

An Assortment of Study Slides for Discussing

Brian D. McLaren's

A New Kind of Christianity

Part VIII: The Future Question

(Comprising Chapter 18)

May 10, 2026

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The lead-up to Chapter 18:

- **Ch. 16 (“What Do We Do About the Church?”):** “The church, then, In Paul’s mind, must be above all a school of love. If it’s not that, it’s nothing” (170).

To make it so, we must be “creative protagonists who [use] the power [of] the Holy Spirit to create a new future of the church as a school of [. . .] listening, dialogue, appreciative inquiry, understanding, preemptive peacemaking, reconciliation, nonviolence, prophetic confrontation, advocacy, generosity, and personal and social transformation” (171).

- **Ch. 17 (“Can We Find a Way to Address Human Sexuality Without Fighting About It?”):** “Sociologists sometimes say that groups can exist without a god, but no group can exist without a devil” (175).

“As in so many areas, we must blaze a new trail into that terra nova beyond the binary and reactionary ideals of sexually repressive fundasexuality, on the one hand, and sexually unrestrained hedonism, on the other (189).”

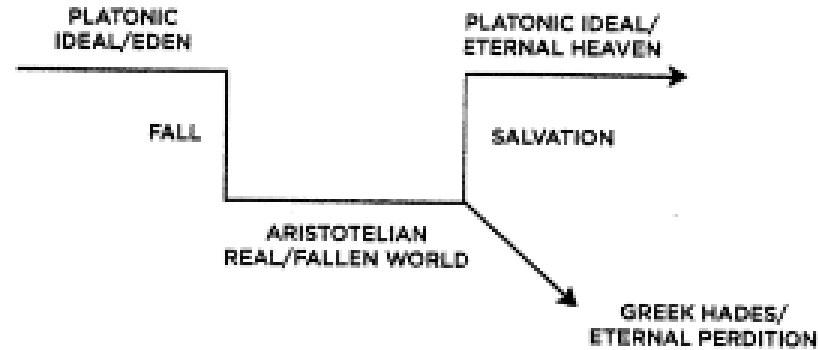
On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

Dispensationalism and its problematic effects:

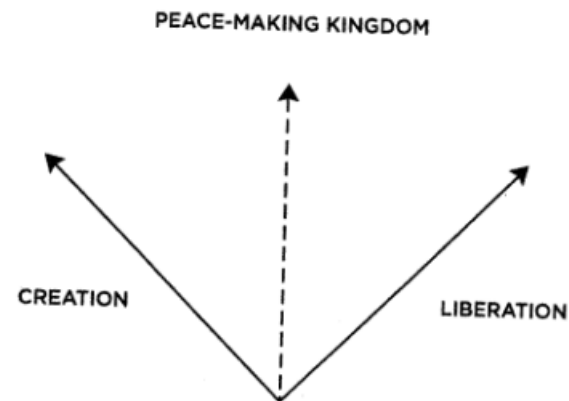
1. **Fear of being “left behind”** (NN: thus establishing a kind of eternal insecurity that makes one vulnerable to ever-more-restrictive “holiness” protocols and even to distrusting the saving power of Christ?)
2. **Constantly revised speculation about the identity of the Antichrist** (NN: at the expense of concerns about anti-Christ-al behaviors widely expressed and tolerated in the world—even the world of “holiness” groups?)
3. **So-called “Christian nationalism”** (esp. wherein the United States speaks for God and becomes the arm of the Lord)
4. **Abdication of responsibilities in the present world** (NN: in order selfishly to protect one’s own holiness bubble and to avoid a lot of hard work?)

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

1. Leaving the “theological flatland” of the Greco-Roman vision of history”: “a *time line*”

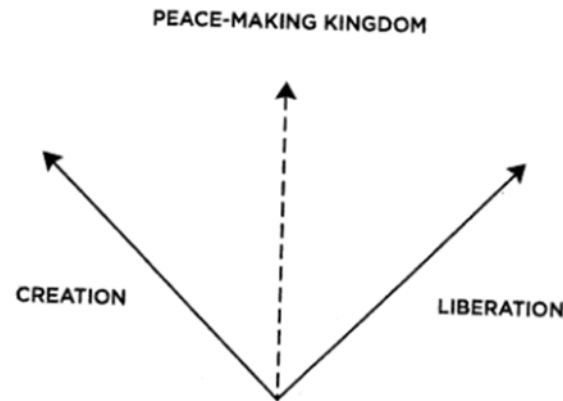


2. Entering the “3-D universe” of “a generous, creative, and liberating God”: “a *time-space*”



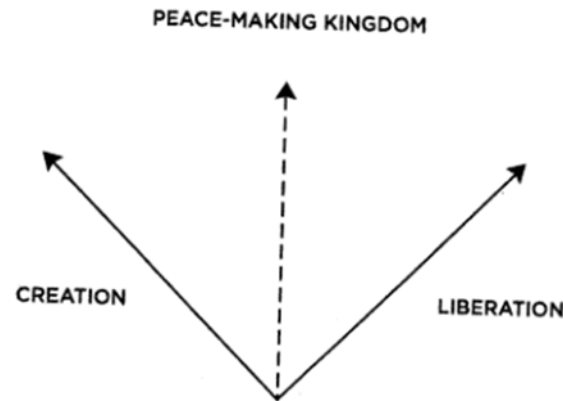
(pp. 193-94)

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”



- “If we think of the moment of creation at the bottom of our diagram, we can think of God’s light shining from above, calling all things from chaos, void, and darkness toward order, fullness, life, and light.”
- “Evil actions resist the flow. They turn away from the light and revert toward the darkness of destruction (antcreation) oppression (antiberation), and violence, hatred, and fear (antireconciliation).”
- “Good things grow upward and outward like seedlings from soil, like the branches of a tree reaching toward the light” (194).

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”



- “That means that, **contrary to dispensationalism and many other conventional eschatologies**, there is no single fixed end point toward which we move, but rather a **widening space opening into an infinitely expanding goodness**, like the air and sunlight into which a tree spreads out its branches.”
- “Creation branches out into an ever widening sphere of goodness, justice, and peace.”
- McLaren rhapsodizes, “This understanding, to me, is glorious, and I want to get up and shout and sing and dance around my office today as I sit here writing about it” (194-95). 😊

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”



- “This 3-D approach provides a spacious and hopeful alternative to secular as well as religious determinisms—visions of the future that are set in stone, determined by either laws of physics or decrees of the Almighty” (195).
 - Secular₁: “a final white-hot collapse of gravity (a big crunch)”
 - Secular₂: “an eternal dark, cold freeze of entropy (a big freeze)”
 - Religious: “a ‘soul-sort’ universe” with destruction/damnation and redemption/salvation “bins”

A Famous Meditation on Secular Determinisms:

Fire and Ice

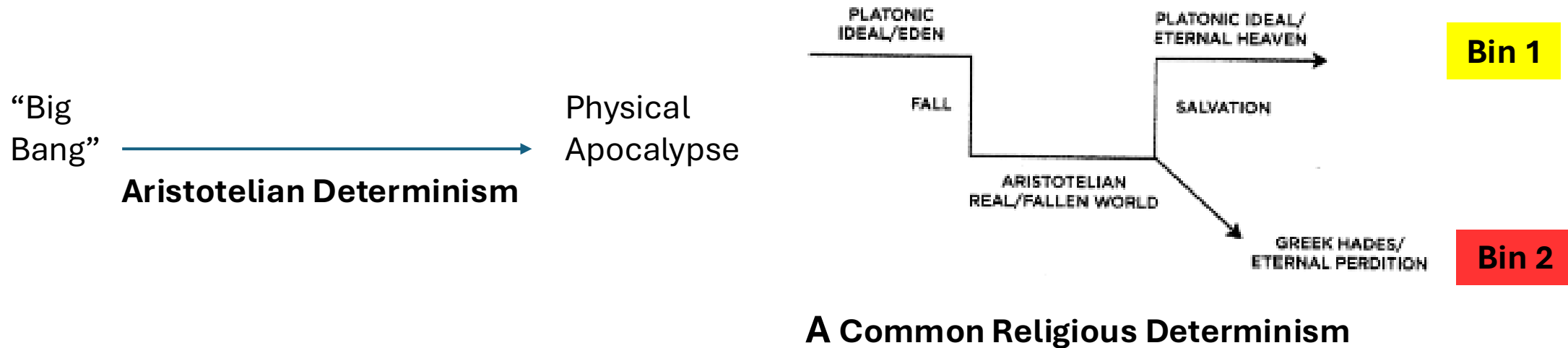
Robert Frost 1874 – 1963

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

First printed in *Harper's Magazine*, December 1920.

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

- “This 3-D approach provides a spacious and hopeful alternative to secular as well as religious determinisms—visions of the future that are set in stone, determined by either laws of physics or decrees of the Almighty” (195).



Three Determinisms:

- Secular₁: “a final white-hot collapse of gravity (a big [hot] crunch)”
- Secular₂: “an eternal dark, cold freeze of entropy (a big freeze)”
- Religious: “a ‘soul-sort’ universe” with destruction/damnation and redemption/salvation “bins”

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

- **Against those common determinisms, McLaren thinks that the concept of a 3-D universe originating from God “undooms” the future.** In other words, it causes us to expect “eventual healing and joy” instead—as well as “ultimate resurrection, liberation, reconciliation, and (in the fullest sense of the word) salvation, because the living God will never forsake or forget this beloved creation” (195-96).
- **Against both **deism** (“watchmaker God” [hands-off] theology) and **providentialism** (“sovereign mover” [hands-on] theology), McLaren suggests that “**God and the universe are in [intersubjective] relationship**”;** thus, “All creation groans for humanity to reenter a right relationship with God” (196).
- **McLaren thinks that holding a 3-D view of the universe requires an “**improvisational eschatology**” that requires our participation.** “In a participatory eschatology, when we ask, ‘What does the future hold?’ the answer begins, ‘That depends. It depends on you and me. God holds out to us at every moment a brighter future; the issue is whether we are willing to receive it and work with God to help create it. We are participating in the creation of what the future will be” (196).

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

McLaren’s labors to describe (and prescribe) a “participatory/improvisational eschatology” lead him logically to redefine the *parousia*, commonly known in Protestantism as “the Second Coming of Christ.” Obviously, doing so puts him in danger of severe pushback and (I would think) charges of heresy. Here are some pieces of his argument:

1. “[T]he New Testament writers were not anticipating the ‘end of the world’ and the destruction of the space-time universe.”
2. “They were anticipating [. . .] the beginning of a new spiritual-historical age or era.”
3. “For them, the ‘blessed hope’ outlined in the gospels focused on several soon-to-be-fulfilled historical realities, not one far-distant history-ending one.” Here is that set of expectations:
 - Christ’s resurrection
 - the coming of the Holy Spirit
 - a local physical catastrophe (which turned out to be Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 CE)

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

McLaren calls into question the now-common notion of a much-delayed *parousia*, arguing that

- “the term ‘second coming of Christ’ never appears in the Bible”;
- the idea of Christ’s millennia-long absence (*apousia*) from our world from the time of His ascension to now cannot have been what the apostles expected (and indeed is not what they experienced on Easter);
- the physical resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit (the spirit of Christ) **immediately initiated** the *parousia*—thus giving us the “Second Coming” within the near-at-hand expectation of apostolic-era Christians; and
- the continued presence of Christ’s Spirit in our world since that time is evidence of an **ongoing** *parousia* in which we can be participants.

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

According to McLaren, the *parousia* began with the advent of the New Covenant—i.e., the physical arrival of Jesus on the planet.

“In other words, the age of the New Covenant [and the *parousia*] had been **conceived** in the birth, life, teaching, good works, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Then, after Easter, the new era continued **gestating** in the community of his followers through several decades of struggle and persecution, culminating in a time of great tribulation, when persecution and danger intensified like **labor pains**. During these years, the new age, like a gestating baby, was **already** here, but **not yet fully born**. During this time, the old system of animal sacrifice, priesthood, temple, and holy city had **not yet** ended, yet the new system (or covenant) that would outlast it was **already** developing in secret” (198-99).

McLaren’s next move is then to explain a new role for Christians of today and beyond:

“Our Call, in this view of things, is not to wait passively for something that is not present (*apousia*), but rather to participate passionately in something that is present (*parousia*)—**fully present, but not complete in its development**, and so calling for our wholehearted participation” (199).

On Chapter 18: “Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?”

There it is again--the notion of an “improvisational eschatology” in which we work with God on spurs of the moment to institute (or install) the Peace-Making Kingdom:

“This is a participatory eschatology. Within it, we are not frantic to get this world and its history over with as soon as possible, so a perfect forever can begin, any more than a musician is frantic to get to the last note of a beautiful song; we understand that every note of the song is precious and should be played with all we can give it. The point of history, like a song, is not in the ending or finishing of it, but in the passionate playing of it, every moment. To say the kingdom of God is fully born and fully present, of course, does not mean that it is fully grown or fully mature, any more than a president has completed the work and the term of the office on inauguration day, the date on which he or she and the new administration are fully present. [. . .] So we who follow Jesus, embody his Spirit, and continue his work could be said to serve—or *participate*—in his administration” (199).

Furthermore, says, McLaren, “this **eschatology of participation** produces an **ethic of anticipation**: we seek to have our present way of life shaped by our vision of God’s desired future.” This is not to be confused with mere “human effort, strategy, or wisdom apart from God” (200). (Re: the latter, see note 18 on [Bruce Cockburn’s “Laughter.”](#))

Reminders from Chapter 12 (“Who Is Jesus and Why Is He Important?”):

McLaren: “Revelation is not portraying Jesus returning to earth in the future, having repented of his naïve gospel ways and having converted to Caesar’s ‘realistic’ Greco-Roman methods instead” (125).

Jesus has **not**

- “concluded that it’s best to live by the sword after all”
- “abandoned the way of peace”
- “had second thoughts about all that talk about forgiveness”
- “given up on that ‘love your enemies’ stuff”
- concluded “that God’s strength is manifest not in weakness but in crushing domination”
- decided “that the weapons he needs are physical after all”
- admitted “that the enemies of the kingdom are flesh and blood after all”
- shown after all “that the way to glory isn’t actually by dying on the cross [. . .] but rather by nailing others on it”
- “sold the humble donkey [. . .] and purchased chariots, warhorses, tanks, land mines, and B-1s”
- “climbed back to the top of the temple and decided he made a mistake the first time”
- “decided that the message of the cross is a little too foolish after all”
- “decided that [. . .] nobody can be expected to worship a king they can beat up”
- “decided that a tattoo down his leg would look a whole lot tougher [. . .] than scars in his hands, feet and side”
- “defect[ed] to the Greco-Roman narrative,” though most of his followers prefer it to his “good news of the kingdom”

Reminders from Chapter 12 (“Who Is Jesus and Why Is He Important?”):

- **McLaren:** One interpretation of Revelation 19:11-16 “**subverts** the reconciling messages of Jesus’s gospel and life [. . .].” Another interpretation “**reinforces** them” (124).

“For me,” says McLaren, “the latter approach is the only acceptable one.”

McLaren suggests that the “sharp sword” *coming out of Jesus’s mouth* is “his message of forgiveness and reconciliation” (124, italics added). ***What do you think of that interpretation?*** Here is the immediate context:

¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a scepter of iron; he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Reminders from Chapter 12 (“Who Is Jesus and Why Is He Important?”):

Several concluding statements from page 126:

- “That’s what Revelation actually tells us, that the humble man of peace is Lord.”
- “It invites us to pledge allegiance to the one who rules by his own example of service and suffering rather than by making examples of others.”
- “Revelation celebrates not the love of power, but the power of love.”
- “It denies, with all due audacity, that God’s anointed liberator is the Divine Terminator, threatening revenge for all who refuse to honor him, growling ‘I’ll be back!’”
- “The suffering, serving one who bled on a cross—not the one with a commitment to make others suffer and bleed—is the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Reminders from Chapter 13 (“Jesus Outside the Lines”):

A challenge from another “loyal critic”:

“The only reason Jesus came was to save people from hell. . . . Jesus had no social agenda. . . . [He didn’t come to eliminate poverty or slavery or] . . . fix something in somebody’s life for the little moment they live on this earth.”

- [John MacArthur, ca. 2008](#)

A declaration from Jesus himself:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.’

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

- [Luke 4:18-19, 21 \(cf. Isaiah 61\) NRSV, ca. 60-90 AD](#)

Reminders from Chapter 13 (“Jesus Outside the Lines”):

McLaren tests his theory on the gospel of John, which, he says, “is the one most often used to buttress the Greco-Roman story” (128).

In the Book of John, he finds allusions to and echoes of important elements within what he calls the three forward-looking “primary narratives of the Bible” (Ch. 5, p. 54):

- **in the Genesis story and John’s:** creation, light, new life, gardens
- **in the Exodus story and John’s:** emancipation, guided journeying, old and new commandments
- **in the Isaiah story and John’s:** justice, shalom, light, healing, sociocultural transformation

McLaren provides many intertextual examples that, in his estimation, “make it clear that Jesus, contrary to [MacArthur’s] assertion, did not come merely to ‘save souls from hell.’ No [says McLaren], he came to launch a new Genesis, to lead a new Exodus, and to announce, embody, and inaugurate a new kingdom as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). Seen in this light, Jesus and his message have everything to do with poverty, slavery, and a ‘social agenda’” (135).