

The Discerner

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A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 30, Number 3

July • August • September 2010

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

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PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF OUR TREASURER

I was born in the gold mining town of Timmins, Ontario, Canada. At the age of three, I lost my mother. Dad arranged for a succession of nannies to care for me, but after a year he decided that it would be best if I were raised by my uncle and aunt and their ten children on a small farm. We attended a small country Baptist church each Sunday. These were memorable times for me. Dad remarried, and at the age of nine, I moved back home to be cared for by my dad and stepmother, a former teacher. I was taken to church and Sunday school, but at times reluctantly.

At 23 years of age, I married Glenys, a wonderful Christian lady, and we became parents of two children. Working underground in the gold mines at the time presented a bleak future. My wife encouraged me to attend the University of Waterloo. I did and graduated with an engineering degree. Subsequently I worked 25 years designing mining exploration equipment, retiring in 1988.

In July 1976, I realized I was suffering from living a self-indulgent, sinful life. I pleaded with the Lord to forgive me of my sins and come into my life. Thereupon I experienced the pure joy of salvation. His Son became Lord of my life. I am thankful to Jesus Christ for the privilege of serving Him in my home church, community and at R.A.S. All praise to God for His grace, kindness, correction, and love!

DEAR READER

In his book “Learning to Trust Again” (NavPress, Copyright @2009), Paul Miller asserts that “cynicism is increasingly the dominant spirit of our age.” He explains: “I mean it is an influence, a tone that permeates our culture, one of the master temptations of our age.” ... “Cynicism is so pervasive that, at times, it feels like a presence, a spirit.” Miller attributes this cynicism to Satan, the god of this present world system. Satan “dulls our soul and corrupts us”... “cynicism creates a numbness toward life”... “it leads to a creeping bitterness that can deaden and even destroy the spirit.”

Miller cites, as an example, how cynicism impinges our educational patterns: “Psychology’s tendency to hunt for hidden motives adds a new layer to our ability to judge and thus be cynical about what others are doing. No longer do people commit adultery out of lust – they have unmet longings that need to be fulfilled.”

I might add that cynicism has penetrated our political, sociological, economic, and religious systems as well. For instance, currently we are deeply engaged in national pre-election contests with massive spending and vicious character assassinations. Sociologically, one wonders if the cesspool of abortion (culture of death), homosexuality, divorce, greed, and criminality is almost full; economically, unemployment, indebtedness, and homelessness are on the rise. Spiritually, though church attendances seem to be fairly constant, the church (including evangelical Christianity) presents great weakness in dealing with issues such as evolution, authority of scripture, evangelistic and missions fervor, and in confrontation with aberrant cults and movements. Yes, we have enough to be cynical about, if we want to be cynical!

Fortunately, Paul Miller submits six cures as to how to deal with cynicism: 1) Be warm but wary; 2) Learn to hope again; 3) Cultivate a childlike spirit; 4) Cultivate a thankful spirit; 5) Practice repentance; and 6) Develop an eye for Jesus. A full commentary on these cures goes beyond this page, but I encourage the reader to secure this book. It will teach us to “trust again” the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and attitudes.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

Again, we are indebted to our faithful RAS researchers for their cogent studies on two major cults, the Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Rev. Steve Lagoon employs Mormon literature itself to show that the Mormons are polytheistic and in no way Christian and Trinitarian. The comparison between Mormonism and biblical Christianity is substantive and documented. Dr. Roy Knuteson zeroes in on the number "144,000" in Revelation, chapters 7 and 14. He totally destroys the assertion of the Jehovah's Witnesses that their leaders and their so-called Theocratic Kingdom constitute the "144,000." Well, who are these people then? At this point Knuteson thoroughly investigates the contexts and comes up with formidable arguments and conclusions. Very helpful!

Our controversy with Islamic terrorism has many ramifications, and Rick Kronk, missionary in Europe, enlightens us again (see also: Vol. 30, No. 4, 2009) with his thoughts on the Muslim attitude toward the Koran. Now we can better understand why Muslims were upset worldwide by the threatened burning of the Koran by the Florida preacher, Terry Jones. Kronk's extensive studies on the Muslim perspective fills a gaping hole in our knowledge of this strange religion.

Finally, we have inserted three short blogs: 1) a data sheet on the theology and practices of the United Church of Canada – even this brief exposure shows the liberalism besetting the largest Protestant church body in Canada; 2) a cursory but informative look into the worship phenomenon in many of our churches. This ought to disturb us to the point that worship style and attitudes change; and 3) a very succinct history and description of the so-called "Emergent Movement" – it has "morphed" into a spectrum of varying types. "What's next?" I ask.

The quiz at the end reminds us that biblical teaching and actual practices on church-state relationships often clash. May the quiz cause us too to reflect on our heritage, colorful and confused though it might be. Please let me know if you scored 100% or even 90%. Thank you.

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE FALSE GOD OF MORMONISM

by Steve Lagoon

In this article, we will examine the beliefs of Mormonism (officially *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*) concerning God. Our examination will show that *the god of Mormonism is clearly not the God of the Bible*. It is essential that evangelical Christians understand that Mormonism is a false religion and that its teachings are antithetical to biblical truth.

Specifically, we will see that Mormonism subverts the biblical teaching concerning God, while blasphemously teaching that men can themselves become gods. An examination shows that Mormonism errs in its view of God in the following ways:

One, Mormonism denies the *eternality* of God by asserting that God wasn't always God, but became God. **Two**, Mormonism destroys the *distinction between the creator and the created* by teaching that any man can become God just as God himself has done. **Three**, Mormonism denies the *true unity* of the persons within the nature of God, resulting in tri-theism and polytheism. Let us take a closer look at each of these in turn.

Our Eternal God

The Bible clearly teaches the eternality of God. He didn't one day happen to become God; He has always been God. For instance, 1 Chronicles 16:36 states: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." In Psalm 90:2, Moses affirms the eternal existence of God, "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

Mormonism's God in Process

In contrast to this, Mormonism asserts that God (the God of this earth) was not always God, but became God through a process. For instance, Joseph Smith Jr., the founding prophet of Mormonism, taught shortly before his death¹ in a funeral address known as the King Follet Discourse: "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!... I am going to tell you how God came to be God... He was once a man like us."² Jerald and Sandra Tanner, experts on Mormon history and doctrine, quote from Mormon leader Milton Hunter as follows: "Mormon

prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a Mortal Man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He became God-an exalted being-through obedience to the same eternal gospel truths that we are given opportunity to obey.”³ Hunter then cites a well-known dictum by the Mormon prophet Lorenzo Snow: “As man is, God once was: as God is, man may become.”⁴

The god of Mormonism is clearly not the eternal and almighty God of the Bible.

Mormonism’s God Has a God

Indeed, Mormonism not only affirms that God became God, but that he (Elohim, god of the earth) was created by a god that became god before him! Mormon apostle Orson Pratt explained the Mormon teaching this way: “We were begotten by our Father in Heaven; the person of our Father in Heaven was begotten on a previous heavenly world by His Father; and again, He was begotten by a still more Ancient Father; and so on.”⁵

We are again forced to make a choice between the eternal God of the Bible and the god of Joseph Smith Jr.’s imagination, a god antithetical to the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.

Mormonism’s God Does Not Pre-exist Man

Another troubling aspect of Mormon teaching along these lines is that Mormonism actually teaches that men are equally eternal with God in the spiritual sense that if all men existed before being conceived and born into this world. In this way, they are actually co-eternal with God. For example, Joseph Fielding Smith, the sixth president of the Mormon Church, taught: “The intelligent part of man was never created but always existed.”⁶ Le Grand Richards, a prominent Mormon leader in his well known book *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder*, described this teaching: “We have already pointed out in this chapter that ‘Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.’ (D&C 93:29.) We are also taught that these intelligences, of which God is the greatest...”⁷

In other words, according to Mormonism, God and all mankind are equally eternal and there is no explanation as to how this can be. God (Elohim) is merely god of this world because he more quickly advanced on the path to godhood, but otherwise neither preceded us nor is our creator. Mormonism finds itself on the horns of the dilemma of eternal

regression; each god was made by a god before it, with no explanation of whether there is an ultimate god, or an unmoved mover, if you will.

Brigham Young, Smith's successor as the leader and prophet of the Latter Day Saints said, "How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity, and it is and will be to all eternity."⁸

The teaching of this supposed Mormon prophet are in direct contradiction with that of the Bible which teaches that man's existence began in this world and is therefore not eternal. The beginning of man described in Genesis does not at all suggest that man pre-existed before our earthly existence in some such spiritual state. Rather, the account of Genesis describes the creation of both man's body and spirit: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

Again, we must decide between the Mormon view of God and that of biblical Christianity, for clearly they are not the same thing. One follows the words of the Bible, the other the speculations of modern-day false teachers.

Trinity or Tri-theism?

The Bible also teaches the true unity of the persons within the nature of God. There are not three Gods working closely together, as Mormonism asserts. Rather, each of the persons is fully God, yet sharing the nature of the one God equally.

Some false teachers err by confusing the persons of the Godhead (e.g. Oneness Modalist), or by denying the deity of one or more of the persons (Jehovah's Witnesses). Mormons, however err, not by denying the distinction or the deity of the persons, but rather by asserting that each of the persons is a distinct god, and thereby deny the Trinity and affirm tri-theism.

For instance, Joseph Smith Jr. said: "We have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural: and who can contradict it?"⁹ Francis Beckwith sums up the Mormon view on this question: "Mormon theology affirms tritheism, the belief that there are three gods with which this world should be concerned (though Mormon theology teaches that there exist many other gods as well)."¹⁰

Sometimes, Mormons will deny they are polytheists by saying they have only one God. What they mean is that, while they acknowledge the existence of a multitude of gods, they only worship the god of the earth. This slight of hand trick is sophistry at its worst. It should also be remembered that since Mormons believe that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods, they are still polytheists.

Biblical Teaching of the Trinity

In contrast with Mormon tri-theism, based on the teaching of the Bible, Christians believe there is one and only one God (Monotheism), yet within the nature of this one God there are three eternally distinct persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us show these truths from Scripture.

That there is one, and only one, God, we stand upon the following passages of Scripture. The great *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, *the LORD is one.*” 1 Timothy 2:5 agrees, “*For there is one God* and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

While there is one God, yet there are three distinct persons identified as God and having the attributes of God in the Bible: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is called God in John 6:27: “On Him (Jesus) *God the Father* has placed His seal of approval.” The apostle Paul agrees saying that he was sent by “Jesus Christ and *God the Father*” (Romans 1:7).

Passages showing the deity of Christ Jesus are many. For example, John 20:28 states, Thomas said to Him (Jesus), ‘*My Lord and my God!*’ Paul says that Jesus is the creator of all things (Colossians 1:16) as does the John the apostle (John 1:1-3). The Holy Spirit is called Lord in 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

Putting these biblical passages together, we find that there is only one God, and that within the nature of the one God, there are three distinct persons.

Elohim and Jehovah

In accordance with tri-theism, Mormonism teaches that the Hebrew word in the Old Testament “*Elohim*” always refers to God the Father and that the Hebrew word “*Yahweh*” i.e. Jehovah or LORD (always refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of God).

For instance, a Mormon tract describes an alleged appearance of Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith Jr. in 1836 in which Smith described Jesus' words as the "voice of Jehovah."¹¹ Mormon leader James E. Talmage taught: "The identity of Jesus Christ with the Jehovah of the Israelites was well understood by the Nephite prophets."¹² Likewise, Talmage asserts: "Elohim, as understood and used in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ, is the name title of God the eternal Father, whose firstborn Son in the spirit is Jehovah... Jesus Christ."¹³

Cult expert Walter Martin commented on Talmage's description of this aspect of Mormon belief: "Talmage lapses into the error of making Elohim and Jehovah two separate gods, apparently in complete ignorance of the fact that Elohim 'the greater god' and Jehovah—Jesus 'the lesser god,' begotten by Elohim, are compounded in the Hebrew as 'Jehovah the Mighty One,' or simply 'Jehovah God' as any concordance of Hebrew usage in the Old Testament readily reveals."¹⁴ In other words, in Hebrew or Old Testament usage, Jehovah and Elohim are just two different names for the same God (sometimes combined together), and not two different beings as Mormons teach.

However, for the sake of argument, we note that there are powerful implications that flow from these Mormon assertions. For instance, Isaiah 43:10 states, "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD (Jehovah), "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me."

Now Mormons believe that this verse was spoken by Jesus Christ since He alone is Jehovah, in their understanding. If that is the case, Jesus' words would be refuting fundamental Mormon beliefs.

For instance, in the verse Jehovah said there was no god formed before or after him. If it is Jesus talking, as Mormons teach, then Jesus is denying that God the Father (Elohim) became a god before Jesus. It would also deny that the Holy Spirit became a god after him. Indeed, the Mormon Jesus would be denying the Mormon doctrine of exaltation, since no one can become a god after Jehovah spoke these words.

The Mormon Doctrine of Exaltation

Finally, the Bible makes a clear distinction between the creator (God) and the created (every thing else). It is surprising for many to learn that Mormonism actually teaches that men can become gods. We have already referred to the famous or infamous Mormon maxim

that “As God is, man can become; as man is, God once was.” This teaching of Mormonism combines beliefs known as the Law of Eternal Progression along with the doctrine of Exaltation.

The idea is that by following universal, so-called gospel principles, men can progress spiritually and eventually become gods, just as the god of this world was once a man who became god. Men can follow in god’s footsteps, so to speak, and become gods themselves; but they will never ‘catch up’ to god because he is ahead of them and also continues to eternally progress.

For example, the *Gospel Principles* manual published by the Mormon Church states under Exaltation: “We can become like our Heavenly Father. This is exaltation... These are some of the blessings given to exalted people... They will become gods.”¹⁵ This teaching goes back to Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith Jr. who said to the faithful, “You have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you.”¹⁶

I have occasionally asked Mormon missionaries about this doctrine and its implications. I wonder what the effect is on one’s thoughts to believe that one day you will become a god yourself, ruling over your own planet, and having people worship you. This is, of course, the same lie Satan used to deceive Eve in the Garden: “You shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5).

We conclude by calling Mormons to abandon Satan’s lies and follow God’s truths as He has revealed them in the precious Bible. We further implore evangelical Christians to recognize the dangerous false teachings of Mormonism.

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- 1 Gordon H. Fraser, *Is Mormonism Christian?* Chicago (Moody Press, 1977) 38.
 - 2 Joseph Smith Jr. *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6:305-6 as cited in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, Francis Beckwith, Norman L. Geisler, Ron Rhodes, Phil Roberts, and Jerald Sandra Tanner, Eugene: OR (Harvest House Publishers, 1998) 70.
 - 3 Milton R. Hunter, *Gospel Through the Ages*, p. 104, as cited by Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?*, (Enlarged Edition), Salt Lake City: Utah (Modern Microfilm Company, 1972) 164
 - 4 Milton Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages*, pp. 105-6 as cited by Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis: MN (Bethany House Publisher, 1985 Revised Edition) 203.
 - 5 Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, p. 132 as cited by Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?*, (Enlarged Edition), Salt Lake City: Utah (Modern Microfilm Company, 1972) 164
 - 6 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, pp. 351, 355 as cited by Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, Grand Rapids:MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963) 47.
 - 7 LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work And A Wonder*, Salt Lake City: Utah (Deseret Book Company, 1979 Revised Edition) 285.
 - 8 *Discourses of Brigham Young*, arranged by John A> Wldstoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954), pp. 22-23. As cited by Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, Grand Rapids: MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963, 1986 Reprint) 37.

- 9 *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Alma L. Burton, 1977, p. 35 as cited by Sonny Bowman, *Mormonism: Does It Pass God's 3- Question Test for Truth?*, p. 6.
- 10 *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, Francis Beckwith, Norman L. Geisler, Ron Rhodes, Phil Roberts, and Jerald Sandra Tanner, Eugene: OR (Harvest House Publishers, 1998) 75.
- 11 *What The Mormons Think of Christ*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976, p. 30.
- 12 James E. Talmage, *Jesus The Christ*, Salt Lake City: Utah (Deseret Book Company, 1976) 38.
- 13 ibid
- 14 Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis: MN (Bethany House Publishers, 1985) 205.
- 15 *Gospel Principles*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City: Utah, 1978, 1992, p. 302
- 16 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, Salt Lake City:UT (Deseret Book Co., 1976, 1980) Volume 6, p. 306 as cited by Richard Abanes, *Becoming Gods: A Closer Look at 21st Century Mormonism*, Eugene: OR (Harvest House Publishers, 2004) 205.

WHO ARE THE 144,000?

by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

In 90 A.D. the Apostle John received the final revelation from God known as the Book of Revelation. In a context dealing with future judgment, John wrote: "I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel" (Rev.7:4). In Revelation 14:1, he testified: "Then I looked and beheld on Mount Zion stood the Lamb and with him 144,000 that have his name and his father's name written on their foreheads."

Who Are the 144,000?

This is a very important question, because whatever interpretation is made will reveal one's hermeneutic, or method of interpreting scripture. It will also reveal a person's personal theology, whether it be Premillennial or Amillennial, and it will also reveal how equipped one is to refute the cultists who have their own unscriptural interpretation of this very important question.

The Symbolic View

Evangelical scholars differ sharply in their interpretation of the vision of the 144,000 and they tend to fall into two distinct groups. Some pay little attention to the specifically - named twelve tribes of Israel. Believing that the number is artificial, it therefore cannot be taken literally. Instead, they adopt a symbolic view and explain that the 144,000 represent the whole company of the saved and not some select portion in heaven, as represented by the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament. This is a typical interpretation of Amillennialists who deny a future Kingdom of God on earth. They see no future for the nation of Israel in prophecy and, therefore, they must spiritualize the scriptures and ignore the context in which the 144,000 appear. The symbolic view provides no consistent understanding of the prophetic scriptures and, therefore must be rejected as a valid system of interpretation.

The Literal View

Anyone who simply reads the scriptures without prejudice will naturally conclude that the 144,000 are the children of Israel just as

the Bible states (Rev. 7:4). The literal or normal reading is the key to understanding all the prophetic portions of God's holy word, including this important and provocative section regarding things to come.

In order to identify the 144,000, it is necessary to compare the original list of constituents in Genesis 35:22-26 with the listing found in Revelation 7:7-8 since they are not identical as one would ordinarily expect. A careful analysis of these two listings reveals that they are not all the initial sons of Jacob (Israel) since the tribe of Dan is omitted in the Revelation 7 listing while the tribe of Manasseh is included. It should be further noted that they are not representative of the tribes that inherited the land of Canaan under Joshua since Dan is omitted and Levi (the priestly class normally excluded) is included in the Revelation passage. Also Joseph is listed in place of his son Ephraim and the tribe of Judah appears first, in place of Reuben the first-born. Various attempts have been made to harmonize these seeming discrepancies. Liberals, for example, conclude that the Bible is in error. Others claim that the 12 tribes recorded in Revelation 7 are symbolic and should not be pressed for a literal ethnic understanding.

However, the better understanding is that these 12 tribes numbering 12,000 each will be those of the tribes listed in Revelation 7, since they are not "lost" as some claim, but are known to God. They will be present for the purpose of judgment in the future because Jesus promised His Apostles that "you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). We may not be able to totally harmonize these scriptures, but a literal and normal reading of Revelation 7:7-8 is a true statement of the facts and provides the necessary foundation for a proper identification of the 144,000.

The J.W. View

Of all the cults of Christendom, the Jehovah's Witnesses are the only ones to my knowledge who have attempted to apply the 144,000 to their particular religion. What began as a Bible study in 1870 under the leadership of Charles Taze Russell grew rapidly, and it was decided to claim the 144,000 as representative of their movement. This gave them a biblical status of sorts, but they neglected to notice that the 144,000 are all Jewish!

According to their theology, the original 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were "spirit begotten" and would reign with Christ in the heavenly kingdom. This was acceptable doctrine until the cult out-grew this number. Under the leadership of Russell's successor, a "Judge

Rutherford,” the cult was officially named the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” in 1931, and a new classification was created to accommodate their numerical growth — the so-called: “Jonadabs,” named after an Old Testament character (Jeremiah 35 :6-8), and as illustrated by the slave relationship of the Gibeonites to Joshua in Joshua 9:21-27. Presently, this is the best that can be promised to the Witnesses, since they cannot be “spirit-begotten” now and are therefore classified as “the faithful and wise servant class” and “people of good will.” They believe they will live with Christ on planet earth. if they remain faithful.

The Identification of the 144,000

1. They are all biologically related to the twelve tribes of Israel listed in Rev. 7:4-8. The 144,000 cited in chapters 7 and 14 are the same persons. The first scene is on earth as the saints are saved and sealed. (Rev. 7:1-3). The second scene (Rev. 14:1) is in heaven as the 144,000 are with Jesus on Mount Zion (which as in Hebrews 12:22, signifies the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place of God). It is to this place that the 144,000, and all the other believers, will be gathered upon their deaths as they await the resurrection (Rev. 6:9-11).
2. They are all sealed on their foreheads with the names of Jesus and the Father by the five angels, commissioned by God for this special task (Rev. 7:3, 14:1). The seal does not protect them from harm or death as some believe, but it does identify them as true believers, just as the mark of the Antichrist identifies those who worship him (Rev. 14:9-11). This visible mark also makes them a shining target for the enemy to kill them, which is permitted by God to happen (Rev. 13:7). Revelation 20:4 states that these believers, and others, will be killed “because of their testimony and because of the word of God.” However, all of these martyrs will come to life at the Second Coming of Jesus and reign with Christ a thousand years. The 144,000 will be the exact number of Jewish believers who will initially be brought to faith in Christ soon after Jesus raptures the true believers of this age to heaven. This massive turning to Jesus is the fulfillment of Romans 11:26 which states:

“And in this way all Israel will be saved as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion and he will abolish ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

3. They are all classified as the “First Fruits” of the harvest of

souls (Rev. 14:5), which anticipates more to come to salvation from within the ranks of Israel. In addition, the 144,000 are said to be “redeemed from the earth” and “purchased among men (Rev. 14:4), which also makes this a heavenly scene.

4. They are all unmarried Jewish young men who are declared to be “virgins, who have not defiled themselves with women” (Rev. 14:4). Attempts have been made to neutralize these plain statements, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have done to include women and others in the 144,000. But the prophecy remains and these Jewish Christians stand in sharp contrast to their wicked contemporaries because these choice young men “have kept themselves pure and no lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless” (Rev. 14:5).
5. They are all designated “servants of God” (Rev. 7:3) which implies that these men are spiritually equipped and are aggressively evangelizing Jews and Gentiles alike during the years of the Great Tribulation. Imagine 144,000 flaming witnesses like the Apostle Paul going everywhere preaching the gospel. This tremendous crowd of evangelists and missionaries will be amazingly effective in their mission for Christ.

Once we are introduced to them, the scene changes and we are introduced to a great number of their converts “which no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9). This will be an unparalleled world-wide evangelistic crusade fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. These unnumbered believers are specifically stated to “have come out of the great tribulation” (Rev. 7:14), which means they were killed for their faith and now are in heaven. How wonderful is the final description of their blessed estate:

“Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat on them, nor will any scorching heat. For the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:15-17).

6. They are all mentioned in Revelation 6:9 as those who were “slain because of the word of God and the testimony they

maintained.” Also included in that number are those who were killed because they “refused to worship the image of the beast” (Antichrist) and to accept his mark (Rev. 13:15-16).

7. They are all members of a huge men’s chorus who sing before the throne of God and the assembled angels (Rev. 14:3). Chronologically, the song John hears is their hymn of praise in heaven during the time of the Great Tribulation on earth. It is a very unique song, because “no one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Rev. 14:3). Imagine a men’s chorus of that magnitude singing their personal testimony to the Lord about the mighty salvation He wrought in Christ. What a day that will be for these choice servants of the Lord!

These seven identification marks provide the information needed to properly answer the question: “Who are the 144,000?”

All scripture quotations are from the New International Version

TO BURN OR NOT TO BURN

by Rick Kronk, Christar Missionary in Europe

Virtually every news outlet reported that Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, located in Gainesville, Florida, had called for a Koran burning event on Saturday, September 11. The purpose of the event, according to Pastor Jones, was to remember the victims of 9/11 and send a message to the radical element of Islam. The scheduled Koran burning, as we now know, did not take place, but it created enormous interest from local, national, and even international news media and spawned raging passions and protests in Muslim communities around the world.

So, what's the big deal? It's only a book?

Jones himself said in an interview with CNN: "We are burning the book. We are not killing someone. We are not murdering people." True enough, but if it's really only a book scheduled to be burned by one small congregation in Florida, why the outrage on the part of Muslims, even those who make a clear distinction between themselves and those that espouse a more "radical" agenda?

To begin, the Koran is not just a book to a Muslim. Muslims consider the Koran to be the uncreated, eternal word of Allah that was handed down to Mohammad over a period of years in the 6th century AD. Islamic scholars maintain that the Koran is the masterpiece of all literature, its style and structure and vocabulary far beyond the ability of mere mortals. Though something like only 15% of all Muslims have Arabic as their mother tongue, the Koran is revered through the recitation of passages in the original Arabic language, learned by heart and recited throughout the day, at times of prayer and on special occasions. In addition to the use of the Koran in traditional religious practice, passages are worn, used as decorations in the home and workplace and even imbibed (through the dissolving of written passages in water) in an effort to tap into the intrinsic power and holiness of the Koran itself to ward off evil and invite blessing. In light of the elevated position that the Koran occupies in Islam, any act designed to desecrate the holy text, such as burning – but also any other effort to deface or mutilate the text - cuts Muslims to the heart.

The Islamic world, though vast and comprised of men and women from all walks of life and numerous, distinct cultures, shares many common elements, among which is what is referred to as a shame-based response to life. That is to say, behavior, and the rules governing such are regulated more so by the effect on the community than by what may be considered to be right or wrong. The key issue is whether a certain act (or spoken word) brings honor to the person or community addressed? If it does, then the act (or spoken word) is considered to be valid and valuable. If not, if what is said and done brings shame and dishonor, then the act (even if “lawful”) is considered wrong. In regard to those acts considered shameful, Islam’s response is largely one of retribution, in an effort to restore honor by eliminating the source of the shame. For Muslims, burning the Koran is an act of dishonor, it is shameful. Failure on their part to respond in an effort to vindicate the honor of their faith would be equally reprehensible.

Another aspect regarding the widespread reaction on the part of Muslims around the world is the apparent solidarity among Muslim regional groups that are otherwise currently engaged in conflict. The curious key to understanding this lies in the adage that a common enemy unites. In a case in which one of the fundamental elements of Islam has come under attack, even feuding brothers will forge an alliance to respond. In light of this, Jones’ effort to send a message to the radical element of Islam misses the mark. Instead he has given Muslims throughout the world reason to unite against what they perceive to be a dishonoring act.

Finally, it must also be understood that people in general, whether they be Muslim or not, tend to view the world through their own “lenses.” These “lenses” are commonly referred to as a worldview and refer to the filter of how we understand the world and all that happens and should happen in it. With this in mind, when the pastor of a small church congregation in Florida proposes to behave in such a way that is defamatory and dishonorable, the person hearing this news is left with a choice – ignore the man and his proposed behavior, or react. As noted above, for Muslims shameful acts demand a response. Furthermore, the worldview of Islam does not easily distinguish between the convictions and behavior of an individual and those of the community at large. This means that despite the fact the proposed Koran burning reflects the attitudes and opinions of one pastor in one small church in America, for Muslims the world over, this act is understood to be the representative opinion and intent of all Christians. Hence, the Taliban leaders in Afghanistan have published and distributed tracts inviting people to defend the

Koran by taking, vengeance not on Pastor Jones, but on Christians anywhere they may be found.

It seems clear, if Pastor Jones had gone ahead with the Koran burning, despite appeals from the White House, the U.S. Military, and others against this action, violence would have resulted and people would have died.

What would Jesus do?

A great question to ask anytime hard choices lie before us is to consider how Jesus himself would respond were He here in person to do so. Interestingly, the Bible does not leave us without information with regard to Jesus' response to religious practices that He deemed to be corrupted and which, instead of bringing people closer to God, drove them further away. Of particular interest is Jesus' response to what He found one day in His visit to the temple. All four Gospels record how Jesus was incensed by the fact that some had turned the temple courts into a marketplace. Jesus' response was immediate and violent. He made himself a whip and overturned the tables and drove the vendors out. But note, Jesus' aggression was directed at those of His own people, the Jews, who had corrupted the truth and were, together with the Jewish religious leaders, preventing people from having true access to God. When Jesus spoke of how to treat those outside of the faith – the Gentiles – His tone was quite the opposite. Matthew records the following in chapter 5: 43-48:

“You're familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what I'm saying is: Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you” (paraphrase from *The Message*).

Jesus' words here make it quite clear: the path of righteousness is that of love made possible through prayer. Jesus himself is the example of

one who loved His enemies to the very end. And God calls us to think and speak and act in the way He does towards those described as enemies. But before we draw a mental image of who those enemies were, or might be today, let us be reminded that Paul put all of us in that camp prior to our conversion (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Finally, what's left for us to do?

The U.S. Constitution protects free speech, under which this proposed act falls. As Americans we embrace and celebrate this fundamental and inalienable right which is one of the hallmarks of our society and culture. So much so that we have a hard time understanding those who do not share an equal regard for what we consider to be a standard element of democracy and humanity. However, just because a certain act is protected, does not mean that it should be carried out. The Apostle Paul came to a similar conclusion for different reasons and with regard to a different set of guiding principles. His words: "All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial" (1 Corinthians 6:12), make this point. Just because something may be allowed, does not mean it should be done.

We are thankful that Pastor Jones did not follow through with his proposed Koran burning event. Not only would his intended message have united Muslims against his shameful act, it would have put Christians around the world in danger of retaliation. We need to pray that Pastor Jones and others who share his opinion will understand that such acts do not encourage Muslims to consider the claims of Christianity. "How," they ask, "do acts of sacrilege fit with a message of love and forgiveness?" Good question, one that I ask myself. Finally, we need to pray that somehow this incident, whether it was consummated or not, will allow God to speak and be heard by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. There is only One God, and He will have His way. He has given us a chance to be agents of blessing through the Gospel which, as the angels announced to the shepherds in Luke 2, is Good News because a Savior is born, and He has come for all peoples.

UCC CRITIQUE

by Victor Shepherd, *Used by Permission*

Editor's Note: The following data concerning the United Church of Canada has been forwarded to us for our use and with the permission of Victor Shepherd. It is enlightening, but also disturbing to read these assessments by this UCC analyst.

UCC Critique – [www.victorshepherd.on.ca/UCC Critique/United Church of Canada Critique.htm](http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/UCC%20Critique/United%20Church%20of%20Canada%20Critique.htm)

The Origins of the Operative Theology of The United Church of Canada	Which has had the greater influence in the <i>theological</i> formation of The United Church of Canada: the Calvinist tradition or the Wesleyan?... Neither. Schleiermacher, the German romantic liberal, has been the determining influence...
The United Church and Ordination of Active Homosexuals: A Critique	"The central thrusts of the report include... A view of the Bible which uses the word 'authority' but which deprives the Bible of any authority... The elevation of an ideology which denatures the gospel... An insistence that the quality of a relationship is sufficient to legitimize sexual intimacy... A devaluation of the Fall so thoroughgoing as virtually to deny the Fall."
A Code of Ethics?	"...I cannot append my signature to the document that is now before the church, for the document appears to (i) reinforce the anti-gospel theology and practice of the denomination, (ii) aim at suppressing dissent born of gospel-conviction."
A Comment on "The Authority And Interpretation Of Scripture"	"The document is flawed throughout by its orientation: anthropology replaces Christology..."
Can A Recovery of the Doctrine of the Trinity Assist the Restoration of the United Church of Canada?	"One issue facing the church, then, is this: is the doctrine of the Trinity baggage which is not only unnecessary but is actually a threat to the seaworthiness of the ship (church) as it appears to founder in the storms of modernity? or is it ballast in the ship's keel apart from which the ship will capsize in even moderate winds?"
A Comment on "Toward a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism"	"In the document before The United Church of Canada (ecumenical) has come to mean something akin to 'lowest common religious denominator.'"
"Voices United" (the UCC hymnal)	"Voices United denies the transcendence of God... the Trinity has all but disappeared... Voices United combines fine hymns and terrible hymns on the assumption... that... no one should feel left out; there should be something here for everybody... the 'Lord's prayer' has been re-written, 'Our Father and Mother'..."
The Incarnation and the Moderator of the United Church of Canada	"Phipps persists in denying the foundation of the church... in denouncing what the apostle Jude calls 'the faith once for all delivered to the saints.'"
Bermuda Trial	Expert testimony given by Dr. Shepherd demonstrated that the United Church of Canada has intentionally and repeatedly contravened its own <i>Basis of Union</i> in its formal theology as well as its day-to-day operative theology.

WORSHIP IS ABOUT CHRIST, NOT IMPRESSING CROWDS

From “ChristianPost.com”

It’s very easy for music to become the point during worship in the church, said a Southern Baptist.

But LifeWay Worship Director Mike Harland told pastors that it’s not about better bands, advanced technology, newer copyright dates or newer models. Rather, it’s about revealing the person of Jesus Christ and giving Him the adoration that is due.

“We don’t want to gather trying to impress crowds with our technology, our innovation or creativity, but to passionately worship the God who saves,” he said Tuesday at a one-day conference on “Transformational Small Churches.”

Harland cited research from the recently released book *Transformational Church*, which was based on a survey of more than 7,000 Protestant churches and interviews with more than 250 of the church pastors.

The book, written by LifeWay’s Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, identified transformational church principles and among them was a worship that actively embraces Jesus.

“God didn’t call us to lead music or to perform worship services for the people’s enjoyment,” Harland said. “God called us to engage people in the experience of expressing their worship and praise to God.”

After observing many churches, Harland has found that the church has stopped singing.

While the congregation is left in the dark under dim lights, stage lights place the focus on the gifted worship leader – or worship artist as Harland called it – who has in-ear monitors and who sings songs in a key that best fits him or her.

The worship leader can’t hear the congregation or see the congregation and “they don’t even know that the congregation is not even singing,” Harland said.

The LifeWay director, who also serves as associate pastor of music in Carrollton, Texas, stressed to pastors that “worship starts where the people are, not where you want them to be.”

“Transformational churches actively engage people in worship and are led by worship leaders who value participation over performance,” he said, citing the new book.

Harland reminded worship leaders and pastors that it is a spiritual calling that God has placed on their lives and not a musical one.

“If musical excellence could accomplish spiritual objectives, then the Mormon Tabernacle Choir would be one of the most powerful spiritual choirs in the world,” he noted. “It takes more than musical execution.”

While debate over relevance versus reverence or music preferences and styles is common, transformational churches find a way to stay above the fray, he added.

“The answer to this issue is to raise the dialogue off the musical and get it on the spiritual objectives that can only be accomplished in spiritual means,” he stated.

Believers worship, he explained, to tell the story of Jesus.

“It’s not enough just to put the word of adoration in the mouths of God’s people. We’ve got to tell the story about who Jesus is,” Harland underscored.

A couple of years ago, a pastor of a church had contacted Harland asking for help as the worship at his church had grown cold. As a solution, the pastor wanted to start a contemporary worship service.

But when Harland visited the church, he found that the music style wasn’t the issue. Rather, the people in the church just were not responding.

He told the pastor, “If your worship has grown cold, it’s not because you selected the wrong music style or you’re making some kind of technological misstep. If worship is a response to God’s revelation and if your people are not worshipping then they’re not seeing who He is.”

The pastor soon realized that he had been preaching to the congregation about how to be better stewards, better parents, better citizens and so forth but he never told them who Jesus is.

“What do transformational churches do?” Harland posed to pastors at the conference. “They don’t get a rock band, they don’t get a projection system, they don’t get a fog machine. They show people who Jesus is and then give people the opportunity to respond to Him in worship and adoration.”

THE EMERGENTS ARE EMERGING

by Gary E. Gilley, *Used by Permission*

The emergent/emerging movement is barely over a decade old (depending on when one marks its birth) and already it has splintered and morphed in many directions. As a result it is often difficult to determine exactly what is being talked about when discussing the subject. Recently the Emergent Village, the most visible emergent organization, eliminated its national coordinator position indicating either a “decentralizing or disintegrating of the movement.”¹ *Christianity Today*, in its January 2010 issue, indicated that one of the surprising trends at the end of the first ten years of the new century is the deflation of the emergent movement. Yet, rather than disappearing, I believe it has branched out and in many ways has simply gone mainstream. Much as we seldom hear the term “New Age Movement” because it is no longer so much a movement as a settled ideology which has latched on to more mainstream forms of spirituality, so the emergent/emerging movement has infiltrated evangelical circles and is hardly recognizable anymore.

To give you some ideal of what has happened, we turn to Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle and self-described emerging church leader. Driscoll was one of the original shapers of what would become emergent/emerging and so is a reliable resource to explain what is taking place. As he sees it, there are now four expressions of emergent/emerging found within Christianity (more may be on the way). First are emerging evangelicals who believe in basic Christian doctrine, such as the Bible being God’s Word and Jesus dying for our sins. Pastors such as Dan Kimball would represent this first wing and would at least cling to certain doctrinal positions such as the three ancient ecumenical creeds but would not want to drift much beyond them. They also tend to form the “hip, cool church,” according to Driscoll.

Next in line would be those involved in house churches. These resist creating large churches and instead form little communities in smaller settings such as coffee shops or even the Internet. Perhaps George Barna with his promotion of the “Revolution”² would be a good representative of this branch.

Driscoll sees himself and his church as being a third splinter of the movement. He calls his group emerging reformers, who believe in all of the evangelical distinctives and embrace Reformed theological traditions. Emerging reformers also try to find ways to make the church relevant, accessible and culturally connected. Many of these tend to embrace charismatic gifts and modern prophecies (that is, they believe that prophecies are still being given today as well as the sign gifts).

In the fourth lane is a group of emergent liberals which Driscoll feels has “totally gotten off the highway and are lost out in the woods.” This branch is best represented by Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt who reject or question even the most cardinal of doctrines such as the atonement, the deity of Christ, inspiration of Scripture and the second coming of Christ.³ Today, when we speak of emergent it is this group we are referencing.

The reader can see how fragmented and complicated the emergent/emerging conversation has become. Like most movements, as it matures it has changed form and is becoming increasingly difficult to define. Many are distancing themselves from the emergent label itself since it has become somewhat pejorative. What all lanes of emergent/emerging have in common is the desire to be relevant to the postmodern culture. Some have sacrificed the faith in this effort; others are more biblically sound.

1 <http://www.ctlibrary.com/print.html?id=69052>

2 See Barna's book by this name.

3 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080227/mars-hill-pastor-ditches-emerging-label-for-jesus.htm>

QUIZ: RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

1. The U.S. Constitution's position toward religion in general is:
 a. adversarial, negative
 b. supportive, positive
 c. selective, changeable
 d. neutral, indifferent

2. The issue of slavery was strongly interwoven with:
 a. the War of Independence
 b. the Spanish-American War
 c. the War of 1812
 d. the Civil War

3. American general known as an outstanding Christian:
 a. Robert E. Lee
 b. Ulysses S. Grant
 c. Andrew Jackson
 d. George S. Patton

4. American politician famous for his "Cross of Gold" speech:
 a. Daniel Webster
 b. Thomas Dewey
 c. William Jennings Bryan
 d. Theodore Roosevelt

5. The military conflict between Mormons and Indians:
 a. Black Hawk War
 b. Cherokee Uprising in Oklahoma
 c. Battle of Little Big Horn
 d. Battle of the Alamo

6. The Mayflower Compact was written just before:
 a. the Jamestown settlement in Virginia
 b. James Oglethorpe's venture in Georgia
 c. the beginning of Roger Williams' colony in Rhode Island
 d. the early settlement at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts

7. Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were:
- a. Deists
 - b. Atheists
 - c. Baptists
 - d. Roman Catholics
8. Germany's national hymn ("Deutschland, Deutschland ueber alles") has the same tune as:
- a. My Country Tis of Thee
 - b. Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken
 - c. The Church's One Foundation
 - d. Crown Him with Many Crowns
9. Jesus identified socially with this group:
- a. Pharisees and Sadducees
 - b. Roman rulers
 - c. tax gatherers and sinners
 - d. the rich and the wise
10. The Bible book that deals almost exclusively with slavery:
- a. Ezra
 - b. 1. Corinthians
 - c. James
 - d. Philemon

Answers:

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

Personal Notes on the Articles:

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