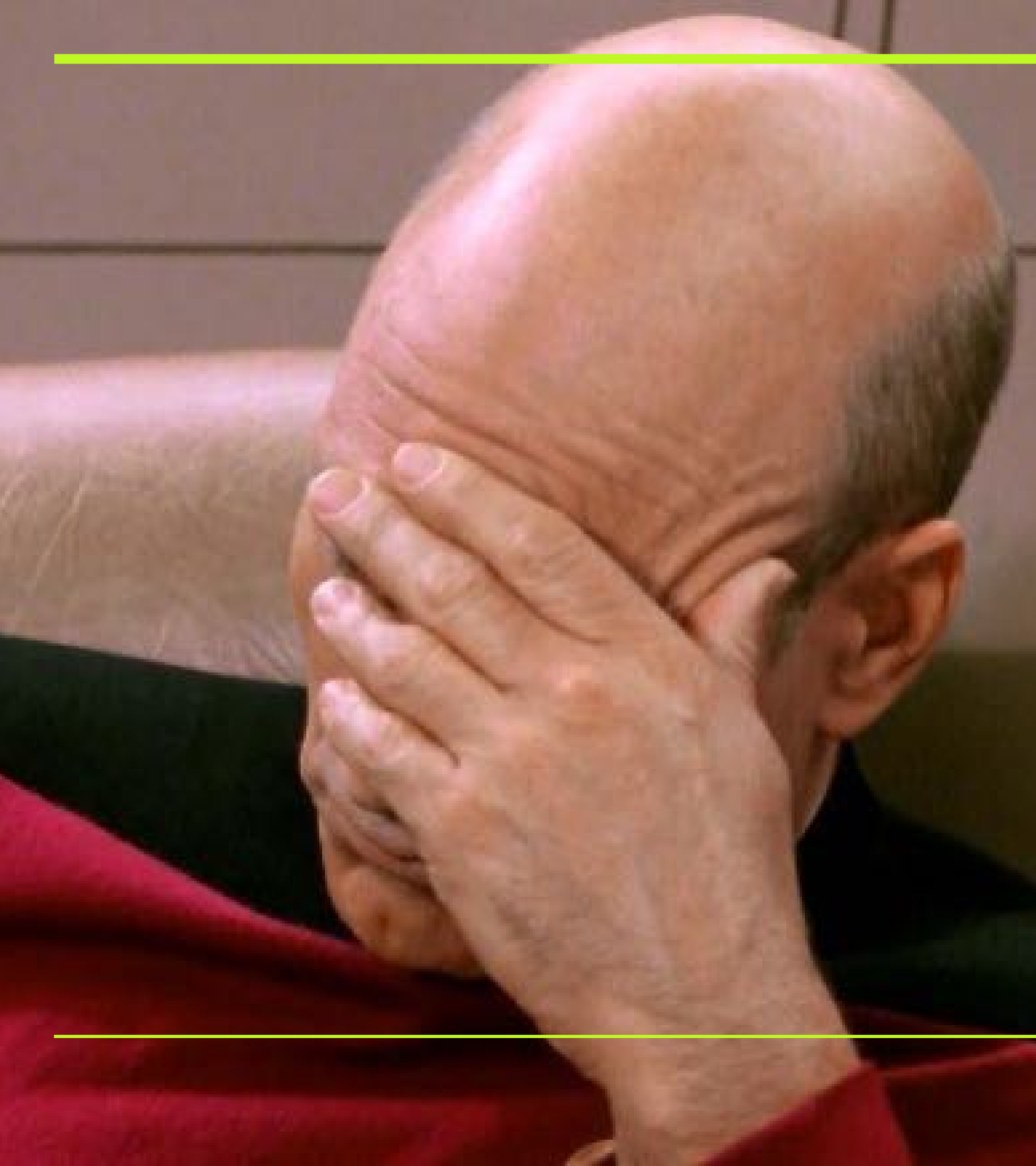


Ch 19. “To Free God”

Ch 20. “Because of Fermi’s Paradox and the Great Filter”

Do I Stay Christian: A Guide for the Doubtters, the Disappointed, and the Disillusioned

BY BRIAN MCLAREN • LIFE TOGETHER CLASS LED BY DOUGLAS OLENA • 4/16/2023



Outline

Chapter 19 “To Free God”

- Liam’s Story
 - Brian’s explanation
 - The problem with “God”
 - Martin Buber: *I and Thou*
 - Experimental Theology
 - Rediscovery of God
 - Reforming our Culture
-

Freeing God

Starting with the conclusion:

“Wherever divine wisdom leads us, let us go.”

Attributed to Origen

McLaren, Brian D., Do I Stay Christian? (p. 149)

Jesus and God, Liam's Story

- “Jesus, the man, is still absolutely compelling to me. . . . But the idea of a Big White Guy on a Throne in the Sky . . . that stopped working for me a long time ago. It’s really why I left the pastorate.” 142
- He also felt that these God concepts pose a credible threat to human survival going forward. 142
- If God likes to save people from predicaments through magic skyhooks, it becomes more spiritual for humans to pray for a miracle rather than to engage in hard work, diligent study, wise planning, and collaboration. 143

I too am an Atheist ...

- ... in regard to the slaveholder's God,
- the MAGA-church God of the white Christian nationalists,
- the prosperity gospel get-rich-quick God,
- the biblical literalist easy-answer God,
- the Theo-Capitalist God with the big invisible hand, and
- the right-wing God who is really upset about abortion but doesn't give a [fig] about racism, environmental plunder, or authoritarianism. 143

I do still dare to believe there is a **You** to address

- Even though I share with my atheist friends “a disappointment with the narrowness and limitations” of many concepts of God, I do still dare to believe there is a **You** to address in the universe,
 - a Presence,
 - a Love that loves through all loves,
 - a radiant and holy mystery,
 - the Spirit of life and creativity,
 - the Wisdom woven into the pattern of the universe,
 - the “still, small voice” that beckons creation, including me, toward love and maturity. 143-144

Martin Buber's *I and Thou*

- Martin Buber's book "I and Thou" is a classic work of existential philosophy that explores the nature of relationships and the way we relate to the world.
- Buber argues that the "I-Thou" relationship is the foundation of authentic human existence.
- Buber also critiques the pervasive "I-It" mode of relating, where others and the world are reduced to mere objects for our use and manipulation, devoid of their intrinsic worth.
- "I and Thou" is a profound exploration of the dynamics of human relationships.

How do we fix this?

- “We don’t let the assumptions of our ancestors about anatomy, psychology, medicine, or physics dominate our thinking and work in these fields today.
- “Why should we be required to let their theological assumptions dominate ... especially when some of those assumptions have contributed to the crisis of faith explored in the first ten chapters of this book?” 145

Experimental Theology

- That means that we are not only free to adapt and experiment in theology, as we are in other fields; we also have a moral obligation to do so ... especially in light of the harm we surveyed in the first ten chapters of this book. 145
- The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart famously prayed, “God, rid me of God.” 146

Rediscovery of God

- “Faith in a god who loves all people begins to emerge slowly and fitfully, three steps forward and two steps back.
- “In this ongoing conversation, Jesus appears, and he invites his contemporaries to imagine something bigger than God as currently understood.” 147
- What is that “something bigger?”
- McLaren suggests the *Kingdom of God*.

Reforming our Culture

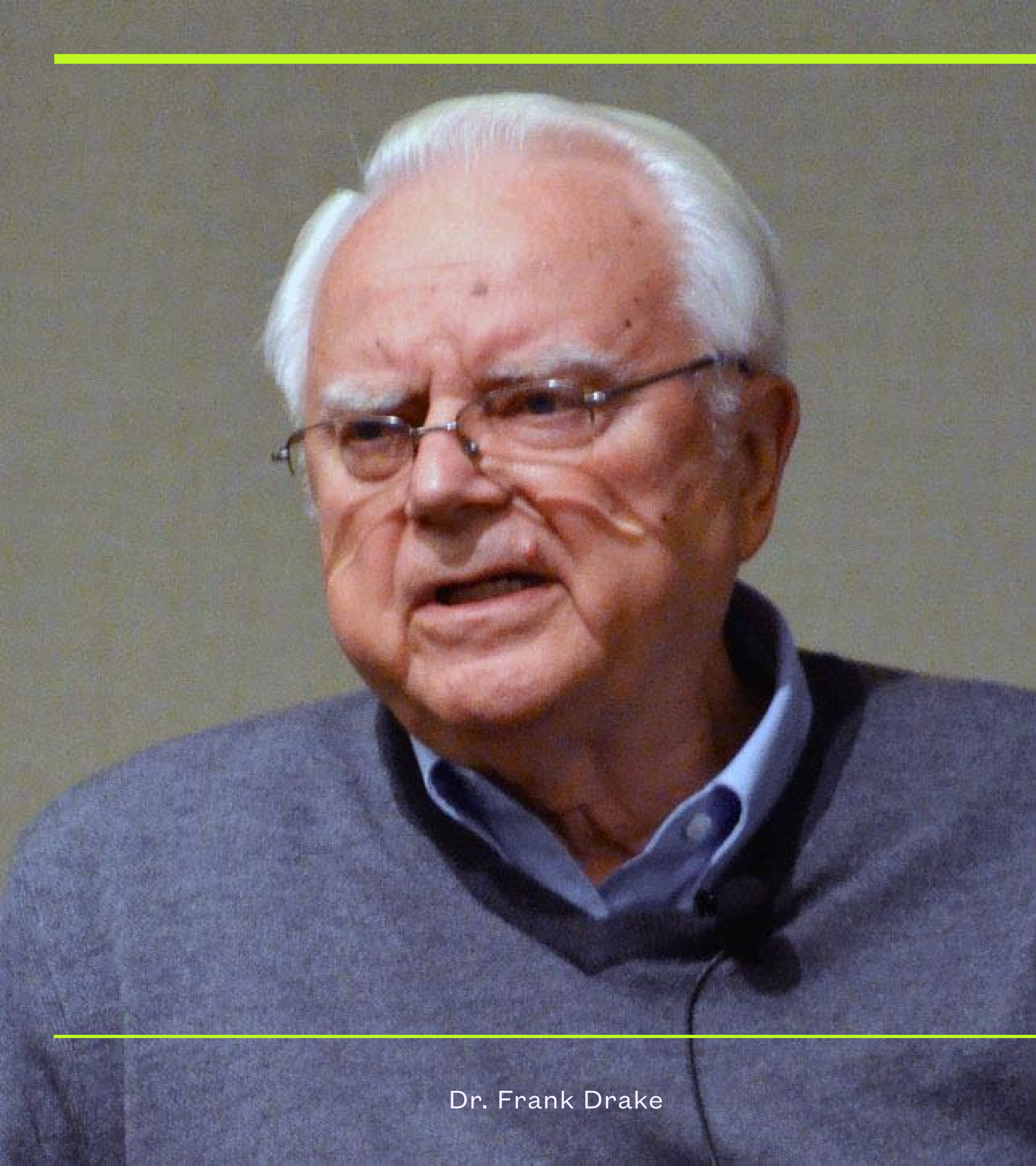
- When we argue about God, we aren't simply arguing about an abstract concept.
- We are also (perhaps even primarily) arguing about what kind of life, culture, and world we want to create, which explains why our theological arguments are often so heated. 148

Conclusion

- When you see it this way, you see that theology, religion, and spirituality aren't just preoccupied with God and mystical esoterica. They are vitally engaged with **the creation of the future**. 148
- In this way, we are free, if we so choose, to stay Christian, because we are free to let our old God concepts die and see what rises from the tomb.
- In a similar way, we can uncage God from at least some of the roles and expectations we have constructed. 149

“In this light, whether we’re speaking of individuals like Liam or whole communities or even civilizations, we humans may need periods of religious modesty and silence, maybe even atheism—whether for three days or three years or three decades or three centuries. That way, the dust can settle and the familiar god-talk can fade to silence, and perhaps then we can get a fresh glimpse of what is really there.”

McLaren, Brian D.. Do I Stay Christian? (p. 149). St. Martin's Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



Dr. Frank Drake

Outline

Chapter 20 “Because of Fermi’s Paradox and the Great Filter”

- Fermi’s Paradox
 - Drake’s Equation
 - The Great Filter
- Salvation and a new way of life
- What kind of God, what kind of world
- Focus on the Future

Because of Fermi's Paradox and the Great Filter

Fermi's paradox and Drake's Equation

- Using Drake's equation ($N = R^* \times f_p \times n_e \times f_l \times f_i \times f_c \times L$)* it is possible to imagine that the universe should be full of life, and even intelligent life.
- That life should have propagated across the universe, certainly within our galaxy there should be evidence of other technological civilizations besides our own.

Fermi's paradox

- A hypothetical solution to the Drake equation gives us this number: $N = 0.0001$ or 0.01% of stars could have intelligent technologically advanced life.
- Given 1 billion stars in our galaxy, that would make 100,000 stars with technological civilizations.
- Fermi's paradox states that given this solution we should see evidence of technological life somewhere in our galaxy. But we don't see anything of the sort.



KURZGESAGT

— IN A NUTSHELL —

<https://youtu.be/UjtOGPJOURM>

The image features a central graphic with the text "GREAT FILTER" in a bold, rounded, blue font. The text is set against a light purple, irregularly shaped background that has a subtle, repeating pattern of the word "GREAT FILTER" in a lighter shade. This central element is surrounded by a dark blue space-themed background filled with numerous small, colorful dots in shades of purple, blue, green, and orange, representing stars or distant galaxies. A prominent spiral galaxy is visible on the right side of the frame. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital.

**GREAT
FILTER**

Why don't we see any aliens?

- Did they destroy themselves during their evolution?
- Could humans do that?

Salvation and a New Way of Life

- “If we humans are on a path to partial or full self-destruction, we need **salvation** ... to be turned around or turned away from our suicidal path.” 151
- “That salvation will require **radical repentance** ... doubting, rethinking, and turning from the destructive assumptions and worldviews that got us into this mess.” 151
- Repentance will prepare us for the **good news** ... “a **vision** for a new way of life that is regenerative rather than suicidal. And this good news will require a new kind of **spiritual formation** so that we can develop the personal and social habits of this new, non-suicidal way of life.” 151

“With our human predicament in mind, when I survey the biblical library and all the other resources of the Christian tradition, a realization hits me like a bucket of ice water: *I would be a fool to walk away from this incredibly rich treasury of wisdom at this time, when I as an individual—and we as a species—need it so much.*”

McLaren, Brian D., Do I Stay Christian? (p. 151)

Salvation and a New Way of Life

- “I need a **transformation-plan gospel**, the kind that inspired our ancestors stuck in their own existential threats to seek a way when no way was visible.” 151
- “I need it as a **library of questions and arguments** among communities of people who sought a better way of living in harmony with themselves, one another, the earth, and God.” 152

Salvation and a New Way of Life

- “What would be left? **Rational analysis** that convinces me that life is doomed and meaningless, that we’ll never make it through the Great Filter?” 153
- “Might I be a truer Christian for **striving with the questions** than I would be for accepting the answers?” 153

What kind of God, What kind of world do we want?

- The Catholic Church, the largest religious community on earth, has failed miserably in many ways, but then along comes Pope Francis “inspiring people to cast a new vision for human civilization!” 154
- “I see it again: the worst moments can set the stage for the best moments, if we do not give up and succumb to despair or cynicism ... if we keep striving.” 154

What kind of future do we want?

- “*Will we stay Christian?* and *Will Christianity survive?* are less important questions than these:
 - *How shall we humans survive and thrive?*
 - *What good future shall we strive for?*
 - *How can we align our energies with the divine energy at work in our universe?*

Suggestions...

- “That striving, that pursuit, that transformation project is bigger than Christianity and bigger than not-Christianity.” 154-155
- “Dr. King: whether we stay Christian or not, we will either learn to live together as family or we will die together as fools. It’s a question of survival.” 155
- With the great filter and Fermi’s paradox, we are “faced simultaneously with existential threats and holy possibilities.” 155

“It’s still not too late, if we dare to see, if we dare to believe, if we can relax our death grip on the past and reach forward into the future with eyes and hearts wide open.”

McLaren, Brian D., Do I Stay Christian? (p. 154)
