

The Discerner

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A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 28, Number 3

July • August • September 2008

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

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1313 5th St. SE, Suite 126E,
Minneapolis, MN 55414-4504
612-331-3342 / 1-800-562-9153
FAX 612-331-3342

Editorial Committee

Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland
Dr. William A. BeVier

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WORDS OF APPRECIATION

We appreciate all letters, calls, emails, and extra gifts.

Our thanks to all who have recently re-subscribed, nearly 100 in number.

We appreciate all who have purchased free subscriptions for friends and churches.

More and more churches are making The Discerner available to their people. Thanks for this service. Several groups have requested the entire list of articles (ca. 1000) that have been preserved since 1947. We appreciate this interest in these significant studies about cults, aberrant groups, and contemporary issues.

We as a Board are especially appreciative of the volunteer work by Ron Anderson, our treasurer, who also serves as our office manager. He keeps our expenses in check and enables us to maintain a healthy bottom line to our budget.

DEAR READER

For my daily devotions, I often use the devotional calendar “Days of Praise”, published by the Institute for Christian Research. This devotional commentary not only provides delightful spiritual and solid scientific insights but also supplies extraordinary help in countering error and false teaching. The devotional on September 22, 2008 written by the late Dr. Henry Morris is a good example:

“There is an unusual emphasis in the New Testament in the New Testament about false prophets. The Greek word *pseudoprophetes* appears 11 times and has no corresponding word in the Old Testament. Of the 298 usages of ‘prophet’ in the Hebrew Scriptures, eight of them are connected to ‘false prophets’, and only in relations to vision and dreams. In the New Testament, the *pseudoprophetes* are workers of ‘miracles’ and ‘signs’ and ‘wonders’. John gives the warning to ‘try the spirits’ because ‘many false prophets are now here.’

...But the prophets of the ‘last time’ (1. John 2:18) will perform great wonders (Matthew 24:24) and can ‘seduce...even the elect’ (Mark 13:22). Dr. Morris’ final words should challenge us all:

‘We are warned to test every one of them, and when they do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, we are to reject their teaching and not have any fellowship with them (2. John 9-11). They are dangerous (Matthew 7:15)!’

We at RAS say “Amen” to these sober and instructive comments. These words are extremely timely. May this issue contribute to our awareness of “false prophets” as they deny the deity of Christ, degrade the great doctrines of the Bible, and deceive many.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

If we have been following the religious scene lately, we will have surely noted the recent publication of the document: “An Evangelical Manifesto” by Os Guinness and his nine-member steering committee. We encourage our readers to first secure it (library or see e-mail address) and then pore over the pro and con comments by evangelical leaders, Paul Edwards (pro-position) and Bill Keller (con-position). The document, is as you see, hotly debated. Is the “Manifesto” helpful or can we do without it? Your judgment and comments are appreciated.

The book review on “The Shack” will also surely make us think about the implications of this Best Seller. Again there are pro and con positions among conservative evangelical scholars. The new book “Is God a Dispensationalist” by Professor Emeritus David Larsen is reviewed by our RAS President, Dr. Ron McRoberts, who has also written several articles on dispensationalism in *The Discerner*.

We are thankful for another contribution from Dr. Roy Knuteson, who submits a clear and concise analysis of the Roman Catholic teaching on the Mass. It is most enlightening and written from someone with first-hand knowledge of Roman Catholicism.

Do you enjoy the quizzes? Your thoughts would be helpful to me as I formulate them from issue to issue.

For your information, we are submitting the RAS Statement of Faith. This helps you understand our positions and convictions.

God bless your reflections and reactions as you enjoy this issue.

Laurence J. Sutherland

REFLECTIONS ON "AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO" *PRO*

By Paul Edwards

An Evangelical Manifesto: Timely or Timeless?

The unveiling of "An Evangelical Manifesto," drafted by theologian and social critic Os Guinness with the affirmation of a nine-person steering committee, nearly all of whom we might readily identify with the religious left, has caused no small stir among those whom we might readily identify as with the religious right. Some of its critics have concluded the document is the religious left's "broader agenda" come to life, an attempt to solidify a moderate to liberal political agenda in the evangelical conscience. Suffice it to say it is a document with a clear articulation of the gospel in the Reformation tradition exhorting evangelicals to more faithfully live out the gospel in the culture as politically engaged followers of Jesus Christ.

Almost immediately the "Manifesto" was judged (condemned?) on the basis of who did or didn't sign it. Within hours of its release the "I follow James Dobson" crowd was pitted against the "I follow Jim Wallis" crowd (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12) in complete contradiction to the spirit of the "Manifesto" expressed in its call for both sides to please stop screaming at each other. (I'll leave it to the reader to ascertain which side is screaming loudest.)

It's somewhat pathetic, isn't it, that rather than making our initial judgments on the merits of the Manifesto we choose first to skip the document altogether and go straight to the signatories to ascertain whether or not we will agree with its contents? This tendency is precisely what ails the evangelical movement. Loyalty to personality has replaced commitment to principle. Whether I allow my name to be seen with yours is determined more by your view of global warming, which may be different from my own, than it is by the distinctives of the gospel. It also betrays an inability to think for ourselves.

Two primary reasons come to mind as an attempt to explain why conservative evangelicals are skeptical about the "Manifesto."

For one, it calls into question our own allegiance to an entrenched political philosophy that has been extremely effective at electing conservatives yet equally ineffective at implementing substantive cultural change. As a case in point, *Roe v. Wade* remains the law of the land in spite of 35 years of conservative evangelical political engagement. During this same time one state has legalized same-sex marriage while nine others provide the legal rights afforded married couples to same-

sex unions, stopping short of calling it marriage. America has seen no substantial change in rates of divorce or the abortion rate. Sexual promiscuity is still encouraged in our public schools through "health clinics" and condom distribution. Our children still have unfettered access to the most virulent forms of pornography in the name of "freedom of expression."

What have conservative evangelicals to show for our political efforts in terms of real change? The "Manifesto" forces us to face up to some very inconvenient truths and we naturally recoil.

Secondly, many conservatives panning the "Manifesto" may be doing so because they weren't included in the three-year process of drafting the document. Given the documents' call for a move away from left vs. right distinctions, it is somewhat unthinkable that Dr. Guinness and his nine person steering committee could not acquire representative voices from among prominent politically engaged evangelical conservatives. However, in a recent interview with Albert Mohler, Os Guinness readily admitted that he should have sought his input by sending him a copy of the "Manifesto." The fact that Dr. Mohler's insight was not sought, along with others who share Dr. Mohler's worldview, is disappointing, but shouldn't be the document's death-knell. (The fact that the steering committee included no African-Americans and no women should assuage the fears of many conservatives that the Manifesto is committed only to being politically correct.)

My own view is that "An Evangelical Manifesto" has been the subject of an often ill-tempered criticism by many people, some of whom immediately wrote it off by reading into it an assumed liberal political agenda. The "Manifesto" is clear that it isn't taking sides:

Christians from both sides of the political spectrum, left as well as right, have made the mistake of politicizing faith; and it would be no improvement to respond to a weakening of the religious right with a rejuvenation of the religious left. Whichever side it comes from, a politicized faith is faithless, foolish, and disastrous for the church--and disastrous first and foremost for Christian reasons rather than constitutional reasons.

Contrary to the assessment of some conservative commentators, nowhere does the "Manifesto" condemn evangelical political engagement. Rather, it rightly points out that political engagement, while certainly the duty of every Christian citizen, is not the priority of the Church. In calling for the Church to rise above the din and the noise of politics, some have characterized the "Manifesto" as a demand for Christian withdrawal from the political process. Some read Guinness' call for "civility" as a call for compromise on the issues important to conservatives, a ruse to get us to drop our guard on abortion and same-sex marriage while the liberals change the priorities to global warming and AIDS/HIV. This erroneous conclusion misses the point of what civility means in the marketplace of ideas.

In reality the "Manifesto" pricks our consciences by pointing out that the place of the Bible in the pulpit as the authoritative word for moral and spiritual change in the culture has been drowned by pro-family political action committees to which the Church has abdicated its prophetic office. We declare in our creed that we have no king but Jesus, yet betray by our actions that our hope is firmly rooted in the outcome of the next presidential election. We have taught our people how to vote (and for whom to vote) all the while leaving them clueless as to how to pray (and for whom to pray). While we frantically sort through labels to determine whether we are on the right, left or middle we are deaf to the Word which calls us heavenward (cf. James 3:13-18).

Nothing I have said here should be interpreted as suggesting the "Manifesto" is above thoughtful analysis. My chief concern is with the "interpretation of suspicion" we have imposed on the document. We have allowed our prejudices against some who signed it to call into question the integrity and intentions of those who wrote it.

No one connected with the drafting of the "Manifesto" claims for it a divine imprimatur, as if Dr. Guinness had just returned to us with face aglow from Sinai having received the "Manifesto" on tablets written with God's own finger. It is, after all, a human document with equally human shortcomings. But so was Luther's 95 Theses. History gives witness to the truth that statements rooted in Scripture endure while those committed to a political agenda quickly fade. History will judge where the principles articulated in "An Evangelical Manifesto" have their roots.

Paul Edwards is a regular columnist and the host of "The Paul Edwards Program" heard daily on WLQV in Detroit. Contact Paul at paul@godandculture.com.

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REFLECTIONS ON "AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO" CON

By Bill Keller

The Evangelical Manifesto

(Matthew 6:24)

The "Evangelical Manifesto." Last Wednesday, a group of prominent Evangelicals released the "Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment." The Steering Committee includes: Os Guinness; Timothy George, Dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University; Rich Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary; and Dallas Willard, Professor of Philosophy, University of Southern California. It has been signed by apx. 80 "evangelical leaders," though when a trained eye looks through the list of signers, it becomes apparent what this document is really all about.

For those who have been part of the Liveprayer family for a while, you might remember me mentioning the gutless Dr. Mouw back in December of 2004, who along with Ravi Zacharias, became pawns used by the Mormons to give them mainstream credibility. Here is an excerpt from that 12/07/04 Devotional: "Mouw preceded Zacharias and amazingly apologized, yes, apologized to the Mormon crowd of roughly 7,000 stating, 'We evangelicals have sinned against you. We have demonized you.' Since when was exposing the false gospel of the Mormon cult a sin? That is exactly what we are supposed to do! Also, the last I checked, those who lead people's souls into everlasting damnation are demonic!"

First of all, let me state the obvious. We already have an "Evangelical Manifesto," it is called THE BIBLE and it has the greatest author of all time...GOD! The real purpose of this document is to create a shift in power regarding those who are seen as the Christian leaders of our day and those who speak for the Christian community. Many years ago, I had to make some hard choices. Do I build a giant ministry organization and preach to the choir like the rest, putting my voice into the same mix as Falwell, Robertson, Kennedy, Dobson, Graham, and the others, or follow God's calling as a true evangelist and reach out to the lost and hurting souls outside the four walls of the church, and take on more of a prophetic ministry to reach this lost world with God's Truth. I made the decision to pass on the comfort, prominence, prestige, and financial security of building another Christian organization, and chose instead to give my life reaching the lost and hurting with the hope of Jesus Christ.

That choice has given me the unique position of being free from the politics of the "church," and allowed me to not have to compromise the

Truth of the Bible to keep a "Christian business" going. Like the prophets in the Old Testament, I have been in the unique position few are in, to deal with the issues of the day and in people's lives without worrying about pleasing men, only God. My focus has never had to be about raising money for infrastructure and operations, only for saving souls. I have no other agenda but God's. My goals aren't earthly but heavenly. My legacy won't be in buildings or the temporal things of this world that will one day soon be gone, but the lives God has used me to impact and the eternal souls of men.

Many of those who put together and signed this document are for the most part those who I have warned you about in recent years, this emerging group known as the "Christian left." Prominent signers of this murky document are people like Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, and Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback and author of the Purpose Driven Life. A major portion of this document is spent repudiating Christians involved in politics, and seeks to replace the fight for life, marriage, and family issues, with a focus on world hunger, AIDs in Africa, and environmental issues. It also lashes out at those who have the audacity to go into the public arena and take a stand for Christ based on the Truth of God's Word. The document says evangelicals have often expressed "truth without love," helping create a backlash against religion during a "generation of culture warring." The fact is, we have been intimidated into silence by those who represent satan!

This is the mindset fostered by the "seeker," "emerging church," and "church growth" crowd that for the past 15 years have watered down the Gospel and set aside the absolutes of the Bible to attract warm bodies. What they have done is created a new subculture of "Christians" who might be saved, but live no different than the world and easily embrace the lies of the false religions, cults, and New Age teachings that are leading the souls of men to hell. This is why you have people like Oprah who claim to be a Christian, yet promote the lies of every New Age guru that comes down the path. This is why you have people like Sen. Barak Hussein Obama who claims to be a Christian, yet votes continually to slaughter babies and redefine God's Holy Institution of Marriage. This is why you have Christians who think people in a satanic cult like the Mormons will go to Heaven. This is why you have people who call themselves "Christians," but deny that the Bible is the only Truth there is!

Add to this the prominence of pastors who are little more than motivational speakers like Robert Schuller and Joel Osteen who go into the secular media when they want to sell their latest book, and brag bout never talking about sin or the social issues of our day and refuse to answer the most simple question of the faith, whether Jesus is the ONLY way to be saved or not. So people read their books, watch their TV programs to "feel good" and become part of this new subculture of "Christians" who have no concept of basic theology and embrace lies

like "there are many roads that lead to God.

Don't believe me? Here is a typical email we get daily: "I'm a Metaphysical Christian and a Human being a child of GOD. I was baptized at Saddleback Church with Rick Warren. There is a very powerful wonderful movement of consciousness going on right now obviously the old way is not working very well. Watch a few Videos on Esther Hicks etc GOD bless you too!" What a load of garbage. Metaphysical Christian??? The "old way" is not working very well? The old way being the Bible? Esther Hicks is one of the more popular New Age teachers out there today. I wish you could see the feed back I get daily from the Daily Devotional, from the TV program, from my appearances on FOX News, CNN, and from the videos we post on YouTube. Here are people who call themselves "Christians," yet reject the Bible as the only Truth there is, and embrace beliefs that are in complete contradiction to what the Bible teaches.

How did this happen? It started with the church. Forty years ago the mainline denominations brought in pastors who were from liberal seminaries and denied the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. They quit preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and opted for a social gospel instead. At the same time, you had this growing Christian subculture of Christian TV, radio, and publishing, geared to and marketed to Christians. Major ministries and Christian organizations were birthed that generated tens of millions annually, and for the most part did very little but preach to the choir and self perpetuate themselves from one year to the next.

Billions have been raised and squandered on the temporal things of this world instead of on the work of God. We have extracted ourselves from the marketplace, and now not only have the better percentage of two full generations who have never even been to church, but a new generation of "Christians" who don't believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, representing Absolute Truth, and our final authority in all matters. It is no wonder our nation is in spiritual freefall and this world we live in grows darker by the day. Men of God in days gone by didn't build great organizations, they built up men and women to serve the Lord. They only had one book, the Bible, and one message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They never compromised the Truth of God's Word and their only goal was to save souls!

I love you and care about you so much. While I agree with 90% of what is in the "Evangelical Manifesto," the other 10% makes it a document designed to give more power and prominence to those in the Christian left, replace abortion, marriage, and family issues with issues like world hunger, poverty and disease, and calls for Christians to be more friendly

to non-Christians by not talking about things like sin and hell in the public. Just in case you were wondering, they never contacted me about signing this document. LOL!!!

I have been warning you for years now about this new and growing group who make up the Christian left who are now fighting with the old guard on the Christian right for power and to be the voice of Christians. The Christian left waters down the Gospel and lays aside the absolutes of the Bible in order to attract warm bodies and advance their social agenda, while the Christian right has been turned into little more than a very lucrative business that generates hundreds of millions annually around various causes and is more concerned with power and self preservation than getting actual results. This leaves Christians alone to deal with the hurts and pains of every day life with a very thin foundation to their faith, while the vast majority of people are living without hope and heading to hell when they die.

However, there is a remnant, a faithful group of Believers who have not sold out and whose sole goal is to serve the Lord and see God's Kingdom advanced. Praise God for those faithful pastors and ministries that only want to see the work of the Gospel accomplished as they share the Truth of God's Word without compromise and labor to bring the lost to faith in Jesus Christ. These are the last days, my friend, Jesus is coming at any moment. There is no time for playing games. People are dying and heading to hell every second. The focus of all Believers in Jesus Christ has to be on bringing lost souls to faith in our Lord. We don't need an "Evangelical Manifesto," we already have one and it is called THE BIBLE!!!

Know that I am praying for you, be richly blessed,

Bill Keller

Founder, www.liveprayer.com

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To get Bill Keller's FREE Daily Devotional...sign up at the link below by putting in your email address and look for the confirming email you must reply to...

<http://www.liveprayer.com/signup.cfm>

THE SHACK

by William P. Young

Published by Windblown Media, 2007, 248 pages

Reviewed by David Dunlap

The novel *The Shack* has taken the Christian community by storm, and it is likely that someone you know has read *The Shack*. This self-published work has sold well over one million copies in a single year. *The Shack* has stood at the number one position for paperback fiction on the *New York Times*' bestsellers list for a number of months.

The author, William P. Young, has been interviewed by numerous news outlets. Many Christian leaders have applauded the book. Eugene Peterson of Regent College, Vancouver, B. C., writes, "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!"¹ Recently, *World* magazine, a weekly Christian periodical, printed a two-page review largely praising the book.

The Shack: A Remarkable Book and A Disappointing Book

Ironically, *The Shack* is a remarkable book and yet, at the same time, a disappointing book. It is remarkable because of the large number of copies sold in a single year. It is remarkable because the story is engaging, creative, and at times profound. Yet, it is also a disappointing book. It is disappointing because of the unorthodox theological perspective to which the author returns time and again.

Although this book is a fictional novel about the spiritual and emotional journey of the main character Mackenzie Allen Phillips, the author also intends it to be a theological work, dealing with the nature of God, the Trinity, salvation, faith, and other biblical doctrines. It is this theological perspective of *The Shack* that we will seek to explore.

When interviewed, author William Young makes it known that although he is a Christian, he does not attend any church and has little interest in the current institutional churches. This being said, the author has a strong Christian background. He was raised in a Christian home, the son of an evangelical church pastor. He spent part of his childhood among the Dani tribe in West Papua, where his parents were missionar-

ies. Later he attended and graduated summa cum laude from Warner Pacific College, a Church of God (Indiana) four-year liberal arts college in Portland, Oregon. As one reads this novel, it causes one to wonder how a writer with such a strong Christian background could get so much wrong about fundamental Christian doctrine.

1. Theological Foundation of The Shack:

Some have called “The Shack” edgy; others say it is “unorthodox”; and still others call it “unbiblical.” In interviews with Young, when asked about some of the unorthodox theological content, he immediately seems to bristle and become defensive. He states that this book was initially written for his young children, and so it is not a theological book. In his interview in *World* he says: “It’s a work of fiction that’s really focused on the journey of a human being to deal with the junk in his life that includes his misunderstanding of the character of God and nature of God.

2. Initially, *The Shack* appears to be just another novel, but as one reads further, the theological precepts and teaching of the Emerging Church movement become more and more evident: This work serves to reinforce the ideas of Emerging church leaders such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, and Donald Miller. On the acknowledgment page of *The Shack*, the author mentions those who have influenced his thinking, including Anne LaMott, a popular writer among Emerging Church leaders and Donald Miller, the author of *Blue Like Jazz* and a national leader of the Emerging Church movement.

Theological Content:

Jason Carlson, the vice president of Christian Ministries International, was, for nearly six years, deeply involved in the Emerging Church movement. Carlson was mentored by Emergent leader Doug Pagitt, the pastor of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During those years, Carlson spent time with Emergent Church leaders such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and others. In 2006, Jason Carlson wrote an important article called “My Journey Into and Out of the Emergent Church.” In this article, he listed numerous characteristics of the Emergent Church.

3 Interestingly, in his novel, Young develops at some length many of these characteristics. Let us take a look at six characteristics:

1. "A Quasi-Universalistic View of Salvation."

William Young follows other Emerging Church leaders in teaching a universalistic model of salvation. Little is ever said about repentance, faith, or conversion to Christ. On the other hand, Young repeatedly states that sin is not punished, all individuals are forgiven of their sins, and all that God now seeks is a relationship with man. He has God say: "I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it" (p. 120).

In another place: "...you asked me what Jesus accomplished on the cross; so now listen to me carefully: through his death and resurrection, I am now fully reconciled to the world" (p. 192). Also, "In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some have chosen relationship" (p. 225).

2. "A Lack of Proper Appreciation for Biblical Authority over and against Personal Experience or Revelation."

The Shack over and over again sends the message that personal experience with God trumps the biblical authority of Scripture. Moreover, the commands and precepts of Scripture are not to be taken too seriously, for God does not have high expectations for His people (p. 206).

Concerning Scripture, Young writes: "...God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects...Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that guilt edges?" (p. 66) Mack, the main character, asks God where people will find Him: "You might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in creation, or in your joy or sorrow...you will see me in the Bible but just don't look for rules or principles..." (p. 198).

3. "Openly Questioning the Relevance of Key Historical Biblical Doctrines such as the Trinity."

Of course, the doctrine of the Trinity is at the very heart of The Shack. But the Trinity is reinterpreted in a way which theologians throughout church history would never have imagined. God the Father is portrayed as "...a large beaming African-American woman named...Elouisa...or ...Papa..." (pp. 82-87). God the Father, bears nail print wounds in his hands just as Jesus does

(p. 107). Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, is described as "...a Middle Eastern man dressed as a laborer...Jesus..." (pp. 82-87). Although fully divine, this Jesus is portrayed as more human than divine. Yet, Scripture depicts the very opposite. The Bible shows Christ's human nature to be subject to His divine nature. In the novel, Mack asks Jesus: "You created the world...?" "I created it as the Word, before the Word became flesh. So even though I created this, I see it now as a human" (p. 109). "Although He is fully God, he has never drawn on His nature as God to do anything..." Papa explains (p. 99). "So when he healed the blind?" (questions Mack...) "He did so as a dependent, limited human being trusting in my life and power to be at work within him and through him. Jesus as a human being, had no power within himself to heal anyone", replies Papa (p.100). The third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, is depicted as "...a small, distinctively Asian woman '...I am Sarayu...keeper of the gardens among other things...' " (pp. 82-87). Young teaches that the Holy Spirit was a created being. Mack says, "Sarayu, I know your are the Creator..." Sarayu replies, "A created being can only take what already exists and from it fashion something different" (p.131). Evangelical theologians have always insisted that the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Godhead was not a created being. (Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Holy Spirit was a created being.) At another point in Young's book, Mack queries, "Speaking of Sarayu, is she the Holy Spirit?" "Yes." replies Jesus, "She is Creativity; she is Action; she is the Breathing of Life; she is much more. She is my Spirit." (p. 110).

4. "Little or No Talk of Evangelism or Saving Lost Souls."

Unlike the New Testament, *The Shack* never speaks of people who are outside of Christ on their way to a lost eternity. It never speaks of the need for Christians to bring a message of salvation to those who are unsaved. William Young teaches that all people are reconciled, redeemed, and forgiven. The problem is simply that some have not come into a relationship with God. We read in *The Shack*: "So how do I become part of that church?" "It's simple, Mack," Jesus replies. "It's all about relationships and simply sharing life...being open and available to others around us. My church is all about people and life is about relationships" (p. 178).

5. "Highly ambiguous handling of truth."

Unfortunately, when Young begins to deal with biblical themes, he either deviates, evades, or misrepresents important doctrines of Scripture. For example, God the Father says, “I don’t do humiliation, or guilt, or condemnation. They don’t produce one speck of wholeness or righteousness, and that is why they were nailed into Jesus on the cross” (p. 223). Needless to say, Scripture never speaks in these terms; this is a viewpoint in the mind of the author that he wishes was true.

6. “An unbridled cynicism towards conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism.” At times in *The Shack* William Young displays bitterness and cynicism toward fundamental and evangelical churches. He often has Mack exhibit a bitter disdain of evangelical churches. He dislikes their zeal, their love for country, their “agenda”, their preaching, and rules, etc. (p.181). Early in the book, Mack realizes that: “...Sunday prayers and hymns weren’t cutting it anymore, if they ever had....He was sick of God and God’s religion, sick of all the little religious social clubs that didn’t seem to make any real difference or affect any real changes” (p. 66).

Conclusion:

The message of *The Shack* has the potential to strengthen and encourage Christians who have experienced great tragedy or personal loss. It is unfortunate that such a moving story is set in a backdrop of so much wrong biblical teaching and imagery. Sadly, this is a book that many would want to give to a hurting friend but cannot do so in good conscience because of its doctrinal content. *The Shack* is rife with theological liberalism, Emerging Church ideology, and startling irreverence. As we would not welcome a Bible teacher into our churches who taught these doctrines, even so we should not bring these doctrines into our homes and lives in book form. Those Christians who are interested in reading *The Shack* should be strongly warned about the errors contained in it.

Endnotes

1. *The Shack* - endorsement page
2. Susan Olasky, “*Commuter-Driven Bestseller*”, *World*, June 28, 2008, 50
3. Jason Carlson, “*My Journey Into and Out of the Emergent Church*”, *Worldview Magazine*, Sept. 6, 2006
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IS GOD A DISPENSATIONALIST?¹

by Dr. David L. Larsen

Professor Emeritus, Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary

Reviewed by Ronald E. McRoberts, PhD

Religion Analysis Service (RAS) always welcomes another positive contribution to the literature on classic dispensationalism, particularly by a former member of the RAS Board of Reference. Dr. Larsen states that his purposes are to examine the classic dispensational system and to grapple with dispensational issues under current discussion. Although the intended readership is not stated, one can only infer that it is some combination of theologians and/or theological students. In general, the Christian in the pew would not be familiar with the theological criticisms of dispensationalism to which Larsen responds, nor would they have access to the numerous references he cites. Nevertheless, the book contains information and discussions easily comprehensible to readers with a rudimentary understanding of dispensationalism.

A brief overview of the Larsen's 10 chapters follows. The first two chapters focus on an introduction to hermeneutical systems and the unique features of dispensational hermeneutics. Larsen concurs with the acknowledged giants regarding the distinctives of dispensational hermeneutics: first, it "insists on the plain, simple, natural meaning of the text, literal where possible" and second, the author's intended meaning in its original context is to be sought. The third chapter provides a brief overview of the traditional seven dispensations and a response to the erroneous allegation that dispensationalism promotes multiple ways of salvation. The fourth and fifth chapters articulate the distinction between Israel and the Church, a distinction that Larsen asserts is the most central teaching of dispensationalism. Chapter 6 focuses on a discussion of the kingdom, a central facet of dispensationalism in that its adherents await a future, literal kingdom in which Messiah reigns from Jerusalem for 1,000 earthly years. The seventh chapter focuses on distinctions between law and grace and on perspectives on sin in the life of believers with the conclusion that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables believers to fulfill the law of Christ. The remaining three chapters focus on the future: the distinctive role of prophecy in dispensation-

alism, Messiah's imminent return, and the millennial kingdom. In that eschatology, the doctrine of last things, is a hallmark of dispensationalism, these chapters are crucial. Consistent with other dispensationalists, Dr. Larsen argues that future predictive prophecy will be fulfilled literally just as a past predictive prophecy has been fulfilled literally. He also wisely advises Christians to turn to the Book of Revelation "to be regularly reminded how it will all turn out."

Dr. Larsen's primary contributions are not unique perspectives on dispensationalism; similar discussions of the selected topics and the positions advocated have appeared in other premillennial and dispensational treatises. Rather, the contributions are a thoroughly researched historical perspective, further development of important dispensational concepts, and comprehensive responses to the critics of dispensationalism. In the latter regard the book represents a substantial contribution to the dispensational and premillennial literature.

Advocates of classic dispensational will have little cause for disagreement with the content of the book. Nevertheless, Professor Larsen is encouraged to consider a revision and/or second edition. First, a few, brief statements in a preface or in the Introduction regarding the intended readership would be helpful. Second, the rather large number of typographical errors should be corrected. Third, the flow of the thought is often disrupted by the large number of parenthetical comments, remarks, and clarifications – more than 150 by count, excluding scripture references. Some paragraphs include as many as five such comments, while multiple other comments are of paragraph length. Finally, a summary of the practical consequences of dispensationalism for the non-theologian would be welcome; i.e., what are the effects in the Christian's everyday life of being a dispensationalist? How does being a dispensationalist affect routine decision-making? One of the only attempts to address the practical consequences appeared in a series of issues of the *Discerner* beginning in 2004 with issue 2 of volume 24.

Despite these minor suggested revisions, RAS highly recommends "Is God a Dispensationalist?" to all readers interested in dispensationalism, regardless of their Biblical expertise.

¹Larsen, David L. 2008. *Is God a Dispensationalist? The Definition and Dynamics of a System*. Morris Publishing, 3212 East Highway 30, Kearney, NE 68847. Tel: 1-800-650-7888.

“CHRIST OR A PIECE OF BREAD?”

by Roy E. Knuteson Ph.D.

One of the major distinctives of the Roman Catholic religion is the centrality and efficaciousness of their church service called the Mass. Unfortunately, very few Protestants and not a few Catholics really understand what supposedly transpires in this extended drama which is solely enacted by the local parish priest, or by a Bishop, an Archbishop, or by the Pope himself. Many ignorantly consider the Mass as just another form of the Lord’s Supper or Communion. It is not. In fact, the sacrifice depicted in the Mass is the unique feature that separates Roman Catholicism from all other religions and especially from biblical Christianity. If the prominent Evangelical leaders who endorsed the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” document really understood the true nature of the Mass, along with a proper understanding of Purgatory and the role of Mary in Catholic theology, they would recant and renounce the document they signed.

THE DRAMA OF THE MASS

The only person qualified to conduct the Mass is a properly ordained priest. In the mind of the worshipper the priest has the spiritual power to actually transform a little edible wafer into the literal body of Jesus Christ! With another spoken word, the wine becomes the actual blood of Jesus.

The elaborate ritual of the Mass is a re-enactment by the priest of the experience of Jesus at the last supper in the Upper Room, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the trials, the betrayal, and His death, burial, and resurrection. Until Vatican II, the entire pageant was in Latin with the priest standing with his back to the audience. Whether the Mass is a “Low or High Mass” will dictate the volume of the priest’s voice and whether it will include chanting and singing by the priest. It is also determined by the amount of monies given to the priest for each Mass. Obviously, the Mass is a major source of income for the church. Many Catholics give and leave large amounts of money which is designated for dozens, if not hundreds, of Masses to assist in the release of a

deceased family member or friend from the fires of Purgatory.

The Mass is a one-man show which includes numerous signs of the cross, kissing the altar, genuflecting, praying silently, and concludes with lifting of the wafer when it becomes the “Host” or the body of Jesus. In addition, the presiding priest performs many other symbolic acts as prescribed by church Law. At the conclusion of this so-called “celebration”, the worshippers file to the front of the sanctuary where they kneel, close their eyes, and open their mouths to receive the wafer placed there by the priest. At that moment, according to their theology, they are literally eating the flesh of Jesus. If this is true, it must be admitted that it is nothing less than a form of religious cannibalism!

Until about twenty years ago, the cup of wine was withheld from the laity and drunk by the priest on behalf of the congregants. The primary reason for this restriction was the belief that a worshipper might accidentally spill it and this was considered a mortal sin. I once was an attendant at a Catholic wedding. Already the priest had officiated at several weddings that day and close up I could see that he was quite drunk as he rolled the cup around in his mouth and licked its edges. His slurred speech and stumbling words were a revelation to all that he was intoxicated, much to the disgust of the wedding couple. Today, Catholic worshippers may also receive the cup and the frequency of this inclusion is determined by the local parish priest.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

Rome rejects the symbolism of the bread and wine by declaring that the Mass is one and the same sacrifice as that of Jesus on the cross.

Disregarding the Bible’s declaration that our Lord’s death was a “once for all” event, Rome teaches that He is re-crucified hundreds of thousands of times daily on the altars of the church world-wide. The only difference they say, is the manner of the sacrifice which was bloody on the cross and bloodless on the altars of the church. However, the Bible clearly states that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). It boggles our minds to realize that this human pantomime which is so absurd and unscriptural, is nevertheless blindly accepted by millions of thinking people world-wide.

In spite of the clear teaching of scripture regarding the sacrifice of

Jesus, Rome believes that the sacrifice of the Mass is just as efficacious to take away sin as the sacrifice at Calvary. Christ is therefore offered as a sacrifice every time Mass is observed. In addition, the priest becomes a “Christ” himself inasmuch as he sacrifices the supposedly real Christ on the altar and presents Him for the salvation of the faithful and for the deliverance of the souls in Purgatory.

Romanism teaches that her priests have the power over the real body of Christ, so that when the word of consecration is pronounced, Jesus is obligated to obey the priest and to appear sacramentally as bread and wine. Priests therefore have the power to hold Him in their hands and even carry Him from place to place! They can also present Him in the form of a large wafer in a “Remonstrance” which is a gold or silver box, which has a transparent center to display this special sacrament. In Catholic countries such as Spain, Italy, and the Latin American nations this large wafer is placed in the “Remonstrance” for special Catholic festivals and then paraded before the world as the alleged body of Jesus. At the local level Catholics are urged to sign up to “perpetually adore the blessed sacrament” by worshipping the host for an hour or more each week as it resides on the Altar In this special box. It is apparent that Rome does not want Jesus to be left alone in an otherwise empty church building. What deception! What mockery! What an abomination before God!

THE ROLE OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

The word “transubstantiation” means a “change of substance”. As already noted, the Roman Church teaches that the wafer and the wine are dramatically changed into the complete and literal body of Christ. However, they have to admit that there is no visible change in the wafer and wine. The elements continue to have the same color, size, and taste in spite of the announced change. A Catholic’s eyes tell him that the Eucharist remains unchanged but their minds blindly accept this jumble of medieval superstition because they have been taught this from early childhood and it must be true because Pope Innocent II declared it to be so in 1215 A.D.

Transubstantiation is the chief doctrine of the church and without this

“miracle” of the complete reincarnation of Jesus, the church would cease to exist. Everything in Catholicism rests upon this spurious foundation. The question: “Is it Christ or a piece of bread?” must be answered. It cannot be both.

THE REFUTATION OF THE MASS

First, the Bible clearly states that the many Old Testament animal sacrifices were anticipatory types of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and therefore need not be observed anymore.

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have no more consciousness of sins”.

“By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God From that time waiting til His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:1-2; 10-14 NKJV).

Over and over the Word of God declares that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary was a “once for all” event that never needs to be repeated. What is said regarding transitory nature of the ministry of the Old Testament priests certainly applies to Catholic priests today. The fact that Masses must be repeated proves their ineffectiveness. If once is not enough, then surely a million re-enactments or repetitions are also ineffective, and this is another reason why no priest or Pope can say how many Masses it takes to release a soul from Purgatory.

Secondly, Evangelical Christians hold that the bread and wine are mere symbols of the body of Christ and nothing more. The observance of the “Lord’s Supper” is simply a memorial, a remembrance of our Lord’s death for sinners. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

We reject therefore the Catholic belief that Jesus was speaking literally when He commanded His eleven Apostles to “eat my flesh and drink my blood” (John 6:54). This was an impossibility since Jesus was physically present with them in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and His revision of the Passover Feast was made prior to His crucifixion. The Bible answer to the question: “Is it Christ or a piece of bread?” is the latter since none of Romanism’s claims have Scriptural support and therefore must be rejected as heresy.

Revelation 18 contains an end-time prophecy regarding the doom of the Roman Catholic Church and what a true believer’s response should be in the light of this expose:

“Come out of her my people so that you will not share in her sins” (Rev. 18:4).

QUIZ: VIEWS ON POST-DEATH EXISTENCE

1. The American Indians hoped for
 - a. The Elysian fields
 - b. The “Happy Hunting Grounds”
 - c. The “Big Rock Candy Mountain”
 - d. Beulah Land
2. A future state with procreation and progressivism
 - a. Jehovah’s Witnesses
 - b. Christian Science
 - c. Reformed Jewry
 - d. Mormonism
3. People in the Bible who denied future existence were
 - a. Pharisees
 - b. Sadducees
 - c. Disciples of John the Baptist
 - d. Disciples of Paul
4. Which cult anticipated Paradise being set up in California?
 - a. Satanists
 - b. Scientologists
 - c. Jehovah’s Witnesses
 - d. Followers of Bahaiism
5. The wicked are “annihilated” but not eternally punished
 - a. Roman Catholics
 - b. Protestant fundamentalists
 - c. Buddhists
 - d. Seventh Day Adventists

6. Who instructed the most on “hell” in the Bible?
 - a. Solomon
 - b. Paul
 - c. Peter
 - d. Jesus

7. The Bible teaches that the believer’s future is characterized as
 - a. Eternal bliss
 - b. Invisible spirit
 - c. Purgatory
 - d. Utopian self-indulgence

8. The Hebrew word for “hell” is derived from this biblical site
 - a. Armageddon
 - b. Valley of Hinnom
 - c. Valley of Achor
 - d. Mount Carmel

9. According to the Bible, the millennium occurs
 - a. before the Rapture
 - b. before the descent of the New Jerusalem
 - c. before Armageddon
 - d. after the punishment of the wicked

10. The parable that describes future existence is
 - a. the Sower
 - b. rich man and Lazarus
 - c. the importunate widow
 - d. the pearl of great price

Answers:

1. (b); 2. (b); 3. (d); 4. (b); 5. (c); 6. (d); 7. (a); 8. (b); 9. (b); 10. (b)

RAS STATEMENT OF FAITH

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments as verbally inspired of God, inerrant, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life.

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, and is true God and true man.

We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned, and thereby incurred, not only, physical death but also that spiritual death and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature, and in the case of those who reach moral responsibility become sinners in thought, word, and deed.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice; and that all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of His shed blood.

We believe that all those (and only those) who by faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, are miraculously born again of the Holy Spirit, and thereby, without benefit of any human merit, religious rite and ceremony, partake of Divine life and nature, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit for time and eternity.

We believe that, at the time of the new birth, the believer received the Holy Spirit and by Him is body of Christ; is forever indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is baptized into the Guide and Comforter; and if yielded to Him, is empowered for service.

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Head of the Body, the Church.” We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in His ascension into heaven, and in His present life there as High Priest and Advocate for us.

We believe in “that blessed hope,” the personal, Premillennial, and imminent return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost; the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting conscious punishment of the lost.

We believe that Satan is a real being, a personal Devil, that he, the enemy of God, the “father of lies,” the great deceiver of mankind, is the instigator of all false systems of religion, and that, with him, all persistent followers of such will find their end in the lake of fire.

We hope this answers any inquiry. Should you have a question, please feel free to call or write to the office of RAS.

The Staff of RAS

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RELIGION ANALYSIS SERVICE, INC.
1313 5th St. SE, Suite 126E,
Minneapolis, MN 55414-4504

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