

## **Book Review: *The Jesus Manifesto***

By Bob Young

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Sweet, Leonard, and Frank Viola. *The Jesus Manifesto*. Thomas Nelson, 2010.

In *The Jesus Manifesto*, Len Sweet and Frank Viola have teamed up with the goal of writing a book that restores “the supremacy and sovereignty of Jesus Christ” by identifying the basics of the message of Jesus without the typical extraneous, divisive issues. What is the basic message upon which all Christians can unite?

The book is easy and enjoyable to read, with many memorable phrases and illustrations. It should appeal to the average reader, but despite the easy read, also reflects profound theological thinking. For the most part, the authors have succeeded in making the difficult simple.

Working to a large extent from the Colossian letter, they claim Jesus is absent from the Christian message as it is proclaimed in many churches today, and seek to reaffirm Jesus as the center of all things. They explore the indwelling of Christ, God’s work in our lives, and the participation we share in the work of Christ, first demonstrated in our own lives. This demonstration, for the authors, comes as a result of what God implants within us and imparts to us more than from a conscious human effort to imitate Christ. In fact, one of the resounding themes of the book is that only Christ has the power to do in our lives what needs to be done, and that dependence on human efforts, an attitude that is reflected in the thinking of too many Christians, will always come up short.

Perhaps it is impossible to write a book about Jesus without addressing related issues. The question is, “What related issues are important enough to include?” What issues deny the supremacy and sovereignty of Jesus? For the authors, several items are included: rationalism, legalism, moralism, benevolence done in the name of Jesus that provides no spiritual benefit, the church as the community of faith, and participating with Christ in his work.

Getting Jesus “right” requires understanding that rational (legal) extremes and moral extremes are insufficient measures of Christianity. Christianity is not measured by what one knows or believes or by one’s morality. In our complex world of competing values and causes, neither is it sufficient to measure Christianity by the values typified by many churches. The only solution which really exalts Christ is to reframe the kingdom over which Christ the King rules. The kingdom is properly understood by understanding the King. It is not about benevolence, food, shelter, clothing, or other physical necessities. Unless the activities of the kingdom reflect the mercy of Jesus and meet basic spiritual needs, the actions are not kingdom actions which glorify the King.

An interesting chapter compares the two trees in the Garden of Eden, and suggests that many Christians are still seeking God according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, seeking

in Christianity a way to define good and evil, make moral decisions, and control the uncertainties of life. The alternative, according to the book, is to live by the tree of life, seeking and finding life in Christ.

The conclusion of the authors is that the new frontiers of the contemporary world demand that the church explore Christ afresh to discover him and demonstrate him in the world. This reviewer is in full agreement. Just how much of the traditional baggage must be brought along will always be the sticking point as Christ Jesus is discussed within the larger Christian community.

As one who has sought to bring the focus of the church back to Christ for at least the last decade, the book resonates with this reader. A member of my congregation commented shortly after I began my work with this church, "If we keep at it, we may be able to get Christ back into this church!" What goal could be higher? Let us bring Christ back to the center of the faith and lives of Jesus' followers. Let us bring Christ back to the focus of the church!