

# The Discerner

"Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"  
1 John 4:6

The Voice of the Religion Analysis Service

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**A  
NON-DENOMINATIONAL  
QUARTERLY EXPOSING UNBIBLICAL  
TEACHING & MOVEMENTS**

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## OFFICE NOTES

1. Our thanks to those who have given extra contributions beyond the subscription price in the last few months. December's giving was especially encouraging.
2. If you wish to speak to a "live" voice, please call Shawn Ruth, our office manager, Wednesdays - Fridays, 9AM to 2PM.
3. We welcome your feedback on articles in The Discerner. Please feel free to make comments, also suggestions for future issues.
4. RAS would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Mr. Ed Sparr of the Victory Baptist Church of Maple Grove, MN for his many hours, effort, and expertise in providing without charge two computers for this ministry. God bless you, Brother Ed!

## DEAR READER

Anyone confronting the cults and unbiblical movements will soon notice the dearth of humility among cultist leaders and adherents. Not only are these leaders convinced that they alone possess the final and ultimate revelation from God, but they often openly reject and arrogantly disdain the convictions and belief systems of others, notably those of Evangelical Christians.

Truth and humility go hand in hand. The very entrance to biblical and true wisdom is “humility and the fear of the Lord”. We enter the Christian life through repentance, that is, by our sincere admission of moral unworthiness and total inability to please God. Our submission to God through heart belief in Christ becomes a core belief not only for the entrance into salvation but also for the continuance in the Christian life. Our whole Christian life should be permeated by the grace of humility. Basilea Schlink, a sister with the Sisters of Mary (Marienschwestern, a Protestant humanitarian organization in Germany), puts it so poignantly: “The Christian life is a life of repentance” or in German: “Das christliche Leben ist ein Leben in der Busse”.

Even false teachers and cultists are impressed by and corrected through a humble witness. Yes, we must confront them with biblical truth, but we should do this in “meekness” (1. Peter 3:15) and “in humility correcting those who are in opposition (2. Timothy 2:25).

God grant us the grace of humility in our life and witness.

Laurence J. Sutherland

# **A PRIMER ON CLASSIC DISPENSATIONALISM PART VI: SUMMARY, CONSEQUENCES, AND ERRANT FORMS**

*By Ronald E. McRoberts, PhD*

## **Introduction**

This sixth article concludes the series on classic dispensationalism (McRoberts 2004-2005) with three sections: (1) a summary of the progressive nature of dispensationalism, (2) a few examples of the logical consequences of being a dispensationalist, and (3) a brief discussion of two errant forms of dispensationalism: ultra- or hyper-dispensationalism and progressive dispensationalism.

## **Summary of the Progressive Nature of Classic Dispensationalism**

One characteristic of classical dispensationalists is that they make clear distinctions among dispensations, arguing that because God's stewardship relationships change from dispensation to dispensation, careful analysis is necessary to determine if truth revealed in a previous dispensation is applicable in succeeding dispensations. Such analyses are entirely appropriate. However, classical dispensationalists have not given comparable attention to the progressive nature of dispensations; i.e., they have not analyzed how concepts continue and develop progressively through dispensations. Ryrie (1995) acknowledges the issue, referring to it as the matter of "carryovers," but he devotes only one page to its discussion. The use of the term "progressive" to describe the development of these concepts should not be construed as support for an errant form of dispensationalism known as progressive dispensationalism. In this series, the purpose for commenting on sacrifice, covenants, the faith that is counted as righteousness, and the methods God uses to foster obedience has been to draw attention to this issue of progressive development.

**Sacrifice.** The concept of a blood sacrifice is based on two underlying principles: first, God regarded the life of an animal to

be in the blood (Gen. 9:4), and second, a blood sacrifice was necessary for the remission of sin (Lev. 17:11). God initiated the practice when He provided the skins of animals to cover Adam and Eve. The practice continued in the dispensation of Conscience as evidenced by Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flock, in the dispensation of Human Government as evidenced by Noah's offering of clean animals upon disembarking from the ark, and in the dispensation of Patriarchal Rule as evidenced by Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac and God's provision of a substitutionary ram. In the dispensation of Mosaic Law, God made the practice a covenant obligation and prescribed the materials, procedures, and times for the sacrifices. The connection between the requirement that the sin offering be without blemish (Deut. 17:1, Ezek. 43:21-25) and Messiah's characterization as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) cannot be missed. Following Messiah's sacrifice, the physical practice of the blood sacrifice ended. Although blood is no longer shed sacrificially following Messiah's sacrifice, the life, which is represented by the blood, is still to be offered as per Paul's instructions to believers in the dispensation of Grace "to present their bodies, a living sacrifice, ..., a spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 1:12). Although sufficient revelation is given in the dispensation of Grace to understand the effects of Messiah's ultimate blood sacrifice, a full appreciation of its necessity requires an examination of the progressive dispensational development of the concept of blood sacrifice.

**Covenants.** Although eight or more Biblical covenants have been identified (Scofield 1988), the focus of this discussion is on the progressive development of the covenant God established with Abraham at the beginning of the dispensation of Patriarchal Rule. The covenant promises may be summarized in three categories: (1) personal promises that God would grant Abraham great blessings and make his name great; (2) national promises that God would make Abraham's descendants into a great nation, that this nation would have the land promised to Abraham as an everlasting possession, and that kings would come from Abraham; and (3) universal promises that the nations of the earth would be blessed through a descendant of Abraham. In the dispensation of Mosaic Law, the covenant promises to Abraham were more fully developed. In the Palestinian Covenant (Deut. 30:1-10), God promised to enable the spiritual conditions in Israel that would permit the nation to finally possess the promised land. In the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-16), God clarified the

promise that kings would come from Abraham by further promising that He would establish a descendant of David on David's throne and that this kingdom would be everlasting. Finally, in Jeremiah's New Covenant (Jer. 31:1-9), God clarified the time at which the covenant would be fulfilled, revealed that He would write His law on the hearts of His people as a means of spiritual enablement, and revealed that all men would know Him. Although Israel has intermittently occupied the promised land and had kings, the covenant promises have never been fully realized. Regardless of how one considers the relationships among the covenants announced by Messiah (Mt. 26:28), the covenant proclaimed by Paul (2 Cor. 3:6), the covenant discussed by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 9:15), and Jeremiah's New Covenant for the Church, the compelling conclusion is that Messiah's blood sacrifice enables both complete fulfillment of them and blessings to the Church. Also, based on application of the literal or normal hermeneutic, it is clear that neither the promises God made to Abraham nor the promises of Jeremiah's New Covenant have been completely fulfilled. The promises to Abraham require complete restoration to and occupation of the promised land and a physical descendant of David to sit on his throne in Jerusalem, while Jeremiah's New Covenant specifies that fulfillment will be subsequent to the Tribulation (Mt. 24:1-25:46; Rev. 4:1-18:24) and that in that time all men will know the Lord. Although complete fulfillment is yet future, Pentecost (1984) makes a strong argument for considering the redemptive blessings made available to all nations as a result of Messiah's sacrifice to be at least partial fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through one of his descendants.

The progressive nature of dispensations is exemplified in the manner in which the covenant promises God made to Abraham were more fully developed. A complete understanding of the position of the Church in the dispensation of Grace is impossible without understanding the progressive development of the Abrahamic covenant. First, the Church owes its existence to the same sacrificial act that enables fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Second, the redemptive blessings now available to the Gentiles are considered by at least some prominent dispensationalists to be partial fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to the nations. Third, a correct understanding of the relationship between Israel and the Church is impossible without understanding the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant as developed progressively in the Davidic Covenant

and Jeremiah's New Covenant. In the context of the Church, there are no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, but in the broader context of the covenants, there are crucial distinctions between Israel and the Church. Only national Israel, not the Church, has been promised a physical land as an everlasting possession and an everlasting political domain, i.e., a kingdom with a descendant of David on its throne.

**The things of faith that count as righteousness.** The object of faith is always God. In practice, the writer of Hebrews states that faith is "the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of *things* not seen." What are these *things*? At the end of the dispensation of Innocence God revealed only that a descendant of Adam would "bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15). Thus, the *things* of the faith that lead to righteousness in the dispensations of both Conscience and Human Government were simply that God would provide for man and eventually attain the victory over Satan. In the dispensation of Patriarchal Rule, the *things* of faith were clarified with the focus on the promises God made to Abraham, specifically that Abraham's descendants would become a nation with a land and kings and that nations would be blessed through Abraham. In the dispensation of Mosaic Law, the *things* were further clarified in three ways. First, the promises to Abraham became more specific with respect to the land and the kingdom; second, God would accept the blood sacrifices as obligated by the Mosaic Law in that dispensation; and third, God would eventually enable the repentance, conversion, and obedience necessary for complete fulfillment of the promises. Messiah's blood sacrifice at the end of the dispensation of Mosaic Law was the ultimate clarification of the *things* with the attendant understanding that the sacrifice was efficacious for the remission of sins for all peoples. Further, this sacrifice was the act that enables eventual complete fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel.

Righteousness in all dispensations results from faith that God's provision will be or has been sufficient. However, the specifics of those unseen *things* in which the righteous have hoped and placed their faith have changed progressively from a vague notion of an animal covering and a promise of victory to the very specific understanding of the blood sacrifice of Messiah.

**Fostering obedience.** Throughout the dispensations God has expected men to master sin and comply with His commandments. Fortunately, He has not abandoned man in this endeavor

but has progressively fostered fulfillment of the expectation. Following expulsion from the Garden, God provided conscience, human government, promises, and the Mosaic Law in successive dispensations as incentives for compliance. None of these provisions, however, has enabling power. Unger (1966) defines conscience as the exercise of judgment as to whether a proposed act conforms to a standard; i.e., it relates to the discernment of good and evil (Heb. 5:14). The purpose of human government is to protect human life and to provide a mechanism for punishment when established norms and bounds are violated. The covenant promises, despite their ultimate unconditional nature, require a spiritual condition that the nation Israel cannot achieve on its own. Finally, the purpose of the Mosaic Law, in a more explicit manner than conscience, is to identify sin. The primary moral aspects of these provisions are progressive and cumulative with even nine of the Ten Commandments repeated in subsequent dispensations.

In the dispensation of Grace, God provided the Holy Spirit as an indwelling, enabling power, and in the dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom, God will make three more enabling provisions. First, all men will know Him; second, He will write His laws on the hearts of His people, Israel; and third, Satan will be bound for the duration of the dispensation. Nevertheless, with all men knowing the Lord, with the Law written on the hearts of His people, with Messiah reigning on earth, and with Satan's influence removed, some will still sin. For these there will be no more excuses.

Over the dispensations God's provisions that contribute to the mastery of sin have been in the form of positive and negative incentives, the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and the total removal of the impeding power of Satan. With the exception of some specific aspects of the Mosaic Law, the provisions have been progressive and cumulative. For Gentile believers in the dispensation of Grace, God continues to provide conscience, human government, the promise of blessings via a descendant of Abraham, knowledge of His moral law, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. In the dispensation of Grace, an appropriate understanding of God's provision is enhanced by the knowledge of how He has progressively and cumulatively fostered obedience over the previous dispensations.

### **What difference does being a dispensationalist make?**

The title of a book and film series by Francis Schaeffer



(Schaeffer 1976) asks the question, “How should we then live?” The question may be posed in a dispensational context as how should being a dispensationalist affect decisions and a world view? Although a comprehensive answer is beyond the scope of this article, a few examples suffice to illustrate the issue.

Dispensationalists interpret Scripture in a dispensational context. First, they ask whether teaching from a previous dispensation carries over to future dispensations. As an example, believers in the dispensation of Grace no longer adhere to the strict dietary requirements of the dispensation of Law, partially as a result of God’s revelation to Peter that in the new dispensation all animals are now clean (Acts 10: 9-16). As another example, in the dispensation of Grace, blood sacrifices are no longer offered, because Messiah’s ultimate blood sacrifice has fulfilled the requirement; further, it was a once for all sacrifice (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27). Second, dispensationalists analyze the context of teaching and ask when and to whom it applies. For example, the portions of Matthew 25: 31-46 regarding feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick are often used to push the Church into a social ministry. However, close examination of this passage clearly indicates that it is in the context of teaching on the Tribulation and that the reference is to acts of kindness to the Jews (e.g., Ryrie, 1995, Note for Mt. 25:35). Although the Scriptures do not preclude acts of kindness to both believers and non-believers at any time, this passage cannot be understood as establishing a social mission for the Church. First, the reference population is the Jews during the Tribulation, not the unbelieving world at the present time, and second, most dispensationalists understand that the Church will have been removed via the Rapture before the Tribulation.

Dispensationalists take seriously God’s dispensational judgments and provisions. As an example, God ordered the relationship between men and women following Adam’s and Eve’s sin in the Garden (Gen. 1:16), and Paul confirms (Eph. 5: 22, 24) that this ordering has not changed. As a second example, God established human government following the flood to preserve life and to emphasize its sanctity. Any deviation from this role via governmental tolerance for homicide, abortion, or euthanasia directly contravenes this injunction. As a third example, the foreign policy of the United States of America emphasizes the global promotion of free-market democracies as the route to international peace and prosperity. Scripture reveals, however, that only when

Messiah rules by fiat from David's throne in the Millennial Kingdom will international peace and prosperity be realized.

One of the most obvious ways that being a dispensationalist makes a difference is in regard to the nation Israel. First, none of the promises God made to Abraham regarding the earthly future of Israel has been abrogated. Second, and of particular importance for Christians, the Church has not supplanted Israel in God's plan. Israel's future is earthly; the Church's future is heavenly. The nation Israel is not just another of the world's nations; for dispensationalists, Israel represents the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. This is a people God has called His own, and the nation has a unique future. Third, the land God promised to Israel includes what is now called the West Bank of the Jordan River. Thus, despite Palestinian claims to this land and despite the propensity of various Israeli governments to relinquish some of this land under the pretense of securing defensible borders, eventually this land will all be part of the nation, Israel.

Finally, dispensationalists understand that this current dispensation of Grace will not culminate with a crescendo of international peace, social justice, cultural harmony, and global economic prosperity ushered in by the Church. Rather, this dispensation will end in the apocalyptic chaos of the four horsemen: conquest, war, famine, and death. The root cause of sin is not poverty, discrimination, or injustice; rather sin is rooted in the nature of man, and neither elimination of harsh economic and social conditions nor the dispensational provisions of conscience, human government, law, the Holy Spirit, and the binding of Satan will change man's nature. Messiah's sacrifice is the only solution to the sin problem. Thus, while the Church has both a spiritual and physical mission to believers, its only mission to unbelievers is spiritual, to proclaim to them the efficacy of Messiah's sacrifice and to call them out of the world. For dispensationalists, the mission of the Church is decidedly not to usher in the Millennial Kingdom via promotion of peace, justice, reconciliation, and prosperity. Dispensationalists commit their time and economic resources accordingly.

### **Errant Forms of Dispensationalism**

Classic dispensationalism as it is known today is recent in origin, although there are numerous references to dispensations and dispensational concepts as early as Justin Martyr (110-165).

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), founder of the Plymouth Brethren, is also considered by many to be the founder of modern dispensationalism (Crutchfield 1992). Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921), author of the Scofield Reference Bible (Scofield 1988) and Clarence Larkin (1850-1924), whose book of dispensational charts has been in print since 1918 (Larkin 1999), are among early 20<sup>th</sup> century adherents who popularized dispensationalism. Much of the codification of dispensationalism may be attributed to the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary including Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Ryrie. Although the essential nature of classic dispensationalism has remained relatively unchanged, the system has not been completely static but has been subject to a refining and clarifying process. Out of this process several errant forms of dispensationalism have emerged of which two merit discussion: ultra- or hyper-dispensationalism which dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and progressive dispensationalism which dates only to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Ultra-dispensationalism.** The defining feature of ultra-dispensationalism is its position on the historical beginning of the Church as the body of Christ and, hence, the beginning of the dispensation of Grace. While classic dispensationalism sees the Church beginning at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, ultra-dispensationalists see the Church beginning later in Acts. One group sees the Church beginning in Acts 9-11 with the conversion of the Gentiles; another sees it in Acts 13:46 where Paul and Barnabas state that they “are turning to the Gentiles;” and a third group sees it in Acts 28:28 where Paul states that the “salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.” Although ultra-dispensationalists do not agree on exactly when the Church began and on some other points, all adhere to the following:

- (1) Ultra-dispensationalists regard the four gospels as entirely Jewish and having no relevance for the Church. In addition, the first part of Acts in which the gospel is preached to the Jews is regarded as merely an extension of the gospels and also not relevant for the Church. Ultra-dispensationalists believe in two churches: (a) a Jewish bride church that exists only in the first part of Acts; and (b) a Gentile body church that began with Paul’s ministry.
- (2) Ultra-dispensationalists regard the revelation given to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome as different than

the revelation given to Peter and the other apostles. They regard only the revelation given to Paul as revealed in his prison epistles as applicable to the Church today.

- (3) Ultra-dispensationalists reject water baptism because the ordinance was given to Paul before his imprisonment. Some ultra-dispensationalists also reject the Lord's Supper.

Although a detailed, point-by-point rebuttal is beyond the scope of this article, a few points are worth noting:

- (1) Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, composed during his Roman imprisonment, clearly stated that the Church was built on the "foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Eph. 2:19-22).
- (2) Despite Paul's commission to go to the Gentiles, he did not limit himself to them. Immediately following their statement of Acts 13:46 that they were "turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46), Paul and Barnabas entered the Jewish synagogue in Iconium and preached to a large number of both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 14:1).
- (3) Paul received his understanding of the mystery of Christ (Rom. 16:25) several years before his imprisonment and before writing his prison epistles, not during the imprisonment (Eph. 3:4).
- (4) Paul and Barnabas baptized the Gentile Philippian jailer and his entire house (Acts 16:33).
- (5) Paul gave the Gentile church in Corinth detailed instructions regarding the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:17-34).

For a detailed rebuttal, the reader is referred to Ironside (1989).

**Progressive dispensationalism.** The beginnings of progressive dispensationalism may be traced to the early 1980s. Progressive dispensationalism is currently somewhat difficult to define precisely, perhaps because sufficient time for refinements and clarifications has not elapsed. Nevertheless, numerous distinctions between classic and progressive dispensationalism can be identified.

The greatest debate between classical and progressive dispensationalists regards David's throne; in particular, the issue is whether Messiah is or is not currently reigning from David's

throne. Classic dispensationalists acknowledge that while Messiah is currently seated at the right hand of the Father, his reign from David's throne will not begin until the Millennial Kingdom. Progressive dispensationalists regard Messiah as currently reigning from David's throne in Heaven. Furthermore, progressive dispensationalists regard Messiah as already having begun to act as Davidic king by dispensing some of the spiritual blessings of the Davidic Covenant and/or Jeremiah's New Covenant including the indwelling Holy Spirit. Classic dispensationalists do not see any aspects of these covenants being fulfilled in this dispensation.

A foundational difference between classic and progressive dispensationalists is hermeneutical. Classic dispensationalists adhere to the literal or normal interpretative principle and understand that Biblical texts have only one meaning, the one the author intended. Progressive dispensationalists have shifted from the normal interpretative principle, contending that the New Testament introduces changes and advances in understanding Old Testament prophecy. Further, they contend that the mysteries of equal participation of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit were at least partially revealed in Old Testament prophecy. Although classic dispensationalists acknowledge that Gentile participation in some Abrahamic covenantal blessings are revealed in the Old Testament, they contend there is no Old Testament revelation regarding the body of Christ or the indwelling Holy Spirit. Finally, progressive dispensationalists blur the distinction between Israel and the Church, seeing a common salvation and a common future for both.

For a more detailed discussion of and response to progressive dispensationalism, readers are referred to Ryrie (1995).

**Future work:** The six articles on classic dispensationalism will be collected into a single document, published and made available by Religion Analysis Service, and announced in a future issue of *The Discerner*.

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# THE CHRISTIAN AND THE MASONIC LODGE

*By Steve Lagoon*

In this article, I intend to show why membership in the Lodge of Freemasonry is incompatible with the Christian faith. I am responding particularly to those Masons whom I have met who claim that Masonry is not only acceptable, but even desirable for Christians. I do not doubt the sincerity of those who make this claim, nor do I deny that Masons have done much good through their philanthropic works. But for the Christian, the bottom line is God's Word, and it is at just this point that Masonry is found wanting.

The modern beginning of Freemasonry is usually dated at 1717 with the forming of the first Grand Lodge in London, England. All Masons must join the Blue Lodge which consists of the first three degrees of Masonry, which are:

1. Entered Apprentice
2. Fellowcraft
3. Master Mason

There are rites for those who want to go deeper into Masonry. They are the York Rite (consisting of 10 degrees), and the Scottish Rite (consisting of 30 further degrees, the last of which is an honorary degree). There are also affiliated or auxiliary Masonic organizations for family members of Masons.

For women with relatives in Masonry there is the "Order of the Eastern Star." For boys, 14-21, there is DeMolay, and for girls, there is the "Rainbow Girls and Job's Daughters", For adults, the "Shriners" (Ancient Arabic Order Nobles Mystic Shrine A.A.O.N.M.S.), "Tall Cedars of Lebanon" (must be a Master Mason), and "Square Clubs" for any associated with Masonry.

"There are approximately 2.5 million Masons in the United States and nearly 6 million throughout the world" (Facts About Freemasonry, Masonic Information Center, Silver Spring MD, Brochure n.d.).

## **Is Masonry a Religion?**

Many Masons will claim that Freemasonry is not a religion, but is only a fraternal organization. Let us examine this claim.



Webster's New World Dictionary (Second Collegiate Edition, New York,: Simon and Schuster, 1984) defines religion as: "belief in a divine or superhuman power . . . to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator and ruler of the universe; 2) expression of . . . [this] belief in conduct and ritual."

With Webster's dictionary definition in mind, let us examine the statements of Masonic authorities on the subject. Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia states:

"Some attempt to avoid the issue by saying that Freemasonry is not a religion but is religious, seeming to believe that the substitution of an adjective for a noun makes a fundamental difference. It would be as sensible to say that a man had no intellect but was intellectual or that he had no honor but was honorable. . . . Freemasonry certainly requires a belief in the existence of, and man's dependence upon, a Supreme Being to which he is responsible. What can a church add to that, except to bring into fellowship those who have like feelings? That is exactly what the lodge does. . . . It is said that Freemasonry is not sectarian, by which is meant that it has not identified itself with any well-known sect. But, if it has a religious credo, may it not, itself, constitute a sect to be added to the others? . . . Only by judging from external appearances and applying arbitrary gauges can we say that Freemasonry is not a religion . . . Nothing herein is intended to be an argument that Freemasonry ought to be a religion; our purpose is simply to determine what it has become and is" (*Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, 1961 as cited by L. James Rongstad in *How To Respond to the Lodge*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis: MO, 1977, p. 12, hereafter *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*).

"Freemasonry may rightfully claim to be called a religious institution" (Albert Mackey, *Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia*, Volume 2, p. 847, as cited by John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Cult Watch*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, p. 101, Hereafter, *Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia*).

Blue Lodge Masonry has a Worshipful Master, Senior and Junior Deacon, altars with the Bible or another holy book placed upon them, chaplains, rituals including Scripture, and meetings that open and close in prayer. Meetings are held in buildings called temples. Further, belief in a deity known as the "GAOTU" is required for involvement in Masonry. There is an emphasis on moral improvement. Masonry claims to bring the initiate out of the darkness and into the light. At funerals, the Worshipful Master



assumes the role of “High Priest.” Masons refer to each other as “brothers.”

“In the opening of the lodge, the Great Architect of the Universe must be worshipped, and His blessings upon the work about to be done must be supplicated” (*The Holy Bible- Masonic Edition*, John A. Hertel Co., Revised Edition, 1957, p. 34, as cited by James Rongstad in *How To Respond to the Lodge*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis: MO, 1977, p. 20).

“All [Masons] unite declaring it to be a system of morality, by the practice of which its members may advance their spiritual interest, and mount by the theological ladder from the Lodge on earth to the Lodge in heaven” (*Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia*, p. 269).

“It is a science which is engaged in the search after Divine Truth” (*Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia*, p. 269).

“The fact that Freemasonry is a mild religion does not mean that it is no religion” (*Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*, p. 512).

“No institution was ever raised on a better principle or more solid foundation; nor were ever more excellent rules and useful maxims laid down that are inculcated in the several Masonic lectures” (Ralph P. Lester, ed., “Look To The East, A Ritual of the First Three Degrees Of Masonry”, Ezra A. Cook Publications, Inc., Chicago: IL, 1977, p. 36, Hereafter, Lester).

This statement is from the ceremony for the first degree of the Blue Lodge, something every Mason would be familiar with. It is amazing in that it seems to place Masonry on an equal if not greater level than Christianity. It is my experience that Masons pay lip service to the church, but their real zeal is dedicated to Masonry.

The foregoing makes clear that Masonry is indeed a religion, and though it borrows much imagery from the Bible, it is not Christian. Rather, it is ultimately a demonic deception to draw souls away from sincere and total devotion to Jesus Christ and His Church.

### **Masonry and the Bible**

What does Masonry have to say about God’s Word, the Bible? One Masonic authority states:

“The prevailing Masonic opinion is that the Bible is only a symbol of Divine Will, Law, or Revelation, and not that its contents are Divine Law, inspired, or revealed. So far, no responsible

authority has held that a Freemason must believe the Bible or any part of it” (*Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*, p. 520).

This Masonic understanding of the Bible is clearly contrary to the self-witness of Scripture itself:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, all biblical quotes from the New International Version).

Another Masonic authority said:

“Whether it be the Gospels to the Christian, the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Mussulman . . . or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea – that of the symbolism of the Divine Will revealed to man” (*Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia*, Volume 1, p. 133).

A further Masonic writer stated:

“Thus, by the very honor which Masonry pays to the Bible, it teaches us to revere every book of faith in which men find help for to-day and hope for the morrow, joining hands with the man of Islam as he takes oath on the Koran, and with the Hindu as he makes a covenant with God upon the book that he loves best. For Masonry knows, what so many forget, that religions are many, but Religion is one” ((R.W. and Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, *The Bible in Masonry, The Holy Bible, The Great Light In Masonry*, Masonic Edition, A. J. Holman Company, Philadelphia, PA, 1957, pp. 5-6, Hereafter, *Newton*).

Still another Masonic statement goes further:

“But what are ‘His [Sovereign of the world, i.e. God] declarations’? . . . They are the inspired wisdom contained in the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, the Bhagavad-Gita or any of the other Great Books of Faith” (*Freemasonry and Religion*, brochure published by The Supreme Council, 33° Ancient And Accepted Scottish Rite Of Freemasonry Mother Jurisdiction Of The World, Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A. Washington D.C., August 1993, Hereafter, *Freemasonry and Religion*).

How can a Mason be party to an organization that elevates the “scriptures” of false religions to the same level as the Holy Bible? And, how can a Christian support an organization that claims that the message of the Bible is the same as that of the “Holy Books” of false religions? The Bible alone affirms that Jesus Christ is the only

hope and way of salvation for all of mankind (John 14:6).

### **Syncretism**

Not only do we see that Masonry devalues the Bible, and elevates the holy books of false religions, but we also see the same idea toward the Christian faith. Masons do not accept the biblical idea that Christianity is the only true religion. Rather, Masonry affirms the belief that all the world's major religions are true as the following quotes display:

“Thus, by the very honor which Masonry pays to the Bible, it teaches us to revere every book of faith in which men find help for to-day and hope for the morrow, joining hands with the man of Islam as he takes oath on the Koran, and with the Hindu as he makes a covenant with God upon the book that he loves best. For Masonry knows, what so many forget, that religions are many, but Religion is one . . . Therefore, it invites to its altar men of all faiths, knowing that, if they use different name for ‘the nameless one of a hundred names,’ they are yet praying to the one God and Father of all; knowing, also, that while they read different volumes, they are in fact reading the same vast Book of the Faith of Man as revealed in the struggle and sorrow of the race in its quest of God” (*Newton*, pp. 5-6).

Newton also said:

“Yet, ‘tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be *good men and true*, or men of Honour and Honesty, by which whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the *centre of Union*, and the means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must else have remained at a perpetual distance.’ Still deeply religious, Masonry had become universal” (*Newton*, p. 35).

“On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance” (*Lester*, p. 57).

These statements stand in stark contrast with the biblical witness that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

Masonic authors seem oblivious to the biblical importance of

avoiding compromise by an admixture of true and false religion as more Masonic quotes will show.

“The religion of Freemasonry is not sectarian. It admits men of every creed within its hospitable bosom, rejecting none and approving none for his peculiar faith. It is not Judaism, though there is nothing in it to offend the Jew; it is not Christianity, but there is nothing in it repugnant to the faith of a Christian. Its religion is that general one of nature and primitive revelation handed down to us from some ancient and patriarchal priesthood—in which all men may agree and in which no men can differ” (*Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia*, Volume 2, pp. 847-848).

Mackey claims that “there is nothing . . . to offend the Jew.” Is not the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah and only savior of the world offensive to the Jew? But these Christian truths are absent from Masonry. Mackey also said that there “is nothing in it repugnant to the faith of a Christian,” to which I say nonsense. Masonry is filled with ideas foreign and repugnant to biblical Christianity.

For example, in the Royal Arch Degree of the York Rite, the initiate is told the name of the true god is Jah-Bul-On. This blasphemous name combines the names of the true God Jehovah –Yahweh, with the false gods, Baal (the Assyrian god) and On (the Egyptian god of the sun).

“The chaplain of the Masonic lodge who prays as the voice of the lodge does not pray in the name of the carpenter of Nazareth or the name of Jehovah or the name of Allah, He prays to the Grand Artificer or the Great Architect of the Universe. Under that title men of all faiths may find each his own deity. Failure to mention any deity by name is not denial, but merely the practice of a gracious courtesy, so that each man for whom prayer is offered can hear the name of his own deity in the all inclusive title of Great Architect” (*Short Talk Bulletin*, Vol. 36, No 8, p. 7, as cited by L. James Rongstad in *How To Respond to the Lodge*, Concordia Publishing House, ST. Louis: MO, 1977, p. 20).

Notice the antagonism that Masonic authority, Henry Wilson Coil, displays for biblical truth:

“Men have to decide whether they want a God like the ancient Hebrew Jahweh, a partisan tribal god, with whom they can talk and argue and from whom they can hide if necessary, or a boundless, eternal, universal, undenominational, and international Divine Spirit, so vastly removed from the speck called

man, that he cannot be known, named or approached" (*Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, p. 516-517).

The "god" of Masonry is not like the God of the Bible, for the God of the Bible wants to have an intimate relationship with us, and in fact our salvation depends upon it. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

"[The Mason] may name Him [God] as he will, think of Him as he pleases; make Him impersonal law or personal and anthropomorphic; Freemasonry cares not . . . God, Great Architect of the universe, Grand Artificer, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge above, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or Great Geomoter" (Carl H. Claudy, *Introduction to Freemasonry*, Volume 2, Washington, D.C., The Temple Publishers, 1984, p. 110, as cited by John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Cult Watch*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, p. 118).

On what basis can a Christian join hands with men of other faiths in spiritual unity, considering those in other religions like Hinduism and Islam his "brothers"?

"The true Mason is not creed bound. He realizes with the divine illumination of his lodge that as a Mason his religion must be universal: Christ, Buddha or Mohammed, the name means little, for he recognizes only the light and not the bearer. He worships at every shrine, bows before every altar, whether in temple, mosque or cathedral, realizing with his truer understanding the oneness of all spiritual truth . . . No true Mason can be narrow, for his Lodge is the divine expression of all broadness. There is no place for little minds in a great work" (Manly P. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, Inc., Richmond: VA, 1976, p. 65).

We wonder if Mr. Hall included Jesus Christ in the company of those with "little minds" because he 'narrowed' salvation to only those who followed him: "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)?

One Masonic tract stated:

"Is Masonry 'guilty' of teaching toleration? And proud of it! It seems a strange accusation, but anti—Masonic writers often charge that we accept people with many different religious viewpoints as brothers. They are correct" (Jim Tresner, Forward by

Ed Waldon, Grand Master of Masons of Minnesota, 1992-93, *Conscience And The Craft—Questions on Religion and Freemasonry*, Masonic Grand Lodge Of Minnesota, p. 8, Hereafter, *Conscience And The Craft*).

Mackey agrees saying:

“But its universality is its boast. In its language citizens of every nation may converse; at its altars men of all religions may kneel; to its creeds disciples of every faith may subscribe” (*Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Vol. 1, p. 149).

Well known preacher, Norman Vincent Peale, a 33° Mason, felt the same way:

“As a result, men of different religions meet in fellowship and brotherhood under the fatherhood of God” (Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, 33° in *Freemasonry and Religion*).

### **Masonic Versus Biblical Salvation**

We now proceed to examine what Masonry teaches about salvation and contrast it with Biblical teaching.

“He who wears the lambskin as a badge of a Mason is thereby continually reminded of purity of life and conduct which is essentially necessary to his gaining admission into that celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the universe presides” (Malcom C. Duncan, *Masonic Ritual and Monitor*, New York, David McKay, N.d., p. 50, as cited by John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Cult Watch*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, p. 102).

This passage implies that salvation, and entrance into heaven is gained by “purity of life and conduct” which stands in stark contrast to the biblical gospel in which salvation is gained by faith in Christ and based upon the work of Christ at Calvary.

Ankerberg and Weldon quote a similar statement from Masonic authority, Henry Wilson Coil:

“Freemasonry has a religious service to commit the body of a deceased brother to the dust whence it came, and to speed the liberated spirit back to the Great Source of Light. Many Freemasons make this flight with no other guarantee of a safe landing than their belief in the religion of Freemasonry” (*Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, p. 512).

I believe that Coil is exactly right. Many Masons, though claiming to be Christians, do not really understand the biblical plan of

salvation, and are tragically depending on their Masonic involvement for salvation.

Masonic ritual and imagery displays this same idea when it pictures those who are not Masons as though lost in darkness, and those who enter into Masonry as though they are finding true spiritual light.

Masonic authority, Albert Mackey, speaking of an initiate into Masonry states:

“There he stands without our portals, on the threshold of his new Masonic life, in darkness, helplessness and ignorance. Having been wandering amid the errors and covered over with the pollutions of the outer and profane world, he comes inquiringly to our door, seeking the new birth, and asking a withdrawal of the veil which conceals divine truth from his uninitiated sight” (Albert Mackey, *The Manual of the Lodge*, New York, Clark Maynard, 1870, p. 20, as cited by John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Cult Watch*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, p. 111).

It is astonishing (and blasphemous) to picture a Christian seeking entrance into the lodge as being in “darkness” and “ignorance,” and in need of the “new birth” and “light.”

“The common gavel is an instrument made use of by operative masons to break off the corners of rough stones, the better to fit them for the builder’s use; but we, as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of divesting our minds and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our bodies as living stones for that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (*Lester*, pp. 38-39).

Tom McKenney, author of two books exposing Masonry, sums up the Masonic view of salvation this way:

“The Masonic plan of salvation is a three-part plan of self-redemption. The Mason is redeemed (made spiritually perfect and sinless) by: (a) being enlightened (having both secret knowledge and the proper understanding of it); (b) faithfulness to his oaths of obligation (death oaths); and (c) his virtuous life (by “being good”). Each man’s salvation is his own responsibility; he is his own savior” (Tom C. McKenney, *Please Tell Me, Questions People Ask About Freemasonry—And The Answers*, Huntington House Publishers, Lafayette, LA, 1994, p. 84).



Whereas “Freemasonry labors to make good men better” (*Freemasonry and Religion*), Christ takes bad men and makes them saints!

### **The Oaths**

I want to include the oaths that Masons swear to because they are so contrary to the open and honest way that the Bible calls Christians to live. We have nothing to hide, but a great truth to proclaim!

The first three oaths are from the Blue Lodge to which all Masons belong. One Masonic brochure defends the Oaths this way:

“Freemasonry does not require improper oaths. The solemn promises taken in Freemasonry are no different than the oaths taken in court or on entering the armed services. The much discussed ‘penalties,’ judicial remnants from an earlier age, are symbolic, not literal. They refer only to the pain an honest man should feel at the thought of violating his word” (*Facts About Freemasonry*, Masonic Information Center, Silver Spring MD, Brochure n.d.).

I will leave it to the judgment of the reader to decide if the above statement is accurate and whether the oaths are proper for the Christian.

### **Entered Apprentice (1st Degree)**

“I, A.B., of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God, and this Worshipful Lodge erected to him and dedicated to the Holy Saints John, do hereby and hereon (Master presses his gavel on candidates knuckles) most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail, forever conceal, never reveal any of the secret arts, parts or points of the hidden mysteries of Masonry which may have been heretofore, or shall be at this time, or at any future period. . . I furthermore promise and swear that I will not write, print, paint, stamp, stain, cut carve, hew, mark, or engrave them on any thing moveable or immovable. . . whereby. . . the secrets of Masonry be thereby unlawfully obtained by my unworthiness. . . All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear. . . binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut from ear to ear, my tongue torn out by its roots, and buried in the sands . . . Should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly violate or transgress this my Entered Apprentice obligation. So help me, God, and keep me steadfast” (*Lester*, pp. 30-31).



## **Fellowcraft (2<sup>nd</sup> Degree)**

“All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same, without the least equivocation, mental reservation or self-evasion whatsoever; binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my left breast torn open, my heart plucked from thence, and given to the beasts of the field and birds of the air as a prey, should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly, violate or transgress this my Fellow Craft obligation. So help me God and keep me steadfast” (*Lester*, p. 96).

## **Master Mason (3<sup>rd</sup> Degree)**

“All this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same, without the least equivocation, mental reservation or self-evasion whatever; binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my body severed in two, my bowels torn from thence and burned to ashes, and these scattered before the four winds of heaven, that no more remembrance might be had among men or Mason of so vile a wretch as I should be, should I, in the least, knowingly or wittingly violate or transgress this my Master Mason’s obligation. So help me God and keep me steadfast” (*Lester*, pp. 154-155).

## **Shriner’s Oath**

“Having my eyeballs pierced to the center with a three edged blade, with my feet flayed and I be forced to walk the hot sands upon the sterile shores of the Red Sea until the flaming sun shall strike me with livid plague” (Cook, *The Mystic Shrine*, p. 22, as cited by ).

“The Candidate for initiation is greeted by the high priest who says, ‘By the existence of Allah and the Creed of Mohammed, by the legendary sanctity of the Tabernacle at Mecca we greet you . . .’ The Candidate must kneel before a Muslim altar, put his hand on the Koran (in some cases also a Bible), and take his horrible death oath calling upon the pagan god, Allah, for help: ‘May Allah, the god of the Arab, Moslim and Mohammendan, the god of our father, support me to the entire fulfillment of the same, Amen, Amen, Amen’ (The Mystic Shrine, an Illustrated Ritual of the Ancient Arabic Order, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, Rev, ed., Chicago: IL, Ezra Cook Publishers, n.d.. p. 2, as cited by Tom McKenney, *Please Tell Me, Questions People Ask About*

*Freemasonry And The Answers*, Huntington House Publishers, Lafayette: LA, 1994, p. 39-40).

When we see the Shriners at parades or their circuses, we should realize that they have made the compromise above in the name of the false god of Islam. James P. Wesberry, a 32° Mason and Baptist, stated:

“While the true secrets of Masonry are lodged safely in the repository of faithful breasts, there are many things Masonry teaches that are not secret” (Dr. James P. Wesberry, 32° in *Freemasonry and Religion*).

If Masonry indeed dispenses important truth and light, how can a Christian take an oath to keep such truth secret. Indeed, whether the oaths are understood as literal or symbolic, Masons take them very seriously, refusing to discuss the inner workings of Masonry.

### **Who Is in Charge?**

Masons will often respond to the information I have provided in this essay by saying that the Masonic writers were just giving their own opinions and do not represent the official position of Masonry. By this simple maneuver, the mason hopes to silence criticism. Is that fair? One Masonic writer, Jim Tesner, a Director of the Masonic Leadership Institute and a 33° member of the Scottish Rite, stated:

“Why is it so hard to find an official statement of Masonic dogma? Because there isn’t such a thing. . . . Which Masonic writers does Masonry consider authoritative? None, if you mean ‘authoritative’ in the sense that they speak for the fraternity or that what they say is ‘binding’ upon Masons (Jim Tresner, Forward by Ed Waldon, Grand Master of Masons of Minnesota 1992-93, *Conscience And The Craft—Questions on Religion and Freemasonry*, Masonic Grand Lodge Of Minnesota, p. 5).

However, if Mr. Tresner is correct, we naturally wonder why we should believe him. If there are no authoritative voices that speak for Masonry, then Mr. Tresner is not an authoritative voice either. Since the Masonic statements that I quoted are by respected and active Masons, and experts (Albert Mackey, Henry Wilson Coil, etc) to which they speak, published by Masonic publishing concerns, it seems that those who disagree with their statements are merely using the “no authoritative voice” claim as a device to escape valid criticisms of the Lodge.

It may be possible that some Masons themselves are not familiar with some of the information presented in this article, possibly,

because they are only Blue Lodge members, and haven't advanced in either the York or Scottish Rites. They are welcome to check the information herein contained with more knowledgeable Masons to confirm its accuracy.

### **A Closing Challenge for Christians in the Lodge**

I want to close by asking Christians why they want to be in the Masonic Lodge? What does membership in the Lodge offer that is not available in the Christian church? From the simple point of the amount of time invested, would not that time be better invested in serving Jesus Christ and His Church? Peale observed the same thing: "I have always been interested as to why Masons devote so much time to their Fraternity" (Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, 33°, *Freemasonry and Religion*).

Is Satan using something that seems good to keep men away from God's best? Why spend time in Masonry trying to improve men's morals, when real change can only happen when the Holy Spirit enables men to become like Jesus Christ? What is the price you pay as a Mason by compromising your faith in Christ, joining together with those who worship false gods? Since prayer in Jesus name is generally forbidden in the Lodge, so as not to offend Masons of other religions, how can you be involved with such an organization that will not allow you to pray in the name of your Lord Jesus Christ?

Further, since you are not allowed to evangelize or share your faith with non-Christians in the Lodge, how can a Christian be a Mason? Not only can you not reach out to the lost in the Lodge with the gospel, but you even have to call these unbelievers "brothers." The words of Jesus Christ are appropriate:

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

If you are a Christian that has been involved in the Lodge, I appeal to you to repent and turn back with a sincere and total devotion to Jesus Christ and His Church. God will indeed fruitfully reward your act of faith!

Steve Lagoon

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### DISMANTLING THE BIG BANG: GOD'S UNIVERSE REDISCOVERED

By Alex Williams and John Harnett, Ph.D.

Publisher: Master Books

Copyright: 2005

Pages: 346

*Reviewed by Steve Lagoon*

**T**his book is not for the casual reader. It is a serious work for those who are prepared to do some heavy thinking (although it is not a technical work). While it is not a quick read, the reader is well rewarded for his efforts.

I often found myself struggling to understand some of the scientific theories and concepts. However, the authors are diligent in defining things and giving substantive background information. The book also contains many charts and graphics to help the reader. As a result of reading the book, my understanding of cosmology has undergone a “big bang!”

The primary point of the book is to lay down the evidence against the prevailing Big Bang theory for the origins of the universe, and to show that the biblical model (literal six-days, young Earth creation) best fits the scientific data.

The authors make a great point when they say “If God really did create the universe, then a materialist could never establish that fact by the scientific method” (p. 57). In light of the whole ongoing Intelligent Design debate, this underscores the idea that it may ultimately be impossible to separate science and religion, because if God actually did create the universe, true science will increasingly be a gigantic arrow pointing to God!

In the most important chapter of the book entitled “The Big Bang Model,” the authors lay out the devastating case against the Big Bang theory. In Appendix A, the authors describe “some other cosmological models” that show that the Big Bang isn’t the only show in town.

I did not find the author’s theory on “Relativistic Time Dilation” as the solution to the “Starlight and Time problem” very

convincing (pp. 169-176). While the authors make several references to Occam's Razor, they fail to apply it here, opting for a very questionable theory to explain the apparent old age of the universe; the traditional creationist answers that God created a mature and fully functioning universe, a position that remains adequate and much simpler.

The authors argue that "No one has advanced any reason why God might have created the 'appearance of explosions' in light beams that have no basis in the real history of the stars they represent. Because it lays God open to a charge of deception"(pp. 170-171). It only seems to be deceptive when one assumes a naturalistic interpretation of the cosmos and ignores God's revealed Word in the Bible.

After reading the book, I find I strongly agree with the author's assessment of the current state of cosmology: "Our journey into understanding the universe has hardly begun. Cosmology is an exciting field that has an enormous future, but our present-day naturalistic models are certainly not a reliable foundation for one's eternal destiny" (p.294).

I strongly recommend this book to those who seriously want to grow in their understanding of cosmology in general, and particularly in Biblical cosmology.

# **BOOK REVIEW**

## WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH WICCA?

By Steve Russo

Copyright: 2005

*Reviewed by Rev. Ervin D. Ingebretson*

### WHAT IS WICCA?

Steve Russo has made an in-depth study of the Wiccan religion because of its rise among young people. He has devised a ministry to teenagers to alert them of the dangers of embracing the Wiccan religion. Russo spends twenty weeks a year speaking on public school campuses, and at dozens of events while co-hosting a nationally syndicated teen talk radio show called "Life on the Edge - Live". This gives the author numerous opportunities to interview young people, many of whom have abandoned their active engagement in Evangelical church youth ministries to embrace Wicca. The author claims that Wicca is the fastest growing spiritual practice in America.

He defines Wicca as a complicated contemporary religion associated with occultism, neo-paganism and witchcraft.

### WHAT DO WICCANS BELIEVE?

Wiccans do not believe in a central authority. Wicca is very individualistic and experiential, with great emphasis on personal responsibility. It is a religion based around two deities - a goddess and a god who, in union, are responsible for creating the universe.

Wiccans believe in reincarnation. It is a religion with no absolutes - no right or wrong. One benefit promised to Wiccans is the demonstration of "power within, not power over". This power is generated through inanimate objects such as stones, crystals, candles, clay, mirrors, and many others.

### CONTRASTS WITH THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

As the author enumerates the beliefs and practices of the Wiccan religion he intersperses them with strong declarations of the Christian faith. His primary emphasis is threefold: 1) Trust the Bible; 2) Does God exist?; and 3) Jesus is real. The author also gives some signs in the teenagers' behavior and demeanor if

they are exploring a change to the Wiccan religion. One sign is the propensity to think about death and suicide.

This is not only an important message to young people. It is equally vital to parents. Therefore, I recommend that parents should obtain this very clear and helpful source to counteract a rising problem among teenagers.

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