

Emerging Church

Leading Protestants Back Home to Rome

We have been receiving an increasing number of reports about Protestants who are converting to Roman Catholicism. There is now a series of three books which herald the testimonies of former Protestant pastors who have found the broad way to Rome more enticing and fulfilling. What is causing this growing apostasy? Who is behind this reversal of the Reformation? Why are so many Protestants being seduced by the piety of this false religion? Many evangelicals are puzzled and are searching for answers. Although it is disheartening and discouraging, we should not be surprised because: "the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

Does Christianity Need to Be Reinvented? One of the major influences that is paving the road back to Roman Catholicism is The Emerging Church movement. Proponents say its time for Christianity to be reinvented for a new generation. It must become more relevant to a postmodern generation. They say the best way to reinvent Christianity for the present generation is to reintroduce ideas and experiences from the past. Emergent leaders say God's Word no longer holds the answers to life's questions. Experience must become the key factor to encounter spiritual reality. The experiential attractions which are being promoted by the Emerging Church include: statues, prayer stations, incense, liturgy, candles, icons, the sacraments and calling communion the Eucharist. It is easy to see how this movement complements and encourages the Vatican's "new evangelization program" to win the "separated brethren" back to the "true church."

A New Kind of Christian

The most influential leader in the emergent church movement is Brian McLaren, a pastor and author from Maryland who wrote the controversial book, *A New Kind of Christian*. Time Magazine recently named McLaren one of the 25 most influential evangelical leaders in the world (2/7/05). In another one of his books, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren describes himself as the new kind of Christian, with labels such as: catholic, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, fundamentalist/calvinist, anabaptist/anglican and methodist. How can he hold to all these labels at the same time? It is because he rejects the Word of God as the objective authority for truth. McLaren writes: "How do you know something is true? First you engage in spiritual practices like prayer, Bible reading, forgiveness and service. Then you see what happens; you remain open to experience. Finally, you report your experience to others in the field of spirituality for their discernment to see if they confirm your findings or not."

Mystical Feelings Replace Doctrine

It is appalling to see what McLaren and other leaders of the Emergent Church are really promoting. In *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren writes that he "is consistently over sympathetic to Roman Catholics." Other leaders tell us we need to emulate Roman Catholicism to become more mystical in our reverence of God. Chuck Smith Jr., in his book, *There is a Season* (foreword by Brian McLaren), provides insight into this mystical experience. He writes: "What would happen if we allowed people to "feel" what we cannot explain, to know with the heart and not with the brain? We would open the door of faith to a wider audience than if we continued to insist on a rational belief in the facts as the only legitimate starting point of the Christian faith." Unfortunately, the wider audience Smith will reach are people without discernment, who uphold "truth" that is subjective and believe a gospel that is compromised. These are people who have no biblical roots and will constantly be blown away by every wind of doctrine. Some will be fatally duped into believing there are no eternal consequences if or when they convert to Roman Catholicism.

The Alluring Power of the Eucharist

Another leader of the Emergent Church is Dr. Robert Webber who is recognized by many as the authority on worship renewal. He taught at Wheaton College for 32 years as Professor of Theology and has authored over 40 books. Dr. Webber had a "life changing experience" at a Catholic conference center when he decided to receive the Eucharist. His testimony is recorded in a book entitled *Signs of Wonder*. Following is part of his experience in his own words:

"Closing my eyes, I allowed my life in the church to pass before me. My prejudices rose up within me: What are you doing here? You never worshiped in a Catholic setting, let alone received the bread and the wine from a Catholic priest! Then I heard my Catholic friends speak of their love for Christ, pray with fervency, and express a real desire to know the Scriptures and live by its authority. Those memories said, 'Go ahead. After all, there is only one Lord, one church, one

faith, one baptism, one Holy Communion.' In that moment, God broke through the walls I had allowed to separate me from my brothers and sisters of different denominations. I am convinced the prejudices we hold and the walls we build between ourselves and other communities of Christians actually block our experience of God's presence in our lives. Our biases cut us off from the spiritual communion of the fullness of the body of Christ. God dwells in his church, and to reject a part of God's church is to reject him. Furthermore, rejecting apart of God's church keeps us from experiencing what the creed calls "the communion of the Saints." When God broke down my walls, he brought me into richer fellowship with the body of Christ throughout the world. You might say I was surprised by joy! I had never had an experience like that in my life. In that Catholic chapel, a new worship experience had bumped up against that old prejudice of mine, and a new attitude was born. I had taken into myself the experience of another tradition, I had been in dialogue with another worship tradition, and I was surely the richer for it."

Subjective Experiences vs. Objective Truth

Webber's words are echoed by other Protestants who have experimented with the Eucharist and then converted to Catholicism because of their "joyful experience." It comes as no surprise that these apostates, who have converted to a false religion, have been influenced by subjective experiences. Probably the best known Protestant convert to Catholicism is Scott Hahn. His subjective experience was participating in the ungodly pagan practice of praying the rosary (Mat. 6:7). Hahn was convinced "Mary" performed a miracle after he prayed the rosary. By contrast, those who have been gloriously converted to the Lord Jesus Christ have believed the objective truth of His Word (Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 10:17). Now sealed with the Holy Spirit, they can never again be ensnared by the deceitful schemes of the devil's religion: (2 Tim. 2:23-25).

A common characteristic of Protestants who have converted to Romanism has been a dissatisfaction with their former Christian experience. One convert cited several things that drove him away from his evangelical church: live bands playing loud music consisting of praise choruses repeated over and over again, no place for quiet reverence and prayer, theological shallowness and movie clips drama and plays. He said, "After a few years of the kids raving about how much fun they had and not learning anything, we tried the Catholic Church across the street and immediately enjoyed the formal liturgy, the religious rituals and a reverence for God." What a tragedy for this family. They left a shallow worship experience and replaced it with an idolatrous worship experience. There is an instructive lesson here for evangelical pastors - churches which emphasize entertainment over the preaching of God's Word will always have people looking for a more satisfying experience. Whatever you win then "with" is what you win them "to."

What Can We Do?

Let our voices be heard! Expose the evil deeds of darkness with the glorious light of God's Word. Lovingly confront those who are promoting the Emergent Church and embracing Roman Catholicism as a valid expression of Christianity. Call Roman Catholicism what it is - a false religious system that is holding over 1 billion people in bondage to deception.

To those who have committed themselves to Satan's lies and his evil religious system, we must have a sense of urgency. There is no time for beating around the bush. God doesn't promise anyone tomorrow. Jude wrote: "save others [with the Gospel], snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23). We need to be prepared to offend them with the truth, knowing that the Gospel will offend those who are offensive to God.

Finally, don't be deceived. Hold onto our supreme and objective authority for truth - the Word of God! It, along with the Holy Spirit, is the only security we have in these days of great deception and compromise.