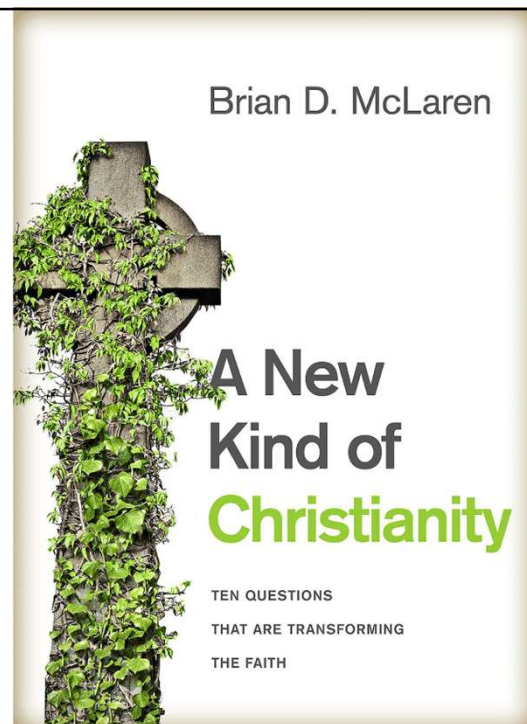


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Much of the material in this presentation was taken verbatim or almost verbatim from the book "A New Kind of Christianity" by Brian McLaren



1

Preface

- In conversation and friendship with an amazing array of Christian leaders from across the denominational spectrum: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, historic Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal. They have convinced me of some bad news and some encouraging news.
- The bad news: the Christian faith in all its forms is in trouble.
- The good news: the Christian faith in all its forms is pregnant with new possibilities.

2

Chapter 1: Between Something Real and Something Wrong

- McLaren gave a day long seminar in England about this book. He spoke about the challenges and opportunities Christians face at this moment in history – in our theology, local church life, and mission in the world. It was warmly received and several people afterward expressed how it affected their lives.
- Outside in the parking lot 4 people were hurriedly placing a sheet of canary yellow paper under windshield wipers. The leaflet warned participants about this “controversial religious leader” who will speak. He is “dangerous,” it says, and “unbiblical.”

3

Chapter 2: The Quest and the Questions

- Imagine it's 1775. You are a young citizen in the Thirteen Colonies, listening to early statesmen like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson dream aloud about a new nation – a government without a king.
- Or imagine it's the early nineteenth century. You're voyaging with Alfred Russel Wallace between the islands of Indonesia, or you're on board The Beagle with Charles Darwin.
- Or imagine it's 1905. You're in Bern, having coffee with an unknown would-be physicist named Albert Einstein, who is working on an article with a strange equation in it.

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- Or imagine it's in the early 1960s, and you're watching Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as he preaches about a beloved community replacing a segregated society.
- Or zip back to 1610, in Italy, and imagine you're standing in starlight among friends on Galileo's rooftop deck taking turns gazing at the moons of Jupiter.
- Asking questions is what got Martin Luther into hot water in 1517. He dared question the issuance of indulgences.
- Statements create debate. Now, nearly five hundred years later, Luther's ninety-five theses have completed their job. It's time for another tipping point; it's time, we might say, for a ninety-sixth thesis.

5

In Chapter 3, McLaren offers a prayer like John Robinson offered on the Beach to Mayflower passengers

Lord, we acknowledge that we have made a mess of what Jesus started. We affirm that we are wrong and Jesus is right. We choose not to defend what we have done and what we have become. We understand that many good Christians will not want to participate in our quest, and we welcome their charitable critique. We acknowledge that we have created many Christianities up to this point, and they call for reassessment and, in many cases, repentance. We choose to seek a better path into the future than the one we have been on. We desire to be born again as disciples of Jesus Christ. Now grant us wisdom and guide us in our quest, and create something new and beautiful in and among us for the good of all creation and to your glory, Living God.

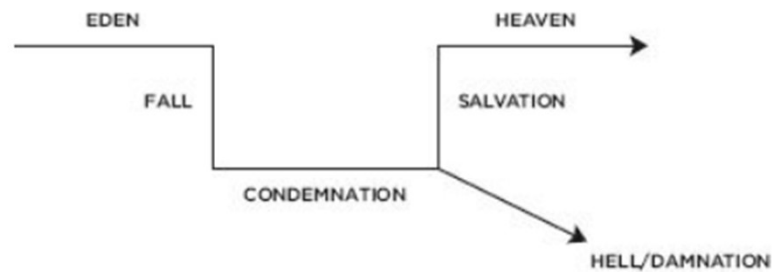
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Book One: Unlocking and Opening

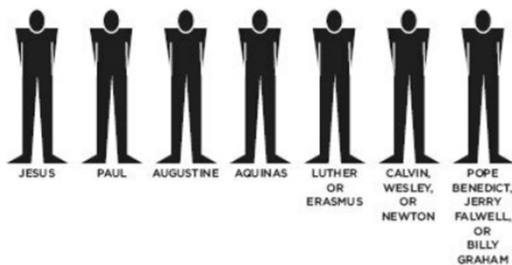
Part 1: The Narrative Question

Chapter 4: What Is the Overarching Story Line of the Bible?

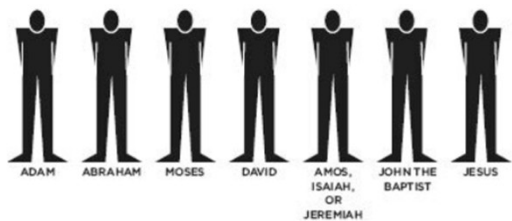
Christians historically were required to believe that the Bible presents one very specific story line, a story line by which we assess all of history, all of human experience, all of our own experience. McLaren calls it the six line model.



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This story line is based on our viewpoint looking back in history at who Christ was. When we look back at Jesus in this way, we aren't directly seeing Jesus. We're seeing Paul's view of Jesus, Augustine's view of Paul's view, and so on.



But if we see him emerging from within a story that had been unfolding through his ancestors, and if we primarily locate him in that story, we might understand him in a very different way.

8

- Once McLaren acknowledged that nobody in the Hebrew Scriptures ever talked about original sin, total depravity, “the Fall,” or eternal conscious torment in hell, a suspicion began to grow in him about where the six-lined narrative might possibly have come from.
- The narrative was shaped by the philosophical narrative that Plato taught! That’s the descent into Plato’s cave of illusion and the ascent into philosophical enlightenment. Later McLaren realized it was also the social and political narrative of the Roman Empire, and so he began calling it the Greco-Roman narrative.
- Plato taught that ultimate reality was nonmaterial, eternal, and unchanging. The material, temporal, and changing objects of this world, in this view, are a shadow, an illusion.

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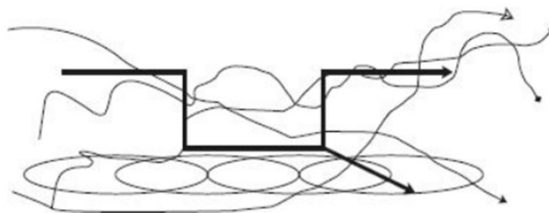
- So, behind the frail world of material chairs is a sturdy ideal called “chairness.” Ultimate reality, then, is nonmaterial, and material things are shadows or manifestations of the Nonmaterial and Unchanging Real.
- Plato’s student Aristotle tried looking at the world from the opposite perspective.
- Plato’s followers would say, “Ultimate reality is nonmaterial Being,” and Aristotle’s followers would say, “Ultimate reality is material Becoming,” to which Plato’s followers would respond, “We believe it is changeless, and change is an illusion,” to which Aristotle’s followers would reply, “Wrong again. It is constantly changing, and changelessness is simply an idea or mental construction, not a reality.”

10

- This Greek philosophical mind-set affected the Roman mind in at least three profound and history-changing ways.
- First, the Greco-Roman mind was habitually dualistic; an enlightened or philosophic mind would always see the world divided in two, the profane physical world of matter on the low side and the sacred metaphysical world of ideals, ideas, and changelessness on the high side.
- Second, this argument infused the Greco-Roman world with a peculiar energy and confidence – so strong we might even call it superiority. Through their Aristotelian resources, the culture attended carefully to the physical world and achieved amazing feats of engineering. Through their Platonic resources, they pioneered the life of the mind. Their intellectual achievements armed them with an astonishing confidence that their enlightened human minds could uniquely grasp the absolute, transcendent, universal truth. As a result, the Greco-Roman mind became highly certain of its own superiority.

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- Third, this philosophical dualism and intellectual superiority epitomized an “us” versus “them,” in-group versus out-group society, in which “we” are civilized and superior and the rest of the world is barbarian and inferior. To the Greco-Roman mind, the story of the Roman Empire represents the real plotline of history, and every other culture has value only in what it contributes to Greco-Romanism.
- To illustrate, imagine that each culture conceives of its own historical time line, creating a messy tangle like this:



12

- Now the god of this Greco-Roman version of the biblical story bears a strange similarity in many ways to Zeus (Jupiter for the Romans), but McLaren names him Theos.
- Theos is a far different deity from the Jewish Elohim of Genesis 1, or LORD (referring to the unspeakable name of the Creator) of Genesis 2 and 12, not to mention the Abba to whom Jesus prayed.
- The Platonic god Theos loves spirit, state, and being and hates matter, story, and becoming, since, once again, the latter involve change, and the only way to change or move from perfection is downward into decay. In fact, as soon as something drops out of the state of perfection, Theos is possessed by a pure and irresistible urge to destroy it (or make it suffer).

13

- According to McLaren, more and more people are defecting from the project of cosmetically enhancing this story and trying to rehabilitate the image of Theos. They want to try reading the Bible frontward for a while, to let it be a Jewish story that, through Jesus, opens to include all humanity.
- They believe it is time to firmly escort the Greco-Roman reframing of the biblical narrative to the door and seek the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the god of the Greek philosophers and Roman potentates.
- Or perhaps better said, it is time to exit the Greco-Roman narrative – to quietly and courageously walk out the door and leave its six straight lines behind, in quest of the Jewish story in which Jesus would have found himself, and in quest of the One Jesus called “Our Father.”

14

Chapter 5: Setting the Stage for the Biblical Narrative

- McLaren was able to consult with Jewish friends and protestant authors such as Walter Brueggemann, N. T. Wright, Marcus Borg, Ched Myers, William Herzog, Rita Brock, and James Cone, and Catholics like John Dominic Crossan, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Richard Rohr, Joan Chittister.
- This very good world has a beginning, which suggests a change from before the beginning. And this beginning is not complete: it unfolds in stages.
- If it were perfect – in the Greco-Roman sense—the earth would have come into being fully populated, fully “developed.”
- Although this evolving creation-in-process would be appalling to Theos, it is delightful to Elohim, who loves stories.
- McLaren shares the repeating story lines he finds in Genesis in Chapter 5.

15

Chapter 6: The Biblical Narrative in Three Dimensions

- McLaren considers the biblical narrative in Genesis to be a kind of prequel to the prime narrative.
- That prime narrative comes to us in the book of Exodus. If Genesis is a story of sacred creation and reconciliation, Exodus is a story of sacred liberation and formation.

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