**Is the IF: Gathering’s Theology Orthodox - Guidelines for Analysis?**

“*Who We Are” is:*

*We exist to gather, equip and unleash the next generation of women to live out their purpose.”*

Dick Pence – Big Sky Worldview Forum

NOTE: YOU may want to print this out. Check our web site for related articles under Resources, Library, IF:Gathering

**Why are we concerned – an explanation of the process:**

In a culture saturated with women’s ministries, directed particularly at young women, there is good reason to examine the orthodoxy of the IF:Gathering. Paul instructs the Elders at Ephesus to “keep watch over the flock entrusted to you.”

Watchman ministries from across America ([Light House Trails Research](http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/), [The End Time](https://the-end-time.blogspot.com/2017/02/ifgathering-more-information-including.html), [Truth Keepers](http://www.truthkeepers.com/?s=IF+it+is+of+God+-+Answering+), [Theology That Matters](https://timothyjhammons.com/2015/02/16/ifgathering-another-gospel-again/), [Harpazo Forum,](http://harpazo.proboards.com/thread/24709/gathering-movement-god) [Grace Alone](http://www.bygracealone.net/2011/05/romantic-panentheism.html) etc.) and leaders from Pastor John MacArthur to Dr. Al Mohler are sounding alarms about this group. A common theme is concern that they are promoting an Emergent approach to Christianity. [Got Questions](https://www.gotquestions.org/emerging-church-emergent.html), a website that focuses on Bible questions defines this theology for us:

*The emerging / emergent church movement falls into line with basic post-modernist thinking—it is about experience over reason, subjectivity over objectivity, spirituality over religion, images over words, outward over inward, feelings over truth… Experience is allowed to define and interpret what truth actually is.*

This, in fact, defines much of our concern for this group as we listen to their leaders and here what is being said about them. Social-justice is also a common theme weaved into the language. In this culture, it is easy to “dismiss” *Watchman* as over-zealous legalists always on a witch hunt – the language sells. However, that is hardly the main concern in the church today. We live in a Christian culture that is – on average – not well grounded theologically. It is not disrespectful to suggest that younger women are more vulnerable to such ministries that tend toward being more story/emotional driven. It is no accident that scripture suggests that *older women teach younger women* and that husbands pay attention to these vulnerabilities.

When it comes to the vetting process, if you’re thin skinned, you can easily be offended. Especially when there is the suggestion of a *“different direction for Christianity,”* there has been and ought to be some very robust debate. The vetting process encourages well-meaning ministries to examine their content and direction carefully. As we will demonstrate, you can’t do any serious research on the speakers that have been involved with this ministry without discovering that there are varying degrees of suggestions that the church needs to change – up to and including a *Second Reformation.* .

As we examine the IF:Gathering it is not our intent to destroy but to examine its orthodoxy and where appropriate encourage redirection.

**IF:Gathering Past and Present**

We will focus on key players as examples of our concerns - those who have been involved in leadership. We began this journey before the 2017 Gathering pointing at past teachers. It is noteworthy that we had difficulty in obtaining a reliable list of speakers for the 2017 event. Several competent tech people could not find [the list](https://ifgathering.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Attendee-Guide-Mobile-2017.pdf) but one finally did. In this 68 page document, we never did spot an agenda of subjects and speakers.

While it is always more useful to examine where a ministry is at a given point in time, it is also within the boundaries of fairness to examine recent leaders - it goes to how cautious the ministry is in vetting. We believe we saw enough concern with speakers that we could examine to justify a *clarion call* to examine the safety of this ministry. Following, we will see evidence that past speakers (and some present) were way off the beaten path. It has been suggested that IF:Gathering “cleaned up their act.” But with the seriousness of these issues, this would require an open, visible point of repentance that we have been unable to find.

**A Representative Sample – Looking at Leaders involved in the IF:Gathering**

While we do not question that many of these speakers are sincere, we also want to note that error almost always comes as mixture. Much of what any of these advocates would say or promote is undoubtedly good. The suggestion by IF is that our young women are just not getting on fire in their churches, so let’s subject them to some teachers who can get them going. This should raise red flags. *“Discover what you’re missing, that something more you were created for.”* How does a Pastor argue with that?

We will suggest an order of articles or portion of articles that will help you step through a reasonable examination. Unfortunately, this is not sound bite territory, it will take you some time to come to a good decision. Let’s begin:

**1st. Who is Melissa Green?**

**Melissa Green’s Pastor Speaks**

I will begin by asking you to listen to a sermon by Pastor Stan Mitchell, of Grace Point Church <http://time.com/3687368/gracepointe-church-nashville-marriage-equality/> I am doing this for two reasons:

***First*, this is the home church of Melissa Green**, Pastor of Worship at Grace Point one of the speaker/leaders in this movement. She was not listed this year, it is unclear what her position is now relative to IF.

**Second**, if you listen to a good portion of this message (even if you just spot check it) you realize you’re not listening to Orthodox preaching. **You’re tasting the flavor of the Emergent movement where “Love Wins” over truth.** I encourage you to at least catch the flavor. Be***sure* to listen to the last ten minutes** where he tells of “their journey.” The church went through a process over time to accepting Gays into fellowship and here in this message, into full fellowship including the right to marry and do ministry.

**Does this represent what Mellissa Green believes** and what her attitude is towards the Evangelical Church? On our web page you want to look at the article **Melissa Green – Her Background and Beliefs.** The focus is a thirty minute video <https://vimeo.com/97252399> where you hear her questioning her Evangelical background where salvation was pushed as fear.

* On the YouTube at **21** minutes she talks about how she entered what some would call the “slippery slope of spirituality” that could take her to the pit of hell. She began to read Brian McLarens book “A Generous Orthodoxy” and came into a freedom and peace and joy - she gives a glowing recommendation of the book describing how she entered into a “generosity” that described my spiritual life. She repeats how love wins, how feelings are different than truth… we will not sing songs that say we are wretched or unworthy – murky theology that is hard to pin down. Read the article for details.
* She does not just *mention* New Age and Emergent authors (including, Richard Rohr, Phyllis Tickle, Brian McLaren, Frederick Buechner) - she *recommends* them. From 2009 on, she has celebrated how McLaren and Phyllis Tickle will be at their church. We will see this later also with Sarah Bessey, but Phyllis Tickle calls for a “rummage sale” [[Embracing Emergent Christianity, The Great Rummage Sale]](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;_ylt=AwrTccKB_p1YkKkAkvkPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByNWU4cGh1BGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzYw--?p=Phyllis+Tickle+Rummabe+Sale&fr=yhs-iry-fullyhosted_003&hspart=iry&hsimp=yhs-fullyhosted_003#id=1&vid=4c98aed2a58c519bc09789f85f2d71d5&action=view)
* In Melissa’s closing few minutes she espouses some muddy theology. Understand that many of the names she loves **are clear Universalists**. She never quite says she is. You can’t lead **young women into this world of theology without some real danger**.
* Her stance on Gay marriage? From her language in the video about inclusiveness and her love for her church and Pastor, one can reasonably assume she is good with it.

My point from Pastor Stan Mitchell’s sermon is, this is the kind of journey **you don’t want your young women to go on**. Catch the applause at the end, they “drank the Kool-Aid.” Once people buy into this kind of emotion-base spirituality, you almost never get them out of it.

**2nd. What is the background of Jen Hatmaker and why does it matter?** Jen is a good friend of the leader of IF, Jenny Allen. She apparently dropped out of IF for undisclosed reasons. She has come out in support of Gay marriage.

However, on our web page article **Understanding Jen Hatmaker** you see she has a history with the Emergent groups. IF has more explaining to do than just Hatmaker’s recent Gay marriage issue. She has a disdain for sermons - *“I have spent half my life listening to someone else talk about God. Because of this history, I’ve developed something of an immunity to sermons.”*

Aside from the Gay marriage issue, Jen Hatmaker’s July 2014 book, *Interrupted: When Jesus Wrecked Your Comfortable Christianity*, she makes it clear that she is influenced by a number of New Age/New Spirituality individuals. She quotes Catholic priests and contemplative activist Richard Rohr as well as emergent leader Shane Claiborne. Her current relevance goes to the question why was she a part of IF in the first place. Her questionable theology is not new.

**3rd. What is the truth about Sarah Bessey?** Apparently, Sarah did not appear this year. But again, there are serious questions about what IF supports and time frames. Is she still part of the group and why was she in the first place? Two articles are relevant here on our web page.

* **Leaving the Evangelical Church** (March 2014)– in this article she explains how she has left the Evangelical church for something much better... “The Church is sorting and casting off, renewing and re-establishing in the **postmodern age** and this is a good thing.” What does this mean? She lets Phyllis Tickle explain this in “rummage sale” [[Embracing Emergent Christianity, The Great Rummage Sale]](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;_ylt=AwrTccKB_p1YkKkAkvkPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByNWU4cGh1BGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzYw--?p=Phyllis+Tickle+Rummabe+Sale&fr=yhs-iry-fullyhosted_003&hspart=iry&hsimp=yhs-fullyhosted_003#id=1&vid=4c98aed2a58c519bc09789f85f2d71d5&action=view) **This is hard core Emergent in the highest degree as she says it’s time for a Second Reformation to redo the church.**
* **I’m an Evangelical Christian and I think Same-Sex Marriage Should be Legal (May 2012)** Catch the flavor of this woman’s strong Bible background. *“I think that Christians, even those that believe homosexuality to be a sin, need to back off the issue… In actual practice, our society has become “live and let live” which is actually a rather tolerant and comfortable place to be.* [Tell me this sounds like an informed Christian]*. With that in mind, I think that, in the interest of separation of church and state, a post-Christian or post-religious society should, in fact, be exactly that – post-religious.”*
* Why in the world was this young Canadian ever on the IF line up – catch the dates?

**4th. Is Ann VosKamp Teaching Bible or Mysticism?**

First, a note about “guilt by association.” Just because I read a book by a non-Christian, does not mark me as in error. But when it becomes obvious that mystical or New Age authors are a significant part of the makeup of my belief system, then “guilt by association” is a real concern. In our article **Ann Voskamp’ Emergent Roots** we look at a CURRENT SPEAKER who is again has questionable beliefs. While Ann Voskamp’ s sincerity and her desire for a relationship with the Lord are unarguable, it is clear by reading *One Thousand Gifts* that Ann Voskamp reads and admires a number of mystics, panentheists, and universalists. Her book is **peppered with quotes** by Sarah Ban Breathnach, a New Age author launched into stardom by Oprah. ,<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Sarah+Ban+Breathnach&view=detail&mid=530F186D6CF892A791A5530F186D6CF892A791A5&FORM=VIRE> . She is also a fan of Catholic mystic Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Evelyn Underhill, Brennan Manning,  Annie Dillard, Thomas Acquinas, Buddhist sympathizer and Catholic convert Peter Kreeft, [Walter Brueggemann](http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=812), Francis de Sales, Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Henri Nouwen, and Jean-Pierre de Caussade.

Many of the statements Voskamp says in her book would resonate with these authors showing that Voskamp has absorbed some of the beliefs of these people. In addition, VosKamp’s blogs lists a number of contemplative/emerging authors.

In the last chapter of One Thousand Gifts, “The Joy of Intimacy,” Voskamp devotes to what she calls “intimacy” with God. But brace yourself, you won’t find the way she talks about intimacy with God in the Bible. We share the following with you not to shock you for theatrical sake – it’s to show where the “new” Christianity is heading. We think it important, in light of the many young women who are reading this book, to quote Voskamp’ s view of “intimacy” with God which she also calls the “mystery of that romance.” Voskamp says:

*Mystical union. This, the highest degree of importance. God as Husband in sacred wedlock, bound together, body and soul, fed by His body, quenched by His blood . . . God, He has blessed – caressed. I could bless God – caress with thanks. It’s our making love. God makes love with grace upon grace, every moment a making of His love for us. . . . Couldn’t I make love to God, making every moment love for Him? To know Him the way Adam knew Eve. Spirit skin to spirit skin. . . The intercourse of soul with God is the very climax of joy . . . To enter into Christ and Christ enter into us – to cohabit.* (pp. 213, 216-217).

Voskamp’s mixture of sexual and spiritual language when referring to a relationship with God is troubling. The most “intimate” relationship anyone ever had with God on this earth was the one Jesus Christ had with His Father; but nowhere in the Bible does Jesus (or the disciples) use sexual language and innuendos to describe the relationship between God and man. See more of this discussion at <http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=6604>

Reformed theology bloggers express a concern that she **expresses panentheism** (the belief that God is in everything from the birds to the rocks as opposed to Pantheism – God is everything.) <http://www.bygracealone.net/2011/05/romantic-panentheism.html> At best her language is careless, experience-emotion based and confusing.

Finally, we see that she encourages the Eastern Mystical practice [Lectio Divina](http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?tag=ann-voscamp) in her *One Thousand Gifts.* See our web page for an explanation of this practice.

**5th**. **LysaTerkeurs**t is President of *Proverbs 3 Ministries*, she has written several books. Much could be said about her but I think it is enough to hear a video her Pastor did that she gives hardy approval to. Steven Furtick, Pastor of Elevation Church does the video [hey Haters](http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=FFCM2CNU). If you follow this down you will find the 2 minute video where he says things like. “Hey Haters, your day is done… we’re done with the way you sling blame and shame to anybody that does not [agree with you]… with your propensity to pick a fight and hide the light… nit picking everything of God… seeing only your side… shaking your fist in the face of change… depth is a measure of LOVE more than whether people synk up with every one of your opinions… you’re full of opinions but low on the Spirit… the Spirit is love and the only kind of words you utter bring death…fall back, it’s a new day… exchange your hate… embrace a new way. Lysa gives hardy approval to this kind of rhetoric indicating her disdain for the church and her hunger for a Second Reformation. Is this what you want your young woman exposed to?

**Conclusions:**

Time does not allow for us to examine all of the speakers at IF and undoubtedly there are vast differences in their theology and their attitudes towards the church. While the stated intentions of the IF:Gathering seem noble, the message seems suspect. In these five we see an attitude of disdain for the church and the suggestion that it needs to get out of the road for the New Day and New Way they wish to bring. Without question, there is good reason to warn pastors and their flocks that this ministry is sympathetic to and even promoting Emergent thinking. Have they cleaned up their act as some say? I think that there is much evidence to suggest that this ministry has far to go before a responsible, orthodox leader would recommend it.