.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶2 Corinthians 11:23-27, NASB.

¹⁷Job 12:6, NASB.

Whats with the Holes?

Have you noticed the holes on the Cover? We have been told by some recipients that they like to keep their copies of the **MCOI JOURNAL** in three-ring binders. In previous layouts, the punches would knock out some type. We have changed the margins starting with this issue to accomodate those of you who wish to keep your copies safe in this way.
Happy Punching!

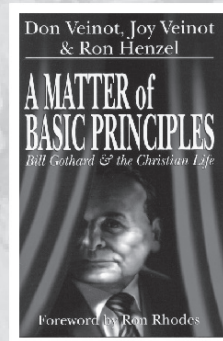
“A Matter of Basic Principles deserves a hearing . . . Those who have experienced abusive spiritual authority in any context will be more inclined to find this book refreshing for its thoroughness.”

—Christianity Today

A MATTER of BASIC PRINCIPLES

Bill Gothard & the Christian Life

Don Veinot, Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel



“A must read for all thinking believers who wish to protect their churches..”

—Dr. Jay Adams
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, PA

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!
Call, Write or visit our web site.
www.midwestoutreach.org

CROWDED OUT?

A Bible Study Examining the Two-Class System of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Compiled by Donna L. McGehee

Many are aware that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) teaches a two-class system: One is the 144,000 who will be in heaven, and the other is the "Great Crowd" who will never see heaven but hope to live forever on earth. What can we discover about this by asking questions from the Scriptures themselves? To be as fair as possible, we will do this using the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation Bible.

First of all: WHERE IS GOD'S THRONE?

Matt. 5:34	"However, I say to YOU: Do not swear at all, neither by <u>heaven</u> , because <u>it is God's throne</u> ; ..."
Matt. 23:22	"and he that swears by <u>heaven</u> is swearing by <u>the throne of God</u> and by him that is sitting on it."
Acts 7:49	"The <u>heaven is my throne</u> , and the earth is my footstool. What sort of house will YOU build for me? <u>Jehovah says</u>"

An Interesting Side Note:

There has been an increase of 150 anointed. On p.16 of the 01/01/96 Watchtower, the number of Memorial Partakers (anointed) for 1995 is listed as 8,645. On p.21 of the 01/01/98 Watchtower, the number of partakers for 1997 is listed as 8,795. (This increase is contrary, of course, to the WTBS claim on p.199 of their 1969 book Then is Finished the Mystery of God that "Ever since the end of the first world war on November 11, 1918, there has been a remnant of these Kingdom heirs on earth. In recent years their number has been dwindling ...") However, we read that there now are 144,150 anointed!

WHAT GROUPS OF BEINGS AND WHAT THINGS ARE BEFORE (Gr.=enopion) THE THRONE OF GOD (IN HEAVEN)?

Rev. 1:4	" <u>seven spirits</u> that are before (<i>enopion</i>) his [God's] throne,"
Rev. 4:5	" <u>seven lamps of fire</u> burning before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne [of God],"
Rev. 4:6	"And before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne [of God] there is, as it were, a <u>glassy sea like crystal</u> ."
Rev. 4:10	"the <u>twenty-four elders</u> fall down before (<i>enopion</i>) the One seated upon the throne..., and they cast their <u>crowns</u> before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne,"
Rev. 7:9	"a <u>great crowd</u> , ... standing before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne and before (<i>enopion</i>) the Lamb"
Rev. 7:11	"And <u>all the angels</u> were standing around the throne and <u>the elders</u> and <u>the four living creatures</u> , and they fell upon their faces before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne and worshiped God,"
Rev. 7:15	"That is why they [<u>the great crowd</u>] are before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne of God; and they are rendering him sacred service"
Rev. 8:3	"And another angel arrived and stood at the altar, having ... incense ... to offer ... with the prayers of all the holy ones upon <u>the golden altar</u> that was before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne."
Rev. 9:13	"And I heard one voice out of the horns of <u>the golden altar</u> that is before (<i>enopion</i>) God."
Rev. 11:16	"And <u>the twenty-four elders</u> who were seated before (<i>enopion</i>) God"
Rev. 14:3	"And they [<u>the 144,000</u>] are singing as if a new song before (<i>enopion</i>) the throne and before (<i>enopion</i>) the four living creatures and the elders;"

Clearly, when considered in context, there is little reason to doubt that the "great crowd" is "before the throne of God" (in heaven) in the same manner as the seven spirits, the seven lamps of fire, the glassy sea like crystal, the crowns of the 24 elders, the angels, the elders themselves, the four living creatures, the golden altar, and the 144,000.

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.


Journal

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
P.O. Box 455
Lombard, IL 60148-0455

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LOMBARD, IL
PERMIT NO. 1

Address Service Requested.

Do All Paths Lead To God?



UNDERGROUND

its coming. . .

In This Issue!

Dangerous Cults in the NewsPage 1
By L.L.(Don) and Joy A.Veinot

Occultism in the ChurchPage 6
By John Ferrer

Emerging From What?Page 10
By Peter Simpson

Crowded OutPage 15
By Donna L. McGehee

Midwest
Christian
Outreach
Inc.