

# Brian D McLaren: Everything must change

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## Jesus, Global crises, and a revolution of hope

Thomas Nelson 2007

summary by Alison Morgan Feb 2010

This is a radical assessment of our assumptions and behaviour as a society, and a call to live in a different way according to a different framing story. He rejects a faith which is focussed only on being 'saved' and which expects the destruction of the world in favour of one which begins to live a different way in the here and now. He is compelling on the need to look beyond the individual at the whole framework in which we live, and right that a defeatist expectation of the world's imminent end is not helpful – but perhaps over optimistic that the new Jerusalem can in fact be created in the here and now.

### 1. Hope happens

Book is the result of 'grappling to understand our world's top problems and to see them in relation to the life and message of Jesus'. And the thought that Jesus calls for a simple response which can foment a revolution of hope, a hope that can change everything. 'This book is a first visit to a new way of seeing the world and hearing the message of Jesus'.

## I : TWO PREOCCUPYING QUESTIONS

### 2. The Amahoro flowing between us

2 questions which have always intrigued him: what are the biggest problems in the world; and what does Jesus have to say about these global problems?

*Amahoro* means peace in Burundi; he went there.

### 3. Everything must change

He went to Burundi and listened to Claude, who said all his life he heard only one sermon: *you are a sinner and you are going to hell; you need to repent and believe in Jesus; otherwise if he comes back and you are not ready you will go to hell forever*. It was followed by 1m people dying in genocide in Burundi, nearly 1m more in Rwanda; by massive foreign aid; and by still more poverty. Claude realised he'd never heard a sermon which had addressed these realities. Did God only care about what happened after we died? Or did he send Jesus to teach us how to avoid genocide by learning to love each other, how to overcome tribalism and poverty by following his path, how to deal with injustice and corruption, and how to make a better life here on earth, in East Africa?

This is not an African problem; it is the same in the West. Do we teach about exploitation, slavery, racism, prejudice, oppression, creation? What was Jesus' essential message? It was: the kingdom of God, not just in the next life but also in this one – how his will can be done on earth as in heaven. This can't be done by adjustment; only by total change.

### 4. Not what Jesus intended

An AIDS worker speaking in church in S Africa: you tell them they can be healed, they can be born again, and they must tithe in order to support your ministry – but you never teach them how to live. His conclusion: religion can become little more than a chaplain to a failing and dysfunctional culture. A right understanding of God and faith can train people to become a force for transformation; a misguided understanding is an opiate that keeps them still serving the system that is destroying them. This conversation is echoed all over the global south.

### 5. Second thoughts had come to stay

In the West, millions of young adults have dropped out of church; because the Christian religion has specialised in dealing with 'spiritual' needs to the exclusion of physical and social ones. It doesn't address the pressing issues of our world. So they leave. 'A message purporting to be the best news in the world should be

doing better than this'. 34. We need the freedom to seek and articulate a debugged version of the Christian faith that we can hold with confidence, honesty and hope. Modernism was a period of excessive confidence, based on a foundationalist methodology based on reason alone (Descartes) and of domineering framing stories or metanarratives which permitted atrocities. But at the heart of the life and message of Jesus was an attempt to expose, challenge, confront, transform and replace the unhealthy framing stories of his day – and is there a relation between those and ours? *NB is our lack of confidence an overflow from misplaced confidence; and should we remember that the solution is not to backtrack from confidence but to be confident in the right things?*

## II : SUICIDAL SYSTEM

### 6. Simmering on the back burner of my mind

'One might wish there were more books on averting the destruction of the earth than books amusing us while it proceeds'... What are our top global problems? Various lists in the MDGs. Rick Warren has come up with 5 things:

1. Spiritual emptiness – we must plant churches that will proclaim the gospel
2. Poor leadership – we must equip servant leaders
3. Poverty – we must assist the poor
4. Disease – we must care for the sick
5. Ignorance – we must educate the next generation

'No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it' – Einstein.

Goudzwaard, Vander Venner and Van Heemst list three areas: global poverty, environmental destruction, increasing violence; and suggest they are all symptoms of a deeper disease, one of ideology. That's the real issue.

### 7. Three interlocking systems

We have created a suicide machine in which different facts of contemporary life connect to destroy, devalue and damage. It consists of 3 interlocking subsystems:

1. Desire for prosperity – which we channel into consumer systems
2. Desire for security – which we turn into systems of weapons, intelligence, control, surveillance
3. Desire for equity – systems of law, press, charity.

### 8. That could never happen to us – global warming

### 9. The stories we tell ourselves

You have 60 trillion cells – there are 10,000 times the number of cells in your body as there are people on earth. All these cells are organised into 10 organ systems which work within one framing story. So it is with societies – they are driven by the framing stories we tell ourselves as groups. Ours is failing. The prosperity system is based on economic growth, which is unsustainable. The equity system legitimizes the gap between rich and poor; violence and starvation result. The security system is based on lethal weapons. An unhealthy framing story produces destructive narratives = violent, isolationary, theocapitalist ones. We need an alternative framing story. *Jesus confronted the framing story that drove the society of his day and offered a radical alternative, seeking to turn their trajectory from a downward arc of self-destruction to an ascending spiral of transformation and hope.* We, on the other hand, have domesticated him and made him into part of the dominant framing story.

## II : REFRAMING JESUS

### 10. How much more ironic

What is the story we find ourselves in?

- Conventional view: perfect creation, fall, punishment, hell – except for those exempted
- Emerging view: world created good, human rebellion has filled it with injustice

What questions did Jesus come to answer?

- CV: how can individuals be saved; how can they be happy until heaven?
- EV: what must be done about the mess we are in?

How did Jesus respond to the crisis?

- CV: repent and believe, and you will be saved
- EV: good news, God loves humanity, turn from your path, follow a new way, become my disciple and you will be transformed and participate in the transformation of the world

Why is Jesus important?

- CV: he came to solve the problem of original sin
- He came to be saviour of the world, the earth and all it contains from its ongoing destruction because of human evil

The conventional view poses no significant challenge to the dominant framing story.

1. The EV sees Jesus as a medicinal cure to a lethal infection that plagues humanity; the CV sees him as the legal solution to a capital infraction against God.
2. The EV sees God's focus as the transformation and salvation of humanity within history; the CV offers little hope for history, focussing instead on its destruction and replacement.
3. The EV sees God's concern as holistic, the CV as dualistic.
4. In the EV God cares about all people and wishes to bless all people; in the CV God blesses an elect group.
5. In the EV God wants to save us/world from the suicidal machinery of a false framing story; in the CV he must destroy it. The CV sees the world as moving towards destruction and creates a kind of religious death wish.
- 6.

The CV has put Jesus in the very framing story he sought to subvert. *'We are so familiar with this version of Jesus and the gospel that it is truly difficult to imagine any other alternative. It's as if we've only seen trained lions in circuses behind iron bars, snarling at ships snapped by performing trainers, jumping through hoops and leaping through rings of fire; we cant imagine what a lion living wild and free on the Serengeti Plain would be like. We've got to release Jesus into the wild of his native habitat to let a fresh view emerge', 83.*

Roman empire promised peace, security and equity; through domination, esp. of slaves, servants, tenant farmers, women. Not a good story. And the cross was its symbol.

### **11. Switching jigsaw lids**

Steve Chalke – we have a jigsaw puzzle in a box, but someone's put the wrong lid on so we are using the wrong picture to make it.

### **12. No junk DNA**

Jesus did not, like Sadducees and Herodians, accept the presence of the Empire, or, like Pharisees and Zealots, reject it. He chose a Zealot and a tax collector among his disciples – one from each viewpoint. He rejects the idea of a living to a dual narrative – see the rich young ruler. His steward parables (stewards stood between the ordinary farmer and the wealthy landowner) are politically dynamic – eg the steward who switches sides, Lk 16. His chose title, Son of Man, evokes a dream of liberation from Daniel. His appellation Lord was not a recognition of divine status but a declaration that he, not Caesar, was the earthly authority; it's also the term used for the emperor. The term kingdom of God becomes incandescent in this new framing.

### **13. Jamming the accelerator, slamming the brakes**

Magnificat – rewritten according to the CV, p103! But her son g is not about the solution to the theological problem called original sin.. Zechariah likewise.  
Jesus in Nazareth - not a tame prophet...

### **14. Or so it appeared**

Peter – who do you say I am?

Pilate – what is truth? In his world, truth is plastic.

## **IV : REINTRODUCING JESUS**

### **15. Peace through domination**

Fundamentalist movements try to do this – reimpose laws/codes written for 00s of years ago. Praps we should ask not what would Jesus do, but what did Jesus mean. 'Good news' was Augustus was said to have brought; an inscription describes him as a saviour who brought peace to mankind. Same term used for Jesus-differently. 'Repent and believe'; a phrase used by Josephus when sent to root out a rebellion. He he didn't

mean, give up sinning and have a religious conversion experience. He meant give up your agenda and trust my kingdom agenda. He proposes a new framing story.

### **16. Occupying regime, equity gap, excrement factory**

*'When groups of seemingly disparate people defect and band together in the way of Jesus, they form what we might call unterror cells. They secretly plot detonations of hope. They quietly conspire to set off explosions of spontaneous kindness. They plan gentle coup d'états to replace regimes of domination and oppression with movements of empowerment and service. In a complete overthrow of violent terrorism, they fly airplanes of generosity into towers of need and plant improvised encouragement devices by roadsides and in neighbourhoods everywhere, seeking God's kingdom and God's equity' – 130.*

'We consume time and produce fatigue, consume art and talent and produce entertainment and amusement, consume work and leisure and produce paychecks and heart attacks. And ultimately we consume communities and produce extended families, consume extended families, consume extended families and produce nuclear families, consume nuclear families and produce individuals, consume individuals and produce consumers, and finally consume consumers themselves and produce disembodied fragments called "wants" and "needs" and "markets" and "segments" and "anxieties" and "drives that the economy consumers and excretes and reconsumes in a kind of cannibalistic ferment or rot'. 131. Jesus would speak of the new global love economy of God.

### **17. How different it would be**

The sermon on the Mount offers an alternative to all this, an alternative framing story. The word 'repent' means a profound defection from one framing story and a profound investment of trust in another.

### **18. Which Jesus?**

Dangerous to overemphasize the Jesus of the Second Coming and of Revelation at the expense of the Jesus of the gospels – is it really all a waste of time, or is God powerful to make a difference now?

## **V : THE SECURITY SYSTEM**

### **19. Joining the peace insurgency**

We are in the early stages of a radical reassessment of Jesus. Jesus takes the old 'destroy the Canaanites' narrative and turns it round – he shows mercy to a Canaanite woman. We are involved in a peace insurgency.

### **20. Whose side are we on?**

Few of us live consistently within Jesus' framing story. It has little influence on global/national security; we (esp US) live in a framing story of redemptive violence, which says peace can be achieved only through elimination of our enemies. The 2006 US military budget was 21x that of diplomacy and foreign aid combined. A mere 10% of the US military budget, if reinvested in foreign aid/development, could care for the basic needs of the entire world's poor. Half a percent would halve African hunger by 2015. Alfred Nobel invented dynamite and called it 'security powder', hoping it would be a tool of violence so terrible it would bring peace. It brought Hiroshima.

### **21. Layers and layers more**

The more imperial the US has become, the greater the resentment; the greater the resentment, the more fearful the US and the more it arms itself... Between 1998 and 2001, the US, UK and France earned more from selling arms to developing countries than they gave them in aid. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 43m military personnel and 62m civilians were killed. There have been only 29 years in human history during which a war was not underway somewhere (historian Will Durant). War is an addiction; it distracts us from the impotent ordinariness of peace, and brings a 'high'.

### **22. Joining warriors anonymous**

Jesus proposes a craving for justice instead of a craving for war (nb he doesn't propose pacifism).

## VI : THE PROSPERITY SYSTEM

### 23. Capitalism as God

The security system exists to support the prosperity system. Our prosperity system has been dubbed theocapitalism (Tom Beaudouin) – ie it is a system of seeking prosperity that functions like a religion/cult. Consumer media capitalism offers malls as cathedrals, amusement parks as shrines of pilgrimage, celebrities as saints/priests, TV as an altar, multinationals as denominations. Consumer media capitalism provides identity, community, trust (in brands), ecstasy, transcendence (through icons), conversion (to a brand family), rest (customer satisfaction and life enhancement). It's an anonymous spiritual discipline. It has 4 spiritual laws:

1. Progress through rapid growth
2. Serenity through possession and consumption – happiness comes from owning and using more (why does it become wealth only when someone puts a fence round it and declares it private property?).
3. Salvation through competition
4. Freedom to prosper through unaccountable corporations

Bumper stickers: WWJB – who would Jesus bomb? WWJE – who would Jesus exploit?

### 24. Obligations to nonexistent future people

Growth is not the solution to all problems. Imagine 1.2b Chinese with cars, fridges, washing machines etc; eating more meat – and the ecological consequences. We've been building a skyscraper which won't take another 20 stories.

### 25. Quick Bliss through footwear, palate grease and skin paint, & 26. Collaboration for coliberation.

Through his good news, his framing story of the kingdom of God, Jesus recruits heroes to join him in deconstructing the suicidal machinery of theocapitalism. Then he invites them to build a new kind of prosperity system, based on 4 new laws:

1. The law of good deeds for the common good – economy isn't a bad thing, and Jesus uses business imagery often; the exchange of money represents the exchange of trust, service, love, even worship. Economic, ecological and social sustainability replaces short term profit.
2. The law of satisfaction through gratitude and sharing. Relationships are a better predictor of happiness than money – in a global survey by Josef Pieper of happiness, the top 4 were rich Americans (5.6 out of 7), the Amish (5.6), the Masai (5.7) and, top, the Greenland Inuits (5.9).
3. The law of salvation through seeking justice – rather than domination through competition. Mt 6.33.
4. The law of freedom to prosper by building better communities. Communism was good at distribution but ended up distributing poverty evenly. Capitalism is good at production but weak at distribution – great gap between rich and poor. Jesus talks about honesty (Zaccheus), accountability (steward, Lk 12).

## VII : THE EQUITY SYSTEM

### 27. On the other side of the rebel Jesus

Political leadership is confined to 2 parties both parasitic on corporate money and interests.

In 2000, developed nations gave aid investment of 3% of their GDP to developing nations; and developing nations gave 6.3% of theirs in debt repayments. They got poorer. In 2005 the G8 nations cancelled some debts – 2% of them. 6m children under 5 starve each year. Over 1b people face decline in living standards.

### 28. Beyond blame and shame

It's not the fault of the rich, who often have just worked hard – it's a systematic injustice which leads to the wealth of the rich and the poverty of the poor. Cf Matt 5, equal pay reflects not equal work but unequal opportunity to work. Women are seen as equal to men.

Only a fraction of our sins are personal – we inherit a sort of sin frozen into the institutions and social arrangements within which we are born. And yet we reduce the scope of the gospel to personal and family issues. It's a shrunken gospel, and the world says no thanks.

### **29. A new kind of question**

1% of the world's income could provide universal water, health care, education and nutrition. Not to do this makes an unsafe world even for the most privileged – it makes no sense. Can we imagine the world another way?

### **30. Organized religion or religion organizing for the common good?**

Overcoming extreme poverty requires action, according to economists, in 7 basic categories: trade, aid, debt, limits, wages, justice, community.

## **VIII : A REVOLUTION OF HOPE**

### **31. The most radical thing we can do**

Can the suicide machine be stopped, the earth liberated from the destructive framing story that drives it? No one really knows. But the current framing story has no power except the power we give it by believing it. Believing an alternative one may be the most radical thing we ever do.

Summary:

1. We live in a societal system with 3 subsystems (prosperity, security, equity) and is guided by a framing story
2. The system goes suicidal when driven by a destructive framing story (one which employs narratives of domination, revolution, withdrawal)
3. Jesus proposed a new framing story, neither reacting violently to nor withdrawing from the current one.
4. His new framing story invited people to change the world.

### **32. An unfolding, emergent, spiralling process**

*There is one great step we can take to dismantle the suicide machine and the framing stories that legitimize it: to stop believing in it, and to believe, in its place, a different story, the story of the kingdom of God. 275.*

### **33. Exposing the covert curriculum**

Jesus' movement wasn't called Christianity, which sounds institutional, it was called The Way – Acts 9.2; 22.4; 24.14; 1 Cor 13.1, 14.1; Eph 5.2; Col 2.6, 3.7; Rom 6.4; 1 John 1.7.

Everywhere we are fed hidden messages, values. Our message: another world is possible, available now for all who believe. We need to find ways of living it together.

### **34. Moving mountains**

Surely then the hopeful vision of the kingdom of God will begin to reshape our world in its own hopeful image. We don't need to hold to an eschatology of abandonment and despair; the new Jerusalem seeks to inspire our imaginations with hope about what our world can actually become through the good news of the kingdom of God.

Our call to action:

1. Personal action – making decisions a different way, working a different way, relating a different way
2. Community action – modelling what we believe
3. Public (social) action – using nonviolent methods of social change
4. Global action

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