

My Trip to the Rethink Conference

Commentary by Roger Oakland
www.understandthetimes.org

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Roger Oakland is a true watchman on the wall (Ezekiel 33). I recommend that readers sign up for his newsletters and support his ministry.

Over the 30 years I have traveled the road of life as a born-again, Bible-believing Christian, I have experienced a number of significant events that have provided inspiration and direction for the ministry God has given me. The *Rethink Conference* held at Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral, January 17-19, 2008 can now be listed as one of those watershed events.

While I was not able to attend the entire conference because of a missionary trip scheduled to the Philippines, the opening day of *Rethink: new perspectives from global influences* provided ample evidence to evaluate the significance of the event. For nearly two thousand years, most professing Christians have seen the Bible as the foundation for the Christian faith. The overall view at the *Rethink Conference*, however, is that Christianity, as we have known it, has run its course and must be replaced.

Co-hosted by Erwin Mc Manus and Robert Schuller, the conference declared that a paradigm shift is now underway. Speakers insisted that Christianity must be re-thought and re-invented if the name of Jesus Christ is going to survive here on planet earth now that we are in the twenty-first century.

The Observable Evidence

With the risk of being labeled a negative divisive critic who is against everything, I am compelled to tell you what I witnessed at this conference. This commentary will paraphrase the actual statements made by the speakers as I took extensive notes.

The conference opened with an on-stage dialogue between Schuller and McManus. Schuller gave a brief overview of his accomplishments through his many years of ministry. He explained how pleased he was to be able to look back at the tremendous leaders he had mentored over the years, which include Willow Creek's seeker-friendly pioneer pastor Bill Hybels, the six million member Church of God in Christ's Bishop Charles Blake, and Rick Warren who has pioneered

the purpose driven church and the purpose driven life.

While Schuller said he was very pleased with all the great accomplishments of the past, his vision to impact the world in the future is even bigger and better. He told the audience that even though he is now over 80 years old, he believes there is even a greater potential to succeed now at a time in his life when he is no longer subject to “temptation.”

Erwin Mc Manus, a much younger version of Robert Schuller, offered a solution to anyone in the audience that might have that problem. He mentioned there were “pills” available on the market to curb “temptation.” Schuller quickly retorted that he knew there were other pills available for those who were supposedly over the hill.

While some of the people sitting around me were noticeably bothered by such out-of-place comments, the majority of the people in the auditorium seemed to enjoy these opening remarks.

Re-thinking Think Tank

Following this brief introduction by the two hosts, Bishop Blake was scheduled to speak. For reasons not announced to the attendees, Bishop Blake did not appear on the platform when his name was announced. Schuller then reappeared, joking that he was Schuller and not Bishop Blake. It was difficult to know whether this was a pre-planned moment of silliness or not.

A moment later, Mc Manus reappeared on the platform and told the audience there would be a slight change in the schedule. At this point a coat rack was brought out on the platform with three hats hanging on it. A skit was performed which involved an off- screen person asking questions of an onstage actor. I later found out the talent for this drama was provided by Mc Manus.

The drama was obviously designed to set the tone of the conference and was of professional quality. The actor played three characters who represented different well-known men throughout history. The first was Copernicus. The second was Christopher Columbus, and the third was Martin Luther. These three men were revolutionary in their thinking at that particular time in history, and each was going up stream against the mainstream of society.

The actor who played the three different characters finally appeared as himself. He announced to the audience that he was a new Christian. However, he said he had a problem with Christianity now that he was a Christian and was disgusted with how hypocritical traditional Christianity had

become. He suggested that the church as we know it today needs to be re-thought.

Of course, we know the Bible teaches that the traditions of man are a hindrance to faith when they are not based on the Word of God. Jesus made it clear that when tradition supersedes the truth of the Word, it is imperative to toss away tradition and get back to the Word. The actor in the drama left the impression that Jesus was referring to our present generation when he spoke these words.

To Think or not to Think

To “think or not to think,” that was the question. The speakers I heard on that opening day sounded very convincing, and from reactions in the audience, their views were heartily embraced. I sensed that most there were drawing the conclusion that rethinking all they had once believed to be true was the only valid option.

Chuck Colson’s half hour talk was primarily focused on the importance of having faith based on the Scriptures. He did a commendable job talking about the authenticity of the Bible, the Trinity, salvation, sin and the need for repentance. But, just before his time was up, Colson said something I found very troubling ... and confusing.

Colson indicated how very encouraged he had become on how the emerging church was “energizing” Christianity in such a positive way. I found his statement surprising, remembering an article about a year ago where Colson actually condemned the emerging church. I wondered what caused him to change his mind. He also mentioned the importance of taking our faith to the world in an effort to “establish the kingdom.”

This was very significant to me, as it is well known that Charles Colson is very sympathetic to partnering with Rome in order to establish the kingdom the Roman Catholic Church way. The Roman Catholic Church is planning to establish the kingdom of God here on earth through the Triumph of the Eucharist and the Eucharistic Reign of Jesus.

Why Did Chuck Colson Re-think the Emerging Church?

Chuck Colson may have given a clue as to his change in heart regarding the emerging church. His new book *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It and Why It Matters* was not supposed to have rolled off the press until February. However Colson said he was able to

convince his publisher to advance the book to the fast track and speed up the printing process so the book would be available when he spoke at Saddleback earlier in the month of January.

It was not hard for me to do some simple deductions. You see, the publisher for Colson's new book is Zondervan, owned by Rupert Murdoch (one of the presenters at the Re-think Conference). Murdoch's company publishes many emerging books as well as purpose driven books. The fact that Murdoch's pastor is Rick Warren of Saddleback cannot be ignored. No wonder the book by Colson was given priority.

Wondering

While we may never know for sure, I cannot help but wonder if Chuck Colson's new take on the emerging church has anything to do with Zondervan's willingness to speed up the release date of the book.

Be that as it may, I am reminded of the ecumenical nature of the emerging church, which is driven by contemplative spirituality that traces back to ancient Roman Catholic mystical practices. Contemplative spirituality provides a mystical formula also known as "spiritual formation" in order to get closer to Jesus. The problem is that this state of silence achieved is similar to that which is reached through eastern meditation, and the realm reached is not the presence of God but the possible presence of demons. The Bible is very clear in its warning against practicing divination, which uses mystical methods to conjure up the spirit world. Yet, a growing number of evangelical churches are incorporating contemplative into their church body.

During my day at *Rethink*, I interviewed a number of men and women. I was often amazed at their comments. Most of them had no idea what the term emerging church meant (even though they were right smack in the center of it), and they had no idea why the conference was called "Rethink."

When I asked them what they thought about the fact that President Bush senior (a member of a secret society), Rupert Murdoch (a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and who profits from pornographic tabloids) and Larry King (I was told Schuller has been witnessing to him and he is almost a Christian) had been enlisted to provide input to help Christians re-think, they were not able to answer why this would have been so.

Before I left the conference I had the opportunity to give Schuller's secretary, Kym Smith, a copy of *Faith Undone*. While I am sure Schuller would not waste a moment on a book with such a negative title, I felt compelled to give a token of my appreciation for being allowed to attend the

conference.

Incidentally, the reason I was able to attend the conference was because Schuller's secretary gave me the opportunity to volunteer for the conference and save over \$200 on the admission fee. I worked with about 10 other volunteers for approximately two hours stuffing conference bags at the Crystal Cathedral on January 16, between 9:30 and 11:30 in the morning.

I enjoyed the time working with these other volunteers. The LORD provided an opportunity for me to be able to share with them how the Word of God is changing lives all over the world as Jesus Christ is being proclaimed as the Creator and the Redeemer.

In the future, I will write other commentaries on the Rethink Conference. For now, I am soberly reminded that faith in the Word of God is under attack. The potential for Christians to be led astray by a strong delusion as Paul warned in Second Thessalonians chapter two is not only a real possibility, it is happening right now.

I hope and pray that Erwin Mc Manus, Robert Schuller, and Chuck Colson, along with many of the other speakers will *re-think* the direction in which they are heading. I pray they will start proclaiming the gospel according to the Scriptures. I pray they will begin to warn about the many unbiblical ideas that are driving the unsuspecting towards an apostate church.

Finally, I pray those attending the *Rethink Conference* will do some rethinking themselves and consider what happens to those who will spend eternity in hell because they did not *think* about what the Word of God proclaims thus they rejected God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Another note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Why do we have to rethink Christianity? Who was the one that first thought it up? Wasn't it the all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing Lord God of all Creation? Didn't Jesus say in the garden that if there was any other way to save man from sin that He and the Father should rethink it, nevertheless, not my will but thine (the Father's) will be done. Therefore, if God has already thought about His salvation plan, and knows there will be no changes, then what in the world are these supposed men of Christian faith doing messing with God's perfect plan? The scary answer is that a true Christian man never would mess with the plan that saved them. Therefore, they must not be saved and we would do well to take to heart the warnings of Jesus and the Apostles.

Matt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in

that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (NKJ)

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (NKJ)

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