

The Great Spiritual Migration

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It is already mid-February. I seem to always be wondering about my faith and how the Christian message relates to the world I live in, a world which seems out of control right now. There seems to be no limit to the number of people analyzing the world situation and trying to make sense of it. I read these cultural analysts because they help me get a handle on how to live in this fast paced, changing world.

The church has not been spared by the rapid pace of change. The church used to be considered a solid rock which would give us something stable to hang on to and enable us to cope in the midst of life's storms. Now the church is being rocked by a huge storm of its own that is closing an unprecedented number of churches every day. We are seeing people leaving church or questioning their faith. I am in the latter category — re-thinking my faith. But this is not new for me. I have been doing this my whole ministry. In fact, I think this is the job of a minister, to continually ask how the gospel relates to our world and helps people search for truth and live a more purposeful life.

I am currently in a book study of Brian McLaren's latest book: ***The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion Is Seeking a Better Way to Be***

Christian. McLaren has been writing on evolutionary theology and the emerging church for over 20 years. I am reading his latest book for the second time because I am involved with a group of people who are bringing Brian McLaren to Calgary in November. This book summarizes a lot of my own journey in faith and has reaffirmed why I remain a Christian.

His introduction delineates the reasons why Christianity needs to move on from the baggage it acquired over the years. He goes on to specifically identify acquired beliefs that are not rooted in Jesus' teaching. These are beliefs that have led us to an image of God that is less than the God Jesus reveals in his life and teaching. The migration that Christianity needs to make is a "back to the future" movement, a trip back to the teachings of Jesus before the church took hold of them, shaped them into creeds that had to be believed and interpreted scripture in a narrow, self-serving way.

In chapter 3, *Learning How to Love*, McLaren spells out his fundamental belief which is the foundation of this book. He had just left the pastorate and moved to a new city. As he wondered what kind of church he wanted to go to he realized: "I wanted and needed a church that would help me live a life of love. ...I need sustenance, encouragement and help in loving God, loving myself, loving my kids and grandkids and extended family, loving my neighbors, especially people I might struggle to love, and loving the earth." p. 50.

In chapter 4 he describes the history of Christianity based on a judgemental God who only really loved those who loved Him. The church became a group of people who believed that loyalty to this God was the only way to reward/heaven.

In chapter 5 he speaks of a migration of belief from God 1.0 to God 5.0. He shows how our perception of God changed through history until it arrived at God 4.0, who moved beyond selfishness to compassion. However, it was still only compassion for those who believed, looked and worshiped as we did. In the next migration to God 5.0 we must move to a religion that is global (universal?) and does not believe that Christianity is the only way.

“Only a bigger, nondualistic God can unite us and them in an inclusive identity that is not limited to a tribe or nation, but that extends to all humanity, and not just to all humanity, but to all living things, and not just to all living things, but to all the planetary ecosystems in which we share. We need to migrate to a grown-up God....” p.

102. This resonated with me and my evolutionary Christianity.

The rest of the book addresses our fears about losing our faith, losing Jesus as our saviour, and losing the Bible as our book. McLaren and I know that this “leap of faith” is attended by dark periods of uncertainty. That is why it is called a leap of “faith”. McLaren states that we must live in faith, not in fear. We must let faith draw us forward, not allow fear to hold us back. As we get in touch with the new reality that science is putting before us, we find that

our faith has a deeper purpose than describing how God created and runs the world. God, through us, is shaping the world into a more holy and human shape. Are you, am I, on board with the task of loving more intentionally the life we have in and around us? This is our holy purpose. McLaren calls for us to join or create a movement — a group of people who rise up, organize, and confront institutions by pointing out what is wrong with them and proposing how to make things right. When institutions go wrong, they create more harm than good and fail to provide the life enhancing benefits they were created to give the community.

The old-time religion is just not good enough for me. At 75, I still have an important place in sharing the love of God and creating a community where love is the basis of our relationships. Right now it seems nearly impossible for us to get out of this mess in any reasonable fashion. That is where faith has its grab — to raise up hope and belief that there is a way forward and it is a holy path. I will follow-up with a final comment when I finish the book study. I am looking forward to your comments and hope you will read the book.