

Mark Driscoll Rejects McLaren But Embraces Contemplative

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Mark Driscoll is a very popular pastor in the Seattle area (about 15 miles from us across the water of Puget Sound). I agree with all the concerns voiced by Lighthouse Trails Ministry and encourage the believers in Jesus to pray for great discernment during these days of unprecedented deception.

2 Pet 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. (NKJ)

Since last Fall, when Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church, denounced some of the teachings of emerging church leaders Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt at the Convergence Conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, his talk has been the topic of many discussions across North America. People feel that such a denouncement by someone who had a role in start up of the emerging church is very noteworthy. ⁽¹⁾

However, while Driscoll has placed himself in what he considers a more conservative and a biblical form of the emerging church, evidence shows that when it comes to the driving force behind the emerging church - mysticism - Driscoll embraces the same spiritual technology as McLaren and Pagitt.

A “**Recommended Reading List**” on Driscoll's website shows that Driscoll resonates with contemplative and emerging church leaders who teach and adhere to eastern-style meditation.

Some may feel that a disclaimer on the site releases Driscoll from any connection. The disclaimer states that “Mars Hill Church does not endorse every thought, idea, principle, and/or method of every single title or author on this list,” but says the books are “good for those who read with discerning minds as they worship God in spirit and truth.... Our heart in having this list

is to help people live for Jesus and grow in their relationship with Him as they are reaching their city with the gospel.” Unfortunately, several of the titles are not at all “good for those who read” them, will not help them in their “worship” of God, and rather than help them “grow in their relationship with Him” will point readers toward a mysticism that runs contrary to biblical truth.

A complete list of the recommended books (about 85 altogether) has several titles in question (about 1/4 of the list). For instance, Driscoll includes three books by contemplative/centering prayer advocate Larry Crabb. In Crabb's book, *The Papa Prayer*, his propensity toward the mystical is quite obvious (see our report on this book). Crabb is a spiritual director for the AACC (American Association of Christian Counselors). A statement in the AACC Code of Ethics shows how it is influenced by contemplative pioneer Richard Foster:

Although rooted primarily in an orthodox evangelical biblical theology, this Code is also influenced (according to the paradigm offered by Richard Foster) by the social justice, charismatic-pentecostal, pietistic-holiness, liturgical, and contemplative traditions of Christian theology and church history. (p.3, *American Association of Christian Counselors, Code of Ethics*)

In Crabb's book, *The Papa Prayer*, he says:

I've practiced centering prayer. I've contemplatively prayed. I've prayed liturgically....I've benefited from each, and I still do. In ways you'll see, elements of each style are still with me (p.9).

Speakers who the AACC uses at events would further confirm Crabb's affinity with contemplative and emerging spiritualities. Some of those speakers include: David Benner, John Ortberg, Gary Thomas, Leonard Sweet, and Dan Allender (Mars Hill Graduate School). All of these fall in the mystical/contemplative camp.

For those who may still have doubts as to Crabb's stand, a 2003 Christianity Today article titled “*A Shrink Gets Shrunk*,” describes how Crabb moved his focus from psychology to “spiritual direction.” The article says that Crabb “recites insights from an eclectic group of thinkers he drew on to come up with his model of direction.” This group of thinkers includes an array of eastern mysticism proponents: Thomas Merton, Eugene Peterson, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, John of the Cross, Michael Card, and Buddhist sympathizer Peter Kreeft.¹

While Driscoll does not include *The Papa Prayer* in his list of books, this raises a valid question: Is it ok to promote some of the books by those who propagate mystical spirituality as long as those particular books don't? The problem this presents is that by placing these names in a “Recommended

Reading List,” with a weak disclaimer, this puts readers in harm's way. Secondly, whatever it was that Larry Crabb was teaching in his earlier books (that Driscoll recommends) has somehow led him to become a follower of Thomas Merton and other blatant mystics. Reading Crabb's books will catch trusting readers off guard and could ultimately lead them into the panentheistic spirituality of Thomas Merton. After all, that is where it led Larry Crabb. To substantiate this statement, in 2002 Crabb wrote the foreword to a book written by David Benner. Benner's book, *Sacred Companions*, openly promotes the teachings of Merton and is actually a who's who of mystical and panentheistic writings such as atonement denier Alan Jones (*Reimagining Christianity*), Thomas Keating and a host of like-minded writers. In that foreword, Crabb said something that was in a sense prophetic of the emerging church. He stated:

The spiritual climate is ripe. Jesus seekers across the world are being prepared to abandon the old way of the written code for the new way of the Spirit (p. 9).

Benner's book is a manual for this new emerging way that throws out the old way (the biblical way). As an example of this, Benner praises a book by John Gorsuch titled *An Invitation to the Spiritual Journey*. Benner says, “This little book sparkles.” In Gorsuch's book, the general gist of it is how mysticism is uniting all the world's religions. He makes specific reference to Swami Paramahansa Yogananda and comments that he was a great saint who brought many people to God. In the back of Gorsuch's book there are also Tibetan Buddhist meditations. Without a doubt, Gorsuch's book is a New Age book. It proclaims the validity of all religions and also that God is in everything and everybody. For Benner to say this book sparkles, means he embraces its views - more importantly, not just in an intellectual sense but in a mystical sense. So in essence, for Crabb to write the foreword to this book speaks for itself.

It is interesting that one of the points Driscoll has against Brian McLaren is McLaren's rejection of the atonement. Why interesting? In Driscoll's “*Recommended Reading List*,” he recommends five books by Dan Allender. Allender, a promoter of the emerging church and contemplative prayer movement, is the president of Mars Hill Graduate School. One of the adjunct professors there is Brian McLaren,² and MHGS is a sponsor of McLaren's “*Everything Must Change*” tour. In case there is any question as to MHGS' stand on contemplative mysticism, here are a couple more examples. Their course, TCE 527 Kingdom of God, uses a text book by panentheist Thomas Keating, and their spiritual formation course uses a textbook by Catholic proponent Michael Downey.³ One Catholic news source describes Downey as “an expert in the subject of contemplative prayer, draw[ing] on the writings of *America's* great contemplative monk and author, Thomas Merton, to help us learn how to make

contemplation a part of life.”⁴ A word search on MHGS search engine brings up favorable and supportive links to countless contemplative and emerging authors and teachers: Doug Pagitt, Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, Keating, McLaren - the list is extensive. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that Allender is an evangelist for mystical spirituality and emerging thought. Once again though, Driscoll says that these books help bring people closer to Jesus. We would contend that this is *another Jesus and another gospel (II Corinthians 11:4)* that these contemplatives draw people toward.

Another author Driscoll recommends is contemplative promoter Ken Boa. Boa, in his book, *Conformed to His Image* speaks favorably of the practice of lectio divina, turns to Richard Foster for guidance, references mystic Jean Pierre de Caussade, St. Ignatius Loyola's mystical practices, and favorably refers to and/or quotes Julian of Norwich, Thomas Kelly, Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating⁴ Driscoll is drawing his followers into the palm of contemplatives, who incidentally would share much of the same philosophies as McLaren and Pagitt.

Driscoll also recommends Brother Lawrence's book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. In one edition of that book, Lawrence is said to have been “singing and dancing violently like a mad man” while in the presence of God (1977, Image Books, p. 34) (see *A Time of Departing*).

It makes sense that Driscoll has also included Essential Kierkegaard in his list. Soren Kierkegaard had an interest in mysticism as well. In a dissertation at Purdue University called “*Faith and nothingness in Kierkegaard: A mystical reading of the God-relationship*,” the writer says of Kierkegaard: “[H]e has marked structural similarities to mystics such as [Miester] Eckhart, who is warmly received by the Japanese philosophical tradition, particularly in the writings of its Zen and Pure Land Buddhist representatives.” (from chapter 2, *Faith Undone* by Roger Oakland) Oakland adds about Kierkegaard: “[Peter] Drucker attested to Kierkegaard's mystical affinities, saying he “stands squarely in the great Western tradition of religious experience, the tradition of ... St. John of the Cross,” a mystic in the 1500s” (*Faith Undone*, p. 25).

Another represented on Driscoll's list is author Gary Thomas. Thomas has been the subject of *Lighthouse Trails* articles for two reasons; one, because of his teaching on mantra meditation in his book *Sacred Pathways*, in which he states:

It is particularly difficult to describe this type of prayer in writing, as it is best taught in person. In general however, centering prayer works like this:

Choose a word (Jesus or Father, for example) as a focus for contemplative

prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing. (p. 185)

In addition, Thomas shares an affinity with a woman named Mary Oliver McPherson. This is quite significant, but most Christians don't realize it. In Thomas' book, *Sacred Marriage* (the one Driscoll recommends), he speaks favorably of McPherson several times. In McPherson's book, *Conjugal Spirituality* (the one Thomas references in *Sacred Marriage*), McPherson comes out as an advocate for tantric sex (the mixing of mysticism and sexual activity), as well as many other New Age and mystical practices (please read our report on this. Gary Thomas has proven himself as a staunch advocate for mystical practices time and again. As is the case with Larry Crabb, his books do not belong on a recommended reading list.

Others on Driscoll's list include: the late Robert Webber, emerging church author Donald Miller, Buddhist-sympathizer Peter Kreeft, and a book titled *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*.

Some may be asking, Why does it matter which books Mark Driscoll recommends? We believe it matters greatly. While Driscoll has announced that he rejects some of the more aberrant theologies of McLaren and Pagitt, to our knowledge he has never renounced contemplative mystical spirituality, which is the very heartbeat of the emerging church. And yet, a growing number of evangelical ministries are considering him a trustworthy source in spiritual matters (see below for a partial list).

It is essential to understand that beneath the surface of contemplative and emerging spirituality is a belief system that embraces a kingdom now, dominionist theology that says we should not think about a terrible end-time scenario for earth (Armageddon), a rapture that would remove believers prior to God's wrath on the earth, and a second coming of Christ who will establish the kingdom of God AFTER His return to a ill-fated earth. What many Christians do not understand is that such thinking lines up with New Age belief, and mysticism plays a huge role in their synopsis of the future for planet earth. When enough people begin meditating (a critical mass) and realize that all human beings and all creation are divine and one, then the earth can be healed from its corruption. As any Bible believer can see, this is totally contrary to Bible prophecies about the end of the age.

As Roger Oakland wrote about in his article *Bible Prophecy on Trial*, many Christian leaders downplay and actually condemn those who study end-time Bible prophecy. Mark Driscoll is no exception. On more than one occasion, he has spoken negatively about those who want to talk about eschatology. On his website, he states:

We are not eschatological Theonomists or Classic Dispensationalists (e.g. Scofield) and believe that divisive and dogmatic certainty surrounding particular details of Jesus Second Coming are unprofitable speculation, because the timing and exact details of His return are unclear to us.

Driscoll backs up this view as can be seen on a *YouTube* session where Driscoll says those eschatology-minded Christians who come to his church are not welcomed there. In Driscoll's book (a title included in his "*Recommended Reading List*"), *Confessions of a Reformissional Rev*, Driscoll mocks the idea of a rapture for believers and a one-world government with an Anti-christ who makes people wear a mark to buy, sell or trade (pp. 49-50). He added that this kind of end-time "mission" was not a message from Jesus but rather one "concocted from a cunning Serpent."

The reason we bring up Driscoll's disdain for end-time perspectives is because there is a growing connection between those who resonate with contemplative spirituality and those who say we should not think about Bible prophecy in relation to the end times. While the reasons for this connection may not appear to be obvious at this point in time to many, we believe, as stated previously in this article, that mysticism plays a crucial role in what the Bible calls a great falling away (*II Thessalonians 2*). This is why it is imperative that Christians take a critical examination of contemplative spirituality and ascertain for themselves as to its validity to the spiritual health of the body of Christ. The evidence is there for those who take the time to investigate. The ramifications of failing to do so could be absolutely enormous.

(1) <http://www.sebts.edu/chapel/listenNow.cfm?FileID=396>

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/may/7.52.html>

² <http://www.mhgs.edu/common/new-mdiv.asp>

³ <http://www.stjohnsem.edu/Fac.Eng.Downey.htm>

⁴ <http://www.americancatholic.org/e-News/FranciscanRadio/fr071906.asp>