

# 'Synagogues of Satan'?

**Green Belt 2008: Spring Harvest 2009: Summer Madness 2009**

Whilst 3 different 'Christian' festivals are listed in the title to this article, the article itself will for the most part concentrate on the upcoming **Spring Harvest 2009** festival scheduled for 4<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2009. I will be focussing on the ramifications of their willingness to include a certain individual amongst their invited speakers and this 'invited speaker' is actually the common thread linking in the other 2 'Christian' festivals, **Green Belt 2008** and **Summer Madness 2009** to this article.

Before proceeding any further, I want to give some insight into the main heading for this article – '**Synagogues of Satan**'? The Lord Himself used this expression when He wrote to the Church in Smyrna. He was referring to a group of people in that area who clearly claimed to be God's people but He said of them that they were "**the synagogue of Satan**" [Revelation 2:9]. They were a group that rejected both the Divine Person and the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ.

Matthew Henry comments on this expression –

'As Christ has a church in the world, the spiritual Israel of God, so the devil has his synagogue. Those assemblies which are set up in opposition to the truths of the gospel, and which promote and propagate damnable errors -- those which are set up in opposition to the purity and spirituality of gospel worship, and which promote and propagate the vain inventions of men and rites and ceremonies which never entered into the thoughts of God -- these are all synagogues of Satan: he presides over them, he works in them, his interests are served by them, and he receives a horrid homage and honour from them. For the synagogues of Satan to give themselves out to be the church or Israel of God is no less than blasphemy. God is greatly dishonoured when his name is made use of to promote and patronize the interests of Satan; and he has a high resentment of this blasphemy, and will take a just revenge on those who persist in it.'

The **Westminster Confession of Faith** also has occasion to use this expression. In **Chapter XXV paragraph V** that deals with '**The Church**' we read this –

'The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ but synagogues of Satan'.

The warning is that any group, that either openly opposes the Divine Person and the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ, or supposedly pays lip service on the one hand to the Divine Person and the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ but by doctrine and proclamation on the other hand then proceeds to deny or to welcome as believers those who deny some aspect of the Divine Person and the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ, then these are to be classed as '**synagogues of Satan**'.

Bearing that background to this expression in mind let me proceed now to how it can possibly apply firstly to **Spring Harvest 2009**. To do that I need to go back to the run-up to Easter in 2007 when a service was broadcast on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April on BBC Radio 4 that was conducted by the [gay] Anglican minister Jeffrey John. During that service Mr John said the following –

**'St Paul explains, crucifixion was the method of execution which, according to the Law, was the special sign of God's ultimate punishment, his absolute curse: "Cursed be he that hangs upon a tree". On the cross, says Paul, Jesus took the place of all those who were supposed to be punished according to the Law. "God made him into sin who knew no sin". "He became a curse for us". But hang on – you may well say - what exactly does that mean – 'Jesus took our place' ? Does it mean, then, that we are back with a punishing God after all, and that the Cross is somehow to be understood as God's ultimate punishment for sin? That's certainly what I was told in my Calvinistic childhood. The explanation I was given went something like this. God was very angry with us for our sins, and because he is a just God, our sin had to be punished. But instead of punishing us he sent his Son, Jesus, as a substitute to suffer and die in our place. The blood of Jesus paid the price of our sins, and because of him God stopped being angry with us. In other words, Jesus took the rap, and we got forgiven, provided we said we believed in him. Well, I don't know about you, but even at the age of ten I thought this explanation was pretty repulsive as well as nonsensical. What sort of God was this, getting so angry with the world and the people he created, and then, to calm himself down, demanding the blood of his own Son? And anyway, why should God forgive us through punishing somebody else? It was worse than illogical, it was insane. It made God sound like a psychopath. If any human being behaved like this, we'd say they were a monster. Well, I haven't changed my mind since. That explanation of the cross just doesn't work, though sadly it's one that's still all too often preached. It just doesn't make sense to talk about a nice Jesus down here, placating the wrath of a nasty, angry Father God in heaven. Christians believe Jesus is God incarnate. As he said, 'Whoever sees me has seen the Father'. Jesus is what God is: he is the one who shows us God's nature. And the most basic truth about God's nature is that He is Love, not wrath and punishment... The cross, then, is not about Jesus reconciling an angry God to us'**

In the wake of that broadcast a Press Release was published by **Spring Harvest** and part of that Press Release said the following –

**'Speaking at this year's Spring Harvest Word Alive, Bishops Pete Broadbent and Wallace Benn were united in their dismay over the recent statement by Jeffrey John that... that the cross is not about anger or wrath or sin or atonement, but only about God's unconditional love. There is, he says, nothing to understand in the cross which is anything to do with sacrifice or Jesus dying for our sins – and we say No. You've got it wrong.'** The Very Reverend Jeffrey John, Dean of St Albans, was speaking on a Radio 4 Lent Talk broadcast this week on Wednesday, in which he attacked the Church's teaching that Christ died to make atonement for the sins of the world and said that being forgiven because of belief in this is 'repulsive as well as nonsensical.' The Rt Revd Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden and Team Leader of the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, stated in response; 'You cannot read the Old Testament and New Testament .. and blank out an entirety of language and concept and understanding that means that we are guilty sinners, we need our sins to be paid for and we need Jesus Christ to die for us. That is what the Creeds say, it is what the Bible says and you cannot rewrite them. You cannot understand Jesus Christ without understanding Old Testament atonement material.' The Rt Revd Wallace Benn added that 'the truth that Jesus died as our sin-bearing substitute carrying the punishment for our sins on the cross is the glorious heart of the Gospel. It displays the love of God: Father, Son and Spirit, for us. To deny or vilify that is a tragic denial of the power and heart of the Gospel. I hope Jeffrey John will speedily reconsider and repent of his attack on apostolic Christianity.'

That was certainly a very robust defence of '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' – the names by which this biblical truth is known. However, in another Press Release published by **Spring Harvest** just a few days later on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2007 they reported as follows –

'Two and a half thousand people gathered on Minehead beach at 7am Easter Sunday morning for a Sunrise/Sunrise service to celebrate the Resurrection. Led by the **Reverend Steve Chalke, MBE**, the crowd sang, prayed and listened as the sun rose. Steve Chalke founded the Oasis Trust, which works across the globe in education, healthcare and housing; Parentalk (an organisations that equips and inspires parents), and the Faithworks movement which is dedicated to helping individual Christians and local churches get involved in their local communities. He has presented his own television series for both ITV and BBC, has written over thirty books, and received the MBE in the 2004 New Year's Honours list for his services to social inclusion'.

Well, anyone who is familiar with Steve Chalke's views of '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' - He refers to such a belief as being the equivalent of '**cosmic child abuse**' – you can read my challenge to these views in articles located on these links –

<https://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-december-2004/>

<https://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-march-2005/>

<https://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-june-2006/>

will perhaps understand why in my opinion **Spring Harvest** were sending out confusing signals on this issue of '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**'. In the first Press Release they were arguing very much against the views of Jeffrey John, saying at one point - '**the truth that Jesus died as our sin-bearing substitute carrying the punishment for our sins on the cross is the glorious heart of the Gospel**' but then in the second Press Release they are enthusing over the Easter Sunday service conducted by Steve Chalke who holds basically the same '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' denying views as Jeffrey John. In the light of these Press Releases I sent the following email to **Spring Harvest** on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009 [the date on which I came across them] –

**Dear Spring Harvest,**

I was looking on your website at 2 press releases dated 4 April 2007 and 8 April 2007. In the first one there is a defence of '**Substitutionary Atonement**' by 2 Bishops and this defence was to counter the views to the contrary of Jeffrey John and it was made, according to the press release, at '**this year's Spring Harvest Word Alive**'.

In the second press release there are details of a sunrise service conducted by Steve Chalke - Steve Chalke would hold views similar to Jeffrey John namely he also rejects '**Substitutionary Atonement**'.

In the light of these rather confusing press releases could you please let me know the official Spring Harvest position on '**Substitutionary Atonement**' - do you accept it [as the 2 Bishops do] or do you reject it [as Steve Chalke does].

I look forward to hearing from you

**Cecil Andrews**  
**Northern Ireland**

Eventually on 26<sup>th</sup> March I received the following response –

Dear Mr Andrews,

Thank you for your email. I have visited your website, and I have no wish to enter into correspondence with you, I am afraid. The sole purpose of your site appears to be to attempt to vilify large numbers of your fellow Christians, from Tony Campolo to Billy Graham, and Steve Chalke to Rick Warren. I have no intention of providing any further fuel for your rantings. The theological position of Spring Harvest is available for you to read here: [http://www.springharvest.org/about-us-sh/our-beliefs-sh/module\\_index.php?id=6](http://www.springharvest.org/about-us-sh/our-beliefs-sh/module_index.php?id=6) All our speakers speak from within that context. Thank you for your interest. In the words of Oliver Cromwell, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

**Pete Broadbent**

Spring Harvest & ICC working together

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Well, as a well-known saying goes – ‘you could have knocked me down with a feather’. However, after gathering my thoughts I sent the following response to Mr Broadbent who of course was one of the 2 Bishops that put up the robust defence back in April 2007 of ‘**Penal Substitution**’ or ‘**Substitutionary Atonement**’ that was quoted by **Spring Harvest** in their Press Release of 4<sup>th</sup> April 2007 –

Dear Mr Broadbent,

I would confirm safe receipt of your most helpful email. I have read the statement of ‘**Our Beliefs**’ that you directed me to and was particularly interested there to read that ‘**We believe in ...The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place [substitution] paying the price of sin [enduring the Father’s penalty for sin by offering Himself and His sufferings as a “ransom” to redeem His people] **and defeating evil so reconciling us with God**’. Unless I am mistaken a fairly clear affirmation of ‘**Penal Substitution**’.**

Quite how you can then go on to affirm ‘**All our speakers speak from within that context**’ is baffling and beyond the grasp of my understanding in view of the publicly stated positions on this issue by the likes of Steve Chalke and Brian McLaren who would certainly not be speaking ‘**from within that context**’. It is all the more baffling in the light of the comments attributed to I presume yourself in the Spring Harvest Press Release of 4<sup>th</sup> April 2007 that states –

The Rt Revd Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden and Team Leader of the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, stated in response; ‘**You cannot read the Old Testament and New Testament ... and blank out an entirety of language and concept and understanding that means that we are guilty sinners, we need our sins to be paid for and we need Jesus Christ to die for us. That is what the Creeds say, it is what the Bible says and you cannot rewrite them. You cannot understand Jesus Christ without understanding Old Testament atonement material.**’

Turning now to your personal comments about me you have accused me of ‘**vilifying**’ (speaking ill of) certain people. To take public statements and actions made and performed by these people and to analyze them in the light of what God’s Word teaches is not according to **Acts 17:11** a ‘process of vilification’ but rather a ‘noble process commended by God’.

**'Rantings'** according to the dictionary are 'ravings in violent language' – I can only surmise that you view Paul's inspired words to the **Galatians** in chapter **1:6-9** similarly as 'rantings' and not as a warning designed for the eternal well being of those who would take serious note of what he was saying about false teachers and their false gospels.

I had been in 2 minds about whether or not to pen an article about Spring Harvest and another 'Christian' festival where Brian McLaren is scheduled to speak but thanks to your email, I am now fully persuaded on the course of action to be followed.

Yours for Christ's glory and true gospel

Cecil Andrews  
Northern Ireland

As you will have read in my response, I made reference to **Brian McLaren** who is scheduled to speak at this year's **Spring Harvest** festival [7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> April]. This is how the news was announced in a Press Release dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009 –

'Spring Harvest is pleased to announce that internationally renowned author, speaker and **pastor Brian D McLaren** will be appearing at Spring Harvest Skegness, Weeks 1 and 2. Pastor McLaren will be speaking as part of the afternoon seminar programme as well as a Big Top evening Celebration. Known as a key networker among innovative Christian leaders, thinkers and activists, McLaren was listed amongst America's 25 most influential evangelicals, as featured in the USA's Time Magazine. Author of 8 books and co-author of 3 more, including A new kind of Christian - for which his exploration of the Christian faith and post-modernity won him Christianity Today's 2002 "Award of Merit"- and The Secret Message of Jesus which explores the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus, McLaren continues to play an active role in global networking. As well as serving on the international steering team and board of directors for Emergent, a growing generative friendship among missional Christian leaders, McLaren is a founding member of Red-Letter Christians, a group of communicators seeking to broaden and deepen the dialogue about faith and public life. "We are so excited to have Brian McLaren with us at Spring Harvest in 2009" comments **Wendy Beech-Ward**, Director of Events. **"Brian is a leading thinker on the issues of faith, politics and culture. I'm sure our Guests will be inspired by his experience, insight and vision for Church mission"**.

**Brian McLaren** is a close friend of **Steve Chalke** and has used similar language to describe his rejection of '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' referring to it as '**divine child abuse**'. Again, I have previously written about **Mr McLaren** in the articles located on these links

<https://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-december-2006/>  
<https://www.takeheed.info/the-summer-madness-of-an-invite-to-brian-mclaren/>

So, where does all this bring us? Quite simply to this conclusion – any '**Christian**' grouping that is willing to give a platform to those who deny the very heart of Christ's Gospel namely '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' and to refer to them as '**fellow Christians**' has in my view passed into the category of being a '**Synagogue of Satan**'. What is even more deceptive is that in the case of **Spring Harvest** they have, as you will have read, a Statement of Beliefs in which they appear to affirm '**Penal Substitution**' or '**Substitutionary Atonement**' and yet they are happy to give platforms to the likes of **Steve Chalke** and **Brian McLaren** – quite how that fits in with Bishop Pete Broadbent's comment to me that '**All our speakers speak from within that context**' [Their Statement of Beliefs] is well beyond my grasp or understanding. Bishop Broadbent's biographical details make for interesting reading and I post the following extracts here without comment

Formerly an Islington Councillor and Chair of its Development and Planning Committee, Peter Broadbent is a member of the Labour Party. Married to Sarah, a teacher, with a grown-up son, Simon, Peter Broadbent is a lifelong supporter and season ticket holder of Tottenham Hotspur FC. He enjoys theatre, film, popular music and real ale.

The full biographical details of Bishop Broadbent can be viewed on

<http://www.london.anglican.org/BishopOfWillesden>

Earlier in this article I quoted from the **Westminster Confession of Faith** – Bearing in mind that Pete Broadbent is an Anglican Bishop these extracts from their **(39) Articles of Religion [Paragraph XXVI]** make interesting reading –

**‘Although in the visible Church the evil is ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the Word and Sacraments... Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the Church that inquiry be made of evil Ministers and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally being found guilty, by just judgment be deposed’.**

Keeping in mind the current dreadful overall state of Anglicanism in many crucial doctrinal and practical areas I would venture to suggest that there would be one almighty clearout from Anglican pulpits if ever these wise words in **Paragraph XXVI** of their **Articles of Religion** were to be implemented – the sad reality is that there appear to be few if any within Anglicanism who would be qualified to bring the accusations and to see just judgment carried out.

In conclusion I just want to comment upon the inclusion of **Green Belt 2008** and **Summer Madness 2009** in the title of this article. Well, the uniting factor is **Brian McLaren**. He was a guest speaker at **Green Belt 2008** as can be seen on this link –

<http://www.greenbelt.org.uk/festival/2008/lineup/talks>

Incidentally if you visit this link it is worth noting another group listed about half-way down the page on the right-hand side called **‘Outerspace: Coming out: Staying in Church’** – another vindication of the application of the term **‘Synagogue of Satan’**.

Then in relation to **Summer Madness 2009** on Brian McLaren’s own website he has listed the following for July on <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/schedule/current-schedule/>

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
29	30	1 Jul	2	3	4	5
East Africa		Summer Madness Ireland				

Brian McLaren’s last planned appearance at Summer Madness back in 2007 was overruled by the Lord when massive flooding in England meant his travel plans were disrupted and he was unable to come – it would be helpful if something again prevented him from coming here [not wishing him any personal harm of course] so perhaps all with a concern for the spiritual well-being of the young people attending Summer Madness 2009 might be moved to pray to that end.

**Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

