

Review: Stay Christian? No (1-10) Yes (11-20) ... Why? ... because...

## McLaren (14) - Because It Would Be a Shame to Leave a Religion in Its Infancy

### DON'T THROW OUT THE BABY

What form of Christianity will gain your commitment? Regressive/conservative? Or progressive/*anticipatory*?

**First axial age** 800 BC to 200 BC. Internal individual subjective awakening.

[https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Axial\\_Age](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Axial_Age)

Karl Jaspers (1883 - 1969) pioneered the idea of the Axial Age. According to Jaspers, the period between 800 to 200 B.C.E. was the time in which all foundations that underlie current civilization came into being. Some extend the Axial period as late as 600 C.E. The Axial Age plays a central, foundational, or crucial role in human history. The idea is not universally accepted, however, because it implies a knowing directive force behind the unfolding of history. Some historians find this unacceptable.

Second Axial age

<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/religious-identity-in-an-emergent-second-axial-age>

Entering the **second axial age**, radically new. Demands a new theological method based on anticipation of the future. **What are you anticipating?** The cosmic narrative is still unfolding, and the story is yet incomplete. **How do you see your story completing?**

We are in a new universe where everything is in motion. **How do you see the universe evolving into something more beautiful, diverse, alive, and conscious?** **Or is it stagnating and decaying toward extinction?**

We do not know what the universe can become given enough time, and enough opportunity, added by our own faith, hope, courage, and love.

**Three things are clear.**

- The earliest form of something is not its pure or original or best or permanent or ideal form. There really is no such thing. Every form is in the process and adapting involving mutating and changing.
- Over time the universe becomes more complex, diverse, alive, intra-dependent, conscious beautiful and good
- Extinction happens on the path of evolution when conditions change. Life forms must either evolve to cope with them, or go extinct.

But Christianity in all its conventional first-axial age forms does not allow me to live in this universe, because the first axial age constricted it within a change-averse set of boundary conditions. Diversity is rebellion from that original expression. Creative or progressive change is heresy, apostasy, or corruption. Since a first-axial age God created and rules this first-axial age universe, any who dare to evolve and diversify face damnation.

It's not that we won't accept first-axial age Christianity, but that we can't. The best we can do is *pretend* to accept it, but that kind of pretense *corrupts our conscience* and turns good faith into bad faith. **What have we been pretending to accept?**

Will Christianity only exist in those enclaves where authoritarian leaders rule over submissive flocks who enfold their religious lives within the assumptions of the first-axial age, or is the universe actually evolving, so that Christianity is also in its infancy, and has another possible option alongside extinction, namely, **evolution**?

This way of thinking allows me to view the authoritarian gatekeepers and religious company man with compassion and empathy. They all have a part in the story, but no one has the last word. **Do you view them this way? Can you? Has McLaren done so in this book?**

Instead of an old mature, fully formed, maybe even worn-out religion, McLaren sees it in its **earliest infancy**. If I abandon it now, would I be **abandoning an infant**? The universe is not in a hurry.

Wouldn't I be wiser to be double my efforts to help this fledgling religion learn to walk, stop, biting its playmates, and feed itself? **Perhaps our terrible to religion is on the verge of a breakthrough.**

**What breakthroughs do you see as possible if this is the case?**

Sr. Ilia Delio - six challenges she concludes in *Making All Things New*

- *Know the Earth and our own bodies*, because we have become so obsessed with concepts that we have lost touch with our creatureliness
- *See our world religions as sources of energy* that can mature and guide us forward.
- Understand that *thought is a physical reality*, and like any other involving expression of life, it can lead us forward.
- Fully embrace the idea that *something big, beautiful, and alive is evolving in the universe*. It includes individual humans but is bigger than the sum of its parts.
- Cultivate a *zest for living in the spirit of adventure*, wildly flinging ourselves into the arms of divine love.
- Dare to *trust in the process of evolving life, of birth, of growth* of which we are a small part.

If we see our situation in this light, doesn't the Earth need at least a few people like us to stay Christian especially in this *pregnant anticipatory moment*?

## McLaren (15) – Because of Our Legendary Founder

### LOVING JESUS IS ENOUGH...OR IS IT?

Only Jesus provides a way for Christians to stay Christian, as part of a Christlike resistance to all un-Christlike elements of Christianity and its many mechanisms of domination.

But ... "According to prominent Christian gatekeepers across history, **having confidence in Jesus and loving Jesus simply aren't enough**. We must confess agreement with their beliefs, they say, about Jesus, the Bible, the church, the universe, history, the future, and other matters. We must observe their rituals and submit to their authority structures. Above all, we have to take everything Christianity teaches *literally*."

"Many people, when given the choice between staying Christian and staying honest, feel that honesty requires them to leave literalist Christianity. ... My appeal to you is not to let literalism be to today's Christians what circumcision was in the early church: an option that some make an absolute requirement."

"I call this alternative to the conventional literalist approach a **literary approach**."

- "Jesus must have been so extraordinary as to become *legendary*." (root: *read*; people will read about him or her in the future)
- The development of a legend follows a rather common literary process:
  - Someone lives a truly extraordinary life
  - People tell stories about that life or deed, creating an *oral tradition*
  - As those stories are told and retold, *details are changed*
  - Differing versions of the original story spread.
  - People have to decide which to choose that fits best w/their feelings about the hero.
  - Based on that choice, the extraordinary person's extraordinariness is further embellished.

- One or more of the stories is written down (and then frozen from further embellishment)
- Says this **embellishment process** happened in the **Gospels**. (E.g., Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39, Matt 8:28-34).
- “When the *literal truth* is too much to bear or too dangerous to speak, they speak *literary truth*. They tell fictional stories that have nonfictional meanings.”
- “Embellishment is the sincerest form of flattery.”
- The **experience of transformation** is the point of the story! “When I read the gospels literarily, Jesus becomes not less interesting and wonderful but more.”
- “Oppressive forces may have left you feeling banished to a graveyard, excluded from your community, stigmatized as crazy, heretical, or whatever, hiding in shame about who you really are what you really think how you really feel. Having internalized your rejection, you may find yourself torturing yourself simply for being honest, as if you've done something wrong by speaking the truth as you see it. Perhaps this story about Jesus can help you see and name the oppressive forces that have deranged you and your community and perhaps in some way you can take your place in the community again clothed and in your right mind.”

## McLaren (16) – Because Innocence is an addiction, and Solidarity is the Cure

### CHRISTIANITY R US

“Distancing myself from “bad” Christians absolves me of the responsibility to confront them as my brothers and sisters for the harm they do. It lets me waltz off the stage feeling *superior* and *innocent*.”

Nadia Bolz-Weber: “the **cult of innocence**” formula: “*an innocent victim to defend plus an evil villain to oppose equals innocence to enjoy.*”

For example: “by joining the anti-abortion movement the once guilty are propelled from deep moral unease to a secure position of moral innocence and superiority.”

“People on **both the political left and the political right can be seduced into cults of innocence**. They just transfuse their innocence from different victims and project their shame on different villains. The left defends racial and religious minorities, immigrants, the disabled, LGBTQ persons, Native Americans, science, the environment, social justice activists, and the poor. The right defends the unborn, white people, men, straight people, conservative Christians, the rich, traditionalists, gun owners, and those with little education.”

“For those who do not want to take a shortcut to innocence there is another way to deal with guilt and shame. This alternative is deeper and better but harder. The old fashioned word for it is **repentance**: soberly rethinking the past facing it without minimizing it, grieving over it, feeling the full measure of the pain of victims, seeking to understand the conditions that prompted the victimizers to do what they did, seeking to address those conditions, healing the wounds, righting the wrongs, changing the systems that protected the wrongdoers, and joining with victims in a struggle for mutual liberation.”

One of the reasons McLaren sometimes wants to leave Christianity is to achieve innocence, to distance himself from all the negative things. But by doing so he actually joins/stays in the “cult of innocence.” So, paradoxically, by staying, it is a way to **leave the cult of innocence**. **Solidarity – acknowledging that “Christianity R Us!”**

**To be continued ... McLaren 21-28 Stay Christian? Yes? HOW?**