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Contextualization of the gospel in the West: The emerging church and the example of Brian McLaren

Paper delivered at the 13-15 January 2010 South African Missiological Society meeting in Bloemfontein, by Cobus van Wyngaard

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Introduction

It is with some anxiety that I stand before you today. Not least because I am probably the youngest by a number of years, among theologians and missiologists whom I have respected for years, some whose names I grew up with – my father was doing a Doctorate with Prof Saayman at the time when I was learning the intricate art of climbing trees. Even though this is a cause for anxiety, another reason is even more pressing. The future of what I am discussing here is not certain. Just a week ago Andrew Jones¹, without a doubt one of the most influential voices in the emerging conversation, and an early voice in Emergent Village, made a public statement in which he said Goodbye to Emergent Village, apparently because of “new theological emphases and sectarian attitudes towards church”², and added that he will no longer be using emerging church vocabulary. He, together with Brian McLaren, Tony Jones and others, was one of the early emerging voices in America, and also part of the early Emergent Village network – a network which has proven to be highly influential in the emerging church conversation over the past few years.

The call for papers on the Missio-Logical blog, talk about the challenge of Willem Saayman of a missionary ecclesiology being taken up by proponents of what is known as “emerging church” and “missional ecclesiology”³. It was with total naiveté that I joined the blogging world⁴ and the first of these two groups, the emerging church conversation, while an undergrad student in theology. In the years

¹ Extensively referenced in Gibbs & Bolger (2006).

² <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2010/01/goodbyes-to-emergent-village.html>

³ <http://missionalia.wordpress.com/2009/09/06/call-for-papers-missional-church-in-south-africa-1999-2009-a-moment-of-truth/>

⁴ This was at my first active blog <http://emergingosa.wordpress.com/>, I later moved to the current <http://mycontemplations.wordpress.com/>

since I have continued to be an active, and sometimes less active, participant in the conversations going on in the blogosphere.

The research of Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger (2006) has been important to understanding the emerging church. Looking at a wide variety of churches in North America and the UK they identified as emerging, they attempted to find the core characteristics of emerging churches, the marks of the emerging church. They understood the emerging churches as “communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures” (Gibbs & Bolger 2006:44). Other broad definitions abound, such as Tony Jones who defines “the emergent church” as “the specifically new forms of church life rising from the modern, American church of the twentieth century” (2008:xix), a definition which Norwegian based systematic theologian LeRon Shults use, although changing the word “emergent” to “emerging”⁵ (2009:425). Jonny Baker is widely recognized as an important UK voice in the conversation. Gibbs and Bolger quotes him defining the emerging church as “nothing more than a way of expressing that we need new forms of church that relate to the emerging culture”. (Gibbs & Bolger 2006:41). Nelus Niemandt has said that the emerging church is primarily about mission, therefore saying that we should rather talk about emerging missional churches (2007a:550-553; 2007b:147). All of the above perspectives look at emerging as a broad movement of change in churches, and being missional is a very important, for some the defining, characteristic of these churches (apart from Niemandt, see Jones (2008:56), Gibbs & Bolger B(2006:50-53).

But arguments about what should be understood as emerging, emergent and missional continue within the blogosphere. Theologians grouped together under umbrella categories in some of the above descriptions of the movement still seem to continue along totally different paths. Critics, especially from the American evangelical scene⁶, have been pointing to different groups within the emerging church, and so have friends of the emerging movement (McKnight 2008:60).

If we are to continue a responsible dialogue with the interlocutors (the call of Botha 2008:?), the unique, and sometimes contradictory, voices within this movement will have to be understood and respected. And if we are to truly understand the contribution voices from these movements are making, and evaluate these contributions critically, we would need to get a much better understanding of the different voices from the conversation.

Let me point to one question, and one voice in the emerging church to hopefully add one part of the puzzle in our understanding of this movement. The question is the challenge of contextualizing the gospel in the West put forth by Bosch, which I will unpack in what follows, and the voice is that of Brian McLaren.

⁵ Tony Jones does seem to use emerging and emergent interchangeably at times (for example 2008:52-59).

⁶ Driscoll identifies 4 lanes in the emerging church, one which he considers to be at odds with Christian doctrine <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58fgkFS6E-0>.

Belcher (2009:45-47) use an approach he found at Ed Stetzer, to divide emerging into three main groups, again with one characterized as being open the rethink key Evangelical doctrines.

David Bosch's challenge of contextualizing the gospel within western culture

In January of 1992 a group met in Paris to discuss the steps they might take to develop a missiology of Western culture. David Bosch was invited to participate, and, according to Wilbert Shenk (1995:iX), he "indicated that he was feeling a moral obligation to turn his attention to this theme. Although he had only recently completed the writing of his massive work *Transforming Mission*, he recognized that he had not yet truly engaged the challenge of modern culture to the gospel". What he presented was later published under the title *Believing in the Future*.

After an introduction into what the Western culture of his day looked like in the first half of the book, Bosch proceeds to point to some ingredients which must be part of a "missiology of Western culture". The first of these ingredients forms Bosch's "fundamental perspective from which several others follow" (Bosch 1995:33). He argues that the church is missionary by its very nature, that what we need is a "missionary theology, not just a theology of mission ... (w)e are in need of a missiological agenda for theology, not just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*" (1995:32).

Ten ingredients are then mentioned, four being discussed in some detail, and six only mentioned shortly. Of these six, arguably the one on which the least is being said, at least the ingredient with the shortest piece of text under the heading, is the question on what contextualization of the gospel in the West will involve and look like. The paragraph is ended with the words: "I submit that we do not really know. That makes it all the more necessary to reflect on this issue with utmost urgency" (Bosch 1995:58-59).

My focus on this ingredient is not because it is necessarily more important than the other. It's probably more out of personal interest than anything else, and similar questions could definitely be asked of every of the other elements in *Believing in the Future*, and from many other perspectives. But in our quest for understanding the voices from these movements, let me start to paint a picture by asking: Do they help us in finding out what the contextualization of the gospel in the West will involve and look like? Or maybe, if we follow Bosch, we might start with the question whether a specific approach should even be described as contextualization of the gospel in the West, as even an attempt at addressing this important issue which Bosch put on the table.

A narrow understanding of contextualization

In what is becoming generally recognized (Pears 2009:location 299-313), Bosch also work from the assumption that all theology is contextual. That faith is essentially contextual. But when it comes to contextual theologies, those which should be considered to be explicitly contextual (Pears 2009:location 299-313), which Bosch calls "contextual theologies proper" (2004:421), Bosch's approach is somewhat narrower than that of, for example, Stephan Bevans (Ahonen 2003:161). I point this out not as an critique of either Bevans' or Bosch's work, both which I find quite helpful, but to help us in remembering that when Bosch calls for contextualization of the Gospel, there are some approaches to context which

he simply didn't consider contextualization proper. And this should guide us when looking at contextualization of the gospel in the West according to Bosch.

Contextualization is very important in *Transforming Mission*, published but a few months before the above mentioned discussion in Paris where we found the challenge under discussion. Of the thirteen elements of mission in chapter 12, three concern contextualization directly. Using the typologies of Justin Ukpong, Bosch mentions two major types of contextual theology, each divided into two subtypes. "(T)he indigenization motif presents itself either as a translation or as an inculturation model; the socio-economic pattern of contextualization can be evolutionary (political theology and theology of development) or revolutionary (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc)." However, Bosch qualifies Ukpong's categorization. In his view "only the inculturation model in the first type and only the revolutionary model in the second type qualifies as contextual theologies proper".

Although aware of Western examples such as political theology, these examples are not what he had in mind when talking about contextualization in general, and I therefore believe neither when talking about contextualization in the West. Similarly, the translation model, which, according to Stephan Bevans, is "the most commonly employed and usually the one that most people think of when they think of doing theology in context" (2002:37), is also not what must be understood under contextualization in the West.

Some markers for contextualization of the gospel in the West

Although Bosch left us with the statement that "we do not really know" what contextualization in the West will look like (Bosch 1995:59), I believe that Bosch at least left us enough markers on the road to be able to see the borders, admittedly sometimes fluid borders, of the space in which we should look for examples of what the question of contextualization of the gospel in the West would involve and look like in his view. Let me point to what I think might be some of these markers.

Sensitive to context and own indebtedness to context

In Bosch's own words: "(a) basic argument of this book [Transforming Mission] has been that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it." (2004:421). Bosch credits Schleiermacher with being the one who "pioneered the view that all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it had evolved" (2004:422). But the next step needs to be taken, recognizing that also our own theologies are conditioned by our own contexts, that all theology are by its very nature contextual (2004:423).

The problem, however, is that "we still believe that the gospel had already been properly indigenized and contextualized in the West" (Bosch 1995:58). This attitude however fails to recognize not only its indebtedness to its own context, it also falls prey to what Bosch described as the erroneous idea that we can talk of inculturation as an accomplished act, failing to recognize that no context is static, but in Bosch's view also failing to recognize that "the church may be led to discover previously unknown mysteries of the faith" when in new contexts (2004:456). Even worse, it can create the idea of an eternal theology which may play referee over local theologies. This was the problem of Western theology at the

time of the colonial expansion (Bosch 2004:448), and remains a problem in various forms of theology, most notably the various forms of fundamentalism popular at this stage, and being exported between cultures around the world.

A process of contextualization of the gospel in the West should be **sensitive to its own indebtedness to the Western culture** of the past and **sensitive to the changing context** if we are to talk about contextualization proper, that which is explicitly and fundamentally incorporating context into its theology (to use the words of Pears (2009:location 301).

The socio-economic context and the Third World

The point of departure for contextual theology is orthopraxis, not orthodoxy. The emphasis is on doing theology. Knowledge is found in an immersion in a process of transformation and constructing a new world. The theologian can only theologize credibly if it is done with those who suffer. It is a break with a concept of truth which conforms and legitimizes the world as it is now, and profoundly suspicious that Western theology was designed to legitimize the world as it is now (Bosch 2004:423-425). The world being: the world where the West is in a privileged position of power.

For Bosch the poor are the all-embracing category for those who are the victims of society. “The poor are the marginalized” (Bosch 2004:436). Liberation theology developed primarily in the Third-world (Bosch 2004:432), with the poor as its interlocutors (Bosch 2004:436). These theologies begin with the experience of the poor, the experience of marginalization, from which it proceeds to reflect (Bosch 2004:425).

However, the context of the West which Bosch describes is one of affluence, of a system which is set on maximizing wealth and power regardless of the cost, which presupposes the subjugation of other nations. The experience is not that of the poor, but of the non-poor, actually of complicity in the plight of the Third World (1995:36-37). It is within the **socio-economic context of the West and of the world that gospel in the West must root itself**. This experience calls for a different kind of conversion, one which admits the complicity in the oppression of the poor, and a turning away from idols of money, race and self-interest (Bosch 2004:437; Bosch 1995:36).

The Western churches complicity in the plight of the Third World makes the voices of the Third World important in Western theology (Bosch 1995:36). Any theology should recognize its need for other theologies to enrich it, not least Western theologies which, according to Bosch, need to be liberated from its “Babylonian captivity” of many centuries (Bosch 2004:456). Western theology need to rediscover being missionary by its very nature, similar to Third World theologies (Bosch 1995:36). This call for a process of **interculturalism** in our contextualization of the gospel in the West, where the West take a **special interest in Third World theologies**, to be influenced and challenged by them (Bosch 2004:456).

Countercultural

As a last marker, our process of contextualization should help us with a mission which is truly **countercultural**, although not escapist. This has been important throughout Bosch's life⁷, and also forms part of his call for contextualization of the gospel in the West, since the gospel seem to have lost its distinctive character, somehow being overcontextualized, or never contextualized at all (Bosch 1995:58).

The contextual theology of Brian McLaren

With this in mind we turn now to one specific emergent voice, that of Brian McLaren, widely considered to be the most influential voice in the American emerging church movement, or at least of what can be considered the more progressive wing, also known as emergent (McKnight 2008:60; Carson 2005:187; Niemandt 2007a:546). In 2006 he was considered by Time Magazine to be one of the 25 most influential Evangelicals in America today⁸. Jim Belcher, in the recent bestselling book *Deep Church*, says that it is because of high-profile writers such as McLaren, and with him Tony Jones en Doug Pagitt, that the stream of emerging thought associated with *Emergent Village* gets the most media (2009:46-47). Phylis Tickle calls McLaren the symbolic leader, equating him with Martin Luther, of the change happening in the church in the time of the Great Emergence (2008:164), the way she is describing the paradigm shift currently under way in the world.

In the South African scene, at least the white Afrikaner part of the church that I know, McLaren has also been leaving a mark. He was mentioned a number of times in Nelus Niemandt's book on the emerging church (2007b), and has visited South Africa on a number of occasions. In 2009 speaking at the yearly Amahoro conference which was held outside Krugersdorp, in 2007 speaking at two Dutch Reformed congregations and holding a three day retreat at Achterberg, and other visits preceding these.

Understanding this specific voice becomes important in the global missional conversation, as well as the South African conversation. What makes McLaren an interesting dialogue partner when working with the missiology and theology of David Bosch, is his own acknowledgement of the importance of Bosch, and positive evaluation of Bosch (McLaren 2009:location 2813-2821, 2003b:xv-xvi). Although Bosch is generally considered an important influence in both emerging (Niemandt 2007a:542) McLaren is still actively engaging his thoughts, which is not necessarily the case for all example of emerging theology.

Scot McKnight mentions that to understand McLaren we must appreciate the fact that "his books are "works in progress." He's working things out in front of us all" (2008:60). McLaren is a pastor, or at least has been till 2007, and is writing as he is figuring things out. I'm am not going to try and trace the development in McLaren's thought, but simply try and point to how he is responding to the challenges presented above, focusing more on his later work and ignoring the fact that some of his earlier works might actually differ sharply from the picture painted here.

⁷ Bosch used different concepts to describe this idea: alternative community, countercultural community, distinct community etc. I wrote an overview of his thoughts on this subject (Van Wyngaard 2008:24-36).

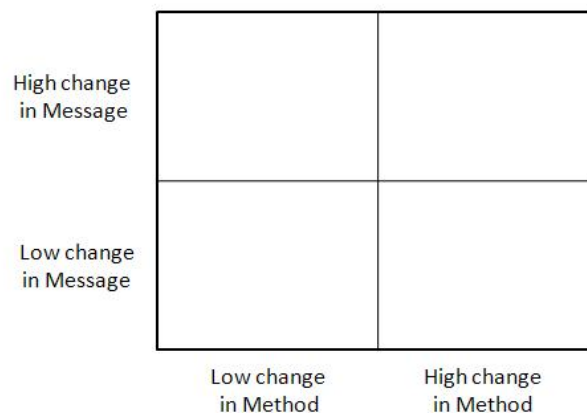
⁸ <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/photoessay/17.html>

Mclaren and postmodernism

Brian McLaren is the grandchild of a Scottish missionary to Angola and the child of Plymouth Brethren parents. However, he's journey has taken him on vastly different routes. He is at least a decade older than most of the other voices that initiated the emerging church in America, but became part of the network of people that now form Emergent Village because of his writings on postmodernism in *A New Kind of Christian* (Jones 2008:49).

Mclaren started his career as an author with the publishing of *Reinventing your church*, later revised and published under the title *The church on the other side*. In the introduction he writes about being born at the end of one age and the beginning of another. The new world which he writes about he calls postmodernism (Mclaren 2000:12). In the preface of the second book in the *New Kind of Christian* trilogy, he describes *A New Kind of Christian* as an exploration of postmodernism, looking at its challenges and opportunities. *The Story we Find Ourselves In* is an attempt at a turning point in his work, from writing about postmodernism, to writing about the Christian gospel from the vantage point of postmodernism (Mclaren:2003b:x).

Although *A New Kind of Christian* would probably be considered the classic when it comes to McLaren's engagement with postmodern culture, to understand his approach I first turn to a different essay. Leonard Sweet edited a conversation in a book called *The Church in Emerging Culture*. In it he worked with a matrix of four quadrants, onto which he mapped five different authors, and each wrote an essay on how the emerging culture, called postmodernism, should be engaged (Sweet 2003:18-19). On the two axis he put change in method, and change in message, so that the matrix would look like this:



Mclaren wrote the essay on the upper-right quadrant, high change in both method and message. He starts his argument with a critique of an approach which states that the methods may change, but the message never does (Mclaren 2003a:191). He relies strongly on the view that all theology is contextual, illustrating this through a journey through early church history, pointing to how the message of Paul, John, and the early church changed as they engaged different cultures (2003a:207-211). He used the message and method argument again when summarizing the early emerging conversation a few months

ago (Mclaren 2009:location113-124). What McLaren calls for is not only the new forms of church we found in definitions of the emerging church, but also a rethinking of theology from within the postmodern culture.

Doug Pagitt is in emerging circles credited with stating that some in the emerging movement will minister *to* postmoderns – meaning that they attempt to rescue them from moral relativism and epistemological bankruptcy – others *with* postmoderns – meaning they accept the postmodern condition as the current reality and seek to proclaim the gospel within this culture – and others *as* postmoderns. Many, according to Scot McKnight, in the emerging church fall within the first two categories (McKnight 2006:11-13). It is however, the third category which interests us. This category of emergents embrace the postmodern worldview, “they embrace the human condition of not knowing absolute truth or at least not knowing truth absolutely – and they speak of a proper confidence and a chastened epistemology and the end of metanarratives and the fundamental importance of social location as shaping what we know and find to be true” (McKnight 2006:13). McLaren clearly consider himself to be part of this last group, and his critics consider him to be part of this group as well. I’m not going to try and summarize what exactly McLaren’s view of the gospel from within postmodernism looks like but it involves, in the very least, “a radical reworking of familiar terms – eternal life, heaven, kingdom, repent, believe, and sin”⁹ (McKnight 2008: 61).

It is enough at this point to recognize that McLaren’s approach is indeed an attempt at a rethinking of the gospel from within the context of postmodernism, which involves among other things the recognition and critique of Western theology’s indebtedness to modernism and the enlightenment (Mclaren 2009:location 131; 2007b:35).

Mclaren in dialogue with the Third World

In *A New Kind of Christian*, postcolonialism was never mentioned. But for a number of years now McLaren has been talking about postmodernism as the tail side of the postcolonial/postmodern coin. He credits this insight to a conversation he had with Dr. Mabilia Kenzo, a Twa theologian from the Congo, currently Professor of Systematic theology at Ambrose University College in Canada (Mclaren 2006). He used Kenzo extensively in his contribution to a 2007 book, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, in which he declared: “I am hereby giving notice that I’m not interested in arguing with anyone about modernity and postmodernity, but that I would very much like to engage in honest conversation about colonialism and postcolonialism” (Mclaren 2007:143).

It is not that McLaren seized to talk about postmodernism from this point onwards. But where he spent a lot of time talking about postmodernism from a philosophical point of view in the past, he said that it is the social side of postmodernism that he wanted to focus on hence forth (Mclaren 2006a). In this approach he sees “the postmodern conversation as a profoundly moral project in intention at least, a kind of corporate repentance among Europeans assessing the causes of the holocaust” (Mclaren 2007a:144).

⁹ This approach has led to an almost endless stream of claims coming from the evangelical world that McLaren is slightly extreme at the very least, or better yet heretical.

The Western context that McLaren's relationship with Third World theologians is starting to have him sketch, and which he considers postmodernism to point to as well, is a context of excessive confidence, and it is this assumed primacy of the West from which the church must repent. In this it would seem that McLaren is attempting to reposition the emerging church as latecomers to the scene of Liberation theology and Postcolonial theology (2007:147). He describes the emerging church as "emerging into a postcolonial faith, a post-Western faith – not a faith that wants to forget and deny the many blessings of Christian faith in Western idioms, but a faith that no longer wants to be in denial about the dark sides of our history" (2007:149).

Mclaren on the socio-economic context of the West

In the introduction to *A New Kind of Christian*, McLaren wrote that he was "On to something", this something being that the way we have been approaching Christianity for a long time isn't working anymore, and that something new is happening, which is described as postmodernism throughout the book (McLaren 2001:xii-xv). In the introduction to *The Secret Message of Jesus* he again says that he is "on the something" (McLaren 2006b:xii). He summarizes *The Secret Message of Jesus* saying that "more and more of us are realizing something our best theologians have been saying for quite a while: Jesus' message is not actually about escaping this troubled world for heaven's blissful shores, as is popularly assumed, but instead is about God's will being done on this troubled earth as it is in heaven" (McLaren 2007:4). He later admits that many in the Catholic and mainline traditions have been saying this for decades, or even centuries (McLaren 2009:location2813-2821).

In a recent publication, *The Justice Project*, of which McLaren was one of the editors, he writes in the Introduction that the emerging conversation of the mid 1990's was about doing church, but that it has been moving ever since towards doing justice. Part of the reason for this he attributes to the growing relationship with theologians from Africa and Latin America (2009b:location 104-162) and to growing relationships with mainline theologians, but also to "the increasingly shrill, constricting rhetoric of the religious right, and a painful and polarizing presidency" (McLaren 2009b:151). Some of the effect of this context can be seen in his writings over the past decade.

A New Kind of Christian was published in 2001, the year George Bush became president, and it is against the background of the presidency of Bush that McLaren was selling hundreds of thousands of books talking about an alternative approach to Christianity. In the sequel to *A New Kind of Christian*, written in 2003, the attacks of September 11 became part of the story. Through the eyes of the characters, McLaren recounts the events of that day and the days following it. This includes a sermon by one of the main characters in which he says at one stage "we must not allow ourselves to hate anyone. We must not seek revenge" (McLaren 2003b:134), and tells of how the evangelical congregation in the story reach out to the Muslim community in the days following the attack, to support them as they were being singled out and harassed (McLaren 2003b:134-135). McLaren has been focusing on Christian-Muslim dialogue in the past years, specifically because of the context of Muslim relations in America (McLaren 2009a), and especially in 2009 came under severe criticism because of his observation of Ramadan.

Similar to other radical voices of our time, in *Everything Must Change* McLaren identifies the United States of America as "empire". He goes on to describe the security system of this empire in vivid and

chilling language (McLaren 2007:164-175). Although he explicitly states that he is not calling people to ideological pacifism, he condemns war in no uncertain terms, and calls for active dedication to peacemaking (McLaren 2007b:176-185). Albert Nolan has said that some of the strongest critics against the American empire are citizens of the USA (2007:32), and this can surely be said of Brian McLaren as well.

McLaren describes the following two questions as being his obsession over the past few years:

1. What are the biggest problems of the world?
2. What does Jesus have to say about these global problems? (McLaren 2007b:11-13).

Everything Must Change is his response to this. It is explicitly contextual. Talking about reintroducing Jesus and relating his words to our time, contrasting his approach to fundamentalism which attempts to directly apply words of a time past to our day (McLaren 2007b:119). The picture of Jesus that he continues to paint, addresses the problems of today in new words and new metaphors¹⁰. Although well-informed by some of the most authoritative voices on the historical Jesus, especially N T Wright and Dominic Crossan, his theology was explicitly informed by the global problems of our day. His writing has a sense of urgency, sounding a call to revolution (which must be understood in the specific way he is using the term), writing from an experience of crisis, at times becoming almost apocalyptic when describing the suicide machine of the world, the system that threatens the existence of the world (McKnight 2008:61).

Conclusion

I have made very little reference to the specific answers at which McLaren arrives. What exactly does the gospel look like from within postmodernism? How does Western theology change when being open to the influence of voices from Third World theologies? What does Jesus look like when we read him with the biggest problems of the world in mind, rather than with my individual well-being in mind?

The specific answers he provides need to be studied, even if it is just because of the influence they are having on the church today, but maybe more importantly because we have here an example of what a contextual theology proper would look like when written in the West. Although it might still take some time to figure out what contextualization in the West would mean, at first glance it would seem that McLaren provide us with an example of what it would look like if Bosch's challenge of contextualization in the West is taken up.

This specific example, and the same won't be true for all examples of emerging thought, is however more than a reaction from a context grappling with secularization and postmodernism (Botha 2008:?), although it is this as well. The missionary theology of McLaren takes the socio-economic context of the

¹⁰ I would suggest that an interesting topic for further research might be to look at the development of McLaren's Christology, which I believe changed radically over his career as a public writer, and which is one of the most important aspects of his theology.

West, and of the world, into account. It is serious about the plight of the poor, of the Third World, and it grapples with the reality of the West's, also the Western church's, complicity in this.

Mclaren has continuously over the past 4 or 5 years been pointing to the fact that he is participating in a conversation that has been ongoing in the Third World for many decades now. He admits that they are latecomers on the postcolonial scene, but asks that his own work be read as part of a postcolonial conversation. At this point I would suggest that a critical reading of these sentiments by postcolonial theologians is needed¹¹, but on these grounds dialogue may be possible between South African voices and McLaren, in what Bosch would have called a process of interculturalization.

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¹¹ In the sermon in A New Kind of Christian referred to above, the character, Dan Poole, talks about America as "a nation extraordinarily gifted", "having duties that go beyond those of other nations, since much is expected from those to whom much has been given" (Mclaren 2003b:134), a sentiment which he again repeated in The Justice Project when it's focus on the American society is explained (Mclaren 2009b:location 174-180). The interpreting of American power and welfare as if given by God has a strange sound to it from an African perspective. But I leave this as a point for further reflection.

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