

## The 800 Pound Gorilla in the Room

By; Charles Bissett (August 2010)

Proverbs 28: 13-14 (NIV):

*<sup>13</sup>He who conceals his sins does not prosper,  
but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.  
<sup>14</sup>Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD,  
but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.*

How did we get to the point where we find ourselves caught within a raging debate going on in the greater Church?

It is because a major denomination, the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), has elected to embrace a modernistic *metaphorical belief* system called antinomianism undergirded by an Emergent Church panentheism<sup>i</sup> belief system. It is a belief system that is sweeping through too many of the evangelical denominations, and even the Catholic Church.

This is an issue that is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals.

The acceptance of two heretical belief systems being allowed into the ELCA directly conflict with the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. This has caused changes in ELCA church law to coincide with these new belief systems. The first is antinomianism, and the second is the Emergent Church belief system. These changes have been criticized or renounced by every other major Lutheran denomination in the world. If you go on the internet, the volume of Christian commentators (aside from WordAlone and CORE) criticizing the ELCA for what has done is overwhelming. Almost 91,000 members and 48 congregations have left the ELCA after the enactment of its new doctrinal policies so far and hundreds more will follow.<sup>ii iii</sup> Roman Catholic theological pundits in the blogosphere are having a field day chastising Lutherans for being shameless in their infidelity to the Scriptures. Even the atheists are questioning the integrity of their claim to being called, followers of Christ.

Here, one shares a quote from a contemporary atheist philosopher who is a pundit blogger on the internet. Professor Austin Cline, in his article: "Problems in Liberal Theology" wrote:

*One of the interesting conundrums facing liberal Christian theology is that so little of it seems to really be "Christian".... More and more of the historical, orthodox doctrines are abandoned in favor of "metaphorical" beliefs that are compatible with modernity. Where does such a process ultimately lead? Is there a point where the belief system ceases to be "Christianity" in any meaningful sense, or does Christianity simply become so broad that it encompasses a huge variety of incompatible systems?<sup>iv</sup>*

Again; this is an issue that is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals. Our atheist friend's comments go to the heart of the ELCA's "Bound Conscience" policy; where incompatible belief systems are asked to co-exist with each other. The issue confronting us as followers of Christ (more significant than membership within the ELCA) is about the authority of the Scriptures, as being the Word of God. This is about a pattern of events that has been going on for the past fifteen, plus years. This is about a transformation that reflects new belief systems taking over the denomination, and threatening other denominations.

Let me take a moment to introduce myself: I am a convert to Christianity from a secular and politically liberal family. I was introduced to Christianity through the Charismatic Revival (the Jesus People subsection) of the early 1970's. I served for three years as an Army Chaplain's assistant. In the late 1980's, I determined to serve out my faith through the Lutheran church, and joined the ELCA for its non-fundamentalist evangelicalism. Likewise, I have been a lifelong civil rights activist. My friends refer to me as a California liberal. So, I can appreciate the attraction people have to the Gospel of Social Justice, which is unseating so many of our classical Christian beliefs.

### **Christian Belief and Core Values:**

What defines the nature of true church or denomination's teachings that are common to all Christians? For the Christians who are focused on believing the Word of God as it is written directly from Bible, alone, the *Roman Road to Salvation* is the most commonly referenced concise description of the Christian belief system. *(There are a large number of sites on the internet that one can Google to find the Roman Road to Salvation.)* For Christians who also interpret the Bible against church tradition, there are a series of documents or creeds which authenticate what constitutes the minimum values of a true Christian belief system. The oldest document that defines Christian belief is the Didache, which claims to have been authored by the twelve apostles. While this is unlikely, the work appears to be a direct result of the first Apostolic Council, c.50 C.E. *(Acts 15:28)*. This is followed by the Apostles Creed, which was drawn up in the first or second century. It emphasizes the true Humanity of Christ, including the material body, of Jesus, since that is the point that the heretics of the time *(Gnostics, Marcionites, and later Manicheans)* denied. *(1 John 4:1-3)* The Nicene Creed, drawn up in the fourth century, is emphatic in affirming the Deity of Christ. It is directed against the Arians, who denied that Christ was fully God. *(Colossians 2:9)* The importance of Christ's divinity is well expressed in Barnes' Notes on the Bible as he elaborates on Colossians 2:9.

*For in him dwelleth - That is, this was the great and central doctrine that was to be maintained about Christ, that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him. Every system which denied this was a denial of the doctrine which they had been taught; and against everything that would go to undermine this; they were especially to be on their guard. Almost all heresy has been begun by some form of the denial of the great central truth of the incarnation of the Son of God.<sup>v</sup>*

One of the most influential and least known creeds is the Athanasian Creed; also known as the "Quicumque vult", in which the word "Trinity" is first used. The use of the word, Trinity defines a uniquely Christian belief. It was not used by the apostles in scripture, but this word serves as a convenient shorthand for pulling together the scriptures mentioned in this section, into a singular thought that attempts to describe God:

*"... And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God...."*

Thus, the classical Christian beliefs and core values of those who are traditional, conservative, or orthodox in their faith will fall into the baseline scriptures and creeds mentioned above, in this section. However, such belief system statements are not enough to answer all theological questions about cosmology or about man's relationship with the eternal. Thus these subtle differences, which are beyond the baseline tenants, become the issues that constitute the branches or denominations of Christianity. Over 90% of all professing Christians (indifferent to the laity's' understandings of Scripture) are affiliated with a Christian body (church) that officially professes these baseline tenants. Almost all these churches have incorporated the Nicene Creed into their worship services. Anything that does not conform to the above baseline might like to call itself Christian, but is not.

### **The First Prong. Me Focus:**

The movement away from traditional Nicene Creed Christianity is a part of a growing heresy within Christian denominations called, "Emergent Church." The advocates of the Emergent Church movement do not have a creed or a singular doctrinal system of belief. What holds them together as a movement is a disenchantment with how classical Christianity defines and addresses the issue of sin and the proscriptive law which is usually written in the Old Testament. Simply, the Emergent Church views sin as transitory (that which is experienced in the immediate moment), having no long lasting ramifications on a person's long term relationship with God. The adherents of the Emergent Church are focused only on God's grace and the life of Jesus, to the exclusion of sin, retribution, or hell. The elements of Emergent Church thinking have their contemporary foundation back in the 1960s. However, if one looks at the Gnostic heresies of the century before Christ's birth, on up through the third century, one sees that this so called post-modernity thinking is not at all a revelation or original.

The history of how liberal secular values have worked their way into Lutheranism is recent. Yet, the modern rationale is something that has been fermenting since the Renaissance. In 1966, the American Episcopal moral theologian Joseph Fletcher published a popular book titled, "***Situation Ethics: The New Morality.***" In the book he advocated his new approach to Christian ethics and moral decision-making. To Fletcher, relativism was fundamental to his argument, conceding that there was only one moral truism. The six propositions forming the framework of his ethical theory are as follows:<sup>vi</sup>

1. only one 'thing' is intrinsically good; namely, love: nothing else at all;
2. the ruling norm of Christian decisions is love: nothing else;
3. love and justice are the same, for justice is love distributed, nothing else;
4. love wills the neighbor's good whether we like him (sic) or not;
5. only the end justifies the means, nothing else; and
6. love's decisions are made situation-ally, not prescriptively

For Fletcher, "Good and evil are extrinsic (basically, something that is beyond our capacity to influence, and beyond our concern). What is right and wrong for us, personally, depends on the situation." There literally is no intrinsic good apart from love.

Of course, Fletcher (who wants to keep his job as an Episcopal theologian) does not deny the existence of God. Yet, in proposing that the abstract concept of love is the only intrinsic good, he negates the value of all the other prescribed moral values of not only the Old Testament, but likewise those in the New Testament; and he opens the door to relativism and subjectivism in Christian ethics.

At about the same time, on the Lutheran side of the house, Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a theologian from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in 1966 introduced a theology called **Law/Gospel Reductionism**.<sup>vii</sup> It was his position that as long as we lived by the New Testament, the Old Testament was not relevant, because Christians are free from sin and the law. The Law may be characterized as ALWAYS telling its listeners what TO DO and what NOT TO DO. The Gospel may be characterized as always telling its listeners WHAT GOD HAS DONE for them in Christ Jesus. His writings are treated by the ELCA as: *"This...is of interest and help in the ongoing discussion of whether to use the words "Inerrant and Infallible" in reference to Scripture or to use the word "Immutable"."*<sup>viii</sup> Gospel Reductionism was originally a Lutheran issue that ended up attacking the traditional holistic interpretation of Scripture. However, the post-1960s the liberal movement of Emergence Christianity<sup>ix</sup> has a repackaged form of this spiritual poison, which they're now busy injecting into mainstream evangelical denominations.

One shares this about Fletcher and Montgomery because, although these are modern philosophies (albeit, it is neo-Gnosticism). This is where the liberal Christian philosophy of "Christian Relativism" comes from. We crossed the Rubicon when we rationalized that sin is not sin, and codified such new doctrine into church law. It means that graduates from seminary are allowed to ignore the virgin birth, the resurrection, and treat sexual immorality as situational. Here, Jesus is reduced from being part of the triune God who became incarnate, into being just a sage guru. Christian Relativism and Gospel Reductionism have been around long enough to have been examined. Everyone from the Pope<sup>x</sup> to the Pentecostals has reviewed these theologies, and condemned them as heresy.

### **Antinomianism:**

So, now we get to the question of what is Antinomianism, and how does it relate to liberal Christian thinking?

The Antinomian Controversy is a name given by Reformation scholars. It refers to a disagreement that arose between Martin Luther and *Johannes Agricola*.<sup>xi</sup> In fact, the word "antinomian" was first coined by Luther to refer to Agricola and his followers.

An Antinomian is one who believes that under the Gospel of Grace, faith alone (without repentance) is all that is necessary for salvation. And, the moral law as endorsed by Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans, is of no use. Thus, we Christians are under no obligation to live by that code, or Old Testament moral standards.

Antinomianism is a form of Gnosticism. Hans Jonas; a German-born philosopher who was a Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York; wrote: *"The cardinal feature of Gnostic thought is the radical dualism that governs the relation of God and world, and correspondingly that of man and world."*<sup>xii</sup> In simple terms, what makes Gnosticism a heresy is that it doesn't allow its followers to find a middle path between nihilist freedom from sin versus a puritanical adherence to law.

C. S. Lewis writes appropriately in his book, *"Mere Christianity"*:<sup>xiii</sup>

*"The devil ... always sends errors into the world in pairs - pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors."*

Today, the modern man cringes at any form of self-restriction. Thus, antinomianism has again become a serious threat to sound doctrine. Antinomianism has reemerged in a form that we can label "easy-believism." "Easy Believism" is the idea that having a mental belief in Jesus

Christ is the same as obtaining salvation. We can readily spot easy-believism by looking for its characteristic teachings.<sup>xiv</sup>

- 1) Any upholder of rules and standards is a legalist.
- 2) After a person has been converted and has received the Holy Spirit, he is at liberty to follow his own inner promptings. This is because they are from the Holy Spirit within him, which causes him to want and to do only what is good.
- 3) A conversion experience is proof of genuine salvation. If a person can point to some moment when he accepted Christ, when he was “saved,” he is entitled to perfect assurance that heaven is his eternal destiny.
- 4) Not every Christian exhibits a godly way of life.

Since there are many people who have accepted Christ and who have, *to all appearances, accepted Him sincerely*, but who have never amounted to much as Christians, easy-believism ventures yet another deceptive teaching:

- 5) It is possible for a Christian to live out his life as a spiritual babe.

The truth is, a nominal Christian who shows little evidence of spiritual growth is properly called a “Carnal Christian.”<sup>xv</sup>

Our liberal friends like to say that we should be more loving, like Jesus. Well, okay, let’s examine the person of Jesus, and his values: Consider the image of Christ as Saint John shares it with us in Revelation. First of all, remember that both Revelation and the Gospel of Saint John were written at about the same time, with Revelation having been written first. Add to that the witness of the other three Gospels, and we have a fairly rounded image of Jesus’ character.

We see in Matthew 23:15 that Jesus was critical of the Jewish fundamentalists, where he says:

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.”*

However, Jesus was likewise critical in Revelation 2 of the Balaam and Nicolaitans in Ephesus and Pergamum. Who were they? It appears that the Balaam believers and Nicolaitans preached a doctrine of Gnosticism.

*<sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup>Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

It is interesting to note that the *Nicolaitans* were founded by a disciple named Nicolaus who is written about in Acts 6:5 as being one of the first deacons in the early church.

When we compare the Jesus of Revelation to the Christ in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, we see a common denominator; Christ can get pretty angry with churches and church leaders. Jesus didn’t treat religious institutions as sacred cows. And, he was hard on bad leadership. Christ has nothing but condemnation for both the puritanical Legalists and the liberal Gnostics.

### **Strategies to Negate the Holy Bible:**

Again, this is an issue that is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals. This is an issue about the authority of the Scriptures as being the Word of God.

Yet, the question of sexual immorality does serve as a very good example of how the liberal Christians are construing God the Father into something they find more palatable. On this subject, we see logical rationale used to negate three thousand years of traditional understanding. It indicates how the liberal Christian faction of the ELCA is attacking the authority of Scripture. The tactic here is obfuscation by making the wording of a simple illustration unclear and unnecessarily complicated.

Those who would try to cast doubt on the message of the Scriptures are saying that we have mistranslated the Bible. Maybe, it is as the serpent in Genesis (3: 1) says, “*Did God really say... (that)?*” How can we truly know what God is trying to say? This confusion is followed by a temptation that appeals to our human insecurities by saying that God loves us too much to mean what he said (Genesis 3: 4). Thus, emotional appeals to our fear and vanity set the stage for a cunning sleight of theological hand.

Let me tell you: at one time I used to speak fluent “street” German. So, I understand the incongruities of translating one language into another. I can recognize when the Scripture writers are talking about homosexuality, because when they get to that subject, they become so uncomfortable that they resort to euphemisms.

According to the story in Genesis 2, the differentiation into man and woman is the sole differentiation produced by the removal of a “rib” from the originally undifferentiated human.<sup>xvi</sup> It is precisely because out of one flesh came two sexes, that the two sexes, (and only the two sexes) can reunite into one flesh (Genesis 2:24). From this is derived the normative logic that supports the prescriptive prohibitions against all forms of fornication. Any relationship that is outside of one man and one woman sex is fornication. Thus, linguistic efforts to discriminate between one form of perversion as different from another is irrelevant; as being a difference without distinction.

Homosexual practice, in a committed relationship or otherwise, is a violation of God’s intentional creation of humans as “male and female” (as found in Genesis 1:27) and the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (as found in Genesis 2:24).

When Jesus defined both normative and proscriptive sexual ethics for his disciples, he gave priority to these two texts from the creation stories in Genesis (Matthew 19: 3-11). Jesus’ own words tell us how to understand the will of God the Father in Genesis. Paul also clearly has the creation texts in the background of his indictments of homosexual practice (Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9). Therefore, what was written in Genesis has to be given special attention by us.

I am not fooled by anyone who is trying to quibble about semantics; this isn’t rocket science. Linguists might epistemologically cogitate over the subtle etymology of an individual word. But, the process which is described in Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, and Leviticus 18:22 is as easy to read as a Dick & Jane Reader. Thus, homosexuality, premarital sex, adultery, bestiality or any other form of fornication is clearly prohibited because it is incongruent with God’s intent, when He established the world and the processes of nature. It is sad to see church leaders, who are heterosexuals laboring to misconstrue the message of the Bible.

This is not just a case of faulty reasoning. The liberals have an escapist agenda to fashion excuses to justify the self-indulgences of their personal petty vices, and pacify their guilty consciences’. No liberal Christian can tell me that more than two thousand years of Christian tradition has misinterpreted the Bible. Are we to believe that today he can see a hidden truth that no one, not even Jesus has seen before? What absolute nonsense! This is more than just vanity; it’s idolatrous arrogance! It is because of the presence of such a pervasive agenda and

their adoption of Relativism as church doctrine that the allegation of heresy has been lodged against the ELCA.

### **The Commitment of the ELCA to Lutheran Confessions:**

Officially, the ELCA claims to be committed to the Lutheran Confessions, and professes to be an adherent of the Augsburg Confession. Likewise, it has the Nicene Creed incorporated into the weekly liturgy. Yet, on the other hand, the ELCA has become so enthusiastic in pursuing ecumenism it has gotten to the point of ecclesiastical promiscuity. The ELCA has entered into full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, none of which is noted for being doctrinally careful. In 1999, the Churchwide Assembly in Denver voted for full communion between the ELCA and The Episcopal Church, which shortly thereafter went rogue.<sup>xvii</sup>

Understand that the Augsburg Confession stipulates that church unity requires agreement in the gospel and the sacraments, if one professes to be Lutheran. Yet, the Reformed churches have historically held quite different understandings of, among other things, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the wake of the agreement with the reformed churches, one can only wonder about what is happening to Lutheranism in the ELCA?

### **ELCA Rejects the authority of the whole Scripture:**

Still, the issue of ecumenism blurring the standards that define Lutheran identity is not enough to explain why the greater catholic/Christian and apostolic church is in such an uproar. What is it about the decision to accept homosexual clergy that has touched off this firestorm in the church?

During a town-hall meeting in December of 2009, Bishop Mark Hanson said, *“the understanding we have of homosexuality today does not seem to be reflected at all in the context of the biblical writers.”* Therefore, he said, *“Lutherans should consider more modern views on sexual orientation.”*<sup>xviii</sup>

He is correct on his first point. He is wrong about the “therefore.” This is worse than revisionism. It is a clear walk away from Scripture. It is scary that these are folks who have pledged their lives to upholding God’s Holy Scripture, spent 4 years in Seminary learning about Scripture, and can then abandon their faith for the modern culture. In essence what Hanson has said is - *“The Holy Spirit did not inspire the biblical writers, but the Spirit inspires us.”* .... Either that, or... the Holy Spirit is smarter than He used to be, and now, we can delete the Law of Moses from the Bible.

This evolving liberal belief system has taken some interesting inroads upon what is taught in ELCA seminaries;

*Some ELCA teachers present Jesus’ resurrection as a spiritual resurrection. Whether the tomb was empty or not is no concern to them. They would maintain that we can believe in Jesus’ resurrection even if His body remains in its tomb. One graduate from an ELCA seminary claims that when he graduated from seminary, he did not believe in Jesus’ physical resurrection, nor did most of his classmates, nor did any of his teachers.*<sup>xix</sup>

What absolute nonsense! This is more than just vanity; it is idolatrous arrogance! The idea that the ELCA would tolerate such teaching is grounds for apostasy<sup>xx</sup>. For the sake of simplicity, I have called this liberal Christianity. But, please understand that this has nothing to do with political liberalism.

Read the standards of a true Lutheran, in Luther's own words: <sup>xxi</sup>

*The great difference between doctrine and life is obvious, even as the difference between heaven and earth. Life may be unclean, sinful, and inconsistent; but doctrine must be pure, holy, sound, unchanging ... not a tittle or letter may be omitted, however much life may fail to meet the requirements of doctrine. This is so because doctrine is God's Word, and God's truth alone, whereas life is partly our own doing.... God will have patience with man's moral failings and imperfections and forgive them. But He cannot, will not, and shall not tolerate a man's altering or abolishing doctrine itself. For doctrine involves His exalted, divine Majesty itself. (Weimar Ausgabe, [WA], vol. 30, part III, paragraph 343 f.)*

The idea that certain portions of the Bible are not historically correct or are not congruent with scientific discovery, does not necessarily equate to an invalidation of the authority of the Scriptures. In part or as a whole; that type of overreaching would be a logical fallacy. This is because Bible is not a history book or a science book. One has to recognize the Bible in its correct context to experience its message. The Bible is a revelation of God's relationship with man. Its presentation of God comes together as a uniform whole, which becomes incomplete and erroneous if anything is detracted from it. It is in this context that the Bible holds its divine authority as the Word of God. We may come to recognize that certain portions of the Bible are allegory or metaphor, but this does not reduce the weight of authority which these words possess. Sin and redemption are central ideas within the message of the Scriptures. In the context of its messianic cosmology, its message is not negate-able by the advances in man's understanding of the physical universe. Thus, any effort to circumvent uncomfortable issues is not Lutheranism; and is at best, poor Christian thought.

### **Impact on ELCA and Congregation:**

The attenuation of Scriptural authority, and the denial of sin's consequences to rationalize indulgences in petty vice is an issue that is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals. In light of the 2009 Church-Wide Assembly, when the ELCA says that the Spirit leads us on in "new, bold and exciting ways", the liberal faction undeniably takes that to mean even away from Scripture.

Here, the integrity of Sola Scriptura is at question; there is an issue of fidelity to the "Lordship" of Jesus Christ. Participation in the unrepentant ELCA is the same as saying we are not only all right with homosexuality being an appropriate relationship between two people; **even worse**, it says that we are okay with trashing the Scriptures<sup>xxii</sup> in favor of Antinomian Gnosticism or Christian Relativism, or if you like, easy-believism.

For us individually, this belief system threatens to impede if not negate our Christian ability to witness the Gospel (beyond human works of charity). It reduces our worship to a social club. Furthermore, it threatens to stunt the spiritual growth of otherwise earnest believers. What we are seeing is the ELCA adopt the Emergent Church, or Emergent Christianity belief systems. What we are contending with is not salvation by good works; it is good works without a need for salvation.

### **The Lineage of the Emergent Church:**

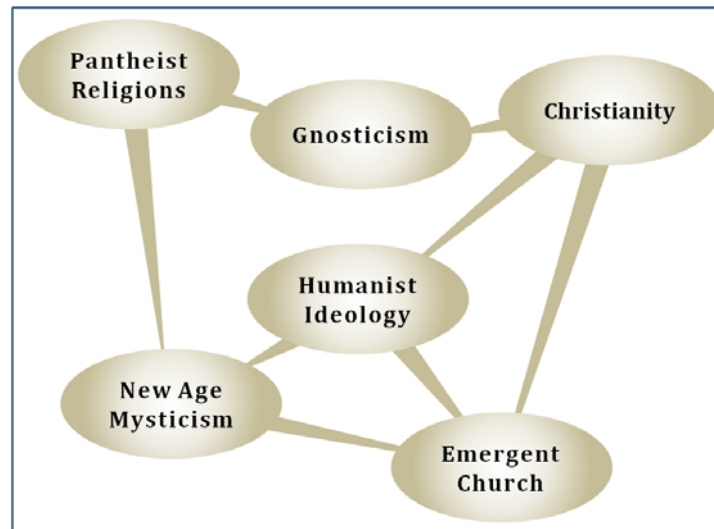
In the discussion to follow, one will be referring to a variety of different belief systems. Making sense of the relationships between these assorted belief systems is hard, if one doesn't understand their historical lineage. The following model is very simplistic, but gives the reader a start for further research. Here is a basic floor model:

The oldest family of religions is the pantheists. This is not a single religion; but, all those religions who believed in multiple gods, and a universe that existed as an integrated whole.



Then Christianity can along with its monotheism. Yet, that became a hard pill to swallow for pantheist Greek, Egyptian, and Celtic converts. By mixing the two beliefs together, we get Gnosticism (which preexisted Christianity and tried to merge with it). They were also known as pagan-Christians during its first and second centuries.

Humanism was a secular (if not atheistic) culmination of the renaissance logic and Christian



good works. It became prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century.

When the hippy movement of the 1960s mixed radical humanism with Eastern religion and Wicca, we got New Age mysticism. This reached its zenith during the 1970s, early 1980s.

The Emergent Church is the result of mixing disaffected Christians with anarchic humanism, and New Age mysticism. It's been getting bigger over the last fifteen years.

**The Second Prong in the Attack on Christ's Body:**

Now, comes the question of what logic or system of rational is the ELCA leadership using to substantiate Antinomian Gnosticism? The second threat comes from another contemporary form of Gnosticism that today is popularly referred to as the Emergent<sup>xxiii</sup> Church movement. It is a repackaged form of New Age. Though it has no defined dogma, there is a body of beliefs which serve to characterize it. Within that movement there are many expressions that a classical Christian would find disturbing. And many of these disturbing ideas have found their way into the American Episcopal and the ELCA denominations. The second issue is the New Age humanist epistemology used to support this revision where communal social justice supplants personal responsibility for spiritual holiness.

It just happens to be that Christianity is the ubiquitous religion of the United States. From within the various church denominations (more than just the ELCA) the descendents of classical Christians view their denominations as being their rightful inheritance; even if they no longer adhere to the same belief system as their parents. Thus, Christianity becomes the prime target to host a culpability-free spiritualism seeking legitimacy. But, to be perfectly honest, this new generation is not practicing Christianity.

If it were only a question of contemporary worship, the Jesus People demonstrated how that could be achieved, back in the 1970's. But for all the nuances of their eccentric worship, the Gospel was never compromised. (The Children of God don't count.) No victim of the

counterculture drugs and free-sex era could deny the demons that had ambush these naive and idealistic young people from the shadows. We understood sin too well to try whitewashing it; and we understood the power of Christ to forgive and save. This is a lesson that the contemporary generation of church goers in their collectively memory, seems to have forgotten.

Many people would be tempted to see the Emergent Church movement simply as young people who dwell in contemporary western culture, seeking to relate and embrace their culture. Thus, there is a tendency to underestimate the damage that this movement can do within a church denomination. Having grown up in a society where individualism is embraced, one sees that many endeavor to escape the intellectual discipline associated with a system of moral reasoning, which infers culpability for the indulgencies of petty vice. The New Age author, Alan Jones writes:

*"I am no longer interested, in the first instance, in what a person believes. Most of the time it's so much clutter in the brain..." (Jones, 79) I wouldn't trust an inch many people who profess a belief in God. Others who do not or who doubt have won my trust. I want to know if joy, curiosity struggle, and compassion bubble up in a person's life. I'm interested in being fully alive. There is no objective authority....<sup>xxiv</sup>" (Jones, 83)*

The problem with defining the Emergent Church is that the Emergent thought is defensively self driven. How is that you ask? It's because of the resistance and refusal by most of the major Emergent Christian proponents to accept or acknowledge labels and definitions that originates from anything from the outside their own community. It's all about "me" and how "I" define "myself" and nobody else can do that. They even resist their own rhetoric being quoted back to them by outsiders. It is a self centered and self driven philosophy. I always find it ironic how they talk about community and being missional, and yet are so self-centered at the fundamental core of their thinking. Yet, it's not a problem for hypocritical Emergent types to label classical Christian thinkers as modernist (which by their standards is not contemporary, enough) and closed minded. In their rejection of logic or systematic rationality, they become slaves to ignorance: a "Don't confuse me with the facts," attitude.

However, being a military analyst with postgraduate training in business process and information technology systems, one can take those tools and offer insight from a unique perspective. After four months of reading and searching through the internet, this author concluded that the systemic foundation and prime constituent of Emergent rhetoric which underpins the larger belief system is "Apokatastasis pantheism," a doctrine of universal salvation. It is the center of gravity for Emergent logical system. The *center of gravity* (CoG) is a concept developed by Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian military theorist, in his work *On War*.<sup>xxv</sup> The definition of CoG according to the United States Department of Defense is, *"those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight."*<sup>xxvi</sup> Thus, the center of gravity is usually seen in military terms as the "source of strength". It is an interesting piece of propaganda that this Emergent thinking is touted as post-modern: as if it was some new epiphany. Just because no one has preached it for 1800 years, these contemporary philosophers think they can plagiarize Origen of Alexandria without anyone noticing (no due diligence or intellectual integrity in that crowd).

The United Methodist scholar, Leonard Sweet defines pantheism and panentheism in his book *Quantum Spirituality*<sup>xxvii</sup> (which is almost an exact quote from the Oxford Dictionary). --- *"Pantheism is 'the belief or theory that God and the universe are identical' --- panentheism is 'the belief that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part of it exists in Him, but... that His Being is more than, and is not exhausted by, the universe.'*<sup>xxviii</sup> --- He then writes, *"New Light communities extend the sense of connectionalism to creation and see*

*themselves as members of an ecological community encompassing the whole of creation. "This is my body" is not an anthropocentric metaphor. Theologian/feminist critic Sallie McFague has argued persuasively for seeing Earth, in a very real sense, as much as a part of the body of Christ as humans.* <sup>xxxix</sup> (Sweet, 124) This is panentheism - plain and simple - he goes on to state, "we constitute together a cosmic body of Christ."

More point blank is ex-pastor Spencer Burke who confesses his belief in panentheism. <sup>xxx</sup> "What's more, I'm not sure I believe in God exclusively as a person anymore either....I now incorporate a panentheist view, which basically means that God is "in all," alongside my creedal view of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.... As I see it, we are in God, here on earth. This is how our relationship is defined. God does not just have to be reached up to; he is hear as the surrounding Spirit." (Burke, 195)

A leading architect of the Emergent Church, Pastor Doug Pagitt says that he is reconsidering "the idea that there is a necessary distinction of matter from spirit, or creation from creator."<sup>xxxi</sup> (Pagitt, 142)

This is the rational point of origin (the prime postulate and logical source of departure) for everything that follows in the Emergent belief system; it has no bases in Scripture. With this logical underpinning, it is not possible for their version of god to excise an individual from the greater universe. Thus, sin becomes only a transient event, having no long term ramification; an inconvenient event against the backdrop of the greater eternity. Sin is a transient moment of distraction from god, which is resolved by emulating the example of Jesus' loving nature. The original form of this doctrine was called, *Apokatastasis*,<sup>xxxii</sup> though better known today as *Christian Universalism* or *Unitarianism*; an afterlife without the existence of hell. In the mind of the Emergent Christian, being a Christian is about using Jesus as a sage-guru to model successful living (instead of Moses, Buda or Mohammad). Here, this thinking runs straight into the admonition of Saint John, (1 John 2:22, NIV): <sup>22</sup>*Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.* Likewise, salvation is not from eternal damnation: it is something that is experienced in a moment of happiness or personal success caused by being more connected with the living energies of the universe. Emergent Christian thought may not yet have doctrine, but it still has a systematic rational (that is evolving) which is anything except Nicene Creed<sup>xxxiii</sup> classical Christian orthodoxy.

In public, the voices of the Emergent Church leadership and influence are focused on the final product of their thought process; "All we need is love." The average adherent is not concerned or does not want to expend the effort to look closely at the input resources, or the rational processes which support this liberal Christian message of love and social justice. Here, the hallmark of apostasy is that the Emergent claims to be Christian, and then runs down the theological road, hand in hand with religious humanists, the New Age Gnostic, and just about anyone else who will rationalize away their guilty conscious for being lazy in their faith.

### **The Classic Belief System Under New Age Attack:**

It is a serious disaster for Christendom at large, that the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States has fallen victim to the latest incarnation of Gnosticism. The first name for this new version of Gnosticism was the "New Age" movement. New Age is heresy:

*History of the New Age movement: New Age teachings became popular during the 1970's as a reaction against what some perceived as the failure of Christianity and the failure of Secular Humanism to provide spiritual and ethical guidance for the future. Its roots are traceable to many sources: Astrology, Channeling, Hinduism, Gnostic traditions, Spiritualism, Taoism, Theosophy,*

*Wicca and other Neo-pagan traditions, etc. The movement started in England in the 1960's where many of these elements were well established... But the movement has become established and become a stable, major force in North American religion during the past generation. xxxiv*

In terms of all outward appearances, the forms of liturgy and the forms of ritual, its participation in charitable activity, as well as the denomination's structure of internal governance remain the same. But the belief system, the Christology which is central to any classical Christian denomination, is gone. Likewise, this has happened to the Episcopal in America, and is currently spreading through such bastions of missionary faith as the Methodists and Southern Baptists. For a Christian denomination to adopt New Age values is apostasy. To understand what has happened, and what was lost, we have to understand how Martin Luther defined the Protestant Reformation's view of God's work on Earth. A very direct explanation of Lutheranism can be found in Wikipedia on the internet:

*The key doctrine, or material principle, of Lutheranism is the doctrine of justification. Lutherans believe that humans are saved from their sins by God's grace alone (Sola Gratia), through faith alone (Sola Fide). Lutherans believe that this grace is granted for the sake of Christ's merit alone (Solus Christus). Orthodox Lutheran theology holds that God made the world, including humanity, perfect, holy and sinless. However, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, trusting in their own strength, knowledge, and wisdom. Consequently, people are saddled with original sin, born sinful and unable to avoid committing sinful acts. For Lutherans, original sin is the "chief sin, a root and fountainhead of all actual sins."*

*Lutherans teach that sinners, while capable of doing works that are outwardly "good," are not capable of doing works that satisfy God's justice. Every human thought and deed is infected with sin and sinful motives. Because of this, all humanity deserves eternal damnation in hell. God in eternity has turned His Fatherly heart to this world and planned for its redemption because he loves all people and does not want anyone to be eternally damned.*

*To this end, "God sent his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to Himself, and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience," as the Large Catechism explains. Because of this, Lutherans teach that salvation is possible only because of the grace of God made manifest in the birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection, and continuing presence by the power of the Holy Spirit, of Jesus Christ. xxxv (Wikipedia, 1 August 2010)*

### **The Failing of the Modern Christian:**

The weakness of the classical Christian is not in the theology, as much as it has been the practitioner's application of their beliefs. Homosexuals accuse the religious of being against them. Yet the theology is best expressed in Romans 3:23 *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."* Christians often use Romans 3:23 to show the unbeliever that he has sinned and that he falls short of the glory of God. Actually the verse says that *all* have sinned and *all* (*sic, still do*) fall short of the glory of God. That includes each and every believer as well! xxxvi The English translation here is a perfect tense. However, the Greek is actually an aorist tense which by itself merely conveys past action. The context must be consulted to determine the precise nuance intended. The context here indeed requires an English perfect tense, for in English the simple past implies that the action has ceased. Yet no living human being has yet ceased from sinning. Paul doesn't say that all *have fallen short* of the glory of God. Look at the verb tense here: all *fall short* of the glory of God. He shifts to the present tense for a reason.

The significant problem is Christians as people are susceptible to sin, and too many have been known to hide behind hypocrisy. Here, the issue is best expressed in Luke 6:41-42, *"Why do you*

*look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>42</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."* The hardest truth Christians have to deal with is that, we each have our own cross to bear. Just because someone becomes a Christian, God doesn't wave a magic wand, and poof... no more worries about old vices.

The truly mature response would be for Christians to not try fixing others, but to be supportive of each other as we all try to deal with the impact of sin in the world. We have to start with the sin in our own lives. In that regard, Christians have done a very poor job of witnessing for Christ.

Yet, the failure of Christians is not a rational for altering the message which God has inspired within the Scriptures.

### **Emergent Church Tactics:**

The core tactic of the Emergent Church advocates within a denomination is to probe for weaknesses using a Socratic questioning of everything from methods of worship to doctrines that are foundational to Christianity. The messages of the movement are particularly seductive to the egoistic nature of people, and offers reductionist explanations that are easily digested by people (carnal Christians) who do not want to be disturbed by the effort to endure the process of sanctification.

Emergent Christians are challenging the modern church on issues such as: institutional structures, systematic theology, propositional teaching methods, the perceived preoccupation by the institutional church with buildings, the value of a professional clergy, a fondness for political process, and an aversion unhelpful jargon ("Christian-ese"). Those in the movement do not engage in affirmative apologetics or provocative evangelism in the traditional sense. Still, they are involved in disseminating Christian beliefs. They prefer to encourage the freedom to discover truth through conversation and relationships with the Christian community; a seductive maneuver. Remember how the serpent led Eve into disobedience: *"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* (Gen. 3:1). Satan does not begin by lying, per se, but with a question. He plants a seed of doubt: "Hey, I'm just asking questions; raising the issues; exploring the terrain. I'm not saying God didn't say this. I'm just wondering if we all really *understood* what He said?"

### **Why can't I own a Canadian???**

The Emergent accuses the classical Christianity of being judgmental and un-loving.... The conundrum for the classical Christian is that non-Christians seem to have a better idea about what a Christian should be than the average Christian does. It seems that there is an immense pressure for the Christian to be perfect; and, that is a trap. The following is an anecdotal fictional example of how this trap plays out:<sup>xxxvii</sup>

*In her radio show, Dr Laura Schlesinger said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance.*

*The following response is an open letter to Dr. Laura, written by a US man, and posted on the Internet:*

*Dear Dr. Laura:*

*Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone*

*tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ... End of debate.*

*I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.*

*1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?*

*2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?*

*3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of Menstrual uncleanness - Lev.15: 19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.*

*4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?*

*5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?*

*6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?*

*7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?*

*8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?*

*9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?*

*10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)*

*I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.*

*Your adoring fan.*

*Jim*

*PS (It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian)*

Dr. Schlesinger never made such a comment, and the event is a fiction. Still, the article does highlight a conundrum for the legalists; classical Christian or orthodox Jewish. (The author actually was confronted by the above litany of scriptural challenges by the lay leader of his congregation's council.) In debate, a tactic (such as the above) where one side throws a flurry

of innocuous facts into the breach is called a spread case. It is simple for Christians who don't know their Bible to get lost in this debate tactic unless you understand substitutional justification (a concept which is not acceptable for the Jewish faith).

The correct answer is to recognize the presence of personal sin in our world and accept that only by Christ can we be delivered from such sin. God's purpose for the Law was to show us how futile it is to be perfect.

*John 3:16-18* "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Poor Dr. Schlesinger wouldn't know this; she's Jewish... and this is outside her belief system.

Poor Jim wouldn't know this; he's just contentious....

In Acts 20:21 (NIV) the apostle Saint Paul says, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

**PRAYER OF REPENTANCE<sup>xxxviii</sup>**

*O Lord my God, I confess that I have sinned against You in thought, word and deed.*

*I have also omitted to do what Your holy law requires of me.*

*But now with repentance and contrition I turn again to Your love and mercy.*

*I entreat You to forgive me all my transgression and to cleanse me from all my sins.*

*Lord, fill my heart with the light of Your truth. Strengthen my will by Your grace.*

*Teach me both to desire and to do only what pleases You. Amen.*

One has no objection to the church being a welcome haven for sinners. A wonderful example of this is the Salvation Army which has been historically focused on urban mission, providing sanctuary to the addicted and destitute on city streets. Yet, it would be a very different situation for such an organization to rationalize selling marijuana or employing prostitution as being legitimate activity for its ordained officers on the grounds that these are victimless crimes. Loving the world is not an excuse for rationalizing sin.

Thus in regard to the above principle, the ELCA has engaged in a two part error: The first is the idea that human emotional passion supersedes the divine revelation of Scripture as a uniform whole. Such passion is equated to spiritual inspiration through the implementation of the denomination's "Bound Conscious" policy. This opens the door to the second error, which is the ordination of people who are openly involved in sexual immorality (or any of the other deadly sins). Thus, the ELCA has castrated the influence of Scripture, and any fundamental Lutheran moral authority it had to offer.

**The Desperation to Find Acceptance for the Church:**

One can appreciate the desire of church leaders to explore ways to attract new members and hold on to successive generations of devotees. Those leaders who have become successful at maintaining or growing the profitability of their operations have achieved greater influence and status within the institutional churches. Some of the changes have been cosmetic, reflecting contemporary culture in the worship music and liturgical expression. Other changes have been substantial but benign rearrangements of congregational and even denominational structures.

In the process, some errant leaders have been quantitatively successful by making qualitative compromises to the integrity of cannon doctrine. This laissez faire style of doctrinal exploration has drifted into oversimplified reductionisms of Christian doctrine and/or the outright denial of some basic standards of classic Christian orthodoxy. This would include a denial of the substitutionary atonement at the cross, a low view of Scriptural authority, and a denial of sin and hell. Even the Antinomian Gnostic acknowledges the value of Christ dying to cover their sins.

Episcopal Bishop John Spong's book is called *"The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love."* Would seem to rail against the hypocrisy of the classical Christian by calling the Christian community to accountability for its long and sad history of violence and hatred of those it has deemed as "the other." Yet, he goes too far by claiming that the Bible is full of *"tribal and sexist prejudices of that ancient time."* He picks and chooses the things he likes in Scripture and tosses out the rest – which is the majority of the Bible.<sup>xxxix</sup> He denounces the Bible in such terms it would lead one to think that the Episcopal Church would defrock him, but instead they prop him up and allow his adverse teachings to spread throughout the denomination. Bishop Spong's writings are a good example of the religious liberal throwing out the baby with the bath water.

### **An Escape from Sin:**

The hardest truth Christians have to deal with is that, we each have our own cross to bear. It seems that there is an immense pressure for the Christian to be perfect; and again, that is a trap. Likewise, the non-Christian is challenged (if not repelled) by this pressure for unrealistic Holy perfection. To escape this trap, the New Age liberal has tried to focus only on the "God is Love" message without reference to Biblical passages on sin or judgment. But, this doesn't work unless the church overhauls its theology (and finds a new set of sacred documents to support such theology).

What the Emergent Church movement thinkers have done is move toward Christian Universalism (neo-*Apokatastasis*) with a *panentheism* twist. What is the appeal of panentheism over pantheism? God still maintains his unique identity (which is lost in pantheism), yet humans then have a consubstantial unity with god that makes us all an unrejectable part of god: like the individual cells of the greater body. Let me quote from Leonard Sweet, the Emergent Church writer, to give an idea of what they are presenting:

*"Spirituality refers first of all to the universal gift of aliveness that exists within all religions and outside of religions. It breathes out the air that "inspires." Those who have been in-spired with aliveness by the kiss of God will "con-spire" to kiss others into coming alive to the spiritual dimensions of existence. "In-spire" means to breathe in. "Con-spire" means to breathe together. "Conspiracy" enters by the same door as "spirituality." A world gagging on smog and smut needs a breath of fresh air. The New Light movement begins as a fresh air conspiracy of "aliveness." But it is more than that. Spiritual consciousness can be something greater than aesthetics or aliveness. The Bible tells us that the human species has been twice kissed by the divine."<sup>xi</sup> (Sweet, 253)*

*"...the New Light movement is concerned about the salvation of ensouled communities as well as individual souls, and the salvation of community souls relating synergistically to one another. ... The power of community is the energy of between: The synergizing of synergies..."<sup>xii</sup> (Sweet, 122)*

*"New Light spirituality does more than settle for the created order, as many forms of New Age pantheism do. But a spirituality that is not in some way theistic (whether pan- or trans-), that does not extend to the spirit-matter of the cosmos, is not Christian."<sup>xiii</sup> (Sweet, 123-124)*



Here, Sweet's definition of panentheism is direct from the dictionary. There is nothing oblique about what he is preaching. This is a critical component of his belief system. Since we are a part of (according to Sweet's version of) god, our sins cannot separate us from him. Because we, and everything else in the universe, are a part of god, there cannot be a capacity for intrinsic evil; thus, there is no such a thing as original sin, or eternal punishment! Estrangement from god is a transient event; a moment of distraction against the backdrop of eternal loving connection.

### **Kingdom of God: Social Gospel and Collective Unity:**

The Emergent Church movement's communal characteristic is a religious extension of secular humanism; with a gospel of social justice. For those who have been the victims of social injustice there is an almost obsessive compulsive need to obtain resources (such as a denomination) through which they can crusade for their pet charity. The focus is on bettering the general human condition, without a reference to the sin that estranges us from God. Social justice is a laudable civil agenda until it becomes salvation by good works (through their pursuit of social justice, over spiritual holiness). A fundamental part of the Emerging Church's reexamination of Christian faith and practice has involved an awakening to issues of social justice, which flows from a rethinking of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus is then exemplified as a social crusader with a liberal political agenda, which we should (according to the Emergent thinkers) seek to emulate. A spokesman for the movement, Dan Kimball writes: *"Our faith also includes kingdom living, part of which is the responsibility to fight locally and globally for social justice on behalf of the poor and needy. Our example is Jesus, who spent His time among the lepers, the poor and the needy."*<sup>xliii</sup> (Kimball, 224)

Their supporters are seeking an existential validation of their lives by the feedback and encouragement they receive through the movement's growth in adherents who will sojourn with them. In part, they advocate a gospel of universal ecumenicalism, as expressed by the non-denominational, Pastor Brian McLaren, one of the preeminent thinkers of the Emergent Church movement. *"I must add, though, that I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts."*<sup>xliv</sup> (McLaren, 260)

Brian McLaren argues in *The Secret Message of Jesus* that Jesus might not have *"come to start a new religion, but rather came to start a political, social, religious, artistic, economic, intellectual, and spiritual revolution that would give birth to a new world."*<sup>xlv</sup> (McLaren, 4) Jesus' "secret" message, according to McLaren, is the Kingdom of God; a man made theocracy or utopia on Earth. This is followed by a universal salvation in the afterlife that causes a restoration of all things. Again, this false logic negates the true destructive effects of immortal sin (or original sin), and the need to accept that Jesus is Christ, Lord and Savior (i.e., soteriology).

Further, this contradicts what Jesus told Pilot at his trial in John 18:36. *"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."* The idea that man can create a theocracy on earth has nothing to do with what Jesus said, and smacks of human self-sufficiency. This idea that Christ had no intention of using human effort to reform the earth or humanity by social/political means is further evidenced by how Jesus stopped Peter from acting out in Mathew 26:50-55 *Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to*

him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. The Emergent Church adherents talk about being more like Jesus, and then advocate an idea (actually, many ideas) that Christ was against. Thus, it appears that the affinity of the Emergent adherent's to amalgamate with organized denominations is only a psychological device to alleviate existential estrangement and reinforce personal identity. This is a religion crutch; a psychological hunger to satisfy the ego; the type of religiousness that Karl Marx<sup>xlvi</sup> criticized. It is a spirituality that is without Scriptural integrity, or the Scriptural authority to the belief system that supports classic Christology. Sadly, they'll say anything to join the group; but true Christianity doesn't work as a fad for narcissists. This is why they need a new doctrine; their excuse to modernize Christian doctrine.

### **Utopia:**

The Emergent Church seeks social justice in lieu of finding a relationship with the Holy God. A relationship with a Holy God would involve self abasement to the Kingship of Christ Jesus as Lord; a concept beyond the understanding of the liberal post-modern man. Here, the turbulence of rapid modernization, and a culture of enlightened self-interest (sic., narcissism) has left people feeling adrift. Adherents to the movement didn't start out with an objective of trying to topple the classical Christian belief system. Yet, in their quest for existential validation of their humanist values (which they won't let go of) they end up preaching a message of nothingness (in terms of Christology) and serve up a Jesus whose sacrifice at the cross is irrelevant. For the Emergent Christian, spiritual fulfillment is collective cuddling in common unity; called spiritual harmony or the Kingdom of God.

The chief reason for classical Christians to draw a line around the issue of "doctrinal orthodoxy" and a Christ centered belief system is that this is something the movement seeks to ignore or even sees as a hindrance to its propagation. Again, I turn to my atheist pundit for an objective look at how Emergent witness has become watered down. In his article, "Liberalizing Christianity: Is Liberal Christianity Still Christianity?" Professor Austin Cline says: <sup>xlvii</sup>

*Atheists can't say what is or is not "real" Christianity, but we can say what is and is not a sound argument for what Christianity should be; and what is, and is not a way of living that's consistent with something that should qualify as Christianity. On this basis, liberal Christianity may be tough to defend.*

*In this case, atheists may find it agreeable that a liberal Christian has abandoned traditional doctrines -like hell, -original sin, -predestination, -and exclusivism, but this must be tempered with the knowledge that such conclusions will likely cause their own problems. For example, while it's true that religions are always evolving - including Christianity - it's nevertheless legitimate to wonder how much change can happen in how short of a period of time before retention of the original label is no longer justified. How many traditional doctrines can a Christian abandon before "Christian" just isn't a legitimate, justified label anymore? If there is no limit, then how does the label qualify as really meaning anything in the first place?*

*It must also be acknowledged that dumping noxious, traditional doctrines make Christianity "easier" in the sense that Christianity becomes more reasonable in light of modern science and society, but this in turn can make Christianity a lot less appealing.*

*That may sound paradoxical because dropping noxious elements should make Christianity more appealing — it's certainly true that liberal Christians find it more appealing. However, it's been established that beliefs and ideologies become more appealing to outsiders when they see that adherents sacrifice for their beliefs.*

### **Re-Imaging Evil:**

My brother once told me, *“The devil will tell the truth nine times, just so he can tell you one good lie.... And, that will be the lie that sends you to hell.”*

Since under panentheism there is no intrinsic evil, the devil has to be redefined as something of spiritual value. Thus, the New Age mystic, David Spangler has written:

*“The true light of this great being can only be recognized when one's own eyes can see with the light of the Christ, the light of the inner sun. Lucifer works within each of us to bring us to wholeness, and as we move into the New Age, which is the age of man's wholeness, each of us is brought to that point which I term the Luciferic Initiation, the particular doorway through which the individual must pass if he is to come fully into the presence of his light and his wholeness. Lucifer comes to give us the final gift of wholeness. If we accept it, then he is free and we are free, that is the Luciferic Initiation. It is one that many people now, and in the days ahead, will be facing, for it is an initiation into the New Age. (Spangler, 45)<sup>xlviii</sup>*

Leonard Sweet acknowledges in *Quantum Spirituality* that he was privately corresponding with “channeler” (a New Age title for a prophet who brings god’s insight) David Spangler. In *Quantum Spirituality*, Sweet writes about what he calls his “new cell” understanding of New Light leadership, then closes his book by thanking Spangler for “his help in formulating this ‘new cell’ understanding of New Light Leadership.” Sweet writes:<sup>xlix</sup> He goes on to add, *“As a cosmion incarnating the cells of a new body, New Lights will function as transitional vessels through which transforming energy can renew the divine image in the world, moving postmoderns from one state of embodiment to another.”* (Sweet, 48) *I am grateful to David Spangler for his help in formulating this “new cell” understanding of New Light leadership.”*<sup>li</sup> (Sweet, 312)

Following this biological analogy, Sweet is saying that each individual life within creation can be equated to an individual cell within the body of god; the *new cell* understanding. Thus, the *Lucifer Initiation* is being equated to embryonic stem cell differentiation and cellular adhesion where cells cleave together as tissue within the larger organism of god. (One finds Sweet’s depiction of biology to be as reductionist as his theology.) This “transforming” is practiced as a mystic rite within all the derivative successors of West African paganism; the trance communion and possession with the spirit realm, where consciousness is lost. It is actively practiced by adherents to New Age mysticism. This is a counterfeit version of the Pentecostal or Charismatic experience with the Holy Spirit, where consciousness is not lost.

### **ELCA and the Emergent Church Relationship:**

So what are these apostates and heretics’ relationship to the ELCA? They are honored guest speakers at ELCA continuing education and professional advancement training activities of ordained ministers and rostered lay leaders:

*“Leadership development: We provide continuing education and professional advancement opportunities for both rostered and lay leaders, including our innovative Faith & Leadership Academy and Diakonia programs to empower missional lay leaders. Recent Bishop's Convocation speakers have included Kelly Fryer, Leonard Sweet, Jerome Ringo and Mike Foss.”*

*MinistryLink, Online home of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA,  
July 2010 < <http://www.ministrylink.org/ministries/vocations-and-leadership/>>*

In fact, if you search the internet, you will find that every one of those speakers listed above is an open activist in the Emergent Church movement. Kelly Fryer's book are for sale through the Augsburg Press, the publication arm of the ELCA.

The Emergent Church is currently not so much a doctrine as it is a movement. There is great pressure from both the inside and the outside for thinkers and writers of the movement to develop a coherent systematic rational that holds all their thinking and practices together; a theology, if you will... as their followers reorient the broader Christian church into something more contemporary to the current generation. There are certain common threads amongst Emergent Christians such as a desire to imitate the life of Jesus; transform secular society along the lines of social justice; an emphasis on communal living; welcoming outsiders; being generous and creative; and facilitative leadership without control.

Although the leadership of the ELCA has not openly identified the source of the changes in church doctrine, a reasonable comparison of statements by liberal leaders in the ELCA and authors of the Emergent Church movement reveals a philosophical connection that ELCA leaders endorse. Such ELCA statements can be found on ELCA sponsored internet sites like the following: *"However, the emerging church's distrust of traditional institutions, keen awareness of postmodern shifts in culture, and emphasis on being authentic communities of ethical formation could be instructive to more established denominations like the ELCA as they grapple with falling numbers and seek renewed vibrancy and relevance. ...I think it [sic., the sited writer's own congregation] is a unique "expression of church" that combines many emerging elements while still remaining firmly rooted in its Lutheran identity."* <sup>iii</sup> Sadly, this idea that the ELCA can be "Emergent" (with its Gnostic underpinnings) and still remaining firmly rooted in its Lutheran heritage is self delusional, at best.

The ELCA has accepted by tacit agreement, the Emergent Church belief that the Kingdom of God is already here on earth as we find spiritual balance; in our personal lives, and in our collective relationships. For the ELCA this is expressed as a pro-active pursuit of ecumenical allegiances, again, to the point of promiscuity. Emergents pursue a collective spirituality that includes all people, regardless of their faiths, and in fact is *in* all people and all of creation and can be felt or realized through mysticism which connects everything together as ONE. This new *collective spirituality* leads people into a socialistic community where rituals, practices, and social justice become a means of salvation, but not the salvation you think of in a personal sense of being born-again through Jesus Christ. This is a *collective salvation* that includes whole cultures and communities who follow the way of someone referred to as Jesus. Martin Luther would recognize that these people are using the pursuit of social justice as a Gnostic version of salvation by works.

### **The Subversion of Classic Faith:**

*"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15*

There are those who are upset by the rancorous discord surrounding the decisions made at the ELCA's 2009 Churchwide Assembly. They see themselves as caught in the middle of two sides, in a fight. They hold up the Bound Conscious policy made during that assembly as a sign that a truce exists between the liberals and the classical believers; which supposedly protects the convictions of each camp. As long as those with their heads in the sand are not directly affected,

they don't want to hear about it. From within this apathy is hidden the imminent threat to the classical Christian congregation.

Nobody is honoring any truce; especially not the Emergent liberal contingent. The liberals are conducting a political offensive, which is well underway. As a military analyst, it appears that the liberals have three critical objectives they must reach to consolidate their rule of the ELCA:

- First, they need to control the teachings of the church and messages that are going out publicly.
- Next, they have to control the rank and file rostered clergy to ensure that even the heterosexual leadership is singing a message of post-modernity.
- And until they have a decisive majority, they have to keep the local congregations appeased or intimidated, and unaware of the transformation during the transition of power.

This entire process will only take five more years. What we are seeing is the transformation of the ELCA into a religious Christian cult.<sup>liii</sup> This is not a conspiracy of the Emergent Church movement alone, in a direct sense; although the movement does endeavor to propagate itself. This also represents a political endeavor by church officers on the religious left, who are disaffected, to ensure job security within a more comfortable environment; a very understandable agenda. Let us look in more detail at these three points, individually.

#### **Control the Teachings and Message of the Church:**

Try as one might, in the near future it will be impossible for the classical Christian community to coexist beside the liberal Christian community, within the ELCA. These liberal Christians within the ELCA are adherents to the beliefs of (New Age) Emergent Christianity, and seek to "reimage" evangelical Lutheranism. Over the next few years, the ELCA members will find that the logical systems are at such variance, as to be incompatible in not only the abstract, but also in the practical. Such belief systems that are heterodox to each other will end up in open conflict, with one dominating the other. Emergent Christian thinkers have expressed how they will handle this conflict: *"The Church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it."*<sup>liv lv</sup> (Jones, 132)

Thus, the Emergent ELCA will have to first sanitize all of the denomination's educational and homiletic publications (including the liturgy) so as to not conflict with the pantheism belief system. For example: the idea that doctrine is holy, belonging to God as espoused by Martin Luther, is not tenable for Emergent Christianity<sup>lvi</sup> which does not distinguish God from creation. They criticize understandings of God that limit God by metaphysical principles, such as atonement and justification for the redemption of sin (or to say, God shouldn't be limited to being perfectly holy). To think that God somehow is compelled to welcome someone, no matter what kind of person he is, or how little faith he has, is to tie the "hands" of God and make any sense of justice meaningless. The new ELCA will probably continue on with a Trinitarian definition of the Godhead; but one that doesn't meet the Athanasian Creed standards. Yet, new publications will begin teaching a concept of God that can save through a collective effort using the general processes of social science and nature. These new teachings will be advanced, without resorting to repentance, individual justification or any distinctive process for negating sin (e.g., like atonement at Calvary). But, let's not confuse the people with the facts. There are many roads to heaven, and the gates to heaven are broad (*Matthew 7:13-14*).

This has been under way for the last two/three years, now. New materials are now in place to supplant classical views. Old teaching is being labeled as controversial, confrontational,

parochial and incongruent with modernity. The Eastern North Dakota Synod, Resource Center has a whole library of Emergent Church materials which has been available since 2008. The Augsburg Press is rife with the sale of books by Emergent Church authors. We can expect that within the next three years, the re-editing and censoring out of classical Christian orthodox doctrine will be complete. This modification of liturgy was done for the ELCA Rite of Reception<sup>lvii lviii</sup>, when the homosexual congregations were received into the ELCA.

**Control the Clergy to Ensure They are Singing a Message of Modernity:**

Ministers of the classical Christian belief system are being shunned by liberal bishops, and not being sent to interview for calling to pastoral positions. And after a year, they are being defrocked. This is already going on.

Likewise, seminaries are propagating Emergent Church doctrine. How this threat impacts ministers who are outspoken adherents of classical Christian values is best exemplified by the following anecdotal evidence of a seminary student.<sup>lix</sup>

*It was almost a year ago when one of the Bible and Ministry professors began to hype the appearance of Leonard Sweet on our campus everyone was excited, after all this was a somewhat big name coming to our university. Still there was a small group of us students who were a little less than comfortable about this man and his teachings. That Tuesday our fears would be confirmed Leonard read Revelation 3:16 from the Message “translation” of the Bible.*

*That was all the scripture that he said he needed to “prove his point” and then began to talk about God’s vomiting of the lukewarm in judgment, here it how he described those individuals. He began to talk about a New Age coming (no kidding he did not try to hide his language) and how one day there’ll be no need for the scriptures or any type of church because everything is united in spirit. “The same energy, the same ‘god’, who works in you exists in nature, exists in all creation in everything” he continued with the idea that everything has a spiritual content and that it was all inherently good, then he really seemed to show a pantheistic streak. Leonard Sweet elaborated on his spirit in everything point “in many ways god is the earth and so are the pews you sit in and your pets and everything that has life, they are not ‘god’ but they are”.*

*These Emergents are dangerous for those that say the McLaren and Bell and Manning and Sweet are harmless, that is not the case. I have read all of their books, they were required reading in missions and evangelism classes. There is so much heresy floating around and so many following after it. In my “world missions” class we spent 2/3 of the semester watching Bell’s Nooma material. If anyone dared to object to Bell’s “theology” (which was but a few of us) we were punished (grade-wise) or considered unloving or even called by the professor anti-Christian.*

*In theology classes we are not allowed to quote New Testament passages to clarify Old Testament passages instead we need to interpret it our own way because “modernity is dead; we live in a postmodern world now” and we must write our Theology essays from the perspective of McLaren in order to please the professors. Bultmann and Barth are required reading in addition to McLaren. I know that my university is not alone in doing this to their students, it is happening at Christian educational institutions all across United States and soon the young missionaries will be going out into the world and the emergent message will be spreading.*

It is one thing for academicians to engage in theological exploration. It is quite another thing for church leaders to forcibly institutionalize such errant thinking into church policy.

### **Keep the Local Congregations Appeased:**

Provision has been made in the resolutions for those persons who must decline to follow the new standards. To lull congregations into not opposing this Emergent transformation, ELCA leaders passed a resolution that portends to respect theological differences. To quote from the amended text of Resolution 4 Related to Ministry Policies as Adopted by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA:

*“RESOLVED, that Evangelical Lutheran Church in America call upon its members to commit themselves to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree regarding decisions on the call and rostering of individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, in this church and with churches ecumenically and globally; and be it further RESOLVED, that this church, because of its commitment to respect the bound consciences of all, declare its intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making....” (Adopted 667-307 as amended)<sup>lx</sup>*

For those congregations that might try to withhold sending the synods their due portion of the tithes, they open themselves to church censure.<sup>lxi</sup> Congregations that hold dual membership in the ELCA, and its conservative sister synod, the Lutheran Church in Mission to Christ (LCMC) are being publicly threatened with censure. A practice that has been accepted for ten years, is now causing congregations to feel synodical heat, as bishops move to stomp congregations that get out of line.

On the other hand, in less than twelve months, over ten congregations that were previously expelled from the ELCA for calling and hiring active homosexual pastors were reinstated with honors.

In its voting during the summer of 2009, the ELCA clearly departed from its Biblical and confessional Lutheran roots. That vote was about doctrine - what the church believes - and as a consequence, everything the church says (or does not say), does, and writes will now reflect its new doctrine. Wimpy Christians have to reject the apathetic notion that it really doesn't matter until it is time to call a new pastor. The issue of rostered leadership was only one of several resolutions that sent the ELCA out into apostasy. The issue of “Bound Conscience” is key here; because it opens the door for New Age heretics to proselytize their doctrines from within the church. Emergent doctrine is and, by extension, its teaching will be in direct opposition to God's Word on the subjects of Biblical authority, conscience, and proscribed sexual acts. At this point, most of the ELCA's regional synods are on board with it, and most congregations have closed or will close their eyes to it. One has to believe that there is almost zero probability of the situation changing in our lifetime, or maybe ever.

People who hold up Resolution 4, which instituted the doctrine of Bound Conscience, as a sign of their differences being respected, are as misguided as Nigel Chamberlain holding a paper with Adolf Hitler's signature, promising peace.... The liberal faction has only just barely attained control of the denomination, and must quickly consolidate its gains if it is to dominate the ELCA.

### **Impact on the individual Christian:**

So, how is the spiritual growth of a true Believer impacted? To understand spiritual growth as a process, we must look at Saint Paul's letter to the Romans. There, he commends the congregation at Rome because their *“faith is spoken of throughout the whole world”* (Romans 1:8). The congregation was already established and apparently thriving. Yet Paul says, *“So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome, also”* (Romans 1:15). Why did Paul want to preach to them? So that they could be converted? No, Saint Paul was offering to continue the process of conversion.<sup>lxii</sup>

There is a paradox in all of this: we are called and commissioned by Christ to witness the Gospel, while our own conversion to the Gospel is still a work in progress. This is the heart of evangelism; and when practiced correctly, it reveals that our baptism is an ongoing event. Today, we refer to this as the process of sanctification. It is just such sanctification which is greatly sought after by people who know God's Holy Spirit. Our need for redemption and sanctification is a direct result of our own sin.

It is this sin that caused Christ to come to earth in human form to die for us. It is this sin, as was defined by Old Testament law, which is what we have to pay for or that Christ had to atone for at the cross of Calvary. It is because of sin, and our total dependence upon God, that we ask for forgiveness.

Again, this is not rocket science. Every time we violate the Law of Moses, it becomes another part of the burden which has been laid upon Christ, to suffer for in our behalf. This is the Passion of Christ. If those things which were against the Law of Moses were sinful before, then they are still sinful today. It is this sin that caused Christ to come to earth in human form to die for us. It is this sin, as was defined by Old Testament law, which is what we have to pay for, or that Christ had to atone for at the cross of Calvary. So, even if salvation is unconditional, it does not negate that breaking the Law of Moses is sinful behavior. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18 (NIV):

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

What does this mean? Jesus elaborates in Matthew 7: 21-22 (NIV):

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*

It is a sham to think that you can escape the penalty of sin by confessing Christ (and, being baptized), and then live your own life as if nothing has changed. That is completely impossible! Does anyone believe that Jesus is an enabler who will spoil us while we pursue our little personal vices? Certainly not! Does anyone think that Our Lord is such a sucker that someone can cover them self with his blood, and be so duplicitous, as to habitually indulge in some sinful behavior that controverts the wishes of God the Father? That is completely impossible! Jesus will see through that game. Hebrews 10: 26-31 says:

*<sup>26</sup>If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup>but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup>How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup>For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." <sup>31</sup>It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

What is it that classic Christians believe? John MacArthur, in "An Introduction to Lordship Salvation," writes:<sup>lxiii</sup> *Present-day evangelicalism, by and large, ignores these warnings. The prevailing view of what constitutes saving faith continues to grow broader and more shallow, while the portrayal of Christ in preaching and witnessing becomes fuzzy. Anyone who claims to be*



*a Christian can find evangelicals willing to accept a profession of faith, whether or not the person's behavior shows any evidence of commitment to Christ. In this way, faith has become merely an intellectual exercise. Instead of calling men and women to surrender to Christ, modern evangelism asks them only to accept some basic facts about Him.*

*This shallow understanding of salvation and the gospel, known as "easy-believism," stands in stark contrast to what the Bible teaches. To put it simply, the gospel call to faith presupposes that sinners must repent of their sin and yield to Christ's authority. This, in a nutshell, is what is commonly referred to as lordship salvation.*

The point is this: the good works of a religious humanist are not enough to cover up his or her sins for attempting to nullify what God the Father has established and holds as standards for the righteous life. No matter how good a person is, every time a Christian commits a sin, it becomes another debit of sorrow that is laid against Jesus as he suffered on the cross. Our social crusading and good works don't turn into gold stars that compensate for the debit of sin that is charged against Christ at the cross. To rationalize that the rules that God the Father establishes are inconsequential, and to live in denial about how sinful behavior only adds to the burden of Christ, is the pinnacle of self-indulgence.

This is an issue that is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals.

**To Summarize:**

The main problem with the manifestation of these larger Gnostic heresies is that they have become entrenched in the ELCA. In his pastoral letter of August 24, 2010, Bishop Mark Hanson affirms his commitment to the path which he has taken the ELCA down, complains about how misunderstood he has been, and pleads for more discussion. *"Do we mean it when we say we can preach, teach and hold divergent views on sexuality and be full participants in the ELCA's life and witness? Again, the answer is yes.... Standing together, we are known as a church that rolls up its sleeves and solves problems, the church that is catalyst, convener and bridge builder. Our strong ecumenical relationships and global partnerships testify to that commitment. Yet before the ELCA can undertake any such efforts with a new Lutheran church body, I believe we must commit to obey the commandment against bearing false witness and commit to live its meaning in every setting, both private and public.... We live in a world that is plagued by incivility, willful misunderstanding and hurtful caricatures of those with whom one disagrees.... There is room in this church for lively conversations and disagreements about questions of faith and life. There is room in this church for vigorous dialogue that witnesses to faith without rushing to judgment and closing off discussion."*

How did we get to the point where we find ourselves caught within a raging debate going on in the greater Church? It is because a major denomination; the ELCA has elected to embrace a Gnostic modernity belief systems. It goes by many names. To the Christians of a classical or orthodox persuasion, this is nothing more than repackaged Gnosticism: a heresy that has dogged the Church since its infancy. There are over ten predominantly homosexual congregations which have been instated into the ELCA, over the last year. And there was even homage paid to the Wiccan goddess Sophia, in the July 25, 2010, Rite of Reception ceremony to reinstate homosexual clergy who were previously expelled. The ELCA has crossed the Rubicon, and there is no going back. Bishop Hansen says he wants to talk, but he is not going to reverse the course that he and his cohorts are on. At this point, to keep having any further discussions is only a stonewalling tactic.

This essay stated with a focus on how the August 2009 decisions of the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA marginalized the authority of Scripture (sic., Solo Scriptura followed by Solus

Christus). Yet, this is only an immediate issue in what will spread into an entire series of assaults against the doctrinal orthodoxy of classical Christian beliefs. Since November 2009, this one has been following what many leaders in the evangelical world have to say about this Emergent movement and always seem to get the impression that their concerns are more focused on a single – stand-alone - doctrines (e.g., Marriage, Virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, church government, biblical eldership etc.); without a firm grasp of the movement's strategic world vision (epistemology) per se. One sees this defense-of-individual-doctrines view as being too shortsighted; not accounting for the systemic wide nature of this challenge.

My personal experience goes back to my childhood when my mother was very active in New Age Spiritualism; the immediate predecessor of the Emergent Church movement. My mother was influenced by her mother, who was Santería or Lukumi (a variant of Voodoo paganism); and influenced by her father, who was an activist in the American Communist Party (a radical form of humanism). The result was that my mother was practicing New Age in the late 1950's, before it had a name. Although the format of Santería ritual and worship was different from New Age, the belief system is the same. (Most New Age thinkers derive most of their views from Celtic paganism, rather than West African paganism.) Whereas, the classical Christian belief system works toward the hereafter, New Age works toward a balance in life on earth. While a method, even a wrong method can be considered Christian (the Corinthian Church heterodox for example), this populist divergence of the Christian belief system is in contention against cannon doctrine; and that is the danger. Even as the Caribbean slaves merged their Yoruban Lukumi religion into Roman Catholicism to create Santería, the New Age has merged into American evangelicalism to create Emergent Church.

The broad issue of liberal Christianity's insurgency and subversion of the ELCA is greater than the singular question of ordaining active homosexuals. It is about two incompatible Gnostic belief systems being asked to co-exist with Nicene Creed Christianity. While in the background, supposedly educated Christian leaders dismantle our classical Christian belief system. The whole objective of the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325 was to denounce Gnosticism. Now, the average Emergent Church adherents might not say that they believe or understand the fine print of Jones, Fryer, Spangler, McLaren or Sweet; but, by their quest to circumvent facing their own personal sin, the rhetoric of these heretics is their only rational alternative.

Formally, the ELCA leadership has given their members the doctrine of, "Bound Conscious". The leadership tells the ELCA that they all don't need to be in agreement, but that as Christians we can agree to disagree; because each of us is bound by the spirit within us. Thus, a major denomination is openly encouraging its classical Christian members to subject their children to doctrine, which is for us classical Christians, a threat to our sanctification, according to our understanding of God's Holy Word. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NIV), Saint Paul says, *<sup>1</sup>But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup>People will be lovers of themselves... without self-control... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— <sup>5</sup>having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.* For the more classical believer, we are forbidden from placating to the beliefs of the world around us. The issue confronting us as followers of Christ is the authority of the Scriptures, as being the Word of God.

The critical issue is about a movement with a new belief system taking over a major denomination. The ELCA is no longer practicing Lutheranism. It is now a modern humanist religion, which is only giving lip service to the agreeable parts of the teachings of Jesus. It involves the redefinition of sin, atonement, justification, and the kingship of Christ; and thus, negating the significance of Jesus' deity. It has become worse than a liturgical version of Unitarianism that allows for Arianism (which accepts that God is separate from creation). By

giving acceptance to the Emergent Church, the ELCA has given credence to Leonard Sweet's version of Christianized paganism.

As for, what do I think (not feel) specifically about ordained ministers and pastors being allowed to engage in homosexual activity?

I say that a righteous response to a call into the ministry is ultimately about integrity. What is at stake when fornicators are ordained becomes the integrity of ministry, and its fidelity to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. How can those who are not whole, rationalizing their public disobedience against God the Father, help others toward wholeness? Although effective ministry does not demand perfection, it does demand integrity.

When we rationalize sin and institutionalize the acceptance of sinful behavior, we become tainted and habituated in the process of desensitizing ourselves and our children to the Holy Spirit's admonition to renounce sin and encouragement to strive for God's righteousness. When we are indoctrinated by institutional norms into rationalizing sin, we forfeit being everything that God had planned for us to be, without a fight. It is at this point that we become a defeated creature, in the clutches of Satan. To such, in Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV) Christ told the church in Laodicea: *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."*

One might be able to make the argument that Antinomianism does not violate the Nicene Creed (heterodox), but it defiantly violates Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism. As for Apokatastasis-panteism, it does not meet the standards of the Apostles Creed or Nicene Creed, and has always been outlawed since the days of the early Church. If we try to ignore this issue, and capitulate to the modernists, what will that do? First, it will demonstrate to Christ your complicity in undermining the effectiveness of the Gospel in your personal life. Second, Christians of integrity will leave to find a Born-Again fellowship that appreciates the Passion of Christ and His Lordship. In which case, the failure of church leaders (throughout the whole of Christendom) to make a sacrifice for Christ will be everyone's undoing. It is at this point that the New Testament Scriptures instruct us:

1 Corinthians 5:11 (NIV)

*But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*

1 Timothy 6:3-4 (NIV)

*<sup>3</sup>If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, <sup>4</sup>he is conceited and understands nothing..*

1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NIV)

*<sup>20</sup>Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, <sup>21</sup>which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.*

Ephesians 5:7-11 (NIV)

*<sup>7</sup>Therefore do not be partners with them. <sup>8</sup>For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup>and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*

The first of the great missionary evangelists, Saint Paul, in the Bible, is clear: Christians are to come apart from apostasy and heretics. The Scriptures above are only a sampling of the Scriptures which admonish believers to come apart from apostasy and heresy. Not a single verse in the New Testament encourages believers to have fellowship with apostasy or sexual immorality, in an effort to be a good witness to them.

If Christ were to return, tomorrow, what kind of Christian would want to be seen cavorting with an openly apostate or heretical denomination? Would anyone want their spouse to find them in the act of adultery? In 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 16 (NIV), Saint Paul says: *<sup>14</sup>Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? <sup>15</sup>What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.*

The next question is; which denomination will be the next to be seduced by the Emergent Church heresy? In Ephesians 6:11-17 (NIV), Saint Paul admonishes us: *<sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup>Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup>and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

Do Christian leaders throughout the whole of Christendom have the moral courage to take a stand for Jesus? If so, pastors will have to be pro-active in addressing this threat before their congregations. Denominational leaders and elders will need to be explicit in naming this heresy, and ensure that it does not creep into the curriculums of seminaries posing as new revelation. Saint Paul warned and admonished his protégée that there would be hard times ahead in 2 Timothy 3:12-17 (NIV): *<sup>12</sup>In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup>while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

It won't be popular, but Lutheran and other Trinitarian denominations will have to break communion with the ELCA. Church leaders of Trinitarian denominations will have to make the hard decisions to segregate their communities from the Emergent Church movement and break communion with those denominations which have adopted or placate the Emergent Church epistemology. Here, a public witness has to be made to protect classical Christian communicants from falling into apostasy. Such an act will incite criticism, but this is one form of the persecution which Saint Paul told Timothy he had to be ready to face.

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Benedict has spoken frequently about his concern that there is no absolute sense of right and wrong in modern society. On April 18, before the conclave at which he was elected pope, he warned that, “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.”

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