

Study Schedule for “Do I Stay Christian?” by Brian McLaren

(Readings are for the week before the Sunday listed. We will discuss those chapters on the date listed.)

If you need a book and can't afford one, let the church office know and we will make sure you get one.

If you don't have time to read everything or anything, come anyway, the discussion will be easy for you to enter.

Part 1 : “NO”

“I like your Christ, but not your Christianity.” Mahatma Gandhi

For February 5 Read the Introduction through Chapter 2 pp.1-37

Questions for Reflection:

1. What aspects of the way Christianity shows up in the U.S. and the world today cause challenges for me?
2. How has Christianity historically participated in Anti-Semitism? How does it participate today?
3. How has Christianity historically participated in the Suppression of Dissent? How does it participate today?
4. Why does it matter?

For February 12 Read Chapters 3-5 pp. 38- 61

Questions for Reflection:

1. How has Christianity historically participated in crusader and colonial violence in the world? How does it participate today?
2. In what ways has Christianity been compromised by institutionalism or has it?
3. How does money influence our current understanding and practice of Christianity or does it?
4. What is my attitude about money? Is money my master? In what ways? In what ways is it not?
5. Why does it matter?

For February 19 Read Chapters 6-8 pp. 62-92

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does Christianity participate in White Patriarchy? How do I?
2. How is Christianity stuck in an understanding of reality that conflicts with science? Or is it?
3. How has western Christianity failed in being a transformative spiritual path? Or has it?
4. Why does it matter?

For February 26 Read Chapters 9- 10 pp. 93 - 114

Questions for Reflection:

1. How has modern Christianity been coopted by commercial, consumer, and corporate agendas? Or has it?
2. How has such coopting led to an unwillingness to face issues like global warming, poverty, dying, the abuse of difference; distribution of and access to life-sustaining resources for all creation, human and otherwise? Is Christianity, as currently practiced in the west, intellectually
3. Why is the Christian message as currently practiced unappealing and irrelevant to much of the younger generation? Or is it?
4. **Given what we have read and discussed in Part I: “No”, what needs to change in the way we practice Christianity? What needs to be confessed, repented, and restitution made where possible? What holds me/us back from doing that?**

PART II: "YES"

"By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight, the slaves undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in their midst." Howard Thurman

For March 5 Read Chapters 11-13 pp. 115-144

Questions for Reflection:

1. What keeps you proclaiming your faith when the abuse of it by the institution and leaders make you want to flee?
2. What impact do the justice seeking, inclusive minority voices have, if any? Does your voice have?
3. If staying is important to us, what options do we have other than staying complicitly or leaving defiantly
4. If Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, where else could we go?

For March 12 Read Chapters 14-16 pp. 146-180

Questions for Reflection:

1. Given the infancy of the Christian religion compared to other world religions, is it possible that it might yet evolve into its truest and deepest manifestation of Christ's teachings, life, and witness? How might the following practices help us usher in a new future for Christianity?
 - Intimately knowing the earth and our bodies
 - Seeing other world religions as sources of energy and truth
 - Understanding that "thought" is a physical reality
 - Embracing the belief that something big, beautiful, and alive is evolving in the universe
 - Cultivating a zest for living and spirit of adventure
 - Daring to trust that God is at work in the process
2. How can having our focus on "I love Jesus" help us navigate the harms of literalism and dogmatism that have taken over much of Christianity? Or can it?
3. How is "Innocence" an addiction and "Solidarity" the cure?

For March 19 Read Chapters 17-20 pp. 181-220

Questions for Reflection

1. Given humanity's propensity toward self-destruction, which of these options would you chose to address that propensity? Why?
 - There is no way. Humanity is doomed
 - There is one way, and Christianity is it
 - There is one way, and it is the rejection of all religion
 - As a Christian, I can draw the best resources from all traditions, not to cure us of being human, but to enable us to be human, recognizing that it is our inhumaneness that is our sin and that to be human is to recognize that we are all One, made in the image of God and members of one body and to live in love accordingly.
2. Do you find hope in the statement: "Across every traditional Christian denomination, there are calls for change." Why or why not? Who do you know that is creating positive change and inspires you to keep working for the truth of the gospel to be lived out in the Christian community?
3. The early Christian leader, Origen, stated "Wherever Divine wisdom leads us, let us go." How might that mantra help us "free God" from our biases and the constrictions we have placed around God?
4. Does this statement help you want to stay committed to Christianity or not: "Christianity has within it a notion of "striving" – the sense that the universe itself is filled with the Spirit who is brooding, gestating, labouring, becoming, yearning, learning, reaching," for the fulfillment of God's purpose in all of creation which is a return to love, wholeness and oneness which is God's Shalom. We get to be a part of that striving.

Part III “HOW”

“I vow to you: conscious speech; purity of heart; compassionate action; and to be of service for all times.” *Nine Gates Spiritual Community Vow*

For March 26 Read Chapters 21-24 pp. 223-267

Questions for Reflection

1. Where is your faith in the spectrum of simplicity, complexity, perplexity, moving toward Harmony/Solidarity?
2. How would you order these desires by priority? Why? How well do you live that priority order?
 - Desire the good of the planet
 - Desire the good of all people
 - Desire my personal well-being
3. What do you think of Meister Eckhart’s statement: “A person who knew nothing, but creatures would never need to attend to any sermons, for every creature is full of God and is a book.”?
4. Along with the prophets of old who envisioned God doing new things out of the rubble heap of faith grown stale, complicit, and compromised, McLaren posits rediscovering Christianity as a religion leaning into a new humanity. He suggests believing it is possible; going beyond opposition to create positive alternatives; not expecting any micro-movement or institution to be the whole answer; supporting every positive change in every micro-movement and institution; preparing ourselves for turbulence; nurturing practices of spiritual resilience; and believing in it. What are your thoughts on McLaren’s suggestions?

For April 2 Read Chapters 25-28 pp. 268-307

Questions for Reflection

1. McLaren suggests that rather than throwing Christianity away, “now is the time to rediscover the redeemable, recyclable qualities of Christianity and other religions to reconsecrate them and appropriately reverence them, even as we tell the inconvenient and unpopular truths of their harmful histories.” What within Christianity do you think needs to be redeemed for recycled and why?
2. McLaren encourages us to “Come Out” by announcing and renouncing. “By renouncing the failures of our past as Christians, whether personal or institutional, and announcing that we are changing, we are committing ourselves to live humbly, committed to justice, and bonded to kindness.” Who do I need to come out to? What do I need to say?
3. What does McLaren mean when he says, “Whether we stay Christian or not, we need to aspire to be part of the reality-based community.” What does he mean by that and how is “learning to acknowledge our unknowing” related to that?
4. What kind of humans do we want to become?
5. What should be our current quest as Christians and fellow human beings? According to McLaren it is: “To become the most just, kind, humble, version of ourselves that we possibly can, day by day... to practice a faith that expresses itself in love... to lean with others in a new humanity, a new generation, or a new kind of humanity, open to every good resource that could help us, explicitly Christian or not.” What do you think about that?