

Do I Stay Christian?

Chapters 21, 22

Brian McLaren
Life Together Sunday School Class
Led by Douglas Olena
4/23/2023



Transcend and Include. . .

This is the self-transcending drive of the Kosmos -
to go beyond what went before and yet include what went before. . .
to open into the very heart of Spirit-in-Action.

-Ken Wilber-



Chapter 21, Include and Transcend

Stages of Life, Stages of Growth

Four Stages



- ☐ **About Stages of Christianity**
- ☐ **Rohr's Stages, 2 stage, 3 stage**
- ☐ **Rob Bell, 3 stages**
- ☐ **McLaren, 4 stages**

**“Whether or not you choose to stay Christian,
here’s what I recommend: pay attention to
your human development, to the stages you’re
entering, inhabiting, or leaving.”**

Brian McLaren (p. 159)

“A lot of people leave Christianity when really all they needed was to leave a confining form or stage of Christianity.”

Brian McLaren (p. 160)

McLaren's 4 Stages

- ☐ “In Faith After Doubt, I tried to synthesize what I had learned from a wide array of theorists into a four-stage model:
 - ☐ Simplicity
 - ☐ Complexity
 - ☐ Perplexity
 - ☐ Harmony (or Solidarity).”

“I use the metaphor of a tree to frame the four stages. Each growing season, a tree adds a ring. The new ring doesn’t exclude the previous rings; it embraces them in something bigger. It includes and transcends.”

Brian McLaren (p. 161)

**See the table for examples
on p. 162-164**

“If you’re frustrated with Christianity, there’s a good chance that your stage of development is in tension with the stage of development of the form of Christianity practiced by your current faith community.”

Brian McLaren (p. (p. 165)

McLaren's 4 Stages: Simplicity

- ☐ **All or nearly all the problems we considered in Part I are exactly the kinds of problems you would expect from early-stage Christianity. 165**
- ☐ **If you're a Christian solidly in Simplicity, I know that it took great moral courage for you to get through Part I of this book, because it challenged all the simple moral categories you are working so hard to construct. 165**

McLaren's 4 Stages: Complexity

- ☐ If you're in Complexity, you were probably tempted to skip Part I entirely and begin with Part II, since you want to make Christianity work and you're more attracted to a pragmatic yes than a critical no.
- ☐ But your thirst for information may have carried you through even the hard truths of Part I. 165

McLaren's 4 Stages: Perplexity

- ☐ If you're a Christian in Perplexity, you were relieved to read Part I of this book and probably a little suspicious about Part II, worried it would be an exercise in putting lipstick on a pig.
- ☐ You are probably a little uncomfortable right now too, because you're aware of how stage models like this one can become hierarchies that privilege those at the top and oppress those at the bottom. 165-166

McLaren's 4 Stages: Harmony (Solidarity)

- ☐ **If you're in or entering Harmony, you are interested in integrating what you learned in Parts I and II, so Part III is probably the part of the book you've been waiting for. 166**

**“Little by little, more and more of us
discovered there was a way to stay Christian
beyond the first half of life, beyond me and we
stages, and beyond Simplicity, Complexity, and
Perplexity.”**

Brian McLaren (p. (p. 167)

Our Desire...

- ☐ **What if your real desire is not simply a way to stay Christian or put Christianity behind you but a way to be more fully and maturely human?**
- ☐ **Can you see that you could leave Christianity and be no less stuck in some other form of Simplicity, Complexity, or Perplexity, whether religious or secular? 167**

Whether you identify as a Christian or not, you are still a human being, and you are still passing through life's stages. 168



Chapter 22, Start with the Heart

Stages of Life, Stages of Growth

The Power of Human Desire



- ☐ Human Desire Changes Things
- ☐ Each Stage has its Associated Desires
- ☐ What Should Our Aim Be?

**“Who would have guessed that human desire
would prove no less powerful than volcanoes,
earthquakes, and incoming asteroids in
shaping the earth?”**

Brian McLaren (p. 169)

**“If religion has a positive role in our future, it
will surely involve specializing in desire
formation.”**

Brian McLaren (p. 169)

“Unless you are intentional about shaping your desires, *others will do so for you*. In other words, religion isn’t the only industry in the desire-formation business.”

Brian McLaren (p. 170)

Each Stage has its Associated Desires

- Because of my own passage through the stages we considered in the previous chapter, I find that my desires are changing. 170
- When early-stage religion lost its grip on me, I found new spiritual communities that helped me embrace and nurture new desires. 170
- To describe those desires, desires that take us through Perplexity and into Harmony, I have to begin with a desire that is a matter of survival going forward: a more mature human community will *desire the good of the planet*. 170-171

Each Stage has its Associated Desires

- ☐ **With more and more of us taking more and more of our planet's resources and pumping out more and more filth, trash, and toxins, we must make a healthy planet a primary desire, a starting line rather than a finish line. 171**
- ☐ **People who are not Christians will find their own meaningful and appropriate ways of encouraging this desire. 171**
- ☐ **Going forward, we will learn to take as good care of ourselves as we would want our neighbors to be taken care of. Our well-being won't be above or below theirs but inseparably linked with theirs. 172**

What Should Our Aim Be?

- ☐ So we start big with a healthy planetary system, and
- ☐ Then desire healthy human systems that thrive within it, and
- ☐ Then we desire our own individual well-being within those larger human and planetary systems. 172

“To love the love that loves the parts is to love the whole. To unify our desires in love is, I think, what Jesus must have meant by purity of heart (see Matthew 5:8).”

Brian McLaren (p. 172)

Web of Life • Tree of Life • Family of Life

- ☐ It is the *life* of the web of life—the tree of life, the family of life—of which we're part. When we cut ourselves off from it, we're like a branch that amputates itself from a vine or tree 173
- ☐ This universal flow of love, may be one of our best new metaphors for God. 173

**“In Sunday school, I learned to think of God as
a very old white-bearded man on a throne,
who stood above creation and occasionally
stirred it with a stick.”**

Barbara Brown Taylor quoted by Brian McLaren (p. 173)

“When I am dreaming quantum dreams, what I see is an infinite web of relationship, flung across the vastness of space like a luminous net. It is made of energy, not thread.”

Barbara Brown Taylor quoted by Brian McLaren (p. 173)

Web of Life • Tree of Life • Family of Life

- ☐ **God is the web, the energy, the space, the light—not captured in them, as if any of those concepts were more real than what unites them—but revealed in that singular, vast net of relationship that animates everything that is. . . . I want to proclaim that God is the unity—the very energy, the very intelligence, the very elegance and passion that make it all go. Barbara Brown Taylor 173**

Web of Life • Tree of Life • Family of Life

- ☐ **We are all one in love.... It is only in unity with my fellow spiritual seekers that I am anything at all. It is this foundation of unity that will save humanity.... God has created all that is made. God loves all that [God] has created. And so anyone who, in loving God, loves all his fellow creatures ... loves all that is. All those who are on the spiritual path contain the whole of creation, and the Creator. That is because God is inside us, and inside God is everything. And so whoever loves God loves all that is.**

**“Healed human desire will re-consecrate what distorted human desire has desecrated.
Because of Christianity’s size and power, we need a strong movement of Christians working within the Christian community to prioritize the formation of this integrated desire”**

Brian McLaren (p. 175)

Web of Life • Tree of Life • Family of Life

- ☐ **So whatever you do, whatever language you use, Christian or not, strengthen the unifying desire, the desire that desires the well-being of all. That is the Harmony that lies beyond Simplicity, Complexity, and Perplexity.**
- ☐ **Everything else flows from there. 176**