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The Ecumenical Jihad: War Without A Winner

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Grace To You teacher, John MacArthur, and long time friend and radio host Al Saunders had a fascinating discussion about a book titled, *The Ecumenical Jihad*. After reading it, John was compelled to address its contents, specifically the serious breach it represents in modern Christianity's understanding of salvation and the gospel.

Now we've captured the entire interview and we're glad to make it available to you. Right now let's join Pastor/Teacher John MacArthur and host Al Saunders as they discuss the book, *The Ecumenical Jihad*.

AL: Thanks, Carl, it's a special privilege to be here addressing a subject to which John MacArthur has called our attention. The issue is disturbing and should present believers with a wake-up call on some alarming trends of our times.

John, this discussion centers on a recent book called *Ecumenical Jihad*. I've never seen the publication on any best-seller list, how did it come to your attention.

JOHN: Somebody sent it to me, as publishers often do, and it was apparently recommended by some people for reading because of its potential positive effect on bringing people together to fight the cultural war and I guess they thought that I ought to be informed on that so it came to me in the mail.

AL: Now when you say positive effect, I presume that word is in quotes.

JOHN: Well, I think the people who promoted it and who distributed it, certainly to me, did so with the idea that it was going to make some kind of contribution to my participation and the participation like it influenced in the cultural war.

AL: Well, let's take a look at the title, first of all, *Ecumenical and Jihad*. How do you fit those two words together and really, what do they mean?

JOHN: Well, Jihad is the Muslim word for holy war. Ecumenical means unifying, or we all come together. And the purpose of the book basically is to identify the fact that we're in a culture war. We're in a battle for the culture. We're in a battle to preserve morality, to preserve values, ethics that are

connected to God. And in order for us to win this holy war against the anti-God, pagan forces, we have to stop fighting each other in the religious community and all get together. So as we become ecumenical, we can win the Jihad, the holy war.

AL:Well that leads us down a number of paths. But before we get to those, tell us something about the author. Do you know the background of his work?

JOHN:Well I do. Peter Kreeft is the author and is quite an interesting guy. He was at one time a Protestant, I think even an evangelical in the broad sense, who converted to Roman Catholicism and is now a very staunch Roman Catholic and professor of philosophy at Boston College. He is definitely an apologist for Roman Catholicism, and particularly for the New Catechism and Vatican II.

AL:Now when you went through the book *The Ecumenical Jihad*, were there some points that you would agree with? You mentioned the moral condition, it's certainly about to flat-line in our country, isn't it?

JOHN:Yeah, I think in the opening part of the book as you go through the first section of the book and he sort of chronicles the problem in our world, terrible social decay, terrible wide-spread abandonment of any kind of morality which is the foundation of social order...

AL:Family destruction....

JOHN:Yeah, family destruction, you know the end of mother hood, the destruction of babies in abortion, all of that sort of pitting Augustine's old city of God against the city of the world. Very, very well done, and, you know, he ends up sort of with Dostoevsky's statement, "If there is no God, then everything is permissible." And so there's absolutely no way to control any society if there's no ultimate authority, if there's no God, and so then he sort of sets up the situation that we definitely need to fight this war and reclaim the culture.

AL:Well, let's talk about that for just a moment. First of all, maybe you could take a look at the aspect of ecumenism and its background. What points are there in this book that really trouble you?

JOHN:Well first of all, the main point troubles me, and that is the idea that we're supposed to spend our time fighting a cultural war, that is, fighting some war on some...some human power base like lots of people can vote in large blocs or like we can influence politicians or we can lobby, or we can create institutions that uphold public morality. The whole idea of a public morality, of fighting for morality on a sort of an unregenerate level, escapes me as any kind of biblical mandate. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:13, "Evil men will get worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." The longer we live, the more we accumulate dangerous seasons, dangerous times. And the accumulation of this moving toward the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ indicates that it's just going to get worse and worse and

worse. Trying to reclaim the culture politically, or even religiously, organizationally, seems to me to be completely off target in terms of what a biblical mandate is, which has really nothing to do with some collective morality and everything to do with individual salvation. That that's what we're called to do.

So I really have a problem with the premise of the whole book, even though it's very...it's a very provocative book and has gotten some widespread reading and some promotion in Christian periodicals because there are a lot of Christians who are heavily into this idea that somehow the Kingdom of God and the gospel as to its future and its impact is linked to cultural morality, but that's not true in the Scripture. You have in the Bible no effort either on the part of Jesus or the Apostles to fix the culture, but rather to approach individuals with the gospel.

AL:Well, are any of these ideas new, or is this something that's been recycled and reemphasized?

JOHN:Well I think probably in Catholicism it might be old. I think the Catholic Church through its history has had tremendous immense political power and has endeavored to impose itself institutionally upon cultures and societies and, of course, the author comes from that Catholic background. I think that liberal Christianity some years back was very much committed to the social gospel, to changing society it saw the mission of the church as helping the poor and the disenfranchised and the disadvantaged and all that kind of thing became sort of the sum and substance of liberal theology. But I don't really believe that ever this has been the agenda of Christians.

Having said that I will say this. Great Christian revivals where masses of people are saved has always had great social and moral implications in their societies. I mean, we all know what the Methodist revival did in England. We remember what the Great Awakening did in America. And even though they were short-lived as, for example, the revival under Hezekiah was in the Old Testament, very brief, they do have some immediate impact on the society but that has to come from transformed lives. And I don't think this is at all a biblical model, though it has appeared from time to time through history.

AL:Well the book is not talking necessarily about revival and I don't find much about salvation in it either. It's talking more about virtues and values. And we've seen something of that as far as bringing together the Catholics and the Evangelicals as recently as 1994. Maybe you could explain something about ECT, if you would.

JOHN:ECT stands for Evangelicals and Catholics Together, as you said, in 1994, a document was signed by a group of Catholics and a group of Evangelicals in which they pledged themselves to each other for the purpose of ecumenism with a goal of reclaiming the culture again, of creating this cultural ecumenism, this cultural unity that's going to capture the culture for the Judeo-Christian morality. In the process of doing that in this particular document, they undermine, severely undermine

the doctrine of salvation by affirming Roman Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ. We know that the Roman Catholic Church does not believe in salvation by grace through faith alone which is the only way to be saved, but rather salvation by grace plus works.

By embracing Catholicism in this ECT document, by affirming that they are our Christian brothers and we all need to work together, they basically just swept away the clarity of the doctrine of salvation as it was defined in the Reformation. And the whole idea was, you know, we've got to do this because we've got to win this culture war again. And that's the...and we don't have enough people in Christianity to vote in the things we want to vote in but if we can get all the Catholics and Evangelicals together, we can pull this whole thing off. Ecumenical Jihad book takes this quantum leap further because in this book they're saying, "Look, let's recognize this, that even Buddhists and Muslims worship one God and since there is only one God, they must then worship the one and true God and ultimately they're going to end up in heaven too and so are other people in Eastern mysticism religions and it even says in the book that people who are atheists who are pursuing truth are really pursuing God under the name truth and they should be included, too. And we'll all get together and if there's enough of us, we can win this great holy war against anti-God paganism.

AI: And they're talking about demons and things of that sort?

John: Well I don't even think it's so much that, it just gets into the ideologies of paganism, the godlessness, the abortion, the immorality, the homosexuality...

AL:Euthanasia...

JOHN:Yeah, all of the stuff that goes along with a godless society. It's not really talking about spiritual warfare on that demonic level but merely having the power in our culture to make laws and to control agendas to the degree that we can maintain some kind of widespread religious morality. That's really the goal of everything.

AL:Well a few moments ago you used two words, quantum leap, and that certainly is the case with this book *Ecumenical Jihad* because the author apparently claims to have had some OBE, which is Out of Body Experience. First of all, do you believe that people have Out of Body Experiences?

JOHN:Yeah, one...

AL:Paul.

JOHN:Just one...and that's the first and last one you'll have...that's when you die.

AL:Oh, I see. Okay. I thought you were perhaps referring to the Apostle Paul.

JOHN: Well no, he got two.

AL: Okay. Well let's go to that for just a moment. It seems so utterly preposterous that I could hardly believe it. Give us that scenario. Apparently it took place...what...in Hawaii, while...

JOHN: Well the writer says he was surfing and in the midst of some surfing experience...

AL: That's not on the Internet incidently.

JOHN: No, surfing on the water. And in the midst of some experience, he flipped out into an out of body experience and in the process found himself in heaven having conversations with the occupants of heaven, who surprisingly enough were Buddha and Mohammed...

AL: And Confucius...

JOHN: And Confucius and they were all in heaven and whether this scenario is contrived and I don't want to say maybe this is a little tongue and cheek by the author...the end result is the same, and that is to show that all sort of monotheists who have one God are going to end up in heaven. And what they don't know about Christ down here, they'll find out when they get up there. So let's quit fighting these people, even go so far as to say Muslims are better Christians than Christians because they fornicate less, they don't commit sodomy and they don't abort babies, so they're even better Christians than Christians, and we need to recognize that. And so we'll all get up there together. Set the differences all aside, embrace everybody as far and wide as you can. He goes beyond that and says the only general who can lead this great war is the Pope, the winner...I think he calls them the winner of unwinnable wars and the only way it's ever going to be energized is going to be when we all return to complete and total devotion to Mary. In those conditions, you know, we can all come together and win this unwinnable war.

AL: He was talking to Mohammed on that score, as I understand it, and Mohammed was saying, "I wrote about that 34 times about Mary in the Koran, she's the mother of God so therefore Mohammed must be a believer."

JOHN: Right, that's exactly the intent of the book, that there's pieces of information either in the Koran or in the writing of the Buddhists, or the Confucianists or wherever that indicate some acquiescence to Christ or Mary or some element of Christian history.

AL: Well, don't the Muslims...aren't they dedicated to Christianity's destruction? They look at us as sort of the great Satan?

JOHN: I think if you define Islam in its truest sense, we are infidels. Not all Muslims would say kill the infidels, but many would. And that's certainly been a part of their history and the more radical of those today would. But all Muslims would say convert the infidels.

AL: I guess I was just a little bit surprised and with this I'll go on because it's sort of tongue and cheek that in this out of body experience, not only was Confucius, Buddhists, Lao-tzu, Mohammed and also Moses, by the way, he was there...but...

JOHN: That includes all the non-Christian Jews.

AL: Dan Quayle was there as well, which seemed rather interesting to read about that. Incidentally, how could Moses have possibly agreed with what this out-of-body experience would be since the first commandment is "Thou shalt have no other gods before me?"

JOHN: Well that's exactly right. You know, one thing about unconverted Jews, if they maintained their Jewishness and stick with Moses, they reject every other religion as idolatry, including Christianity and they are not true Jews who adhere to the Old Testament and certainly are not ecumenical in any sense. Muslims are not ecumenical. Buddhists are not ecumenical. As far as I know, Confucianists aren't either, it seems to me that true evangelical Christians cannot be ecumenical in the terms that this is defining. It seems to me that the only people who want to sweep all this away and embrace everybody would be the Roman Catholics as represented by this writer.

AL: Well do you see any softening of Catholic dogma, the Pope claiming that he's no longer infallible, or anything of that sort?

JOHN: Well...no, and Vatican II changed absolutely nothing. It threw in some new terminology but didn't change anything. We are still, by Catholic doctrine, Protestants are still separated brethren and we're still, you know, in one way or another, disconnected from the truth and from the church. And since the Roman Catholic Church postulates itself as infallible, that is all of its creeds and all of its councils and all of its decisions and edicts and Papal Bulls and ex cathedra statements are infallible, since all of that has been collected through the centuries to describe and define the Bible and since the church is the only legitimate and infallible interpreter of Scripture, nothing could change. It's impossible for anything to change. The idea today that somehow the Roman Catholic Church has changed is a deception because it has not changed. There are still the issues that were raised at the time of the Reformation, and the issue, the main issue that was raised was salvation by works as over against salvation by grace through faith alone.

AL: Now some people would say, just to play the devil's advocate, so to speak, isn't unity what God wants for His church. Isn't that what Christ prayed in His last priestly prayer of John 17.

JOHN: Well, of course, in the High Priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus was praying for unity that came to pass. He wasn't saying, "Father, I really hope these folks can get along." He was saying, "Father, make them one." And the Father answered that on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God came and they were baptized with the Spirit into the body of Christ. And 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we've all been baptized with the Spirit into the body of Christ, we've all been made to drink of the same Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." We are held together in the oneness of common eternal life.

The prayer of John 17 was not a prayer for emotional unity, or for denominational unity or for any other kind of external unity, it was a prayer for the reality of common spiritual life and oneness in the power of the Spirit which was answered on the day of Pentecost.

AL: That's an important point. As you look at the scriptures, John, and as you consider what the author is trying to put forward in this book, *The Ecumenical Jihad*, do you see any area of potential prophetic fulfillment looking perhaps in the book of Revelation?

JOHN: Well I really believe that what is advocated in this book is a scenario that could fit perfectly into Revelation 17.

AL: Explain that.

JOHN: Well in Revelation 17 you have one-world religion. And this one-world religion embraces everybody. You know, we used to wonder, "Well, we could understand how Protestants and Catholics both with Christian roots could all get together, but how would the Muslims ever get in there..."

AL: Right

JOHN: "And how would the Buddhists and the Confucianists and the Lao-tsists, and how would you get in all the religions of the world?"

Well this book gives that formula and it indicates that there's motion in that direction. Now some of the things in the book that are interesting are his references to meetings between Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Protestants, and Catholics and how they're all starting to get together and rub out the lines. That is precisely the picture of the end of the age when the Lord Jesus comes to judge the world, where you have one great world religion orchestrated by the false prophet and the Antichrist around a satanic purpose, to fight against God, against Christ, and against the truth.

AL: So from a positive standpoint, let's go back to some very practical questions as to what are the basic non-negotiables as far as the gospel is concerned? How does one get to heaven? This book indicates that there are perhaps many different ways.

JOHN: You know, Al, you've identified exactly what the issue is. These people who... not only the gentleman who wrote the book, but the people who endorsed the book, leading evangelicals whose endorsements are on the back of the book, these leading evangelicals who endorsed the book for whatever reason they endorse it, are seriously muddying the clarity of the gospel because if this man is a Christian, by their definition, then you can become a Christian some other way than the way the Bible says. If you can...if you can be someone who says that Muslims, and Buddhists, and everybody else is going to be in heaven, then you don't understand the gospel.

AL: As a matter of fact, one of these recommendations ends by saying, "What if he is right?" Shouldn't they know better?

JOHN: Well you would think...you would think. I mean, what if he is right. The proper endorsement of this book should say, "This is damnable heresy right out of the pit, leading us toward the one-world religion of the Antichrist and the false prophet, this is falling into Satan's clutches and we ought to be aware of these kinds of trends so that we can fight against them with all of our might." Instead of saying what that says, "What if he is right?" written by a very prominent reformed theologian, that's just mind-boggling to me. And whatever supposed intellectual stimulation this book might generate, it will do damning harm because what it does is plant the seed, or even make a convincing argument for the fact that we don't need to evangelize all these people because they're all going to be there anyway.

It's really a kind of modified Universalism that just says...Ah, we're all going to end up in the same heaven any way, except for a few really rotten people who don't want to acknowledge God at all, any God at all.

AL: You would be thinking of some like Hitler or Attila the Hun or...

JOHN: Yeah, they use those as illustrations in the book, that people like that...there's got to be a hell for people like that. Which is a terrible misunderstanding of the character of sin and the nature of sin. It's not just Hitler that deserves eternal hell, it's every single person who has ever lived.

Being sympathetic toward this thing is mind-boggling to me because of the issue you raise, and that is what is the gospel? Simply stated, the only way to get to heaven is to believe in your heart that Jesus is God who came into the world in human flesh and died as a substitute for sin on the cross and rose again physically and bodily from the grave and that salvation is through faith in Him alone and it is a gift of God. And the reason God can grant that gift is because He has taken all our sin and punished Christ for it so that His justice is satisfied and so He is free to forgive us.

I know that the people who endorse this, some of these Reformed people and evangelical leaders who endorsed this book, I know they understand that doctrine. But what they are not willing to commit to is that believing that is the only way to be saved. That's the bottom line. There is definite confusion in their minds, there's a reluctance to affirm that that and that alone is necessary for salvation.

AL: Does it concern you, John, that we see more of a movement by evangelicals toward the acceptance of Catholics and Catholic dogma?

JOHN: Well it disturbs me immensely and from a number of fronts. One, doctrinally the Roman Catholic Church does not teach the truth of Scripture. It does not teach the truth of salvation. It confounds the whole gospel by making Mary a co-redemptrix with Christ. It brings in works. The idea being that you're saved by infused grace which is infused into you, first of all, at your infant baptism and then it gets infused every time you have Mass or every time you do Penance, or every time you say you're rosary or whatever. And every time this is infused in you, it cooperates with your human effort to produce salvation.

The problem is they say you'll never know until you die and probably when you die you won't have made it so you'll have to go to Purgatory and burn for a while in a moderate fire until you can finally get bounced out of there into heaven.

That is utterly unbiblical. That is the stuff of the Roman system. It is theologically heretical.

Secondly, this whole thing is frightening from a pastoral standpoint, or an evangelistic standpoint, because it wants to re-label Roman Catholics as if they were Christians and therefore eliminate the whole of evangelism. And I have found as a pastor that I would say 60 percent of our church are new Christians, typically, through the years, brand new Christians. And well over half of those people, well over half of them have come out of Roman Catholic backgrounds where they were lost, where they didn't know Christ at all. And they would be the first people to rise up and say, "Wait a minute. If somebody hadn't come and shown me the truth, I would still be in that system on my way to hell."

AL: Are you saying, John, that a Catholic cannot be born again if he belongs to the Catholic Church?

JOHN: I'm not saying that but I would say this, he cannot be born again if he believes Catholic doctrine. He could be in the Church but he would have to have heard the truth.

AL: Saved in spite of the Church.

JOHN: Well he would have to be saved by the truth which is not the standard doctrine of the Church, but it is possible, certainly, that some priest or some person in the Catholic Church could come to the understanding of the gospel or that like Martin Luther, some Roman Catholic could be reading his

Bible and come to the understanding of the truth. I don't believe though a true believer can really be faithful and obedient to the command to obey the Word of God and to study to be approved of God and so forth, and stay in that system.

AL: Well let's have one or two practical questions, if we may. How do we react then to our Catholic friends and neighbors? What do we say to them, especially if they bring a book like this to us and say, "Here's the thing we've been working toward?"

JOHN: Well, I think, first of all, you always take them back to Christ. You always take them back to the person of Christ. You always take them back to the issue of salvation. Probably the best way to do that is to ask them if they have received the full forgiveness of all their sins forever. And they will say, "Oh, no, no." And then you can show them that that is completely available in Christ and that they can come into possession of complete forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ and not have to live in fear and trying to achieve that hoping that they won't have to go to Purgatory and have it all sort of burned out. I think the issue is to confront them not to assault their system, but to confront their doubts and their fears and their anxieties and the fact that Catholics generally live in this terrible sense of doubt, and never knowing whether they're ultimately going to make it or not.

AL: And, of course, in the average church there is such a differing degree who have biblical knowledge and understanding, some who are truly rooted and grounded in the faith but others who are just sort of drifting around. So it must be very difficult for any pastors who are listening today to say, "But you don't know what's going on in our neighborhood."

JOHN: Yeah, one of the great things that we have going on today is a lack of discernment in the church. Somebody asked me the other day, "What is the single, greatest problem of the church today?" And I said it's easy, one word, "deception." People are just deceived. And that's the tendency. You know, the Apostle Paul was instructing Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, he said, "Preach the Word." Why? "Because the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine."

There is just a tendency to drift. It's just...it's just characteristic of fallen people, even Christian people, they just drift. I mean, you turn on the television on a Christian station and you see some guy whose theology is aberrant and he's filled this arena with tens of thousands of people that come and hear him, you know, give this unbiblical stuff and there they are all in mass, taking it in as if it was truth.

AL: Why do they believe it?

JOHN: It's just a gullibility. It's because they're appealed to on an emotional level. It's because they're made promises here and there because, you know, there's a certain manipulation that goes on. And there's just this basic gullibility. I think it was P.T. Barnum who said, "There's a sucker born every minute." There's a tendency in the human heart to drift. Paul even said at the end of his ministry, "All

in Asia have forsaken me.” I mean, they just tend to drift. The disciples, Jesus spends three years with them, He goes to the cross, they all flee. There is just that built in to them. That's why there has to be the systematic, ongoing care and discipline so that Christians become strong and have good discernment.

I am amazed...I am amazed at this. And I think sometimes these guys who know better who identify with this kind of Movement, do it because maybe they get a little swept away and enamored with the sort of high-brow heady environment of these sort of elevated intellects. Maybe they like the idea of being accepted in wide, wide circles and they don't really want to create conflict. But the bottom line is, this is a deadly, deadly heresy that is being endorsed by Roman Catholic leaders and well-known evangelical leaders as if it were something Christians ought to pay attention to and, in fact, it is a frightening, frightening thing that can recast lost people as people who are going to end up in heaven.

AL: Well, John, I'm sure I'm speaking for thousands of people in expressing sincere appreciation for your stand for the faith, and taking time to pass along information like this to our Grace To You family. It does fit in with our mission statement, doesn't it?

JOHN: It does. And you know, Al, as you know, because you know me well, I feel like my responsibility is a guardianship that I have been entrusted with the Scripture. Paul said to Timothy, “Guard the treasure that's been given to you. Retain the standard of sound words. Hold on to these things.” And there is a guardianship of the truth that I feel so strongly about. And when people come along and assault the truth and replace it with error and lead people astray, then you have to contend for the once-for-all delivered faith. That's part of ministry responsibility for which I believe I am accountable.

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