

Is Brian McLaren Changing Everything?

By L.L. (Don) Veinot

While reading Brian McLaren's book *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, I took the opportunity to view his worship video of the song —"I am an Atheist"¹ (from his album *Songs for a Revolution of Hope, Vol. 1*)—which was part of launching his "**Everything Must Change Tour**" (Feb.-May 2008) on line. It has a sort of 1960s peace-not-war, free-love, flower-power feel to it. It would strike a chord of nostalgia for many who were part of the anti-establishment, anti-war, anti-church movement of that period. Listening to the song and watching the video without the benefit of reading his book can be very misleading, because the definitions of what and who he is talking about are in the book, not the music video.

McLaren raises concerns about some important social issues in *Everything Must Change*; but in the process, he makes false assumptions and builds on them to get to his next point. He misunderstands, misrepresents, or misstates (we cannot always tell which it is) what many Evangelicals believe. Often times, the things in the video he states he cannot believe, we don't believe either. The recurring theme in his music video is:

I can't believe what they believe, but I believe in you.

Who are the "**they**" to whom he refers in the video? "**They believe in the 'God of Jihad' "** and this god "**converts by the sword.**" It sounds as though he may be protesting Islamic extremists; but in actuality, it is pre-tribulation, pre-millennial Christians who are the "**they**" to whom McLaren refers, which comes through very clear in his book *Everything Must Change*.

Why has McLaren become so popular? There are at least two reasons I think. First, he has tapped into that youthful idealism that wants to change the world, and the energy that goes with

it. It begins with the idea that the world ought to be perfect, as it was in the Garden, perhaps. As we look around, we can see the world isn't perfect, and so we are looking for whom to blame in order to get them out of the way or, at the very least, to marginalize them and move on to fixing the world. This brings us to the second reason: There is a spiritual AIDS epidemic.

AIDS for the *physical* body is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Because the immune system is compromised, it cannot fight off even simple sicknesses like colds. *Spiritual* AIDS is the Acquired Ignorance of the Doctrines of Scripture. Like the compromised immune system of the body, the lack of good, sound biblical grounding and ability to think clearly and logically is prevalent in many churches today and leaves the Body of Christ defenseless against attack from false teaching.

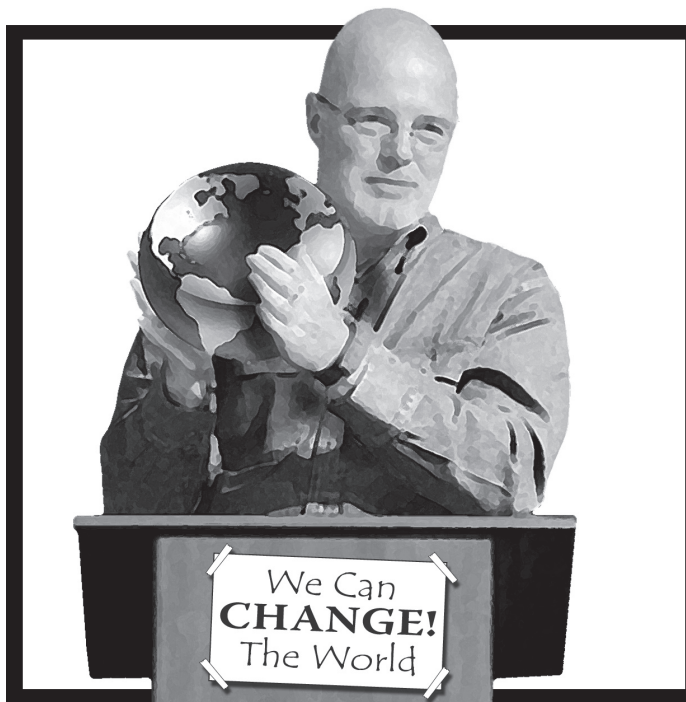
George Barna and his Barna Group (researchers of religious beliefs and behaviors as relating

to American culture) claims that fully 91% of Evangelicals are deficient in one or more areas of essential orthodoxy, and that this is true for 49% of Evangelical pastors as well. I would suggest this accounts for the growing acceptance of much of what McLaren is advocating. Some of McLaren's background may be helpful:

- Brian McLaren grew up in the Christian (Plymouth) Brethren Church;
- Church planter and pastor for 24 years;
- Claims he didn't have satisfactory answers to some questions that were asked of him.

For instance, when I was a pastor, people often asked my opinion on hot-button issues like evolution, abortion, and homosexuality. The problem was that af-

—Continued on page 2



The
Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

Journal

is a publication of:

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
P.O. Box 446, Wonder Lake, IL 60097-0446

Phone: (630) 627-9028

Fax: (630) 627-6829

E-mail: info@midwestoutreach.org

Don Veinot President
Joy Veinot Director
D.L. McGehee Editor
S. Todd McGehee Layout/Art

ADVISORY BOARD

Dr. Norman L. Geisler

Professor of Apologetics and Theology
Veritas Evangelical Seminary
Murrietta, CA

Janet Brunner

Layman,
Glen Ellyn, IL

G. Richard Fisher

Senior Pastor,
Laurelton Park Baptist Church
Brick, NJ

Dr. Jerry Buckner

Senior Pastor,
Tiburon Christian Fellowship
Tiburon, CA

Jhan Moscowitz

North American Director,
Jews for Jesus
Brooklyn, NY

Ray Kollbocker

Senior Pastor,
Parkview Community Church
Glen Ellyn, IL

Dr. Ron Rhodes

President,
Reasoning From The Scriptures Min.
Frisco, TX

Bill Honsberger

Director,
Haven Ministries
Aurora, CO

Gino Geraci

Senior Pastor,
Calvary Chapel South Denver
Littleton, CO

Phil Ballmaier

Senior Pastor,
Calvary Chapel
Elk Grove, IL

Your response to this publication
would be greatly appreciated!!!

Please send all correspondence and
subscription inquiries to the above address.

Thank you for reading the **Journal**.

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
is a non-profit organization.

Financial donations are welcomed
and make this ministry possible.

"McClaren" Continued from page 1

ter discussing those issues in all their importance and intensity, I couldn't help asking other questions: Why do we need to have singular and firm opinions of the protection of the unborn, but not about how to help the poor people and how to avoid killing people labeled *enemies* who are already born?²

Here we can see his answers are based on an emotional response rather than a thoughtful reflection on the issues raised, or has he engaged in a bit of "bait-and-switch?" By that I mean his statement has equated the value of an innocent human life to be on the same par as the mechanics of how to address poverty. If I state this another way, it might be helpful to see what he has done here.

Evangelicals are concerned about the protection of innocent, unborn human life. Some Evangelicals believe picketing abortion clinics is the best way to change public opinion on this issue and to protect the innocent unborn. Other Evangelicals believe electing government officials and appointing judges is the way to change the practice of abortion. There is a "**singular and firm**" opinion "**of the protection of the unborn**," but there is not a "**singular and firm**" opinion on the *mechanics* of how that is to be done.

In a similar way, I think we can safely say most of the Christian Church is concerned about poverty, or to use McLaren's terms, there is a "**singular and firm**" opinion that the Church is to help the sick, infirmed, and needy. These concerns have birthed many great missions such as World Vision and others. These issues have been and continue to be addressed in many ways through various missions of the Church, none of which are acknowledged by McLaren. However, like abortion, there is no "**singular and firm**" opinion as to the mechanics of addressing poverty.

McLaren has used the "**singular and firm**" opinion "**of the protection of the unborn**" and juxtaposed it with the lack of a "**singular and firm**" opinion of the *mechanics* of addressing poverty. By utilizing category confusion and drawing on emotion to validate his case he moves on.

Secondly, he proposes a moral equivalency between protecting the *innocent* unborn with protecting the *guilty* who have killed or are attempting to kill non-Muslims in the name of Allah. This is an emotionally powerful charge. However, McLaren misstates or misrepresents the truth of the case. Although evangelistic, most Evangelical Christians are in favor of peaceful co-existence with those of other faiths including Muslims, and they view all as people for whom Christ died and was resurrected. With the exception of a few fringe groups, I don't know of any Christians calling for the death of those who have not committed crimes. Again, there are missions and missionaries who are providing or attempting to provide food, water, clothing, and medical treatment, as well as a proclamation of the Gospel. The United States, as a nation, has declared war on terrorism and although many Christians are glad for the protection, not all are united or have a "**singular and firm**" opinion on the "Christian" position on war. Nevertheless, the Federal government did not seek the churches' advice or blessing on this endeavor. Is it right to protect non-aggressors from aggressors? That is, perhaps, a question for another paper. Is the Federal Government Christian? No. The government is charged with the protection of its citizenry and deemed its current course as the most correct way to proceed (the mechanics of protection) at the time. Christian citizens like non-Christian citizens, are free to disagree; and as we have seen, having a "**singular and firm**" opinion on any of the *mechanics* of endeavors the Church embarks upon is hard to come by, but that does not prove Christians view Muslims as "enemies" except, perhaps, in the sense Paul called the Jews enemies of the Gospel (Romans 11:28).

We see examples of another question McLaren puts forth in his 2002 book *More Ready Than You Realize*. Someone named "George," who attended his church asked why Jesus had to die on the cross.³ McLaren said he didn't know how to answer and asked for two weeks to think about it. He talked with his brother Peter and shared his dilemma:

... a couple of weeks ago I realized that I don't know why Jesus had to die.⁴

McLaren's brother, Peter, didn't have to hesitate for a second and responded:

Well, neither did Jesus.⁵

This did not receive much bad reaction except amongst a few apologetic ministries, which was generally disregarded. After all, these statements were published by a mainline, capital "C" Christian publisher and must, therefore, fall within orthodox theology. The next year, he came out with *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, where McLaren floated

the idea that Jesus Christ dying on the cross:

... **sounds like divine child abuse.**⁶

McLaren put it in the mouth of a fictional unbeliever named “Kerry” and never refutes the idea in the book. Other than from a few discernment ministries, this received no response from the Church. This is just one of many profane ideas that come from Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan—both liberal theologians and members of the Jesus Seminar; and this background leads us to the others who helped shape McLaren’s ideas contained in his book *Everything Must Change*. Besides Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, the list includes:

- Walter Rauschenbusch—a nineteenth-century, liberal Protestant who developed and articulated *A Theology of the Social Gospel*;
- Karl Marx—Atheist and author of *The Communist Manifesto*;
- Al Gore—former vice president of the United States and promoter of misinformation about “global warming;”
- Cornel West—Communist scholar and promoter of Black Liberation Theology (a religious form of Communism);
- George Soros—billionaire philanthropist and political liberal;
- John Shelby Spong—retired Episcopalian bishop, liberal theologian, and member of the Jesus Seminar.

Like John Dominic Crossan, John Shelby Spong, and many others, McLaren intentionally or unintentionally misdefines what Evangelicals and Fundamentalists believe and teach. The idea of a Jihad Jesus who **“converts by the sword”** is a bad explanation of the teaching that Jesus will be coming in a future Judgment. His **“fake-me-out-Jesus”** (who didn’t intend to complete setting up the Kingdom but, instead, would leave and return) and other questions surrounding the Return of Jesus are simply rendered irrelevant in his thinking, as he says he is agnostic as to the question of the Return of Jesus. Furthermore, he is opposed to the idea that the Bible teaches a heavenly hope and draws from the ideas of N.T. Wright and his book *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. Rather, McLaren is promoting an earthly transformation of society where all will live the way of Jesus—whether they are Christians or not. McLaren presupposes the current lack of solving the problems of poverty, hunger, sickness, illiteracy, discrimination and what he sees as a lopsided distribution of wealth as evidence the church has failed in what he contends is its primary mission of Christianizing the world in behavior. Once we understand this then:

We can rediscover what it can mean to call Jesus Savior and Lord when we raise the question of what exactly he intended to save us from. (His angry Father? The logical consequences of our actions? Our tendency to act in ways that produce undesirable consequences? Global self-destruction?) The popular and domesticated Jesus, who has become little more than a chrome-plated hood ornament on the guzzling Hummer of Western Civilization, can thus be replaced with a more radical, saving, and, I believe, real Jesus.⁷

He lists his big questions that gave birth to this book as:

- 1) **What are the biggest problems in the world?**⁸
- 2) **What does Jesus have to say about these global problems?**⁹

A third question surfaced:

Why hasn’t the Christian religion made a difference commensurate with its message, size, and resources? What would need to happen for followers of Jesus to become a greater force for good in relation to the world’s top problems? How could we make a difference?¹⁰

McLaren goes on to list how important Jesus is to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and even nonreligious people; however, he ignores the fact each group has a false view of Jesus, or as the Apostle Paul put it: **“another Jesus”** (2 Corinthians 11:4). He then spends time claiming the church has missed the essential message of Jesus and calling people to the true message:

The time had come, we said, to center our lives on the essential message of Jesus, the message of the kingdom of God – not just a message about Jesus that focused on the afterlife, but rather the core message of Jesus that focused on personal, social and global transformation in this life.¹¹

Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is rendered irrelevant and, perhaps, even as a false gospel, because McLaren’s view of salvation is a financial question:

—Continued on page 4

MCOI Branches

MAIN OFFICE:

Wonder Lake, Illinois

P.O. Box 446

Wonder Lake, IL 60097-0446

Phone: (630) 627-9028

E-mail: Info@midwestoutreach.org

President: L.L. (Don) Veinot, Jr.

Director: Joy A. Veinot

Spring Hill, Florida

3338 Landover Blvd.

Spring Hill, FL 34609-2619

Phone: (352) 684-4448

E-mail: dgholson@atlantic.net

Director: Diane Gholson

Wayne, Ohio

171 Church Street

Wayne, OH 43466

Phone: (419) 288-2780

E-mail: jkmiles@bgsu.edu

Director: Jonathon Miles

Lohrville, Iowa

408 Main Street

Lohrville, IA 51453-1004

Phone: (712) 465-3010

E-mail: cultwatch@juno.com

Director: Jeff Hauser

Scranton, Kansas

101 Kenton Street

Scranton, KS 66537

Phone: (785)-793-2309

E-mail: mcoscranton@usa.net

Co-Directors: Randall Birtell

Randal Ming

Cape Coral, Florida

P.O. Box 150743

Cape Coral, FL

Phone: (239) 542-1914

E-mail: ronhenzel@msn.com

Director: Ron Henzel



With no apologies to Martin Luther, John Calvin, or modern evangelicalism, Jesus (in Luke 16:19) does not prescribe hell to those who refuse to accept the message of justification by grace through faith, or to those who are predestined to perdition, or to those who don't express faith in a favored atonement theory by accepting Jesus as their "personal Savior." Rather, hell – literal or figurative – is for the rich and comfortable who proceed on their way without concern for their poor neighbor day after day.¹²

Like John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg and John Shelby Spong, McLaren wants to hold on to something he can call "Christianity," while rejecting the core of what the orthodox faith historically has held to be true:

In this way, I found freedom to articulate dissatisfaction and concern about a version of the Christian religion – the modern Western version, or the modern colonial version – without rejecting Jesus and the Christian faith as a whole.¹³

For McLaren, "western version" and "colonial version" are synonyms for what he calls an "empire" "framing story"—a grab for power—by Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians in order to build an empire. They do this, according to McLaren, by proclaiming something called personal redemption—a guarantee of life with God after death, and thus, being one of the chosen or elect who then are in partnership with the returning Jihad Jesus who will wage war on infidels.

McLaren spends a great deal of time developing what he calls a "new" "framing story." This describes how the various groups in the gospels are trying to be liberated from the empire builders represented by Rome. As he moves through the book and develops his ideas, which appeals to the compassionate among us, he misleads the reader to understand that virtually everything historic Christianity has believed about the Bible is wrong. This is one of the first of McLaren's books where he exposes his views of Scripture, and he does so regarding Genesis chapters one through six. Upon examination, most of us conclude these chapters are about man's rebellion against God's authority, its resultant death or separation from God, and His provision to bring redemption and peace—or a reuniting of us to Him. McLaren sets up his readers by disabusing Christians of thinking the Bible is God's communication to us in any meaningful way for today:

Fundamentalist religious movements typically try to do just the sort of thing I'm proposing, and they generally do it in the worst possible way: they take words that were spoken five hundred or fourteen hundred or two thousand or fourteen hundred years ago and apply them, sharia-style, as if they were intended to serve as today's annotated legal code, today's constitution, today's how to manual. They underestimate how the original words and teachings were situated – how deeply their sacred texts were rooted in gritty contemporary problems and human social contexts; instead, they see their sacred texts as timeless, placeless utterances coming from an arid, Platonic plane of universal abstractions.¹⁴

It is McLaren's contention that conservative Evangelicals are attempting to install a Christian "sharia-style" law. Those who do not convert will be slain by the return of the Jihad Jesus. With McLaren's "new" "framing story" in place, he introduces the reader to his view of what is actually going on in Genesis. In his "new" "framing story," the problems are over eating, class warfare, and empire building.

It's interesting to note the importance of consumption in the biblical narrative. When the crisis of human evil is introduced in a passage beginning in Genesis 1:29 and ending in 2:20, forms of the words "eat" and "food" are used about twenty times. Consumption is closely linked with human evil. Adam and Eve live in harmony with creation in a garden, surrounded by food-bearing trees. But to be a human is to live within creaturely limits in God's creation – reflected in self-restraint in regard to eating the fruit of "the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). If they break the limits represented by the fruit hanging on that tree, they will taste death (or as we said earlier, they will decompose).

Eve exceeds the limit, drawn to consume a fruit that "was good for food and was pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom" (3:6). Adam joins her. As a result, an avalanche of alienation crashes into the human story – alienation from God, alienation from one another, alienation from oneself, and alienation from creation.¹⁵

A few paragraphs later, McLaren continues to talk about obesity, anorexia, bulimia and other eating disorders in China and around the world. Now that he has established over-eating was the original sin and it continues today, he progresses to the true meaning of Cain and Abel:

In the following chapters, brother is alienated from brother and a form of class violence enters the story, as the class of pastoralists (symbolized by Abel) are exterminated by the class of agriculturalists (symbolized by Cain).¹⁶

A conventional reading of this Bible passage (Gen. 4:1-8) would leave the average reader with the idea that Cain was angry because God rejected his offering, but He accepted Abel's; so Cain killed his brother in a fit of rage. However, in McLaren's telling of it, there is class warfare going on here. The "haves" and "have-nots" and the "have-nots" committed genocide on the "haves."

Soon new forms of institutionalized violence arise in great cities, so horrible that they are swept away by a flood of judgment. Eventually empires emerge, reflecting the imperial dream of unifying people under one dominating language and culture in Babel. Genesis provides a genealogy for all the pain and evil in the whole social structure of humans on planet Earth; it all can be traced back to a problem of consumption beyond limits.¹⁷

Weight-loss/cult guru Gwen Shamblin and her Weigh Down Workshop/Remnant Fellowship would be proud. Does McLaren's original-sin-of-over-consumption theory bear any resemblance to Holy Writ? When we read the account in Genesis 2:15+, we see that God *invited* Adam and Eve to consume ... as much as they wanted ... from anything around them ... as far and wide in the Garden as they desired to go ... *except* the fruit of one tree.

Abel obeyed God and offered the prescribed sacrifice, but Cain did not. He offered a sacrifice of his own choosing. The passage demonstrates Cain's rebellion against God's authority, but it does even more. It demonstrates God's *grace* in sparing Cain from immediate physical death and protecting him with a special mark (Gen. 4:15) in spite of having killed his brother and lying about it. McLaren wrote earlier:

If we resituate ourselves in this new story, if we find identity, meaning, and purpose in this good news, we find ourselves beginning again, born again, facing a

new start. As recomposed, resituated, de-deranged people, we can begin rebuilding our societal system, not as a suicide machine, but as a beloved community, the kind of garden city envisioned in John's Apocalypse (Revelation 21:1-4).¹⁸

This is nothing new. It is old-time liberalism told from within the ranks of Evangelicalism. Around 1825, theology shifted from being Christocentric (Christ-centered) to being anthropocentric (man-centered). McLaren's theology is man-centered and is built on the idea that simple act of man's will can fix everything and rebuild God's Eden on the earth.

During a question and answer period at a recent conference which was part of McLaren's **"Everything Must Change Tour,"** McLaren let his audience know the Book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 A.D. (preterism or semi-preterism).

I believe all predictive prophecies were fulfilled in the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 under the Roman Empire.

He went on to claim we are **"... co-creators of the future with God,"** and that it **"wasn't a movie that had already been shot."**

This has at least the ring of panentheism* in it. Has McLaren lost (if he ever had it) the absolute holiness of God, the reality of the lostness of man, and the provision for individual and corporate salvation through the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ? He further develops this theme of being co-creators of the future with God in his newest book *Finding Our Way Again* – (2008, Nelson Pub).

Pastor Jeffrey Whittaker attended a McLaren conference at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana. Part of this event is surprisingly similar to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, where I and several others met with the Wiccans and discussed their worship practices. Whittaker describes McLaren's conference:

The conclusion of the Friday evening "session" was an amazing demonstration of this philosophy. The audience was directed to many different "sacred spaces" set up to aid them in getting in touch with themselves and "the divine". One station was a table covered with votive candles which could be lit and meditated upon. Another held a large bowl of water where one could get in touch with the "flow" of nature and spirit, and yet another featured a bowl of dirt where one could literally touch "Mother Earth" and contemplate all the evils done to her.¹⁹

This all would be very comfortable, indeed, for Wiccans and other non-Christian occultists and New Agers. I would suggest that for Brian McLaren, everything has changed. There is very little that resembles **"the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints"** (Jude 3, NIV). With churches such as Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL embracing him and promoting his views by hosting him in their conferences to train youth workers around the world, McLaren may be able to pull off what Walter Rauschenbusch and, later, the Jesus Seminar have not been able to do: Turn the church from the Scriptures to adopt a Socialist view of the world. [Q]

***Panentheism:** Related to Process Theology, panentheism is essentially a combination of theism (God is the Supreme Being) and pantheism (God is everything). While pantheism says that God and the universe are coextensive, panentheism claims the God is greater than the universe and that the universe is contained within God. Panentheism holds that God is the "supreme effect" of the universe. God is everything in the universe, but God also is greater the universe. Events and changes in the universe effect and change God. As the universe grows and learns, God also increases in knowledge and being. (from <http://www.gotquestions.org/panentheism.html>)



Don and Joy Veinot are co-founders of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., which is a national apologetics ministry and mission to new religious movements based in Wonder Lake, IL. He and Joy, his wife of 37 years, have been involved in discernment ministry as missionaries to New Religious Movements since 1987. Don is on the Board of Directors for Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), a consortium of discernment ministries. In addition to being staff researchers and writers for the *Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal* and co-authors of *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, they have been published in the *CRI Journal*, *PFO Quarterly Journal*, *Campus Life Magazine* and other periodicals. Don was ordained to the ministry by West Suburban Community Church of Lombard, IL at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, Israel in March of 1997. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.

ENDNOTES:

- 1) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSm0VyHG40> 2) Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007) p. 4 3) Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 80 4) *Ibid.*, p. 81 5) *Ibid.* 6) Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), p. 102 7) Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 6 8) *Ibid.*, p. 11 9) *Ibid.*, p. 12 10) *Ibid.* 11) *Ibid.*, p. 22 12) *Ibid.*, p. 208 13) *Ibid.*, p. 35 14) *Ibid.*, p. 119 15) *Ibid.*, p. 209-210 16) *Ibid.*, p. 210 17) *Ibid.* 18) *Ibid.*, p. 151 19) <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2008/06/how-everything-must-change.html>

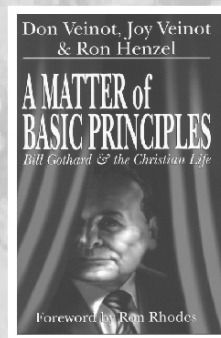
"A Matter of Basic Principles deserves a hearing . . . Those who have experienced abusive spiritual authority in any context will be more inclined to find this book refreshing for its thoroughness."

—Christianity Today

A MATTER of BASIC PRINCIPLES

Bill Gothard & the Christian Life

Don Veinot, Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel



"A must read for all thinking believers who wish to protect their churches.."

—Dr. Jay Adams
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, PA

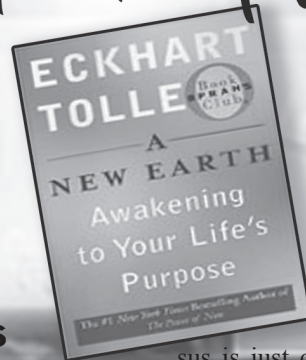
ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!

Call, write, or visit our web site:

www.midwestoutreach.org

A NEW EARTH

A Gospel For A New Age



By Marcia Montenegro

An Evaluation of Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth: Awakening To Your True Purpose in Life*

Kim¹ chimes in and notes that this is a big step for Oprah—to publicly endorse something this *different*. Kim also adds that Oprah has always been a big fan of the message, but has been waiting for the right time to introduce it on a large scale to her audience. And with a global shift in consciousness starting to take place more rapidly, it seems that the time has come.²

On March 3, 2008, Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle began an online class with a reported two-million people to study Tolle's book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. On April 9, an Oprah television show aired highlighting testimonials from those who claimed this book had changed their lives. On that show, Oprah said she is a Christian; but that long ago, she understood Jesus did not come to die on the cross. Instead, He came to show us how to achieve Christ Consciousness. She said rather than the cross, what it really was about was:

Christ coming here to show us how to do it—how to be—to show us the Christ consciousness that he had, and that that Consciousness abides with all of us.³

Oprah acknowledged that a book by Eric Butterworth, *Discover the Power Within You*, is what opened her eyes. Who is Butterworth, and what does he have to do with Tolle?

New Thought and New Age

Eric Butterworth (1916-2003) was a Unity minister. Unity (Unity School of Christianity) was an offshoot of the New Thought Movement, which teaches, among other things, that Jesus was a highly evolved man who realized his inner divinity—the Christ Consciousness—demonstrating that all men could achieve this. Everyone comes from God and returns to God, and there is no heaven or hell. Sin is the belief that you are separate from God; you must realize that you are not. Salvation is a matter of switching your awareness from historic Christian beliefs to the New Thought way of understanding.

The New Age, which is an amalgam of many beliefs—Eastern, Gnostic, Occult—also incorporates elements of New Thought, including the concept of Christ Consciousness. Je-

sus is just one of many who realized his inner divinity. New Thought claimed to be Christian; even today, Unity bills itself as “**practical Christianity**.” This is why Oprah considers herself a Christian. Butterworth's book was a factor in paving the way for Oprah's subsequent acceptance and endorsement of the numerous New Age teachers and beliefs she has promoted on her show. In light of this background, no one should be surprised at her endorsement of Tolle.

A Glimpse of Tolle: From Ulrich to Eckhart

Tolle (pronounced in two syllables as “toll-e” to rhyme with “slowly”) reportedly had a spiritual awakening at age 29 after many years of depression and anxiety. Waking one night in fear, he believed he could not go on. His thought, “**I cannot live with myself any longer**” caused him to surmise there were two of him, and to ask:

“Who is the ‘I’ and who is the self that I cannot live with?” There was no answer to that question, and all thinking stopped. For a moment, there was complete inner silence. Suddenly I felt myself drawn into a whirlpool or a vortex of energy. I was gripped by an intense fear, and my body started to shake. I heard the words, “Resist nothing,” as if spoken inside my chest. I could feel myself being sucked into a void. Suddenly, all fear disappeared, and I let myself fall into that void.⁴

This experience led Tolle into studies of Eastern beliefs, including various schools of Buddhism. According to an interview with Tolle in the *Vancouver Sun* after the success of Tolle's first book, *The Power of Now*:

He knows he's achieved full self-realization.⁵

Tolle is fully convinced of this, and is quoted in this article as saying to another source:

The certainty is complete. There is no need for confirmation from any external source. The realization of peace is so deep that even if I met the Buddha and the Buddha said you are wrong, I would say, “Oh, isn't that interesting, even the Buddha can be wrong.”⁶

This is an astoundingly bold statement revealing that Tolle believes himself capable of being more enlightened than the founder of a world religion—Buddha, who is admired and emulated by not only Buddhists, but also by many in the New Age.

It is important to remember that Tolle assumes himself to be

fully self-realized, which means in New Age terms that he has achieved the Christ Consciousness—the realization of his inner divinity—which is a New Age state of enlightenment. Tolle considers himself a spiritual teacher who is advanced enough to guide millions, even if he were to be contradicted by Buddha! This is in stark contrast with his reputed humility and low-key manner.

Tolle changed his first name *Ulrich* to *Eckhart* out of admiration for the mystic, Meister Eckhart. Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), known as a “Christian mystic,” was a controversial figure having been charged with heretical views after his death. One of Eckhart’s better-known statements is:

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.”⁷

He also said:

God’s is-ness is my is-ness, and neither more nor less. The just live eternally with God, on a par with God, neither deeper nor higher.”⁸

According to Eckhart:

The Son came down from heaven, and was incarnate of a Virgin, and took upon Him all our bodily weaknesses, except sin and folly.”⁹

Eckhart has a rather mystical explanation that on the cross, Jesus drew men to him through “affinity,” “emptiness,” and the “heat of his love.”¹⁰

One must wonder if this thought from Meister Eckhart influenced Tolle’s recurrent theme, first seen in his book *The Power of Now*, which is an idea also expressed repeatedly in *A New Earth*:

There exists only the present instant ... a Now which always and without end is itself new. There is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence.”¹¹

It seems that Tolle took more than just Meister Eckhart’s name.

Meister Eckhart’s views could be described as possibly pantheistic,¹² or at least panentheistic,¹³ not an uncommon viewpoint of mystics.

The Shift

Tolle maintains that reading *A New Earth* will cause a “shift” in your consciousness, and that his book *The Power of Now* or other “transformational” books can also start the process of awakening.¹⁴ The New Age is always looking to a future toward which man is spiritually evolving. Many believe a shift in consciousness is taking place, and humanity is poised to make leaps spiritually, mentally, psychically, and technologically.

Some attribute this shift to the Age of Aquarius (though Tolle does not mention this); others are connecting it to the year 2012 based on a prophecy from Mayan culture stating there will be a particular alignment in a segment of the sky at the end of a cycle of time; and others believe that there is further evidence of this spiritual evolution taking place or about to take place.

However, according to New Age teachers, not everyone is prepared for this “shift.” This teaching is only for those who are

receptive and able to process it. As Tolle explains, his book “**can only awaken those who are ready.**”¹⁵ In order to say this, Tolle must assume that he is “awake” and has achieved a higher level of consciousness than others. He apparently expects others to accept this without question. But readers should be asking: Why should we accept that Tolle is the “enlightened” author? On what basis can he say this, and where is the evidence for it?

Tolle’s ideas are a mere echo and rehashing of philosophies that have been around for centuries; this does not indicate enlightenment.¹⁶

The Big Bad Ego, Buddhism, and the Now

According to Tolle, the root of our problems is the big, bad ego. We identify with the ego—which is the false self—and become trapped in a false identity, which skews our perception of reality. This idea is hardly groundbreaking; it is a well-worn adage of the New Age with origins in Gnostic and Eastern thought.

One of the ways to transcend identity with ego and the false self, Tolle advises, is to “**let go of thought**” because “**Thinking isolates a situation or event and calls it good or bad.**”¹⁷ Tolle also instructs the reader to focus on the present moment, the “**Now,**” which is “**the end of the ego.**”¹⁸ In fact, Tolle posits that there is no real time, but only an illusion of it.¹⁹ When we “**awaken within the dream**” and see who we really are, “**This is the new earth.**”²⁰

Tolle approvingly quotes many Buddhists and uses Buddhist terminology. Buddhist concepts underlying Tolle’s views are strewn throughout the book. Tolle’s depiction of the ego (false self) could be equated to the Buddhist concept of self, which is believed to be a temporary construct resulting from feelings, bodily sensation, memories, and thought.

Identification with this self keeps man trapped in a cycle of illusion and suffering. The answer to this problem is to cease identification with the ego. This is one of the purposes of Buddhist detachment—a practice that eventually allows one to realize the self (ego) is not the true identity.²¹ And Tolle’s “**Being**” could be parallel to the Buddha nature, which is the ultimate and only reality in Buddhism.

The Gnostics taught that man is pure spirit; but through the machinations of an evil god or intermediary (accounts differ), these spirits came to earth and became trapped in bodies. They began to identify with the physical body, and a self separated from God, and forgot they were pure spirit. Tolle’s teaching regarding the ego as being the false self echoes these ideas.

Additionally, Tolle harps on his belief that there is no time, there is just “**Now.**”²² While it is likely he got this idea from Meister Eckhart, it is also plausible he imbibed it from Buddhism, or perhaps, Eckhart’s view was reinforced for Tolle by Buddhism. One of the teachings of Buddhism is “**mindfulness,**” a concept that aids in developing detachment and is often described as “**the capacity to be present.**”²³ Mindfulness is a state in which one has a pure awareness free of judgments, concepts, or bias. In mindfulness, the person allegedly has achieved the ability to observe

—Continued on page 8

“Tolle” Continued from page 7

things as they really are instead of seeing them through any filter. For most who achieve this status, the condition is fleeting; but it is taught as a state to emulate. As one pro-Buddhist source states:

Mindfulness is present-time awareness. It takes place in the here and now. It is the observance of what is happening right now, in the present moment. It stays forever in the present, perpetually on the crest of the ongoing wave of passing time.²⁴

The view of mindfulness usually downgrades rational thinking. According to a known Thai meditation master, in the state of mindfulness:

We become less hypnotized by our habitual tumble dryer of thoughts and are drawn instead to the aliveness of the present moment.²⁵

The adulation of achieving an awareness of an “eternal now” seems like a counterfeit to the eternity and timelessness of God. Only God is outside of time and free of any limitations of time.

It is noteworthy—and disturbing—that the concept of mindfulness has been making inroads into the fields of psychology and counseling over the last several years.

Does Tolle Have Good Things To Say?

It is not difficult to find Christian blogs where comments such as, “*I don’t agree with Tolle’s spiritual views, but he has some good things to say*” are common. Some have even said Tolle’s perspectives can be helpful. Teachings contrary to those of Jesus will almost always “*have some good things to say*” or seem to, and some will even have quotes from the Bible and from Jesus right and left. Deception at its best is often a mixture of lies and truth, because the true parts give validity to the false. The New Age system is a blend of beliefs and is, therefore, quite skillful at embracing and using Christian terms in order to appear compatible with Christianity.

Tolle does address some symptoms of the problems in society—drugs, addictions, suicide, selfishness, fear, hatred, insecurity, anxiety, wanting control, jealousy, greed, etc. But the source of these problems, according to Tolle, is our identification with the ego—which is not our real self.

What Christians need to realize is that Tolle’s beliefs are not just non-Christian, they are anti-Christian. The true source of the human problems discussed by Tolle is *sin*, not identification with a false self such as the ego. If the source of the problems is identification with the ego, then the solution is merely to become aware of this and alter one’s perception and thinking. Indeed, this is the view of the New Thought Movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries based on their false teaching that Jesus came to correct “**wrong thinking**.”

Cracking a Couple of Chestnuts

The old New Age line—we are all energy, and solid things are really energy—is trotted out by Tolle;²⁶ but this is a New Age urban legend. Indeed, if this were true, we all would be part of a nuclear explosion! Matter simply is not energy “**in ceaseless**

motion.”²⁷ To become energy, matter must be converted to energy via something like a nuclear bomb. And we certainly would not continue to walk around as though we were little streaming beads of light! Ironically, considering Tolle’s enlightened teaching on man’s basic, nonmaterial spiritual nature, reducing man to molecules is a very materialistic view. He is saying we are merely a mass of molecules packed together, a view which would gladden the heart of many Atheists. The energy which science speaks about in relation to matter is not the “mystical” energy of the New Age, nor is it the *chi* or *qi* of Taoism.²⁸

Another old chestnut—that millions of women were killed as witches in the Inquisition—is claimed by Tolle. But even Wiccans now acknowledge the figures were vastly exaggerated.²⁹ If Tolle can be so wrong about these two, easily verifiable topics, how can readers trust other things he says?

Man Is Divine

The Bible reveals a God who is both immanent (present in the world) and transcendent (existing beyond the world).³⁰ But God is always distinct from His creation, not a part of it. God created the world out of nothing, not out of Himself.³¹ He did not emanate the world from His being. Since all humanity

is created by God, distinct from God, we do not have a godlike or divine nature (cf. Job 9:32). People often confuse the idea of God’s omnipresence—that God is present everywhere—with the idea that God is present *in* everything, including man.

Only man is created in the image of God, and this means that man, as opposed to animals and to nature, reflects attributes of God such as will, intelligence, language, and awareness of moral rights and wrongs.

The biblical teaching on man is that on the one hand, man is a “**little lower than God**” and “**a little while lower than the angels**” as well as being “**appointed over the works**” of God’s hands.³² On the other hand, man fell into sin by believing Satan

over God and, thus, corrupting his relationship with God, and separating himself from God.³³ Thus, we see that although man is created in God’s image, that image has been eroded or marred by sin; and man is born into this state of separation from God.

In contrast to the biblical view, pantheism posits that man is contained in God, and God is contained in man. This view is popular in the New Age as well as among some mystics. Pantheism can be confusing, because God is spoken of as a Being *apart from man* as well as being *a part of man*, and vice-versa (man as part of God). This seems to be Tolle’s view as well, although he does not say much about God. However, Tolle does equate man with God by taking the biblical titles identifying God and Jesus and applying them to man. Tolle believes man is basically good, since he is part of God.³⁴ He asserts we are all “**I Am**,” (which he equates with the word “God”) expressed in form. Tolle declares:

When I no longer confuse who I am with a temporary form of “me,” then the dimension of the limitless and the eternal—God—can express itself through “me” and guide “me.”³⁵

Tolle says:

God ... is formless consciousness and the essence of who you are.³⁶

This is the spiritually lethal premise of Tolle's message: Man is equal to God.

Tolle and Jesus

Tolle rejects the historical Jesus of the Bible, and recasts Jesus as an enlightened, awakened teacher like Buddha. Tolle completely disregards the context of Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. Tolle declares that Eastern enlightenment and liberation are the same as salvation taught by Jesus. This statement is a gross dismissal of the biblical text as well as 2,000 years of Christian teaching and belief.

Tolle claims when Jesus said, *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"*³⁷ Jesus was saying we are all the Truth.³⁸ If anything, Jesus was saying the opposite: He was claiming to be the prophesied Messiah, the Redeemer, the unique Son of God (which means He has God's nature), and the *only way* to God. Tolle ignores the main theme of Scripture about man falling into sin and the resulting separation from God through this sin.

Throughout his book, Tolle violates the biblical text in extreme fashion, reading his own meaning into the words. For example, Tolle announces that when Jesus said, *"Deny thyself,"*³⁹ he meant, **"Negate (and thus undo) the illusion of self."**⁴⁰ Even a schoolchild studying the context of this comment can see this is not what Jesus meant. Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*⁴¹ Here Jesus is explaining the cost of discipleship to His hearers. He is not telling His disciples that they must deny that their "self" exists.

Tolle writes that what Jesus means by *"eternal life"* is that one can awaken to the **"dimension of the formless within your-self."**⁴² But Jesus was quite clear about what is in man:

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.⁴³


The Bible's message is not to realize one's inner divinity, but rather, it is to recognize one's sin and the need for redemption. Truth is not recognition of a natural unity with God, but rather admission of one's inherent separation from God. The good news is that the separation between man and God is ended when one puts his or her faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ, Who atoned for our sins on the cross.⁴⁴

The biblical Jesus thankfully is not the ethereal Jesus of the New Age—an amorphous mouthpiece of esoteric twaddle; but rather, He is the God-Man Who felt hunger and thirst, ate with sinners, healed the sick, spoke concrete truths for everyday people, and shed real blood on the cross, rose bodily the third day victoriously defeating death itself.

Suggested Questions for Discussion with Readers of Tolle

To engage Tolle fans in fruitful discussion, some of these questions and points might be helpful.

1. On what basis should we assume Tolle is enlightened and not self-deceived?
2. By what authority does Tolle teach?
3. What does enlightenment mean anyway, and who is defining this term?

4. If you had not read Tolle or any other ideas like his, would you think that your self is not your true self?
5. Do you believe man is divine? If so, what evidence is there for this?
6. If we are divine, why did Jesus pay the penalty for our sins on the cross? Please read Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 to understand this.
7. Why is Jesus called the Lamb of God? Why the numerous references to the blood of Jesus in the New Testament? Tolle never refers to or explains this. 



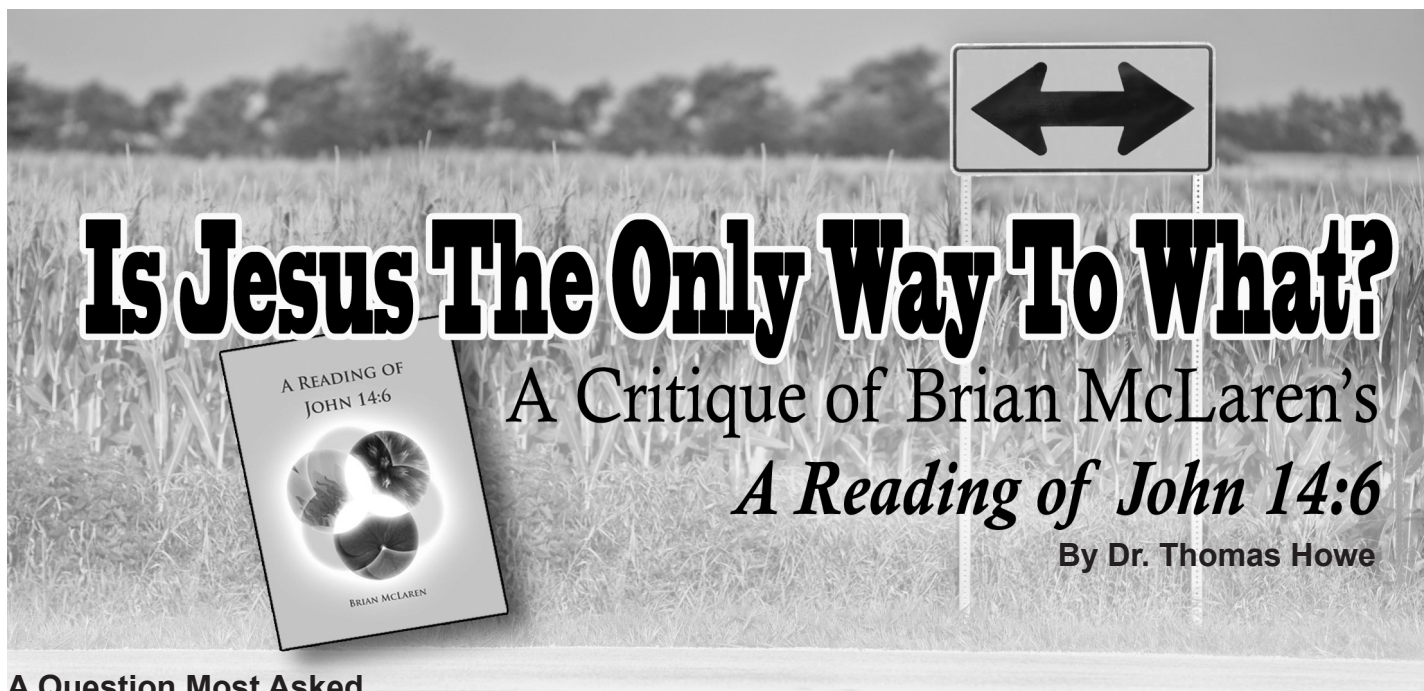
Before trusting Christ in late 1990, **Marcia Montenegro** was a professional astrologer and taught astrology for several years, as well as having been involved in Eastern and New Age practices. Through her ministry, Christian Answers for the New Age, Marcia speaks around the country and writes on New Age and occult topics.

Based in Arlington, VA, she is the author of

SpellBound: The Paranormal Seduction of Today's Kids. (Life Journey/Cook, 2006).

ENDNOTES:

- 1) Kim Eng is Eckhart Tolle's girlfriend 2) From "We Like It Raw," <http://www.welikeitraw.com/rawfood/2008/02/a-new-earth---a.html>, Feb. 1, 2008. Kim Eng is Eckhart Tolle's business partner and girlfriend. 3) Transcribed by writer of this article from the television program, April 9, 2008. 4) <http://www.quotemonk.com/authors/eckhart-tolle/biography.htm> 5) Douglas Todd, Oct. 5, 2002, http://www.innergrowth.info/power_of_now_tolle/eckhart_tolle_va_sun.htm. 6) Ibid. 7) http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_105.html 8) <http://mythosandlogos.com/eckhart.html> 9) "The Attractive Power of God," The Sermons of Meister Eckhart, <http://www.catholicprimer.org/eckhart/sermons/eckhartattractive.htm> 10) Ibid. 11) http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/meister_eckhart.html 12) God and the universe/humanity are one in nature – God is all and all is God. 13) God and the universe are contained within each other – God is in all and all is in God; or the universe is part of God's being that also transcends the universe. 14) *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (NY: Plume/The Penguin Group, 2005), 7. 15) Ibid., 7. 16) The author of this article was involved for many years in Eastern and New Age beliefs similar to many of those promoted by Tolle. 17) Ibid., 194-96. 18) Ibid., 200-01. 19) Ibid., 205. 20) Ibid., 210. 21) Buddhist meditation practices play a large role in developing detachment. 22) This, of course, was the theme of his first book, *The Power of Now*. 23) Mark Coleman, "Natural Wonder," *Yoga Journal*, September, 2008, p. 110. 24) Bhante Gunaratana, "Mindfulness," Adapted from *Voices of Insight*, on Shambhala Publications web site, "A Guide to Buddhism," <http://www.shambhala.com/html/learn/features/buddhism/basics/mindfulness.cfm> 25) Coleman, 110. 26) Ibid., 146. 27) Ibid. 28) *Chi* and *qi* as spiritual concepts are terms derived from Taoist beliefs for a force or energy that underlies and connects all living things. See <http://explorepx.com/bitofsci.html> and <http://www.physicalgeography.net/fundamentals/6a.html> 29) See Jenny Gibbons, "A New Look at The Great European Witch Hunt," http://www.beliefnet.com/story/17/story_1744_1.html and Margot Adler, "A Time For Truth," http://www.beliefnet.com/story/40/story_4007.html. 30) Deut. 32:39; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:13-15, 83:18, 139:7-10; Is. 55:8-9; 57:15; 63:11 31) Gen. 1:1 32) Ps. 8:5, Heb. 2:7. 33) Gen. 3:17-24; Rom. 5. 34) Tolle, 13. 35) Ibid., 251. 36) Ibid., 219. 37) John 14:6 38) Tolle, 71. 39) Matt. 16:23-25. 40) Tolle, 79. 41) Matt. 16:24 42) Tolle, 81. 43) Matt. 15:18, 19. 44) *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* Rom. 5:10



A Question Most Asked

It is rare that Brian McLaren directly answers questions which may shed light on whether he is orthodox or heretical regarding the essentials of the faith. His article “A reading of Jn. 14:6”¹ is a case in point.

For purposes of clarity, I will reproduce the verse in a word-for-word translation in the following table. For ease of reference, I have included the definite articles with the nouns to which they are connected.

Table #1: Jn. 14:6

<i>legei</i>	<i>auto</i>	<i>ho Iesous</i>	<i>ego</i>	<i>eimi</i>	<i>he hodos</i>
says	to him	the Jesus,	I	I am	the way
<i>kai</i>	<i>he aletheia</i>	<i>kai</i>	<i>he zoe</i>	<i>oudeis</i>	<i>erchetai</i>
and	the truth	and	the life;	no one	comes
<i>pros</i>	<i>ton patera</i>	<i>ei</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>emou</i>
to	the Father	if	not	through	Me.

The context of this statement is the dialogue between Jesus and His disciples in the upper room preceding His crucifixion. Jesus is preparing the disciples for the fact that He will be leaving them for a while. He encourages them not to be troubled. His departure is crucial for their future with Him and the Father. Jesus tells them, “*You know the way where I am going,*” (Jn. 14:4) but Thomas does not understand. He responds, “*Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?*” (Jn. 14:5) This is the point at which Jesus makes the statement recorded in Jn. 14:6.

Brian McLaren begins his reading of this verse with the observation:

It is one of the questions I am asked most frequently: “Do you think Jesus is the only way?”²

McLaren is a master at avoiding answering direct questions. He has perfected the ability to change the parameters of a question so as to reshape it into the kind of question he wants to answer; and yet, he leaves you with the impression he has actually answered the question you originally asked. He does that here as well:

The question raises another question, actually: “The only way to what?”³

Of course, McLaren knows what the actual question is. He reveals this when he says:

Sometimes Christians ask it as a test question, to see if I give the right answer.⁴

Since he doesn’t want to alienate orthodox Christians with an unorthodox answer, McLaren must divert everyone’s attention from the real question to an alternate question that is less likely to reveal what he really thinks.

According to McLaren, Jesus is not the way to the eight noble truths or the four-fold path of Buddhism; He is not the way to Allah; He is not the way to a number of other “ways” enumerated by McLaren:

But if you are asking about the kingdom of God coming to earth, what that means, how that can happen, and how we can participate in it, Buddha, Mohammed, and all the others will step back and Jesus will step forward.⁵

Of course, the question was not “**about the kingdom of God coming to earth.**” If we assume the question was provoked by Jesus’ statement in Jn. 14:6, the question was about His answer regarding the way to the Father. But, McLaren has masterfully rerouted the direction of the question to address one’s life on earth today rather than one’s ultimate destiny.

And, the fact is, McLaren is simply wrong when he says, “**Jesus is not your man. Nor does he want to be.**”⁶ McLaren makes

this statement after his brief tour through various “ways.” If you want to learn about the eight noble truths or the four-fold path of Buddhism, **“Buddha is the way, not Jesus.”**⁷ If you want to learn about Allah, again, **“Jesus can’t help you, but Mohammed can.”**⁸ If you want to learn about the triumph of the proletariat over the controlling elites, or the id, the ego, the superego, or a number of other “ways,” **“Jesus is not your man.”** But these statements are strange responses from someone who professes to be a Christian. When Jesus said, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life,”** did He mean He was the truth only of things relating to Christianity? Can’t Jesus tell us the truth about the eight noble truths or the four-fold path of Buddhism? Doesn’t Jesus know the truth about these things? What would Jesus tell us about the eight noble truths or the four-fold path? He would tell us those are not the way to the Father! What truth would Jesus tell us about Allah? He would tell us that Allah is not the Father! What truth would Jesus tell us about the other “ways” to which McLaren refers? He would tell us what He told His disciples, **“I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.”** Although McLaren hoped to avoid answering the direct question by diverting our attention, he has actually exposed what he did not want us to know. That is, for McLaren, Jesus is not *the only way*. Consequently, McLaren is not in a position to comment on other ways. In McLaren’s view, Buddha is a way; Mohammed can help you; you should talk to Marx or Freud. McLaren limits the knowledge of Jesus to conform to McLaren’s notion of the kingdom of God come to earth. So, unless you want an answer to that particular question, don’t come to Jesus, because He can’t help you.

The Way To Where?

Yes or No

McLaren asserts that many people have not answered the first question correctly, because they have not stopped to ask second question:

Many of us try to answer the first question without first answering the second, based on the assumption that the question means, “Is Jesus the only way to get to heaven after you die?”⁹

But McLaren manages to avoid even his own question:

Teasing out some of the other assumptions that lie beneath the question, one might rephrase it like this: “Is personally hearing about and believing in certain statements or concepts about Jesus Christ the only way to avoid burning forever in hell?”¹⁰

Of course, this is not necessarily a correct assumption of the question. Orthodox Christians do not believe salvation is **“hearing about and believing in certain statements or concepts about Jesus Christ.”** There certainly are statements and concepts that must be believed, but that is true of anything. Even in McLaren’s version of religion, a person must hear and believe there is such a person as Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, etc., and that there also is something called **“the kingdom of God,”** and one must hear and believe this before one can **“participate in it,”** as McLaren puts it.

But for the orthodox Christian, going to heaven is not simply a matter of believing certain statements or concepts *about* Jesus Christ. Going to heaven involves trusting in Jesus Christ as the *only way* to get to heaven. Jesus told the Pharisees, **“for**

if ye believe not that I am [Greek = *ego eimi*], **ye shall die in your sins”** (Jn. 8:24). McLaren says the posing of the question about going to heaven is presented as **“a kind of multiple choice examination, so that one must answer: a.) ___ No; b.) ___ Yes.”**¹¹ He goes on to bloviate what he thinks many Christians secretly feel, although he doesn’t tell us how he gained access to what many Christians secretly feel: **“Although many of us Christians are secretly uncomfortable with answer b), we feel that we are being unfaithful unless we choose it, largely because of John 14:6 ...”**¹² But this is not the only place where Jesus poses a “yes-or-no” kind of statement. In Jn. 3:18 Jesus said, **“The one who believes into Him is not judged; but the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God.”** This is a “yes-or-no” statement, and the answer is either “A” or not “A.” Either you believe Jesus, or you don’t; and as a result, either you are condemned or you’re not.

Jesus’ Message

McLaren identifies the question as one that expresses the idea of the **“exclusivity of Christ,”** which he characterizes as the notion that:

... all who do not consciously and decisively accept Jesus as their personal savior will burn forever in hell.¹³

Revealingly, McLaren admits:

That phrase raises concerns for me, because based on the Scriptures, I believe Jesus primarily came not to proclaim a way out of hell for some after death, but rather a way into a better life for all before death.¹⁴

What is particularly interesting about this peek into McLaren’s own beliefs is not so much his concern for what the statement itself means, but the fact that he constructs a false dichotomy to express his concerns. Earlier he implied that the **“yes”-or-“no” “kind of multiple-choice examination”** was improper; and yet, the way the question is phrased, there can be only one answer. It must be either “yes” or “no.” There can be no middle ground. Either Jesus is the only way (“A”), or He is not the only way (not “A”). There cannot be more than one “only way.”

The way McLaren formulates his understanding of Jesus’ primary mission is yet another false dichotomy. He says, **“Jesus primarily came not to proclaim a way out of hell for some after death, but rather a way into a better life for all before death.”** Why must these be mutually exclusive? Isn’t it possible that Jesus’ primary mission involved both of these? In reality, Jesus’ proclamation of the way to escape hell after death results in a better life before death. But the way McLaren poses the issue implies that one can’t believe both. Either Jesus came to proclaim life after death, or He came to proclaim life before death. But the Scriptures testify to the fact that Jesus came to do both.

McLaren declares, **“His message was not about going to heaven after history, but about the kingdom of heaven coming to earth in history.”**¹⁵ This is a very strange thing to say for someone who professes to be a Christian—Jesus didn’t come to tell us about how we can go to heaven after we die? Then what did Jesus mean by all that He said about heaven? We will consider this question later, but for now let us concentrate on what McLaren says. McLaren says Jesus’ goal was:

... not to constrict but rather to expand the dimensions of who could be welcomed into the kingdom of God, of who could be accepted in the people of God. So my
—Continued on page 12

"14:6" Continued from page 11

understanding of Jesus' essential message tells me that "exclusivity of" should generally precede "the Pharisees" or "the judgmental" or "the hypocrites," and never "Christ."¹⁶

So, if there is no "exclusivity of" "Christ," then does that mean anyone who believes anything can be a part of the Kingdom of God? Let us read on!

Consider The Context

In order to clarify what Jesus meant by His statement, McLaren correctly suggests that we must consider the context in which the statement was made. He says:

One of the most basic and widely-accepted principles of biblical interpretation says that to interpret a text out of context is a pretext. In other words, if you pull a verse out of its setting, you may unwittingly (or intentionally) twist it to make it say things it was never intended to say.¹⁷

Of course, studying the context *does not guarantee* that one will, as a result, interpret a passage or text correctly. In fact, if McLaren or, for that matter, anyone is wrong in their understanding of the passage or text, they could equally be wrong in their understanding of the context. The various aspects of context must also be interpreted; and if you start from the wrong assumptions, you are certainly likely to end up in the wrong place. Be that as it may, McLaren contends that Jn. 14:6 is often:

... quoted out of context so that it seems to say, "I am in the way of your getting to truth and life. I will keep everyone from getting to the Father unless they get by me first."¹⁸

I'm not sure where he gets this, but I do not know of *anyone* who understands Jesus' statement that way. But, perhaps, he will clarify this point.

McLaren says: "One would think that the context reads like this:"

You should be very troubled, because if you believe in God, but not me, you will be shut out of my Father's house in heaven, where there are a few small rooms for the few who get it right. ... Then Thomas said to him, "Lord, what about people who have never even heard

of you? Will they go to heaven after they die?" Jesus said to him, "I am the only way to heaven, and the truth about me is the only truth that will get you to life after death. Not one person will go to heaven unless they personally understand and believe a clearly-defined message about me and personally and consciously ask me to come into their heart." (Not John 14:1-6)¹⁹

There are two important points made in McLaren's parody. First, McLaren ridicules the notion that those who believe in God but not in Jesus will be shut out of heaven. But this is something Jesus specifically declared:

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:18);

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins (Jn. 8:24);

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (Jn. 17:3).

So, it seems Jesus declared something quite like what McLaren ridicules, **"if you believe in God, but not me, you will be shut out of my Father's house in heaven."** In fact, didn't the Apostle John say something almost like this: **"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also"** (1 Jn. 2:23); and **"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life"** (1 Jn. 5:12, NIV). If you believe in God, but do not believe in His Son Jesus Christ, then you do not have the Father. In fact, Jesus said, ***He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*** (Jn. 14:9). This statement was made because the disciples did not understand they could not have one without the other. Jesus could very well propose this question to McLaren: **"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?"** (Jn. 14:10).

Second, it seems that McLaren wants to belittle the fact that Jesus is the *only way* to heaven. McLaren constructs the following caricature that Jesus is the only way: **"I am in the way of your getting to truth and life,"** and yet, this very truth is presented in many places. Jesus is referred to as a **"stone of stumbling"** and a **"rock of offense:"** **"They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him**



Next Year in Jerusalem . . .

Join us on a trip to ISRAEL

Every Passover one of the statements commonly heard is, "Next Year in Jerusalem!" Our tour to Israel is scheduled for April 21 - May 4, 2009. It will be a 14-day, in-depth tour with first-class accommodations which includes flights, hotels, breakfast and dinner, (lunches are not included but are only a few dollars a day) bus fair, guides, entry fees, tips and taxes. The cost, proposed itinerary and hotels (with links) can be seen at our web site, or you can contact us for a brochure. We hope you will join us. It will be a great trip!

will not be put to shame” (Rom. 9:32–33). McLaren seems to be doing precisely what Israel did; he is stumbling over the Rock Who is Christ. The Scriptures teach that if you do not believe in Him Whom the Father has sent, you will die in your sins (Jn.8:24). Jesus, indeed, is in the way, and the only way to get to the Father is through Him. McLaren claims this is absurd, but Jesus tells us it is the truth. Who will you believe?

Going Back to the Text

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. McLaren says we must get back to the context in order to see what Jn. 14:6 is actually saying. McLaren starts his description of the context with an assumption he does not bother to support:

It’s a dramatic time. Jesus has just washed the disciples’ feet—expressing the fact that in his kingdom, things are scandalously different from among “the leaders of the Gentiles.”²⁰

Throughout the chapters in John’s Gospel that record the upper-room experience, not once does Jesus refer to a “kingdom.” The word does not appear in any of Jesus’ discourses or interactions with the disciples. Isn’t it rather strange that if the washing of the feet of the disciples was designed to indicate something about the kingdom, Jesus would not even *mention* the kingdom? Now it may be true this is what the washing signifies, but McLaren has not supported this claim. He simply assumes it without evidence. That’s not the way to do exegesis.* But let us move on.

McLaren presents the verses in Jn. 13:31–33, and then says:

This statement—that Jesus is going somewhere, but his disciples can’t follow, forms the common thread that the conversation will follow and to which it will keep returning.²¹

McLaren focuses on where Jesus is going:

Where is it that Jesus is going? Heaven? Then he would be saying nobody can go to heaven.²²

But put in context, this does not make sense. Jesus tells the disciples He is going away, and they cannot follow. McLaren is not only a master of avoiding answering the question; but also, he is a master of selective reporting—giving you just enough of the verse to make his position sound reasonable. However, he doesn’t give you all of the information, because that would weaken his claim. The information he doesn’t give you is the statement of Jesus in Jn. 14:3:

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also.

So Jesus is not telling the disciples they can never be where He is going. Rather, He is telling them they cannot follow Him *now*, but He will return to take them to where He is going. Let us examine at this in more detail.

Where Is Jesus Going?

An important aspect in understanding to what Jesus is referring when He says He is going somewhere they cannot come is to consider the context in which Jesus made this statement to the Jews. In Jn. 13:33, Jesus specifically told his disciples, “*and just as I said to the Jews*” (Greek = *kathos eipon tois Ioudaiois*), so what Jesus means when He addresses the disciples is connected with what He said to the Jews. In fact, McLaren recognizes the importance of this fact when he says:

Jesus said something strikingly similar to the Pharisees

and priests in 7:33–36, an important passage that gives additional background for this scene [in 13:31ff].²³

There are three times that Jesus makes this statement to the Jews: Jn. 7:34; 7:36; 8:21. These specific words also appear in Jn. 8:22; but there, the Jews are actually repeating Jesus’ words. The first reference is Jn. 7:34, but since the second reference (Jn. 7:36) is within a couple of verses of the first, we will consider the verses in Jn. 7:33–39:

Therefore Jesus said, “For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. “You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come.”

The Jews then said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? What is this statement that He said, ‘You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come’?”

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ ” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

It is important to note that Jesus said He was going “*to Him who sent Me*” (Greek = *pros ton pempanta me*). This cannot be a reference to His suffering and death, because this is not where the One who sent Him is. The One who sent Him is obviously the Father, but the Father does not suffer and die. Although it is through Jesus’ suffering, death, burial, and resurrection that Jesus goes to the Father, this is not *where* the Father is. The Father is in heaven (cf. Matt. 5:34). These two things are as distinct as the way is distinct from the destination.

Notice also the connection between what Jesus says to the Jews, and what Jesus says on the great day of the feast. To the Jews Jesus said, “*you cannot come,*” yet on the great day of the feast Jesus said, “*let him come to Me and drink.*” The way to come to Him is by faith: “*He who believes in Me ...*” The Jews cannot come because they do not believe. On the great day of the feast, Jesus is speaking about the Spirit of God Who would be given to all who believe. But this would not happen until His glorification. The giving of the Spirit did not happen at His suffering and death, but rather, at His ascending to the Father. When Jesus says, “*Where I am, you cannot come,*” He is not talking to the Jews about His suffering and death, but about His glorification and ascension to the Father.

The third reference is in Jn. 8:21:

Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.”

So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”

And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:21–24).

—Continued on page 14

"14:6" Continued from page 13

In this instance, it is even clearer that Jesus is not simply talking about His suffering and death, but rather, His glorification and ascension to the Father. He tells the Jews they cannot come to where He is going, because they do not believe Who He is (the promised only Savior); and consequently, they will die in their sins. He even states the fact that He is not of this world. There can be no doubt that when Jesus tells the Jews they cannot come, He is referring to *where the Father is*; and they cannot come there, because they do not believe.

In Jn. 13:33, Jesus tells His disciples:

Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."

Just as it is with the Jews, so it is with the disciples ... except for one small detail. Whereas those unbelieving Jews cannot ever come to where Jesus is going, the disciples will be able to come, but not just yet. Jesus tells them He is going to prepare a place for them, and He will return to take them to where He is so that ***"where I am, you may be also"*** (Jn. 14:3) The Jews will never be where Jesus is going, but the disciples will.

Jesus also tells the disciples, ***"you know the way where***

I am going" (Jn. 14:4). It is important that it is Thomas who says, ***"Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"*** (Jn. 14:5). Thomas is the one who would later refuse to believe Jesus had risen bodily from the dead unless he could see and touch His wounds. The reason he did not know the way is because he had a problem with unbelief. Thomas was the doubter who needed to be shown the way. The way is faith in Jesus. That is the only way to get to where He is going—to where the Father is. The disciples will be where Jesus is going, because someday He would return to take them to where He is.

McLaren wants to make where Jesus is going as a reference to Jesus' suffering and death, but if Jesus is referring to His suffering and death, why did He say, ***"where I am, you (Greek = *humeis*) will be also"*** (Jn. 14:3)? Note that the Greek word used here is *you* plural, not *you* singular. This is not addressed to one disciple alone, but to the disciples. Did Jesus mean to say all of the disciples would suffer and die as He was about to do? That would not be the truth, since they *did not* all suffer and die as Jesus did. In fact, if Jesus is talking about His suffering and death, why does Thomas say they do not know the way? The way to suffering and death is not difficult to find. But Jesus is not talking about His suffering and death. He is talking about His glorification and ascension to the Father. And the way to get there is by faith in God's promised Savior.

The Way

A New Exodus

That Jesus is referring to His glorification and ascension to the Father seems to be supported by the use of the word *way*. In Jn. 14:4 Jesus said, ***"you know the way"*** (Greek = *hodon*). The word *way* is used only four times in John's Gospel. Three of these are in Jn. 14: 4, 5 and 6, and once in Jn. 1:23. The use in 1:23 is important for our understanding of the term in chapter 14:

He [John the Baptist] said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Here John the Baptist is quoting a statement from Isa. 40:3:

A voice is calling, "Clear the way (Hebrew = *Derek*) for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."

As New Testament Professor Craig Keener points out:


In its Isian context, the text proclaims a new exodus, by which God would return his people to the land ...²⁴

Keener says the way is ***"the highway on which God's people will return to the Holy Land."***²⁵ This is certainly an implication of the statement, but initially the way is prepared for God. It is God's highway upon which He goes to the place of captivity. This is a re-enactment of God going down into Egypt to bring out a people for Himself, as Moses declared. Moses challenges the people to remember whether there has ever been a God like the God of Israel:

Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:34).

As God had gone down into Egypt to bring out a people to Himself, so now He is going into Babylon to bring His people out from captivity—a second Exodus.

In the statement in Jn. 1:23, John the Baptist applies the



The
A.I.D.S.
EPIDEMIC
(Aquired Ignorance of the Doctrines of Scripture)

is reaching alarming proportions within the Church. Sound doctrine is the medicine that strengthens the immune system in the Body of Christ.

"Doctor" Don Veinot makes House Calls.
Call today to make an appointment for him to minister at your church or event.
630-627-9028

imagery of Isa. 40:3 to himself and to the new work God is about to do. In this new Exodus of the New Covenant, God would come from the heavenly Jerusalem (heaven) to the place of bondage—the new Babylon (which is now the earthly Jerusalem), and He would bring out from bondage to the evil one all those who believe; and He would do this with great signs and wonders, namely: The Resurrection. As in the first Exodus from Egypt, it was only by faith that anyone, Jew or Egyptian, could come out from Egypt as or with God's people. The *only way* anyone could escape the "iron furnace" of Egypt was to trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. God alone accomplished the redemption of His people, and only by trusting God could His people escape the bondage of Egypt. Their crucial act of faith was demonstrated in applying the prescribed blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts and to the lintel.

However, this escape from Egypt was not confined to the Jews. A multitude of Egyptians also left Egypt with the Jews, but there was no such thing as coming out of Egypt by some other god or some other way. This was the only way. By connecting the 'way' with the Exodus from Egypt and the second Exodus from Babylon, the imagery supports the understanding of Jesus' statement as a confirmation that there is only one way to the Father, and that is by faith in Jesus as the Passover Lamb Who would, by the shedding of His blood, provide the only way out from bondage.

It is significant that in his effort to re-write the text, McLaren consistently strategically alters portions of what Jesus said. McLaren says:

Once again, Jesus comes to the consistent theme that he began with back in chapter 13: *I am leaving, going where you cannot come. But trust me: you'll get through this, and you'll be with me—and even more, I will be in you, and you in me.*"²⁶

Jesus did not say, "**and you'll be with Me.**" What He said was, "**where I am, you may be also**" (Jn. 14:3). Now it certainly is true that if the disciples are going to be *where* Jesus is, they will be *with* Him. But Jesus specifically states they will be "**where**" (Greek = *hopou*). He is, not just "**with**" Him. Jesus tells the disciples He is going where they cannot come *now*; but He then tells them they *will be* there, because He *will come back* to get them, and *will take* them to be where He also *will be*. McLaren completely distorts what Jesus said by rewording this, and thus, makes it sound like Jesus is saying they will be together only in some spiritual sense. Nonetheless, Jesus says the disciples will actually be "**where**" (location) He will be (location). That's much more than simply some spiritual sense.

The Wisdom Of God

Keener also connects the notion of the way to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament:

The LXX of Isaiah (30:11, 21; 33:15; 40:14; 42:24; 48:17; 58:2; 63:17; 64:5) and other biblical tradition [sic] (e.g., Exod 18:20; 32:8; Deut 8:6; 9:16; 10:12; 11:22, 28), especially the wisdom tradition, also apply the image of the "way" to the way of righteousness and wisdom. In both biblical (e.g., Isa 55:7-9; 56:11; 59:8; 66:3) and early Jewish sources, "ways" refer to behavior, as in the rabbinic use of *halako*. "Ways" as behavior represents a usage that would be understood in John's circle of believers (Rev 15:3).²⁷

Keener continues:

Because John envisions Jesus as the embodiment of divine Wisdom (1:1-18) and because the moral use of "way" was the predominant figurative use of the term, it is highly probable that this image constitutes the primary background for "way" in 14:6. In this case the "way" is no longer purely ethical but christological. This image also sharpens the claim of christocentric exclusivism, for the Jewish wisdom tradition portrayed morality in binary terms: one walked in ways of righteousness or in wickedness (e.g., Prov. 4:18-19; 10:9, 17; 12:15). Jesus is the sole adequate revealer of God, for he alone knows God fully (3:13; 6:46). The image of a new exodus, if in view, would also point in the same direction.²⁸

The important point here is that the Old Testament wisdom background forms the context in which the audience most probably would have understood the use of the expression 'way' (*hodos*). Jesus is the wisdom of God, and to know Jesus is to know the way, that is, the truth about the way to life for, as He said, "***I am the way*** [Greek = *hodos*], ***the truth, and the life***" (Jn. 14:6). Jesus had already told them, "***Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way*** [*hodos*], ***he is a thief and a robber***" (Jn. 10:1). Prov. 14:8 connects wisdom and the way: "***The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, but the foolishness of fools is deceit.***"

There are three important words that are translated *wisdom*. The Hebrew word *hokmah* is the most frequently occurring word translated "**wisdom**" in the Old Testament. It is the term most frequently used in Proverbs and indicates a proper grasp of the basic issues of life and the relationship of man to God. This kind of wisdom involves the ability to discern between good and evil and the ability to live prudently. This word is used in Ex.28:1-3 to describe the skill of a tailor' and in Ex. 31:2-5 it is used of the ability of a metal craftsman. We find it used in Proverbs where the wise man receives instruction and will grow by it (1:2, 7; 2:6, 10); he is teachable (10:14; 12:1); the wise man is a righteous man (14:6, 16; 13:5; 22:21-22); he is humble (15:33); he is self-controlled (14:29 calm spirit, 29:11 slow to anger); thinks before he acts (14:8; 15:2; 19:2); forgiving (19:11). The Hebrew word *binah*, usually translated "**understanding**," indicates the ability to discern between the truth and falsehood. It includes the ability to recognize the long-range good as opposed to the immediate gratification of the moment. This word is related to the preposition *bin* which means *between*. The root idea is the insight to make distinctions. (Prov. 1:2, 4:1). Another Hebrew word, *tushiyah*, is translated "**wisdom**" or "success" and indicates the ability to grasp divine truth, and how it should be applied to life (Pr. 3:21, 8:14).

Jesus is all this and more. He is the wisdom of God. To know Jesus is to understand the basic issue of life and how to have a relationship with God—*hokmah*. To know Jesus is to be able to make distinctions between what false religions claim and the truth about how to have a relationship with God—*binah*. To know Jesus is to grasp the divine truth of how to have a relationship with God and apply this truth to one's life—*tushiyah*. When Jesus said to Thomas, "***I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me,***" Jesus is intentionally connecting Himself with the Jewish

—Continued on page 16

“14:6” Continued from page 15

background of wisdom tradition to reveal to His disciples, and to us, that the way of righteousness and wisdom is Jesus—it is faith in Him. This is the only way to the Father.

Don’t let McLaren fool you. His claims are just as **“exclusivist”** as anyone else’s. McLaren is proclaiming that if you don’t understand the way he understands, then you are wrong and going the wrong way.

“In” Or “Out”?

McLaren seems to take pleasure in contending us that we should not be preoccupied with the questions: **“Who is in?”** and **“Who is out?”** McLaren falsely asserts that whoever asks such a question only is concerned about whether others are **“out,”** and we are **“in.”**

We want to know with clarity exactly who’s “in” and who’s “out.” Our preoccupation gives rise to the uncomfortable suspicion that some of us won’t be as happy being “in” unless sufficient numbers of people are “out.”²⁹

Does it not occur to McLaren that maybe we ask these questions because we are concerned about our own eternal destiny and not at all with keeping anyone out? Why does McLaren seem to assume the worst when he is talking about Evangelical and/or Fundamental Christians?

McLaren displays a decided double standard when he employs the same kind of approach. He writes:

But Jesus gives us not the in-and-out information we may want, but what we actually need: he assures us that we don’t have to understand everything as long as we trust him, and the vision of the Father we receive through him.³⁰

Of course, this is just as much an **“in-and-out”** statement as any other. You are *in* **“as long as we trust him;”** but what about those who don’t trust Him? According to McLaren, you are *in* if you trust Him, and you can have **“the vision of the Father”** only if you are *in*. Notice he says:

If we trust him, then, we will have what we need, even though we may not have all the answers.³¹

Of course, the corollary of this is that those who don’t trust will not have what they need. McLaren may accuse me of concentrating on the negative, but what this shows is that for all of McLaren’s effort to denigrate those who are concerned with being **“in”** or **“out,”** McLaren is doing exactly the same thing. Basically, he is substituting his own **“in-and-out information”** for the **“in-and-out information”** others promote. The difference is that McLaren attempts to disguise what he is doing. He misrepresents his **“in-and-out information”** as if they were not, in fact, **“in-and-out information.”**

McLaren claims his approach to understanding Jesus’ statements captures the true message as opposed to those whose approach doesn’t; and you are **“in”** only if you accept McLaren’s account. In other words, we must trust Jesus, be content that McLaren understands **“the vision of the Father through him,”** and what is going on even if we don’t. No one denies the need to trust Jesus, but why should we trust McLaren to have all the answers? McLaren says we should trust Jesus:

... even though we may not have all the answers.

That includes conclusive answers to our persistent curiosity about who is in and who is out.³²

Why is it illegitimate to need to know whether I am in or

out? Should I not be concerned with my eternal destiny? Why does McLaren assume my need to know is some mere *curiosity* and not a legitimate need to know *the truth* about my own eternal destiny?

In support of his understanding of the text, McLaren asserts:

This kind of question, by the way, may receive the same answer Jesus gives to Peter seven chapters ahead: *What is that to you? You follow me! If we stop looking for information apart from Jesus and instead focus on trusting Jesus ...*³³

But why should anyone think that asking about whether I am **“in”** or **“out”** is **“information apart from Jesus?”**

When employing deceit, it is always a good practice to quote something out-of-context that sounds like it supports your cause, when in context it has nothing to do with your claims. Such is the case with McLaren’s use of the quote of Jesus’ statement in Jn. 21:22. Peter’s question had nothing to do with whether John was **“in-or-out”** and neither did Jesus’ response. And why should we think that Jesus is not concerned about our questions? In fact, are not we commanded to make our calling and election sure?

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (2 Pet. 1:10).

The point here is that we should be eager to confirm that we are **“in”** and not **“out!”** How do we do this? Peter says:

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins (2 Pet. 1:9).

To what **“qualities”** is Peter referring? To those he had just mentioned:

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love (2 Pet. 1:5–7).

These are the qualities that should characterize the person who has been called unto salvation by God. Notice for McLaren, these qualities have nothing to do with whether you are in or out; and yet, for the Apostle Peter, having and exhibiting these qualities is the basis upon which a believer makes his **“calling and election sure.”** In other words, whether they are *in* or *out*. Peter is not saying you are saved because you have these qualities and you are not saved if you don’t exhibit them. Peter is saying that these qualities can help you confirm (Greek = *bebaian poieisthai*, lit. “firm to make”) that you have been called and elected by God. Otherwise you stumble around like a blind man or a shortsighted man not knowing whether you are a child of God or not! And for Peter, that’s not the way you should live. You should know that you are **“in”** and you should confirm that you are **“in.”** McLaren makes into a vice what Peter commands us to do.

McLaren warns us that we should not be preoccupied with the question of **“who is in”** and **“who is out,”** but rather, we should **“focus on trusting Jesus,”** as if these are contradictory actions. Why cannot I do both? But, according to McLaren, if we focus on trusting in Jesus, **“we will obey his commandment to**

love one another, and we will do great things ...”³⁴ But ought we not obey the other commandments in God’s Word like the one the Apostle Peter gave us to make our calling and election sure?

As well as the Apostle Paul’s instruction to:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless, indeed, you fail the test! (2 Cor. 13:5, NASB)

Where Are You Going?

At the end of his presentation, McLaren comes back to the initial question: “Is Jesus the only way?” McLaren’s response is:

It depends on where we’re trying to go. If we want to abandon the earth as a lost cause and evacuate upward to heaven as soon as possible, I suspect we’re going in a different direction than Jesus.³⁵

But who claims such a thing? And why does McLaren have to distort the simple question? Is it because he cannot give a straight answer without exposing his actual belief that Jesus is not the only way to the Father?

McLaren quotes Phil. 2:5–11, and then he comments:

Jesus’ movement is downward. Heaven to earth, earth to humanity, humanity to servanthood, servanthood to suffering and death.³⁶

But he conveniently ignores the rest: from His Death ... to His Burial in the grave; from His Burial ... to His bodily Resurrection and the highest exaltation—“**God highly exalted Him**” (Phi. 2:9)—and *where* He is, *we will be*, if we trust Him.

McLaren then writes:

He doesn’t teach us to pray, “May we go to heaven where your will is done, unlike earth,” but rather, “May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as in heaven.”³⁷

Once again, McLaren doesn’t give us all the information. He ignores what Jesus then goes on to say:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 5:19–21).

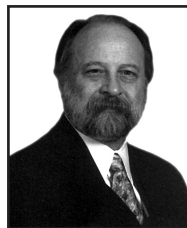
Jesus is not making a suggestion or a request—this is His wise and loving “store-your-real-treasures-where-He is” command. McLaren wants us to get earthy (contrast Phil. 3:19b–20,) and to “**set our direction so that we seek to move down with him...**”³⁸ But according to Jesus, the direction is temporarily down, only because ultimately the direction will be up—up to *where* the Father is, *where* Jesus is, and *where* we *will be* if we trust Him (see Col. 3:1–3).

McLaren is like Enoch—the first son of Cain. Cain was condemned by God to be a restless wanderer on the earth (Gen. 4:12); but instead, he built a city (permanent settlement) on the earth. He called the name of the city Enoch after his son, because that is the ultimate destiny of those separated from God.

I want to be like Enoch—the descendant of Seth. Enoch walked around on this earth with God, but his ultimate destiny was in heaven with God. God took him. Do you want to build a city here on earth as your home; this earth—which eventually will be consumed by fire? Or do you want your home to be in

heaven with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, *where* neither moth nor rust corrupts? Then you had better be concerned about whether you are “in” or “out.” And remember this ... Jesus is the *only way* to *where* we want to go! ☒

*exegesis = the explanation or interpretation of texts, especially religious writings. (Encarta Dictionary)



Thomas A. Howe has been an ordained minister since 1976 and is currently Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary, Matthews, North Carolina. His most recent book is *Daniel in the Preterists’ Den: A Critical Look at Preterist Interpretations of Daniel*. Howe has also co-authored with Dr. Norman Geisler *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, published by Baker Book House.

Thomas received his Ph.D. from Southeastern Baptist

Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina. Thomas is married to Pat, and they have three children and six grandchildren.

ENDNOTES:

1 Brian McLaren, “A Reading of John 14:6,” [http://www.brianmclaren.net/emc/archives/McLaren %20- %20John%2014.6.pdf](http://www.brianmclaren.net/emc/archives/McLaren%20-%20John%2014.6.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2008),

2 Brian McLaren, “A Reading of John 14:6,” [http://www.brianmclaren.net/emc/archives/McLaren %20- %20John%2014.6.pdf](http://www.brianmclaren.net/emc/archives/McLaren%20-%20John%2014.6.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2008), 2

3 Ibid., 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. (emphasis in original).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 2–3

11 Ibid., 3

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 4.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 4–5.

21 Ibid., 5 (emphasis in original).

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 940.

25 Ibid.

26 McLaren, 13.

27 Keener, *Gospel of John*, 940.

28 Ibid., 941.

29 McLaren, 13.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 14

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 14–15.

38 Ibid., 15.

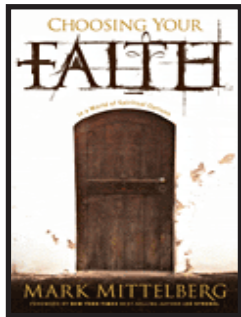
**HAVE NOTHING TO DO
WITH THE FRUITLESS
DEEDS OF DARKNESS,
BUT RATHER EXPOSE
THEM.**

Ephesians 5:11

IN REVIEW

L. L. (Don) Veinot Shares His Thoughts On Three Recently Published Books

One of the ways we keep up with things is to read what others are or will be reading. At any given time, there are 8-10 books on my desk, and I tend to take on reading them one at a time in between other aspects of the ministry. From time to time, we post our reviews on the internet, and since Stephen Burnett reviewed *Why We're Not Emergent by Two Guys Who Should Be* on our *Crux* blog, it seemed about time for me to get a little caught up on these reviews as well.



The first review is of Mark Mittelberg's latest offering: *Choosing Your Faith: In a World of Spiritual Options* (2008; Tyndale House Publishers, \$19.99). Mark has done a service to believers and non-believers in laying out and analyzing criteria by which we can and should examine our world view and embrace only the beliefs which pass the test. Although an Evangelical himself, the criteria he

discusses can and should be applied to the claims regarding Christianity as well. The book isn't directly an apologetic for Christianity, as much as it is a call to ask the hard questions, understand relativism, pragmatism, tradition, authority, reality, intuition, knowledge, mysticism, logic, evidence and science. The study of these issues can be helpful or, if not properly understood, harmful. For example, in his chapter "I Just *Feel* That It's True," he discusses a number of instances where individuals made decisions based on feelings they had. He then tests them to see if there wasn't something else that was influential in guiding their feelings. He opens with a scene from *Star Wars* where Obi-Wan Kenobi has Luke Skywalker practice defending himself with his light saber against a "seeker" robot while wearing a helmet which prevented him from seeking in order to teach him to rely on "feeling" the force. In Mittelberg's analysis, he points out:

To illustrate the limited nature of intuitive information, let's look back through some of our examples, starting with the scene from *Star Wars*. Remember that Obi-Wan Kenobi put the helmet on Luke Skywalker and told him to stop using his eyes and just act on his on instinct. But notice that Obi-Wan failed to heed his own advice. That is, he did not put on his helmet to block his own sight in order to instinctively sense how Luke

was doing with this new, superior approach. Instead, he stood and observed him in the old-fashioned way – with his own two eyes – which were just like the ones he told Luke not to be deceived by. So much for stretching out your feelings. (p. 94-95)

Choosing Your Faith: In a World of Spiritual Options would be good to use in a small-group setting to discuss and develop your thinking in order to be better able to ask questions of the beliefs of others. It would also be a good book to give to non-believers who are willing to question their views and apply the criteria to faith delivered once for all to the saints (Jude 3).

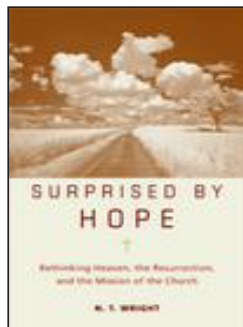


Where Are All The Brothers? by Eric C. Redmond (2008, Crossway Publishing, \$9.99) is a compact book (103 pages) that is an introductory-level apologetic which includes other issues and objections not commonly addressed in a defense of the faith. The chapter titles are:

- 1 - Isn't the Church Full of Hypocrites?
- 2 - Wasn't the Bible Written by Men?
- 3 - Isn't the Church Geared Toward Women?
- 4 - Isn't the Preacher Just a Man?
- 5 - Doesn't Islam Offer More for Black Men?
- 6 - Aren't some Churches Just After Your Money?
- 7 - Is Organized Religion Necessary?
- 8 - Jesus Never Claimed to Be God, Did He?
- 9 - What to Look for to Find a Good Church.

Some of the material is more pertinent to the African-American culture, but much can be helpful to men in general. The chapter "What to Look for to Find a Good Church" is short, to the point, and gives a list of vital things to consider which can be helpful for those who have been in cults and are leery about mak-

ing another commitment. The appendixes are helpful especially Appendix B, “The Church Does Not Welcome Homosexuals.” Mainly, Redmond attempts to answer the primary objections for not getting involved in church. Again, it is introductory level, but many people are at that level and may be more willing to read this than something more in-depth.



Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church by N.T. Wright (2008, HarperOne, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, \$24.95). I touched on some of this in the *Crux* blog article, “Is Wright Wrong?” in February, but I wanted to delay further comment until I had the opportunity of reading it myself. It is a mixed bag; and as I read it, I can see why Brian McLaren would gravitate toward some of the things Wright has to say.

On the positive side, Wright does a very good job of articulating the physicality of the Resurrection—both our Lord’s in the past and ours in the future.

In Wright’s discussion of how we examine historical evidence, he rightly points out that:

There are, after all, different types of knowing. Science studies the repeatable; history studies the unrepeatable. Caesar only crossed the Rubicon once and if he’d crossed it again it would have meant something different the second time. There was, and could be, only one first landing on the moon. The fall of the second Jerusalem Temple took place in A.D. 70 and never happened again. Historians don’t of course see this as a problem and are usually not shy about declaring that these events certainly took place, even though we can’t repeat them in the laboratory. (p. 64)

In the book, many of his concerns surround his contention that many or, perhaps, most believers are not well taught on this importance of the physicality of the Resurrection and the physical connectedness of the Resurrection body to our current body. As a result, there is some sloppy thinking on what happens when we die. As I read *Surprised by Hope*, I was reminded of Bill Hybels’ March 19, 1996 talk: “Life Beyond The Grave,” which he opened with the words, “**Jesus taught that every single human being would be resurrected immediately following death...**” It is little wonder that when the pastor of one of the largest churches in America seems to have little biblical understanding of the Resurrection, many Christians, likewise, are unclear or confused on this issue. This really bothers Wright and, unfortunately, leads him to an equally false belief:

A massive assumption has been made in Western Christianity that the purpose of being a Christian is simply, or at least mainly, to “go to heaven when you die,” and texts that don’t say that but that mention heaven

are read as if they did say it, and texts that say the opposite, like Romans 8:18-25 and Revelation 21-22, are simply screened out as if they didn’t exist. (p. 90)

I don’t know of very many Christians, pastors, or Christian authors who hold this view. Rather, they primarily teach that being with Christ and accepted by God is the purpose of being a Christian. Many think of Christ as being in heaven and, therefore, describe their future state of being with Him as “in heaven.” However, Wright’s false premise becomes necessary to support the second half of the book. By portraying Evangelicals as primarily concerned about getting to heaven—and particularly by those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture and pre-millennial tribulation—he erects a straw man upon whom he—and, through his writings, Brian McLaren and the emerging church—can foist much of the world’s evil. The/His contention is that the church has shirked its responsibility of kingdom living, and thus, we still have poverty, sickness, an imbalance of wealth, etc. In essence, he holds Christians responsible for what unbelievers do, and how they act, with little if any acknowledgement of the sacrifices and missions on the part of many churches and believers over the centuries. For example, Wright states:

As far as I can see, the major task that faces us in our generation, corresponding to the issue of slavery two centuries ago, is that of the massive economic imbalance of the world, one major symptom is the ridiculous and unpayable Third World debt. I have spoken about this many times over the last few years, and I have a sense that some of us, like old Wilberforce on the subject of slavery, are actually called to bore the pants off people by going on and on about it until eventually the point is taken and the world is changed. There are many good books on the subject from different points of view, and I don’t want to go into the arguments now. I simply want to record my conviction that this is the number one moral issue of our day. Sex matters enormously, but global justice matters far, far more. The present system of global debt is the real immoral scandal, the dirty little secret – or rather the dirty enormous secret – of glitzy Western capitalism. (p. 216–217)

Should Christians be concerned about the poor, the sick and the hungry [even though Jesus told us the poor would always be with us (Mt. 26:11, Mk. 14:7, Jn. 12:8)]? Absolutely. Should believers live a life commensurate with the type of servanthood which our Lord displayed? To be certain. I am not sure how that gives us the right to demand that unbelievers live and act like believers or to hold them to biblical standards; and Wright never attempts to support his proposals which must result in exactly these actions. Although there are many things in the second half of the book that are very good, there are others that are very troublesome; and I can see why the emerging church leaders look to him as their theologian of choice. This is a book that needs to be read with care, much thought, and with a group of a few others to wrestle with the ideas he is promoting.



Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

Journal

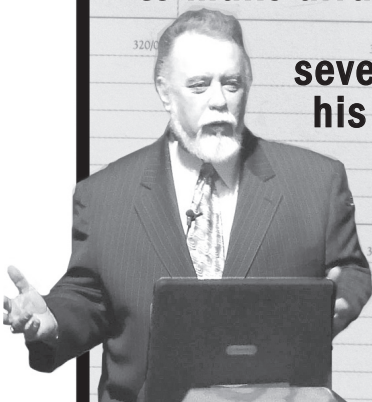
**Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.
P.O. Box 446
Wonder Lake, IL 60097-0446**

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LOMBARD, IL
PERMIT NO. 1

Address Service Requested

There Are Still Dates Available!

MCOI is currently taking requests for the Fall and Winter speaking schedule. If you would like to have Don Veinot visit your church, please contact us for details and to make arrangements. Whether it's for one day or several nights, Don and his staff have a variety of topics to choose from, all of which are relevant to the Church today.



In This Issue!

Is McLaren Changing Everything?.....Page 1
By L.L. (Don) Veinot

Gospel For a New Age.....Page 6
By Marcia Montenegro

Is Jesus The Only Way To What?.....Page 12
A Critique of Brian McLaren's
A Reading of John 3:16
By Dr. Thomas Howe

In Review.....Page 18
By L.L. (Don) Veinot

**Midwest
Christian
Outreach
Inc.**