

Do I Stay Christian?

A GUIDE FOR THE DOUBTERS,
THE DISAPPOINTED,
AND THE DISILLUSIONED

BRIAN D. McLAREN
Author of Faith After Doubt

The “No” answer
Chapter 6
Because of the White
Christian Old Boys’ Network
(White Patriarchy)

Chapter 7
Because Christianity Is Stuck
(Toxic Theology)

Much of the material in this presentation was taken verbatim or almost verbatim from the book “Do I Stay Christian?” by Brain McLaren

1

Chapter 6: Because of the White Christian Old Boys’ Network (White Patriarchy)

OH...OK...
I STAND
CORRECTED.
IT'S NOT
A TYPO

DOGMA
OBEEDIENCE
SCHOOL

RULE 1:
OBEY WITHOUT
QUESTION!
RULE 2:
SEE RULE 1.

PAST BY ANDREW KWEEL ILLUSTRATION

WILEY © 2023 WILEY INK, LTD. 2-22.

2

Raymond, a white pastor acquaintance of McLaren wrote to him after reading “Faith After Doubt” which gives a four-stage model of faith development: Simplicity, Complexity, Perplexity, and Harmony. This model will be summarized in Chapter 21.

“Is the church in America a net gain for compassion in the universe?”

“My sense of connection and belonging to the church and my pastoral vocation within it has been deeply strained” referring to the church’s response to the pandemic, the politicization of it, Black Lives Matter movement, the election, LGBT inclusion

“If you gave me a viable exit strategy and handed me a ripcord, I’d pull that thing so fast it would make your head spin!”

3

When Raymond went to seminary, most books he was required to read were written by white male theologians. The same was true for most of his fellow seminarians, even if they were of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, or other backgrounds.

Powerful white men have been writing the history and theology, so powerful white men have been at the center of it.

96% of murderers are male in US. Wars are mostly male.

Male aggressiveness has caused problems for millennia.

The alpha male was given increased status and prestige, expanded sexual access, extravagant wealth, and tacit permission to engage in various forms of corruption such as nepotism, cronyism, and self-dealing.

4

The name for this time-honored system is patriarchy, “the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation.” (bell hooks)

About five centuries ago, the kings, popes, and rich elites of Europe extended their patriarchal regimes globally.

As a result of colonization, patriarchy expressed itself as white Christian male supremacy for much of the world.

Patriarchy has shown a remarkable tenacity in spite of its one great design flaw: patriarchal succession.

Democracy gave men the right to vote to elect their next patriarch.

5

Of course, men were still running the show. But that began to change—very slowly at first—over the last few centuries.

What are some of the breakthroughs?

In spite of the breakthroughs, white patriarchy doesn't let go of power without a fight.

Two thousand years after Jesus launched a subversive spiritual movement of equality, emancipation, and peace, ... the Christian religion still remains subservient to patriarchy and the authoritarian control it engenders.

These are the reasons why so many people ... are ready to pull the rip cord and make their escape from the white Christian old boys' network.

6

Chapter 7: Because Christianity Is Stuck (Toxic Theology)

McLaren sees Christianity as a huge ship capable of amazing voyages. It has tall masts and wide sails, a strong hull, a deep keel, and a powerful rudder. But it is going nowhere because its anchor is so heavy that its crew cannot pull it up.

In a nutshell, here is how we got here:

- Reduce mysteries to beliefs
- Codify those beliefs in systems
- Define itself by those belief systems

Now you have a ship that floats but doesn't sail

Claim: For most Christians, beliefs are what Christianity is.

7

In the early years, Christianity was a way of life, not a set of beliefs.

Christians will argue it was both, and beliefs had priority.

The earliest Christians were widely divergent in their beliefs.

This is not what is generally taught.

Arguing about beliefs leads to arguments about words, and the New Testament repeatedly and consistently condemns that kind of obsession. But if you say this to most Christians, they start arguing.

Christianity's fervent belief in beliefs has a circular quality to it.

8

Imagine if scientists

- reduced science to a list of facts,
- stopped being curious,
- stopped hypothesizing,
- stopped designing experiments,
- stopped replicating those experiments, and
- stopped subjecting findings to peers for review.

If scientists spent their time policing fellow scientists to be sure they remained faithful to those lists, then science, you might say, would no longer be scientific.

9

In that light, imagine a Christianity that deploys reflective practitioners to follow the life and example of Jesus, teaching others by their example to live by Jesus' spiritual method of radical, nondiscriminatory love and courageous truth-telling. These disciples would be defined by their ongoing quest or mission rather than by the beliefs they hold at this moment.

In contrast, imagine a Christianity that tirelessly sends out belief teachers to promote a list of beliefs about Jesus, God, life, and the afterlife, and then deploys belief police to be sure those teachers are following the list required by their guild.

Two very different Christianities, indeed.

10

The world needs religions that:

- teach us to love our neighbor as ourselves,
- remember that our neighbor includes the refugee, the sick, the poor, the outsider, the outcast, the other, and even the enemy,
- teach us to transform our swords into plowshares, our bullets into trumpets, and our nuclear submarines into artificial reefs,
- value love and interdependence, not money and competition,
- are anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, gender-equal, and characterized by compassion and wisdom rather than greed, arrogance, and dogmatism.

And Christianity could be one of those religions. But the odds are against it doing so.