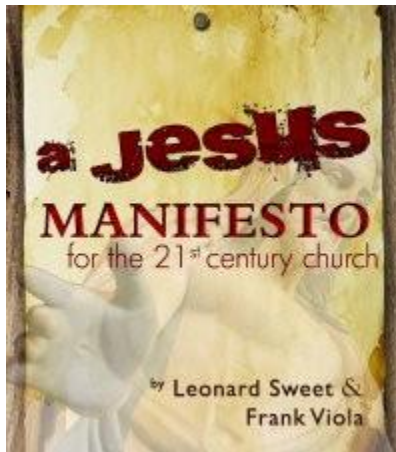


A Magna Carta for Restoring the Supremacy of Jesus Christ

a.k.a.

A Jesus Manifesto for the 21st Century

by Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola



What follows is the original essay that released June 2009. In 2010, the essay was expanded into a 200-page book and published by Thomas Nelson. The book is called **Jesus Manifesto**.

Endorsements by Ed Young, Matt Chandler, Rowan Williams, Jack Hayford, Shane Claiborne, Ed Stetzer, Calvin Miller, Reggie McNeal, Gregory A. Boyd, Mark Batterson, David Fitch, Dan Kimball, Margaret Feinberg, Scot McKnight, Mark Chironna, Francis Frangipane, Todd Hunter, John R. Franke, Alan Hirsch, Chris Seay, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Anne Jackson, Steve Brown, Ken Ulmer, Tommy Barnett, Sally Morgenthaler, and others.

Christians have made the gospel about so many things . . . things other than Christ.

Jesus Christ is the gravitational pull that brings everything together and gives them significance, reality, and meaning. Without him, all things lose their value. Without him, all things are but detached pieces floating around in space.

It is possible to emphasize a spiritual truth, value, virtue, or gift, yet miss Christ . . . who is the embodiment and incarnation of all spiritual truth, values, virtues, and gifts.

Seek a truth, a value, a virtue, or a spiritual gift, and you have obtained something dead.

Seek Christ, embrace Christ, know Christ, and you have touched him who is Life. And in him resides all Truth, Values, Virtues and Gifts in living color. Beauty has its meaning in the beauty of Christ, in whom is found all that makes us lovely and loveable.

What is Christianity? *It is Christ.* Nothing more. Nothing less. Christianity is not an ideology. Christianity is not a philosophy. Christianity is the “good news” that Beauty, Truth and Goodness are found in a person. Biblical community is founded and found on the connection to that person.

Conversion is more than a change in direction; it’s a change in connection. Jesus’ use of the ancient Hebrew word *shubh*, or its Aramaic equivalent, to call for “repentance” implies not viewing God from a distance, but entering into a relationship where God is command central of the human connection.

In that regard, we feel a massive disconnection in the church today. Thus this manifesto.

We believe that the major disease of the church today is JDD: Jesus Deficit Disorder. The person of Jesus is increasingly politically incorrect, and is being replaced by the language of “justice,” “the kingdom of God,” “values,” and “leadership principles.”

In this hour, the testimony that we feel God has called us to bear centers on the primacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Specifically . . .

1. The center and circumference of the Christian life is none other than the person of Christ. All other things, including things related to him and about him, are eclipsed by the sight of his peerless worth. Knowing Christ *is* Eternal Life. And knowing him profoundly, deeply, and in reality, as well as experiencing his unsearchable riches, is the chief pursuit of our lives, as it was for the first Christians. God is not so much about fixing things that have gone wrong in our lives as finding us in our brokenness and giving us Christ.

2. Jesus Christ cannot be separated from his teachings. Aristotle says to his disciples, “Follow my teachings.” Socrates says to his disciples, “Follow my teachings.” Buddha says to his disciples, “Follow my meditations.” Confucius says to his disciples, “Follow my sayings.” Muhammad says to his disciples, “Follow my noble pillars.” Jesus says to his disciples, “Follow me.” In all other religions, a follower can follow the teachings of its founder without having a relationship with that founder.

Not so with Jesus Christ. The teachings of Jesus cannot be separated from Jesus himself. Jesus Christ is still alive and he embodies his teachings. It is a profound mistake, therefore, to treat Christ as simply the founder of a set of moral, ethical, or social teaching. The Lord Jesus and his teaching are one. The Medium and the Message are One. Christ is the incarnation of the Kingdom of God and the Sermon on the Mount.

3. God’s grand mission and eternal purpose in the earth and in heaven centers in Christ . . . both the individual Christ (the Head) and the corporate Christ (the Body). This universe is moving towards one final goal – the fullness of Christ where He shall fill all things with himself.

To be truly missional, then, means constructing one's life and ministry on Christ. He is both the heart and bloodstream of God's plan. To miss this is to miss the plot; indeed, it is to miss everything.

4. Being a follower of Jesus does not involve imitation so much as it does implantation and impartation. Incarnation—the notion that God connects to us in baby form and human touch—is the most shocking doctrine of the Christian religion. The incarnation is both once-and-for-all and ongoing, as the One “who was and is to come” *now* is and lives his resurrection life in and through us. Incarnation doesn't just apply to Jesus; it applies to every one of us. Of course, not in the same sacramental way. But close.

We have been given God's “Spirit” which makes Christ “real” in our lives. We have been made, as Peter puts it, “partakers of the divine nature.” How, then, in the face of so great a truth can we ask for toys and trinkets? How can we lust after lesser gifts and itch for religious and spiritual thingys? We've been touched from on high by the fires of the Almighty and given divine life. A life that has passed through death – the very resurrection life of the Son of God himself. How can we not be fired up?

To put it in a question: What was the engine, or the accelerator, of the Lord's amazing life? What was the taproot or the headwaters of his outward behavior? It was this: *Jesus lived by an indwelling Father.* After his resurrection, the passage has now moved. What God the Father was to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is to you and to me. He's our indwelling Presence, and we share in the life of Jesus' own relationship with the Father.

There is a vast ocean of difference between trying to compel Christians to imitate Jesus and learning how to impart an implanted Christ. The former only ends up in failure and frustration. The latter is the gateway to life and joy in our daying and our dying. We stand with Paul: “Christ lives in me.” Our life is Christ. In him do we live, breathe, and have our being. “What would Jesus do?” is not Christianity. Christianity asks: “What is Christ *doing* through me ... through us? And how is Jesus doing it?” Following Jesus means “trust and obey” (respond), and living by his indwelling life through the power of the Spirit.

5. The “Jesus of history” cannot be disconnected from the “Christ of faith.” The Jesus who walked the shores of Galilee is the same person who indwells the church today. There is no disconnect between the Jesus of Mark's Gospel and the incredible, all-inclusive, cosmic Christ of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

The Christ who lived in the first century has a pre-existence before time. He also has a post-existence after time. He is Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, A and Z, all at the same time. He stands in the future and at the end of time at the same moment that He indwells every child of God. Failure to embrace these paradoxical truths has created monumental problems and has diminished the greatness of Christ in the eyes of God's people.

6. It's possible to confuse “the cause” of Christ with the person of Christ. When the early church said “Jesus is Lord,” they did not mean “Jesus is my core value.” Jesus isn't a cause; he is a real and living person who can be known, loved, experienced, enthroned and embodied.

Focusing on his cause or mission doesn't equate focusing on or following him. It's all too possible to serve "the god" of serving Jesus as opposed to serving him out of an enraptured heart that's been captivated by his irresistible beauty and unfathomable love. Jesus led us to think of God differently, as relationship, as the God of all relationship.

7. Jesus Christ was not a social activist nor a moral philosopher. To pitch him that way is to drain his glory and dilute his excellence. Justice apart from Christ is a dead thing. The only battering ram that can storm the gates of hell is not the cry of Justice, but the name of Jesus. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Justice, Peace, Holiness, Righteousness. He is the sum of all spiritual things, the "strange attractor" of the cosmos. When Jesus becomes an abstraction, faith loses its reproductive power. Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live.

8. It is possible to confuse an academic knowledge or theology about Jesus with a personal knowledge of the living Christ himself. These two stand as far apart as do the hundred thousand million galaxies. The fullness of Christ can never be accessed through the frontal lobe alone. Christian faith claims to be rational, but also to reach out to touch ultimate mysteries. The cure for a big head is a big heart.

Jesus does not leave his disciples with CliffsNotes for a systematic theology. He leaves his disciples with breath and body.

Jesus does not leave his disciples with a coherent and clear belief system by which to love God and others. Jesus gives his disciples wounds to touch and hands to heal.

Jesus does not leave his disciples with intellectual belief or a "Christian worldview." He leaves his disciples with a relational faith.

Christians don't follow a book. Christians follow a person, and this library of divinely inspired books we call "The Holy Bible" best help us follow that person. The Written Word is a map that leads us to The Living Word. Or as Jesus himself put it, "All Scripture testifies of me." The Bible is not the destination; it's a compass that points to Christ, heaven's North Star.

The Bible does not offer a plan or a blueprint for living. The "good news" was not a new set of laws, or a new set of ethical injunctions, or a new and better PLAN. The "good news" was the story of a person's life, as reflected in The Apostle's Creed.

The Mystery of Faith proclaims this narrative: "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again." The meaning of Christianity does not come from allegiance to complex theological doctrines, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that revolves around following Jesus, who taught that love is what makes life a success . . . not wealth or health or anything else: but love. And God *is* love.

9. Only Jesus can transfix and then transfigure the void at the heart of the church. Jesus Christ cannot be separated from his church. While Jesus is distinct from his Bride, he is not separate from her. She is in fact his very own Body in the earth. God has chosen to vest all of

power, authority, and life in the living Christ. And God in Christ is only known fully in and through his church. (As Paul said, “The manifold wisdom of God – which is Christ – is known through the *ekklesia*.”)

The Christian life, therefore, is not an individual pursuit. It’s a corporate journey. Knowing Christ and making him known is not an individual prospect. Those who insist on flying life solo will be brought to earth, with a crash. Thus Christ and his church are intimately joined and connected. What God has joined together, let no person put asunder. We were made for life with God; our only happiness is found in life with God. And God’s own pleasure and delight is found therein as well.

10. In a world which sings, “Oh, who is this Jesus?” and a church which sings, “Oh, let’s all be like Jesus,” who will sing with lungs of leather, “Oh, how we love Jesus!”

If Jesus could rise from the dead, we can at least rise from our bed, get off our couches and pews, and respond to the Lord’s resurrection life within us, joining Jesus in what he’s up to in the world. We call on others to join us—not in removing ourselves from planet Earth, but to plant our feet more firmly on the Earth while our spirits soar in the heavens of God’s pleasure and purpose. We are not of this world, but we live in this world for the Lord’s rights and interests. We, collectively, as the *ekklesia* of God, are Christ in and to this world.

May God have a people on this earth who are a people of Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. A people of the cross. A people who are consumed with God’s eternal passion, which is to make his Son preeminent, supreme, and the head over all things visible and invisible. A people who have discovered the touch of the Almighty in the face of his glorious Son. A people who wish to know only Christ and him crucified, and to let everything else fall by the wayside. A people who are laying hold of his depths, discovering his riches, touching his life, and receiving his love, and making HIM in all of his unfathomable glory known to others.

The two of us may disagree about many things—be they ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, not to mention economics, globalism and politics.

But in our two most recent books—**From Eternity to Here** and **So Beautiful**—we have sounded forth a united trumpet. These books are the Manifests to this Manifesto. They each present the vision that has captured our hearts and that we wish to impart to the Body of Christ—“This ONE THING I know” (Jn.9:25) that is the ONE THING that unites us all:

Jesus the Christ.

Christians don’t follow Christianity; Christians follow Christ.

Christians don’t preach themselves; Christians proclaim Christ.

Christians don’t point people to core values; Christians point people to the cross.

Christians don’t preach about Christ: Christians preach Christ.

Over 300 years ago a German pastor wrote a hymn that built around the Name above all names:

*Ask ye what great thing I know, that delights and stirs me so? What the high reward I win?
Whose the name I glory in?*

Jesus Christ, the crucified.

*This is that great thing I know; this delights and stirs me so: faith in him who died to save, His
who triumphed o'er the grave:*

Jesus Christ, the crucified.

Jesus Christ – the crucified, resurrected, enthroned, triumphant, living Lord.

He is our Pursuit, our Passion, and our Life.

Amen.

Leonard Sweet & Frank Viola

UPDATE: This essay has been expanded into a book endorsed by the major leaders in the body of Christ today. For details, go to theJesusManifesto.com

