

# Brian McLaren on Hell

## Taking Another Look

During an interview with Sherry Huang of *Beliefnet* Emergent Church guru Brian McLaren was asked the following question:

**What made you want to tackle the concept of hell in the final book of your trilogy?**

In the message of Jesus, I think there is a balance between how the message relates to our world in history as we know it and how it relates to the experience of people beyond death, outside of history. For many Christians, their faith is primarily about what happens to people after they die. That distracts them from seeking justice and living in a compassionate way while we're still alive in this life. We need to go back and take another look at Jesus' teachings about hell. For so many people, the conventional teaching about hell makes God seem vicious. That's not something we should let stand.

[http://www.beliefnet.com/story/165/story\\_16589\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/165/story_16589_1.html)

The immediate problem that emerges here is that we can see a supposed minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ apparently more concerned about what “people” allegedly think about God and Hell than what the Scripture actually says. Men and women let me clue you in that as soon as you see the phrase “take another look at” by these theologians of the Emergent Church or any other cultic organization, you should run—not walk—but run to the nearest exit. This is their serpentine smokescreen while they are busy redefining the historic orthodox Christian *faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*. And we need to remember that the true minister of the Lord – *must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught* (Titus 1:9).

Now let's consider something from the very Rev. Dr. Alan Jones, Episcopal priest and Dean of Grace Cathedral, from his book *Reimagining Christianity*. While Jones is talking about Roman Catholic writer James Carrol and his view about the cross of Christ, Jones tells us that Carrol “believes that we have made the mistake of putting the cross at the center of Christianity in the wrong way.” Jones says further that Carrol has said that the Christian faith must “**remove the cross** from the center of Christianity. The Church's fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of **the cross must be reimagined** in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it.”(132).

Notice here that instead of coming right out and admitting this is what he himself believes Jones instead hides behind what is implied of Carrol's words. He says, “This doesn't mean that I agree with Carrol in every particular, but I do think that **basic beliefs** should always be open to reimagining” (ibid). You may ask: “But what does this have to do with Brian McLaren and his view concerning the doctrine of Hell?” Plenty, because here is McLaren's own glowing endorsement of this book of heresy by Jones:

It used to be that Christian institutions and systems of dogma sustained the spiritual life of Christians. Increasingly spirituality itself is what sustains everything else Alan Jones is a pioneer in reimagining a Christian faith that emerges from authentic spirituality. His work stimulates and encourages me deeply. (back cover)

And in *Reimagining Christianity*, where Alan Jones is “reimagining a Christian faith that emerges from authentic spirituality” that McLaren just told us “stimulates and encourages” him

“deeply,” on page 168 we read a crystal clear denial of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, a cardinal doctrine of the historic orthodox Christian Church. The heretical Jones writes: “implicit in the cross that Jesus' sacrifice was to appease an angry God. Penal substitution was the name of **this vile doctrine.**” I cover this in much more depth in “Emergent Church: Guru Brian McLaren.”

So in Jones' theology where does all this reimagining of the Christian faith that so inspires McLaren actually lead us? It leads, says Jones, to what he calls “the converted life.” As we turn to p. 200 Jones explains that, “The goal of the converted life is to find God in all things and is based on the conviction of the unity of reality. Everything is connected. St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) tells us that those advanced in the spiritual life constantly contemplate God in every creature. This life is based on trusting the immediate relationship we have with God, since a human being is, by definition, the place where God chooses to dwell.”

### **The Disappearing Doctrine Of Hell**

Now we can see the inclusivism and universalism begin to emerge, and as we turn to another *Beliefnet* interview we will see McLaren beginning to set the stage for this heresy to come more fully into the Emergent Church Movement. For this counterfeit Christian movement is already “reimagining” Christianity into exactly this type of inclusivism through its pseudo-philosophical denial of the vicarious penal substitutionary atonement of Christ Jesus on the cross. The question is: When are Evangelical leaders going to wake up to the fact that men like McLaren are already turning their back on proper doctrine by denying what God the Holy Spirit revealed in the Bible He wrote? And you need to know that as these men continue to turn away from God, the Lord will also turn His back on them. The Bible says – *because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee* (Hosea 4:6, **KJV**).

For a little bit further insight into where the Emergent Church is heading in its lack of consensus regarding the doctrine of eternal conscious torment of the wicked dead in a literal place Jesus called Hell. On the *Stand To Reason* radio program Kimball is asked by a caller if there is a consensus view among the leadership of the Emergent Church on the doctrine of hell. Here is his reply:

I would say Brian McLaren's latest book deals with the issue of Hell, but there is no consensus at all about that. That's one of these issues that's being discussed and there's no formal opinion of it. I personally, though I wish it wasn't, for most people, I still personally believe in a—that there is some sort of Hell. I don't know what it is, or what it is going to be like. There's a lot of metaphors used in the Bible, but that's my own personal opinion about that. But again it's my opinion, and I'm sure of you talked to other guys they'd say different things so that's all I can say. But there's no consensus on those things.

[My view] isn't traditional, Hell, and here's four descriptions of it, taking too much literal meaning into some of the metaphors that we use to describe it. It's a mystery but I see it as the absence of God, and I don't know what that will be, but it's a big motivator for me in my evangelistic efforts.

On *Beliefnet* we read a little bit more about Brian McLaren's theology in this excerpt “from ‘The Last Word and the Word After That,’ a fictional pastor who has been suspended by his church describes his struggles with the theology of hell” ([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story\\_17371\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story_17371_1.html)). As I said before, a most troubling

aspect of this kind of theological “double-speak,” rooted as it is in philosophical word games, is the hiding behind the words of others. But the fact remains that although this story is set in fiction, from what we have seen above with McLaren’s endorsement of Alan Jones, it is giving us a glimpse into where his own theology is heading.

As this Pastor Dan deals with his daughter Jess and her questions about the doctrine of Hell—whether he knows it or not—McLaren gives us a prophetic peek into the not so distant future of the Emergent Church and their own evolving theology concerning Hell:

I had been taught exclusivism since childhood: everyone was excluded from heaven after death unless they were included among the personally, individually, consciously "born again" or "saved." In college, through the writings of C. S. Lewis, I encountered a kinder, gentler modification of exclusivism that acknowledges that it is possible to be saved by Christ without ever having "prayed to receive Christ."

His words "led by God's secret influence" always reminded me of Paul's Words in Romans 8—"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God"—and that always kept the inclusivist back door secretly open for me, even though most of my colleagues and nearly all of my parishioners considered me an orthodox exclusivist.

Also growing in popularity was conditionalism, or conditional immortality-exclusivism or inclusivism minus the idea of "eternal conscious torment" (abbreviated ECT by its critics), which meant that the unredeemed would be punished for their wrongs and then would cease to exist or that only the redeemed would be resurrected from the unconscious sleep of death. I guess you could say that I was, in reputation, at least, an exclusivist who had secret inclusivist leanings and who could tolerate conditionalists. But universalism was another story. It went further than I was willing to go. ([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story\\_17371\\_3.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story_17371_3.html))

Well, at least for now anyway. But as my friend Cecil Andrews of **Take Heed Ministries** says “I have found over the years that what I would call the ‘shoots and buds’ of someone’s ‘heresies’ have a tendency to develop and strengthen over time until they eventually ‘blossom fully’.” And looking at a recent answer about the doctrine of Hell from his website, McLaren is clearly drifting in that very direction. A reader asks McLaren:

**Brian,** ... You do a wonderful job of pointing out the history of “hell” and give a sweeping timeline that puts most people on the same page. I sighed in relief with how you dealt with Jesus debunking the Pharisee’s teaching... But what about Jesus’ private teaching to the disciples? Matthew 13 has examples of the Wheat and the Weeds & the Fishing Net and when Jesus’ would have the perfect opportunity to instill a new, dare I say it, generous view of Hell, it appears on the surface that he doesn’t. Maybe I’m asking the wrong question... but then I don’t know what the right question would be. Your thoughts and insights have been a blessing and have stretched my so called “ortho-fill-in-the-blank-here”. Thank you.

**Answer:** The reason, I think, that Jesus doesn’t instill a new vision of hell is that hell is really not the main preoccupation in his mind. Can I recommend you explore three websites – N. T. Wright’s site, [christianfutures.com](http://christianfutures.com), and the site for Open Source Theology? I think you’d find insights there that would put all this in a new light. (<http://www.anewkindofchristian.com/archives/000469.html>)

And as we follow McLaren's suggestion to explore these "insights" and put the doctrine of Hell in "a new light," on the site for Open Source Theology we discover a review of McLaren's book *The Last Word and the Word After That* by Andrew Perriman. In "Brian McLaren on hell," Perriman, who is also an Emergent Church planter with Christian Associates International writes:

If Christians today use the language of hell to exclude others, they risk aligning themselves not with Jesus but with the Pharisees, and so they themselves are challenged by Jesus' warning that the justice of God will come upon those who lack compassion. The process of deconstruction can then be taken a step further. Although at a certain level the language of hell can be used to maintain a sense of moral order, the vision of God that lies at the heart of Christianity must sooner or later replace fear with love, making hell a redundant construct (75). In the notes at the end of the book McLaren sums up his position in his own words:

The language of hell, in my view, like the language of biblical prophecy in general, is not intended to provide literal or detailed fortune-telling or prognostication about the hereafter, nor is it intended to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but rather it is intended to motivate us in the here and now to realize our ultimate accountability to a God of mercy and justice and in that light to rethink everything and to seek first the kingdom and justice of God. (188-189)  
(<http://www.opensourcetheology.net/book/print/656>)

### **Rethinking Himself Right Out Of The Faith**

Here again we see McLaren encourage us to "rethink," which is a buzzword of liberal theology. But one should understand that as McLaren drifts further away from orthodox Christianity—if he can even see it anymore—through his associations with, and endorsements of heretics like Alan Jones, God will also abandon him even further. The tragic fact is that all who follow this dead liberalism and the empty social gospel espoused by McLaren will end up just the same as he will unless he repents and returns to *faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith* (1 Timothy 1:19). This generation we live in is not one to play at being a Christian, and McLaren had best know that – *The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message* (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

This Emergent Church movement is growing very quickly and without a doubt it is creating a subversive influence within the Body of Christ. The Bible clearly tells the true Church of our Lord that we must – *watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people* (Romans 16:17-18). And further we are to – *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned* (Titus 3:10-11).

*Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching...*