

Review Part I: The Narrative Question

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

Chapter 5: Setting the Stage for the Biblical Narrative

Chapter 6: The Biblical Narrative in Three Dimensions

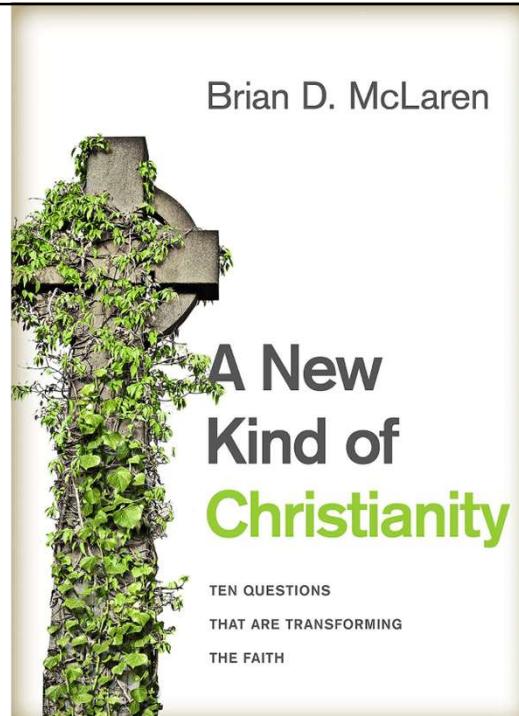
Part II THE AUTHORITY QUESTION

Chapter 7: How Should the Bible Be Understood?

Chapter 8: From Legal Constitution to Community Library

Chapter 9: Revelation Through Conversation

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



Brian D. McLaren

A New Kind of Christianity

TEN QUESTIONS
THAT ARE TRANSFORMING
THE FAITH

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

Chapter 5: Setting the Stage for the Biblical Narrative

Chapter 6: The Biblical Narrative in Three Dimensions

- Recall that the "looking back" narrative was shaped by Plato.
- Perfection was static, any change would lead away from perfection. This was also the social and political narrative of the Roman Empire, and so McLaren calls it Greco-Roman, and this view of God McLaren calls Theos.
- This Greek philosophical mind-set affected the Roman mind in at least three profound and history-changing ways: dualism, superiority, ultimately an "us vs them" worldview.

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- The forward story begins with something better than the perfect realm of Plato: the good world of Genesis. Jewish goodness, it turns out, is far better than Greco-Roman perfection.
- 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, with the first stage being a formless, uninhabited expanse. Into this expanse, light shines and sun and moon take shape. Seas are created and divided from land. Gradually, plant life emerges, then animal life, then human life.
- The Hebrew God Elohim, unlike Theos, loves stories and seems to have little taste for states. And Elohim's story is not a "safe" predictable story, but rather a story with unpredictability and danger written into its first chapters.

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- McLaren uses the following "parable" extensively to model Elohim's role: Imagine that a father has a daughter whom he loves with all his heart. When she comes of age, Dad gives her a beautiful sports car. Dad tells her to drive safely and stay in her lane, but soon she crashes into a tree and totals her vehicle. Dad gives her a stern lecture, and a few months later replaces the sports car with a modest economy car, more of a starter car, you might say. Then she takes her new economy vehicle off-road and gets stuck in a muddy field. Dad pulls her out and requires her to take a drivers' ed class before she can drive again. She finishes the class and then a few weeks later she speeds around a corner, recklessly loses control, and drives herself into a river, and the economy car is totaled. At this point, Dad decides she isn't ready for a car and gives her a bicycle instead. Then she crashes her bike into a tower and breaks her arm. God again comes to the rescue and rushes her to the ER. In each case, what does the father do in response to his daughter's foolishness?

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- Disown her? Lock her in a dungeon? Condemn her to eternal conscious torment? Not even close! Elohim patiently bears with a rebellious and foolish humanity again and again.
- Scene 1: Adam and Eve eating the fruit.
- Scene 2: God makes clothes for them.
- Scene 3: Cain and Abel.
- It begins with God creating a good world, continues with human beings creating evil, and concludes with God creating good outcomes that overcome human evil. We might say it is the story of goodness being created and recreated: God creates a good world, which humans damage and savage, but though humans have evil intent, God still creates good, and God's good prevails. Good has the first word, and good has the last.

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Part II: The Authority Question

Chapter 7: How Should the Bible Be Understood?

- McLaren has always loved the bible. He pastored for several years. But he studied literature in college because he loved literature.
- He thinks this background gave him an advantage when he tried to reimagine how the Bible should be understood.
- There will be no new kind of Christian faith without a new approach to the Bible, because we've gotten ourselves into a mess with the Bible. Specifically, three messes.

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Mess #1 – The scientific mess.

- Fundamentalism in all of its forms has repeatedly painted itself into a corner by requiring that the Bible be treated as a divinely dictated science textbook providing us true information in all areas of life, including when and how the earth was created, what the shape of the earth is, what revolves around what in space, treating mental health problems, and so on.
- This approach has set up Christians on the wrong side of truth again and again—from Galileo’s time, to Darwin’s, to our own.
- Just as fundamentalists were the last to acknowledge the rotation of the earth and its revolution around the sun, they’ll be the last to acquiesce to what science is telling us about our growing ecological crises.

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Mess #2 – Ethics

- The Bible, when taken as an ethical rule book, offers us no clear categories for many of our most significant and vexing socioethical quandaries. We find no explicit mention, for example, of abortion, capitalism, communism, socialism, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, systemic racism, affirmative action, human rights, nationalism, sexual orientation, pornography, global climate change, imprisonment, extinction of species, energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, genetic engineering, space travel, and so on—not to mention nuclear weapons, biological warfare, and just-war theory.

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- If we try to solve these issues in a simple “thou shalt not” way, we will find ourselves stuck precisely where we are stuck now: largely paralyzed in solving major life-and-death-of-the-planet issues and largely obsessed with narrow hot-button feuds that end up being little more than litmus tests for political affiliation. Not only that, but we can look back over history to see how various groups pulled verses from the Bible to justify unjustifiable ethical positions.
- We don’t want to repeat errors of using the Bible to justify
 - segregation and forbidding interracial dating and marriage, or
 - the death penalty for homosexuality and rebellion toward parents.
- Sidenote: White Evangelical Christians are the most fervent advocates of government-sanctioned torture.

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Mess #3 - Peace

- We are in deep trouble relating to peace.
- The Bible is becoming a means of motivating people to violence against “sinners” or those that defend sinners. When careless preachers use the Bible as a club or sword to dominate or wound, they discredit the Bible in a way that no skeptic can.
- There is a kind of Bible-quoting intoxication under the influence of which we religious people lose the ability to distinguish between what God says and what we say God says.
- In McLaren’s travels around the world he is asked about the relation between the Bible and violence more than any other.
- McLaren concludes the chapter with a deeper look at slavery and the abolitionist movement in the USA.

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Chapter 8: From Legal Constitution to Community Library

- McLaren believes the heart of the problem is that we read and use the Bible as a legal constitution.
- We seek to distinguish “spirit” from “letter” and argue the “framers’ intent,” seldom questioning whether the passage in question was actually intended by the original authors and editors to be a universal, eternally binding law.
- As a result, we turn our seminaries and denominational bodies into versions of a Supreme Court.
- At every turn, we approach the biblical text as if it were an annotated code instead of what it actually is: **a portable library of poems, prophecies, histories, fables, parables, letters, sage sayings, quarrels, and so on.**

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- Read as a constitution, the Bible has passages that can and have been used to justify, if not just about anything, an awful lot of wildly different things.
- For example, let’s say we approach the Bible with this question: How should we treat our enemies?
- Matthew 5:44 tells us to love them. Romans 12:17–21 tells us to do good to them and never seek revenge against them. First Peter 3:13–17 tells us to suffer at their hands and set an example for them.
- Psalm 137:9 says we should joyfully dash their infants against a rock. Psalm 139:19 says we should hate them. Deuteronomy 7:1–6 says we should destroy them utterly and show them no mercy.
- In Chapter 9 McLaren takes a deep dive into how to read Job.

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