



*The Church on the Other Side*  
Copyright © 1998, 2000, 2006 by Brian D. McLaren

Revised edition of *Reinventing Your Church*

Requests for information should be addressed to:  
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McLaren, Brian D., 1956-  
The church on the other side : exploring the radical future of the local  
congregation / Brian D. McLaren.  
p. cm.  
Includes bibliographical references.  
ISBN-10: 0-310-25219-9  
ISBN-13: 978-0-310-25219-1  
1. Evangelistic work—Case studies. 2. Postmodernism—Religious  
aspects—Christianity—Case studies. I. Title.  
BV600.2 M37 2000  
262'.001'7—dc21

2000039261

---

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*™. TNIV®. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers printed in this book are offered as a resource to you. These are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

*Interior design by Michelle Espinoza*

*Printed in the United States of America*

# Contents

<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	9
<i>Preface to the Third Edition</i>	13
Introduction	15
<i>If you have a new world, you need a new church.     You have a new world.</i>	
Practice One: Maximize Discontinuity	23
<i>Distinguish between renewed, restored, and     reinvented churches, and focus on the last.</i>	
Practice Two: Redefine Your Mission	32
<i>Clarify and simplify to “more Christians, better Christians”     in authentic missional community, for the good of the world.</i>	
Practice Three: Exercise Systems Thinking	45
<i>See the church program in terms of interrelated systems     rather than quick fixes.</i>	
Practice Four: Trade Up Traditions for Tradition	57
<i>Distinguish between church traditions and the Christian     Tradition, and move emphasis from the former to the latter.</i>	
Practice Five: Resurrect Theology as Art and Science	70
<i>Stop thinking of theology as a matter of technical training,     in which answers are already known, and rejuvenate     theology through a quest for truth and beauty.</i>	
Practice Six: Design a New Apologetic	77
<i>Find fresh ways to communicate the gospel to     the postmodern mind.</i>	
Practice Seven: Learn a New Rhetoric	91
<i>Realize that old communication patterns are less and less     effective in the new world, and discover new, appropriate     modes of discourse.</i>	

Practice Eight: Abandon Structures as They Are Outgrown <i>Adopt a new paradigm for church structure that allows for routine reengineering based on changes in size, constituency, resources, and strategy.</i>	99
Practice Nine: Save the Leaders <i>Recognize the terrible toll that the transition time is taking on leaders; recognize their immense value to the church at this time; help them to be “saved” for their needed work.</i>	113
Practice Ten: Subsume Missions in Mission <i>Understand the crisis in world missions, and help launch a new missionary movement.</i>	126
Practice Eleven: Look Ahead, Farther Ahead <i>Anchor your hope in the future rather than the past, and explore a new eschatology.</i>	152
Practice Twelve A: Enter the Postmodern World— Part A: Understand It <i>Understand postmodernism, and learn to see it from the inside.</i>	166
Practice Twelve B: Enter the Postmodern World— Part B: Engage It <i>Engage postmodernism, and maximize the opportunities it presents.</i>	177
Practice Twelve C: Enter the Postmodern World— Part C: Get Ready for Revolution <i>Prepare to debug your faith from the viruses of modernity.</i>	197
Practice Thirteen: Add to This List <i>Help your church become a community of learners, people on a journey, and expect to make your own fresh discoveries in your own local context.</i>	211
<i>Notes</i>	217
<i>About the Author</i>	223

Practice 1

**Maximize Discontinuity**

*Distinguish between renewed, restored, and reinvented churches, and focus on the last.*

Here we are, in this middle zone, this transition zone. Behind us is the old world, a familiar way of thinking and living, a settled and agreed-upon set of assumptions. And on the other side of our middle zone is the new world, a world that challenges us to adapt and evolve, a world of danger and possibility, of threat and hope. We are struggling like swimmers in a crosscurrent, trying to figure out how to get out of these frightening waves and make some headway, wondering if we'll make it. Some are trying to tell us the currents aren't so bad, that we will be okay if we just hold steady; soon everything will be as it was before if we just hang in there, resist the change, and go back. It is comforting advice and appeals to many—but I think it is fatal.

That is why our first practice is to maximize discontinuity. That is to say, maybe small changes, superficial changes, incremental changes were enough in the past. But the degree of change we are experiencing now is such that small measures, even a lot of them, aren't enough. Instead, we need major change, qualitative change, revolution, rebirth, reinvention, and not just once, but repeatedly for the foreseeable future.

Margaret Wheatley, in her inspiring book *Leadership and the New Science*, tells a story of the famous physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenburg. In the early twentieth century, they faced a situation analogous in many ways to ours: Their theories didn't fit their newest data. Heisenburg recalled the emotional upheaval of that time:

I remember discussions with Bohr which went through many hours till very late at night and ended almost in despair; and when at the end of the discussion I went alone for a walk in the neighboring park I repeated to myself again and again the question: Can nature possibly be so absurd as it seemed to us in these atomic experiments? . . . here the foundations of physics have started moving; and . . . this motion has caused the feeling that the ground would be cut from science.<sup>1</sup>

From that frustration, as the old Newtonian paradigm proved inadequate to cope with subatomic reality, a breakthrough occurred and quantum theory was born.

For us, the upheaval is equally intense. Our theology, our ways of doing ministry, don't seem to work or fit anymore. We have long discussions, take long walks, and ask agonizing questions, but can't see yet that a breakthrough may just be around the corner, opening the way to exciting new discoveries. We need hope.

If we could get even a brief and dim sighting of where we're going, of what life and faith will be like on the other side of this frustration, I think we would gain new hope. Because as frightening as these cross-currents may be, we will see that on the other side is, as the children of Israel discovered, "a good land, flowing with milk and honey." If we can get a vision of what the land on the other side is like, we can help others make the crossing too. It all starts with a glimpse, a sighting, a shout: "There it is, over there! That's where we need to go!"

Many gifted leaders and wise writers are helping us get the needed sightings. They are painting vivid and inspiring pictures for us: the rediscovered, seeker-driven church (Bill Hybels), the purpose-driven church (Rick Warren), the permission-giving church (William Easum), the resurrected church (Mike Regele), the twenty-first century church (Leith Anderson), the metamorphosed church (Carl George), the new apostolic church (George Hunter), the missional church (Alan Roxburgh and others), the emerging church (Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, and Karen Ward) and more. And on this they nearly all seem to agree: The future belongs to those willing

to let go, to stop trying to minimize the change we face, but rather to maximize the discontinuity. William Easum writes,

A new form of congregational life is dragging Christians kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century. The self-understanding, focus, corporate culture, leadership, organizational styles, and strategies are radically different from those experienced throughout the twentieth century. The future church offers new opportunities and problems and requires a new mindset. . . .

We live in a time unlike any other time that any living person has known. It's not merely that things are changing. Change itself has changed, thereby changing the rules by which we live. . . . there is more to this change than simply a linear extrapolation of rapid change and complexity. Quantum leaps are happening that are nothing like evolution. They remove us almost totally from our previous context. Simply learning to do old chores faster or to be able to adapt old forms to more complex situations no longer produces the desired results. . . . Running harder and harder in ministry will not work in this new world. . . .

Established churches are becoming increasingly ineffective because our past has not prepared us for ministry in the future. The discontinuity we have experienced because of these quantum leaps is comparable to the experience of the residents of East Berlin when the Berlin Wall came down. Nothing in their past prepared them for life without the Wall. Very little in our past has prepared us for ministry in today's world.<sup>2</sup>

To maximize discontinuity, it helps to distinguish between three kinds of churches: new, renewed, and restored.

As we shall see, it is possible to have a new church that is not a new church, and an old church that is a new church. New, as we will use the term here, means new in kind, not in age. A new church is