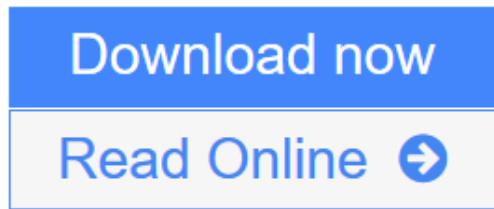


A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith

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“Some books provide us with information about the world, but every once in a while a book appears that enables us to imagine new, more wonderful worlds. [*A New Kind of Christianity*] is one of these.” —Peter Rollins, *Ikon*

A New Kind of Christianity is Brian D. McLaren’s much anticipated follow-up to his breakthrough work of the emergent-church movement, *A New Kind of Christian*. Named by *Time* magazine as one of America’s top 25 evangelicals, McLaren, along with such contemporaries as N.T. Wright, Jim Wallis, and Rob Bell, is one of the acknowledged leaders of a new generation of Christians who want to update their faith for current times while remaining true to the core message of Jesus. In this controversial and thought-provoking book, McLaren explores the questions that will determine the shape of Christianity for the next 500 years.

A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith Details

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James Bunyan says

So, so bad, for some solid reasons.

1. Most of the argument is based on "facts" he's made up, like the "Greco-Roman" storyline or the "constitutional reading of the Bible." It's embarrassing to read someone who claims he is making a valuable contribution to a discussion base their whole book on something they've invented.
2. His view of Jesus is really far away from the Jesus God tells us He is in His Bible. He seemingly dislikes the God of the Bible, so has made a new God up, dressing him in Biblical terms in order to appear legitimate. This is basically a Jesus made in the image of McLaren's own liberalism who doesn't believe in sin, makes no demands on anyone or has nothing really significant to say, a parody of the God of the Bible. There're no real ideas of sin, judgement, heaven, hell, atonement- or anything really except a Jesus who isn't a King but wants to hug everyone. The book made me so glad of the Jesus we find in the Bible, the one who tells us the truth plainly, understands that we have a real, deep problem in sin and acts decisively to rid us of that sin.
3. The author is ridiculously arrogant in his portrayal of his version of truth, whilst clinging to a veneer of humility. He basically infers that anyone who disagrees with him is wrong- tragically, massively wrong. There is no correct way to think, read or act other than the way he does it in his politically-liberal, theologically-chaotic way. Worst of all, he basically ignores the thrust of the Bible he claims to rescue, whilst pretending he is treating it well. He also basically puts himself in the centre of history- everything is interpreted either before or in light of this "New Kind of Christianity." Anyone like him is one of his friends but anyone else is just one of his critics. It is so difficult to read without screaming "Who does he think he is?"
I know many Christian writers say big things- but humility is ultimately about listening to God/ the truth, not "asking questions" of answers God has already plainly given you.
4. This book is so rude that it is difficult to read. Whilst he presents as charitable to his opponents, he often paints anyone who disagrees with him as stupid moral-monsters- especially evangelicals. There are so many straw men, it's dizzying.

There's other things I could say. But Kevin DeYoung, I feel, has worked hard to say them better and I agree wholeheartedly with his review, which is found below.

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/k...>

In other words, this is not a new kind of Christianity. It's not Christianity at all.

Denise Ballentine says

I really struggled with finishing this. I just don't agree. I picked this up on a whim, because I was interested in emergent church ideas. I wanted to understand what this movement is about. While I admit that these questions are valid, I think McLaren is dishonest with his use of scripture, picking out pieces he likes and

ignoring or explaining away difficulties. He really likes diagrams, charts, and things like zones with colors to explain history. Some of it made my eyes glaze over and I just skimmed over those. I found parts of this intriguing, but I also found parts of this almost abhorrent. I still can't figure out where he actually stands on many issues, such as what sin actually is. Does he REALLY believe it can be summed up as a refusal to grow? Is that where all the evil and pain in this world comes from? What about Satan, the devil? Is he real or not? Are the accounts about Jesus real and trustworthy? (Christ was tempted by the devil.) Or not. He makes a big deal about Christ. Can we trust what is written about him to be true? Or just the parts we like, that fit into our "new kind of Christianity." Why did Jesus die on the cross? Does McLaren believe in a literal resurrection? Much of the Old Testament is, in his view, not reliable, but parable, it seems. I just don't buy it. I'm one of those not ready to move up to "the next better stage", I guess. I'm not opposed to hard questions. But God is not something we pick up and attempt to smooth off the rough edges that we don't like. Some things do remain inexplicable. For that we have faith.

Adam says

Though I'm quite sure he would deny that anyone owed him anything, I owe Brian McLaren a debt of gratitude. Over the years, Brian's writing has breathed fresh life and vitality into my faith. To say that I was excited when Viral Bloggers offered an opportunity to review his newest book would be an understatement along the lines of claiming that Bono is kind of interested in social justice, or that Glenn Beck exaggerates a little.

Reviewing the Reviews

As I was finishing the book, I watched as reviews began to pop-up on the internet. The less-than-surprising news is that hard-core Calvinists (including the "New-Calvinists") hate it with a white-hot hatred they normally reserve for child abusers and made-for-TV movies on the Lifetime Network. Reading their reviews, you would think that Brian had done something to them personally, or had betrayed them in some sense (which is weird, sense they haven't liked most of his books). I was disappointed to pick up on this vibe even in a review by Michael Wittmer, whom I had generally considered to be one of the more level-headed thinkers from that perspective. Scot McKnight, whom I have a great deal of respect for, and who is not really thought of as a Calvinist, wrote a review for Christianity Today that, while much kinder and more respectful in tone, claimed that Brian wasn't really saying anything new, but was simply re-packaging the Classical Liberalism that was typical of German Theology before the 2nd World War as typified in Adolf Von Harnack. This struck me as odd, because Brian clearly intends to transcend such polarized categories (not merely repackage one category in a fresh way as "the right one"), and the point at which Brian's thought draws this criticism from McKnight, is actually closer to the much more contemporary (and 3rd-way) thinking found in the work of Peter Enns.

Most of the critics' objections essentially stem from concerns about orthodoxy. Maybe it's because I'm from a non-creedal tradition, but I've never quite resonated with the orthodoxy/heresy argument. (I realize I may have just painted a target on myself...but that kind of illustrates my point, doesn't it?). For starters, an enormous amount of what has historically been defined as "heresy" was so classified by people who were publicly executing people they disagreed with, in the name of the crucified Christ! I'm fairly sure that misses the point of the Gospel to a much greater degree than having different ideas about whether God and Jesus are made out of the same substance. Secondly, when certain subjects are off-limits for questions, it looks like we're not actually interested in "truth", but rather merely maintaining the status quo. Additionally, for large

portions of church history, the "orthodox positions" were precisely wrong (slavery, women's rights, etc.) I could go on and on...but I won't.

The Actual Book

A New Kind of Christianity, is the book that many of us have been wanting McLaren to write for years. Ever since he sparked our imaginations with the fictional conversations between Dan Poole and Neil Edward Oliver in A New Kind of Christian, we've been dying to see those ideas teased out in non-fiction. He structures the book around 10 crucial questions, identifying the first 5 as theological in nature, and the remaining 5 as practical.

1. The Narrative Question: What Is the Overarching Storyline of the Bible?
2. The Authority Question: How Should the Bible Be Understood?
3. The God Question: Is God Violent?
4. The Jesus Question: Who is Jesus and Why is He Important?
5. The Gospel Question: What Is the Gospel?
6. The Church Question: What Do We Do About the Church?
7. The Sex Question: Can We Find a Way to Address Sexuality Without Fighting About It?
8. The Future Question: Can We Find a Better Way of View the Future?
9. The Pluralism Question: How Should Followers of Jesus Relate to People of Other Religions?
10. The What Do We Do Now Question: How Can We Translate Our Quest into Action?

McLaren's approach isn't coercive. He explains that he isn't attempting to answer these questions definitively but rather is responding to them and inviting us, as readers and willing participants into the conversation. He is seeking to get conversation out of the polarized deadlock that it is so often bogged down in, because of the bounded categories (liberal, conservative, etc.) imposed in modernity that serve to insure no real conversation can ever take place (which reminds me of the state of a certain country's political system...but I digress).

What Brian offers here is a beautiful and thoughtful way forward. Is it perfect? No. And he never claims that it is. Will his responses satisfy everyone? Uh, I've never read any book that did that. However, to Brian's credit, he doesn't pander to any particular category's concept of "orthodoxy." A New Kind of Christianity transcends unhelpful categories and sparks hopeful conversation that I believe could point the way forward. That is, if we have ears to hear, and eyes to see.

Curtis Chamberlain says

This book saddened me first, and sickened me later.

It saddened me because of the enormous amount of "anti-Christian, anti-God" sentiment and false doctrine I encountered in my first reading.

It sickened me during my second reading because I realized that there are so many people that will be attracted to and embrace such utter foolishness, thereby putting their immortal souls at risk of suffering damnation.

This book sickened me enough to write a book refuting every one of McLaren's "ten questions that are

transforming the faith," entitled "The Judas Epidemic: Exposing the Betrayal of the Christian Faith in Church and Government," published by WestBow Press.

McLaren's book is an obvious betrayal of the Christian faith (which McLaren even admits on pg 18, paragraph 4); and people are still embracing it anyway. How anyone can call themselves a Christian and produce this type of Godless rubbish is beyond me. Don't fall for it---your soul is at risk if you do!

Rebecca says

I read this book and *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* by Timothy Keller together in a spiritual book club, in order to compare and contrast the authors' views. This was my first book to read by an author in the Emergence Christianity movement, and I know McLaren tends to be even on the fringe of this more liberal view of Christianity. I plan to read some of Phyllis Tickle's books about this movement next to understand Emergence Christianity better.

This book deeply resonated with me and lifted me up in my faith journey. Only a couple of things kept me from giving it five stars. One was that McLaren describes a Greco-Roman interpretation of the Bible that has been used up until now which he believes is just absolutely wrong. McLaren continues to reference this interpretation throughout the book and point out how he is interpreting the Bible correctly in contrast with the old Greco-Roman viewpoint. I agree with a friend in my book club that I think McLaren set up this Greco-Roman interpretation as a "straw man" to tear down and refute throughout the book. I didn't feel like it added to my experience of the book and wished he had just left it out. The second thing that bothered me was sometimes McLaren's writing style seemed too wordy and roundabout; I wanted him to get to the point more quickly.

Those two items aside, there are so many things I liked about this book; I could go on and on. I will just list a few of my favorite quotes in bullet point format (page numbers from the hardback version):

- McLaren argues that we need to stop approaching "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." (79)
- He asserts that the Bible alone does not provide enough clarity to resolve all questions, and it was never even meant to do so. Rather if we believe the bible was "inspired and intended to stimulate conversation, to keep people thinking and talking and arguing and seeking across continents and centuries, it has succeeded and is succeeding in a truly remarkable way." (92)
- In his chapter "Is God Violent?" McLaren states that, "God can't be rendered indistinguishable from the [bad] events themselves, nor is God deterministically controlling the universe as if it were a puppet or a machine. Rather, God's work and wisdom are gently but firmly present in the dynamic and unfolding processes of creation and history themselves." (101)
- McLaren discusses the Quaker scholar Elton Trueblood, who said to a student something like, "The historic Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ does not simply mean that Jesus is like God. It is far more radical than that. It means that God is like Jesus." McLaren then states, "Trueblood's insight, in my opinion, is the best single reason to be identified as a believer in Jesus, and it is an unspeakable precious gift that can be offered to people of all faiths." (114)

- McLaren (rather controversially) argues that Jesus did not come to start a new religion to replace Judaism and then all other religions, rather, “he came to announce a new kingdom, a new way of life, a new way of peace that carried good news to all people of every religion. A new kingdom is much bigger than a new religion, and in fact has room for many religious traditions within it.” (139)
- In his chapter on “Can We Find a Way to Address Human Sexuality?” McLaren points out the many issues surrounding Christian heterosexuality (lowering average age of puberty yet delay of marriage, overabundance of images of the ‘perfect’ body, ready availability of Internet pornography, etc.) and he suggests that, “By coming out of the closet regarding their *homosexuality*, gay folks may help the rest of us come out of the closet regarding our *sexuality*.” (189)
- In discussing the future, McLaren argues for a participatory theology. He states, “When we ask, ‘What does the future hold?’ the answer begins, ‘That depends. It depends on you and me. God holds out to us at every moment a brighter future, the issue is whether we are willing to receive it and work with God to help create it. We are participating in the creation of what the future will be.’” (196)

Overall, I highly recommend this book, though I know we each receive every book differently depending upon our own faith journeys. This is also a wonderful book to read in small chunks and discuss with a group of fellow believers and non-believers alike.

Scott Holstad says

When I finished reading Brian McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christianity*, all I could say was “Wow!” It blew my mind, mostly in a good way. And it left me with an awful lot to think about.

Countless people have reviewed this book (some rather viciously), so I’m not going to win any awards with some in-depth discussion of the book, but I do want to write about a few things that stood out for me. First of all, the book is based on 10 important questions to be asking these days. The first five are largely theological, and the remaining five are more practical. The 10 questions are:

1. The Narrative Question: What Is the Overarching Storyline of the Bible?
2. The Authority Question: How Should the Bible Be Understood?
3. The God Question: Is God Violent?
4. The Jesus Question: Who is Jesus and Why is He Important?
5. The Gospel Question: What Is the Gospel?
6. The Church Question: What Do We Do About the Church?
7. The Sex Question: Can We Find a Way to Address Sexuality Without Fighting About It?
8. The Future Question: Can We Find a Better Way of Viewing the Future?
9. The Pluralism Question: How Should Followers of Jesus Relate to People of Other Religions?
10. The What-Do-We-Do-Now Question: How Can We Translate Our Quest into Action?

The cool thing about this book is that while the author raises – and addresses – these questions, he admits to not having the definitive answers and invites us all to participate in the “conversation.”

The first question is pretty important – what is the overarching storyline of the Bible? Well, he argues that the basic story – as believed and adhered to by most of Western civilization – is mistaken in its belief systems. He asserts the beliefs don’t come from the Bible, but are instead taken from (at the time current)

Greco-Roman narratives. I can almost buy that, but it didn't appear to me that he made a strong case for how this exactly transpired. He just gives us Plato and Aristotle and declares that this is how we have based everything for centuries. Odd. I would like a greater understanding of this theory.

As a result of this theory, there are a number of Christian misconceptions floating around, such as the world was created in a "perfect" state, when in fact, it was "good" – which doesn't equal perfect. Another component of this reading is a rejection of the "Fall" of mankind. This got a bit confusing for me at times, but if you buy into his theory, it makes sense. He relates it as a "six-line narrative," comprised of Eden, Fall, Condemnation, Salvation, Heaven, Damnation. This is what we learn in Sunday school and church our entire lives. This is the basis for believing what we believe. And he asserts it's wrong. McLaren feels that the Bible is really telling us numerous stories of God's never-ending compassion and forgiveness, seen over and over again throughout the text.

In another chapter, McLaren asserts that Christianity has had a "constitutional" view of the Bible and this should be replaced with viewing the texts in the Bible as a type of "community library." As I dislike the constitutional view of Christians I know and know of, this appeals to me. Enough with evangelical fundamentalism, say I! Part of this constitutional view of the Bible is its static state of being, as in everything is settled, so do as I say. McLaren instead thinks the Scripture is inviting us to be a part of an ongoing conversation. This is a refreshing outlook to me.

Still later in the book, he deals with the nature of God, and this reminds me of Rob Bell's Love Wins in a way (a book I like very much). Basically, if you go by the six-line constitutional way of viewing the world, one could see God as a mean spirited, punishing god, one not worthy of belief or worship. With a new kind of Christianity, in this case with a redemptive community library narrative to go on, it's foolish to view God as a god who tortures most of humanity forever in "infinite eternal conscious torment" (ECT). Now that makes a lot of sense to me. Why would God create a world with many billions of people and send the vast majority of them to an eternal conscious torment for the few varied sins they commit during their brief and finite period of existence on Earth? It literally makes no sense to me.

McLaren goes on to discuss many other important issues, all in a radical way of viewing things (to me) that I found appealing. He argues that contemporary Christians are "fundamentalists" in their overt hatred of homosexuals, among others, and reminds us that Jesus forgave the adulteress, sought out and mingled with the outcasts of society, and based his world vision on loving inclusiveness. A refreshing look at things from my perspective.

I enjoyed all of the chapters with the possible exception of the last one – on translating our quest into action – where I think he falters a little bit and makes some assumptions that don't necessarily need to be conveyed as they are. Still, as he starts and ends the book by writing, he's not producing definitive answers to these questions. He's merely starting conversations in calling for a radical rethinking of Christianity, Jesus, God, and the Bible.

In reading through reviews on Goodreads and ones found Googling the author, it's amazing to me how many people hate McLaren. The vitriol is something else. And it's all coming from "loving" evangelical/fundamentalist Christians – some of the very people he describes in this book, and some of the very people we need to move away from. Some of the best things he's called are a false prophet and a heretic. Nice to be able to sit in judgment there, isn't it? It's amazing to me how contemporary conservative Christianity is filled with hate – hatred of others who do not espouse the same beliefs that they do, who don't vote the same way, who – quite frankly – may be trying to lead a life set by Jesus' example of loving others. These Christians just don't get it and they probably never will. They have too much invested in the Greco-

Roman worldview of life to consider alternatives or change. It's truly sad. I'm giving this book five out of five stars. I think it's an amazing book that can be life altering, and it's made me re-think a lot of things that I wish I had re-thought many years ago. Nice job Mr. McLaren.

Thomas Kinsfather says

Warning: This book will probably shake you up, get you angry, and make you uncomfortable. Not for the traditionalist who isn't ready to examine how faith is expressed today.

Overview: McLaren begins like about a thousand other books, by examining how Greek metaphysics has corrupted the Christian faith. He then offers Evangelicals ten questions that challenge us to rethink how our faith is expressed. These questions hit on some major topics: the Bible, Jesus, sexuality, the future the gospel. His book is sure to tick everybody off at some point or another.

The Pros: McLaren is a clear and engaging writer. The questions posed in NCoC are timely and relevant. He gives insight on how he feels we have gone wrong and also offers suggestions on how we can begin to rethink and move forward. The book is well written and well structured.

The Cons: NCoC covers so much material. The scope of this book may be too broad. Most chapters raise more questions than they answer. The author is far more interested in starting conversations than resolving them (if you want to count this as a "Con"). Each chapter will certainly leave you wanting more information and hopefully they will lead to further discussion and reading. I'm afraid McLaren will offend many readers before he has the chance to engage their mind in an honest deconstruction of the way we approach faith today.

My Thoughts: I really enjoyed reading this book and recommended it to several friends. I value any book that helps me to examine old topics from a fresh perspective. I appreciate McLaren's willingness to tackle scared cows and touchy subjects. He made me angry, made me think, and got me asking questions of my own. I'll continue to recommend this to people who like to think and possibly give it a reread myself.

David says

I have found Brian McLaren's books both thought-provoking and challenging, from *A New Kind of Christian* to *the Secret Message of Jesus*. Maybe it is not surprising, looking at the trajectory of where his thought has been moving, but this book frustrating and disappointing.

McLaren argues that we are moving into a new age of the Christian faith and this book looks at ten questions which this new kind of Christianity is dealing with. He does not claim to offer answers, but rather responses to the questions. As I read I found many points where I agreed with what he was saying, but usually I would turn a page and read some point or claim he made that seemed to go off a deep end of sorts. Overall, I cannot recommend this book for I found the responses too often go beyond the historic orthodox Christian faith. Or rather than going beyond (as in saying too much), they fall short (as in not saying enough). I do not presume to question McLaren's heart and faith, but this book does seem to draw a line in the sand and his numerous

shots at "religious thought police" and "seminary education" and the like show that it intends to be just that.

Right away in the introduction I was troubled, for he listed Marcus Borg as one of the trailblazers in this new kind of Christianity. Borg does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, which is really the deepest foundation and central point of Christianity. The simple fact is, can someone who does not believe in the resurrection be lifted up as an example of Christian living and mission? Without the resurrection, there is no mission. I think this demonstrates early on that McLaren's book is going to go farther than his previous books were.

The first question asks what is the overarching story of the Bible? Here he argues that the basic storyline of the Bible, as believed by most western Christians for millennia, is simply mistaken. It is mistaken because it comes not from the Bible, but from the adoption of the Greco-Roman narrative in which most of the early Christians lived. Now he does not make a good argument (or really any argument at all) as to how or when this happened; he simply displays Plato and Aristotle and declares their ideas shaped how we have read the Bible since about the year 400. If such an argument is going to be made, more evidence needs to be given, especially since many Christian writers have contrasted the Biblical narrative with the narratives given by Greek philosophy.

He argues that because of this marriage of the Bible with Greek philosophy Christians interpreted Genesis 1 as a perfect Platonic ideal world, substituting Platonic "perfect" for Hebrew "good". This is something I have pondered too: since when does "good" = "perfect". Many other Christians have noticed this throughout the ages though, including many of the church fathers. But McLaren takes this and uses it to completely reject the "fall" of Genesis, making it into something more about coming of age and the dangers of too much progress too quickly. This is a false dichotomy (Platonic "perfect" or coming of age) and really has no precedent in orthodox Christian tradition. Instead, as many of the church fathers said: perhaps the first humans were created "good" with the intention of growing into "perfection" but in their rebellion they "fell" along the way. This is not the fall from complete perfection (which McLaren says is from the Greek narrative) but nor is it a complete rejection of the fall, and thus all of church interpretive tradition (the direction McLaren goes).

McLaren's description of the overarching narrative of the Bible, including his interpretation of the Genesis story, seems too convenient in what it leaves out. In the next chapter he describes the narrative in three parts: Genesis (creation), Exodus (liberation) and the prophets (peaceful kingdom). This is interesting, because it skips over a huge portion of the story. McLaren argues we need to stop reading the Bible through the cultural lens of the Greco-Roman view. Then McLaren implies (though in other places he is clear that he is aware of this) that his reading is not cultural. But why reject one cultural reading to too quickly implement another (McLaren's) cultural reading? Does it not fit McLaren's tastes to skip from Exodus to the prophets, for we skip over a lot of violence (the Israelites taking the land). McLaren gives no good reason for why his view of the biblical narrative (Genesis-Exodus-prophets) is warranted, and the fact it skips from Exodus to the prophets should make us skeptical that it is any better or less culturally informed than the Greco-Roman one he rejects.

The second question deals with the Bible. Here McLaren rejects what he calls a "constitutional" view of scripture in favor of a "community library". This is a false dichotomy. What he calls the constitutional view is a view that I do not think many, other than maybe the most crazed fundamentalists, would adhere to. It rightly should be rejected. But it is not like McLaren is the first person to adhere to some form of progressive revelation: that God progressively reveals more and more of the truth over time as humans are prepared for it. This is the common view of how to understand scripture, even among evangelicals. Yet here again McLaren goes too far. His form of progressive revelation, similar to his explanation of the Biblical narrative,

ends up giving him warrant to explain away things in scripture he does not like. So when he gets to the third question (is God violent?) rather than a thorough examination of what the stories that portray a seemingly "violent" God can teach us about who God is and who the Israelites understood him to be, the later, more evolved, understandings of God in scripture are practically set against these earlier ones. He is explaining away rather than an explaining.

When we come to Jesus (question four) I am disturbed not as much by what he says, but what he leaves out. This is where his narrative of the Bible comes into play. His reinterpretation of Genesis, with sin and rebellion out of the picture, makes me wonder what exactly Jesus is saving us from? Again, it is not that what he says is wrong, it is just not enough. In responding to people who say that Jesus only came to save us from hell, McLaren goes too far in the other direction where the gospel is only about social change.

In discussing the gospel (question 5) McLaren makes perhaps the most telling statement in the book. He writes, "at some point, more and more of us will finally decide that it would make more sense to go back and revise the contract from scratch. And that project has begun" (142). In other words, we can lay aside most everything in the Christian tradition and start over. Some seek to slightly modify the gospel message, but in doing so they are modifying an inherited Greco-Roman form of the gospel. This statement then, is a license to jettison what he doesn't like (what our culture conditions us not to like?) and start over with the gospel as we see it. It comes off as arrogant, regardless of how often McLaren claims to want to be humble.

All of these lines of thought come together in the chapter on sexuality. Besides the fact McLaren makes the weird statement that male/female duality is an inheritance from the Greco-Roman narrative, this chapter's arguments are muddled. Rather than try to argue for permitting homosexual relationships from a biblical perspective, his view of the Bible and its narrative allows him to simply say we have progressed or evolved to a higher understanding of human sexuality. So it really doesn't matter what the Bible says, for we now know that homosexuality is okay. At the end of the chapter he seeks to show that homosexuality is the least of our problems in terms of sexual issues; people get married later so the temptation to have sex before marriage is greater, divorce is more common, etc. Yet based on McLaren's arguments in favor of homosexuality, does this mean that we have progressed to a new understanding of human sexuality in these areas too? For example, the Bible does not permit sex outside of marriage in any form. But we live in a world where people do not get married until their late 20s, a world foreign from the Bible, so why not jettison that piece of Biblical morality too and say it is okay for people to have sex prior to marriage? I truly wonder if this is what McLaren would say, for he simply offers these other sexual problems without any comment. Is his point to simply say why worry about homosexuality when there are other, more important issues? Or is it to say the Bible is outdated in its sexual ethic on homosexuality and these other issues? And even if he does not want to go that far, perhaps someone else, with the tools he gave in questions 1 and 2, will.

Throughout I found many of his arguments weak. He sometimes argues that we need to set Jesus above Paul as if the two conflict. Instead, maybe we have to seek a better understanding of Paul that puts him in line with Jesus. I agreed with much of what he wrote about finding a better eschatology (question 8), but some of his argument just didn't make sense. On one page he seemed to reject the idea that history was going somewhere, moving forward (as if on a line), but on the next page he said history is going somewhere. His discussion of other religions at times appear to keep Jesus Christ in the center as Lord and Savior, but at other times seems not to. Again, at times I wonder if he is explaining or just explaining away.

At the very end of the book McLaren writes that sin is "ultimately a refusal to grow". Combined with his reinterpretation of the Genesis narrative, I think we can believe he really means this. For McLaren sin is not disobedience to God or rebellion or anything else, it is a refusal to grow, to progress. If we progress and

grow to a place where whatever form of sexuality you desire is fine, or that all religions basically teach the same thing, then refusal to get on board with that is sin, according to McLaren. But ultimately, this quest looks very cultural. We live in a pluralistic world that tells us no religion is better than others and that whatever morals you choose are right for you. McLaren seems to be pushing many of our cultural norms under a Christian guise. So call me brainwashed by the Greco-Roman narrative if you will, but I am just as skeptical by the post-modern, pluralistic, American narrative that McLaren seems to adhere to.

In the end, I think McLaren's book does ask important questions. And I find many of his responses thought-provoking and even pointing us in the right direction. But much of what he says and much of what he leaves out makes me skeptical of his "responses". There is a better way more faithful to scripture and to the historic Christian tradition. I do not claim to have all the answers either, but in seeking them we must submit to the whole Biblical narrative and to Jesus Christ, the king, Lord and Savior who shakes up all cultures and all people. Often, this book appears more to put our own feelings or our own cultural norms above Jesus and scripture.

David Steele says

Brian McLaren comes out fighting in his book, *A New Kind of Christianity*. Indeed, his savvy style and fancy footwork would make Rocky Balboa proud! I suspect that McLaren, however, would not be comfortable with the fighting metaphor. "Dialogue," "conversation," and "exchange" would be more appropriate for this emergent leader. So step out of the "ring" and into the safe confines of a comfortable cafe and enjoy a chai tea latte as we dialogue, converse, and respond to *A New Kind of Christianity*.

First, I appreciate McLaren's willingness to receive criticism. He is crystal clear about this. He is very open about the controversial proposals that he sets forth. He expects response and for this we should be grateful.

Second, McLaren's quest for a new kind of Christianity is commendable as far as it goes: "So our quest calls us first and foremost to nurture a robust spiritual life – not only a deep commitment to serve God, but also a deep desire to know and love God ..." His goal may appear admirable enough on the surface; however the means he utilizes in order to achieve the ends are deeply troubling. This short review seeks to surface some of the more troubling aspects of McLaren's work.

The author begins by alerting readers to the need for a fresh set of questions and likens his pursuit to Luther's 95 theses which caused a firestorm in the 16th century and implies a revived firestorm in the 21st century. McLaren's 96th thesis is as follows: "It's time for a new quest, launched by new questions, a quest across denominations around the world, a quest for new ways to believe and new ways to live and serve faithfully in the way of Jesus, a quest for a new kind of Christian faith." McLaren's so-called 96th thesis sets the stage for ten questions to follow which compromise the main content of the book. They include:

1. The Narrative Question: What is the overarching story line of the Bible?
2. The Authority Question: How should the Bible be understood?
3. The God Question: Is God violent?
4. The Jesus Question: Who is Jesus and why is he so important?

5. The Gospel Question: What is the gospel?
6. The Church Question: What do we do about the church?
7. The Sex Question: Can we find a way to address human sexuality without fighting about it?
8. The Future Question: Can we find a better way of viewing the future?
9. The Pluralism Question: How should followers of Jesus relate to people of other religions?
10. What-Do-We-Do-Now Question: How can we translate our quest into action?

McLaren makes it clear that his assertions are merely responses, not answers. But it becomes painfully clear throughout the book that his assertions are in fact answers, especially in his denial of the Fall, original sin, and the biblical description of hell and eternal torments. Most important is coming to this understanding: McLaren's answers (pardon me, his responses) are rooted in his refutation of the traditional biblical plot-line.

The author challenges and condemns this plot-line, namely, the way of reading redemptive history in the following categories: "Eden, the Fall, Condemnation, Salvation, Heaven/Hell." In this context, he writes, "We might question conventional theories of atonement or the nature and population of hell or whether concepts like original sin or total depravity need to be modified" (p. 35). He maintains the traditional overarching storyline in the Bible is the narrative that Plato taught and was the social and political narrative of the Roman Empire, what McLaren refers to as "the Greco-Roman narrative." McLaren argues that we must "exit the Greco-Roman narrative – quietly and courageously walk out the door and leave its six straight lines behind ..." (p. 45).

McLaren is concerned with matters of authority, and rightly so in a culture where God's Word has been replaced with human autonomy. However, his approach is less than desirable and places readers on the slippery slope of compromise. He rejects the notion of reading the Bible as a "Constitution." Instead of timeless principles, the author sees the Bible as an "inspired portable library." Instead of "brick and mortar to construct a building of certainty," the author sees "hammers and chisels in the form of stories and questions." Instead of propositional truth, the author views Scripture as an "event or discovery" an "encounter that occurs to readers when they engage with the text in faith." Instead of "revelation is" the author sees "revelation happening to us." And instead of viewing the Bible as authoritative and placing the reader "under" the text, the author sees the reader standing "in" the text.

A more lengthy review is necessary in order to respond to McLaren's beliefs in an open future, his views on the person and work of Jesus, hell, homosexuality, pluralism, and his repudiation of the traditional Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of election, and the biblical reality that God ordains everything that comes to pass.

A New Kind of Christianity offers nothing short of a radical reformulation of the historic Christian worldview that results in a marginalized, compromised, watered-down caricature of biblical Christianity. What emerges may appear "new" at first glance, but has more to do with a neo-orthodox approach to Scripture. Indeed, a new emergent liberalism is alive and well. One recalls Barth's repudiation of propositional revelation and immediately recognizes the similarities of this "old" belief system.

Thoughtful Christians must return to the "ring" where men like Gresham Machen, Carl Henry, and Francis Schaeffer fought long and hard to maintain high standards of biblical fidelity and orthodoxy in the 20th

century. These men were firm in their resolve to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3, ESV). How can serious-minded Christ-followers do any less? How can faithful Christ-followers discard the biblical plot-line that emerges in redemptive history, namely, Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration?

Brian McLaren and his version of what he describes as “new Christianity” may appear to be more comfortable in the cafe than the boxing ring. Let the reader decide.

Brianna Silva says

This book explores ten questions that many Christians are asking about our faith, and then the author describes his "responses" to those questions.

I appreciated that he called them "responses" rather than "answers". He did not try to imply that he had everything figured out, but rather invited readers to begin a conversation with him.

The humility in that gesture was refreshing.

Nonetheless, while I did feel that the ten questions of this book are important for Christians to be asking and exploring, I ultimately disagreed with many of the author's "responses".

The main areas where we differ include our approaches to Biblical prophecy, and the fact that the author is a pacifist, and I, well, am not.

Still, I learned some things from this book, and even found parts inspiring. For example, I thought the author's approach of reading the Bible like a "library" instead of a "constitution" was brilliant, liberating, and immensely eye-opening.

Also, his perspective on bringing beauty and redemption to the world, as a mission of Christianity, was stirring... even if parts of it were far-fetched and impractical in my mind. But it's become something for me to think about.

I don't fully agree with this author, but I am grateful for the conversation he began. It's a conversation I definitely intend to continue engaging in.

(P.S. I was unsure how to rate this... I might say it's a 3.5 for me. But my feelings and opinions on this book are pretty mixed, so any rating feels somehow inaccurate.)

Christopher M. says

I could critique this book from about a hundred different angles. Like how I've never met a person in my life who believes the things about the Bible that he combats. Or how he uses some of the very methods that his own view of Scripture finds unacceptable to prove certain points. Or how he chooses to answer the questions

he wants to answer, not necessarily the ones most people are asking. Or how he ignores almost every Scripture passage which his opponents would likely bring up to debunk his positions. I came away totally unconvinced that this man is truly interested in discussion, yet despite a very closed-minded view toward anything resembling a "Greco-Roman" narrative or a "constitutional" approach to the Bible, he claims that that respectful, open-minded discussion is only what he's interested in. It sounds more like he doesn't think he necessarily has the answers, but he sure as heck knows that no one else has them either--I mean, look at how people thinking they're right has turned out! I found him at times reasonable, but more often ignorant, presumptuous, mild-mannered yet arrogant. He claims that the narrative of Scripture and redemptive history "demand" to be understood a certain way, but his perception and the consensus of a few people (who were already inclined to be biased in a particular direction) are the only authorities he can really offer. Again, he ignores most of the questions which would be asked in response to his "self-apparent" assertions. He won't let Scripture be its own interpreter because of how people have misused Scripture in the past, so he forces his own protective mold over the text so that interpretation can never get out of hand. As a result, he ignores history and the millions of Christians who apparently were being told something completely different and completely immature by the Holy Spirit. This has become a rant, so I will conclude with the facts. McLaren sees the God portrayed in most of the Bible as the result of immature theology and completely unworthy or worship. His evolutionary approach to seemingly everything doesn't really necessitate God at all but only requires a good example of that into which humanity should grow. He believes that Scripture contains explicit and numerous falsehoods about the person and work of God and the nature of marriage; yet he seems confident that those things pertaining to the person and work of Christ (at least in the gospels) were recorded with integrity. He leaves one wondering why one needs God, the Bible, or even other Christians to lead a happy, productive, meaningful life. In short, this is not a "new kind of Christianity" being portrayed, but an old kind of (sloppy and decidedly liberal, while also--yes, I'll say it--nauseatingly heretical) Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

Joshua Harp says

The author seemed to exaggerate the stereotype of fundamentalist Christian to suit his arguments. One of his epiphany moments was particularly troubling when he (the author) was asked by a friend to communicate what the Gospel is, he (the author) quoted from Romans. His friend then says to him "You're quoting Paul. Shouldn't you let Jesus define the gospel?" I wonder what will happen to our hermeneutic if this type of knee-jerk biblical interpretation is applied. It is as if to say that the words of Jesus carry greater inspiration, clarity and truth than the words found written by Paul in Romans. Didn't the same Spirit inspire both to be recorded and/or written? McLaren presents himself as a very benevolent/meek writer but he strikes me as actually quite the opposite. Parts of the book reminded me of "Love Wins" by Rob Bell in tone and delivery. Be careful with this book. It's a crafty one :)

Clark Goble says

In past reviews of Brian McLaren's books I have always attempted to hold my criticism back a little. This is due in large part to not wanting to harshly judge a fellow Christian in a public forum. After reading A New Kind Christianity I am no longer concerned with holding back. I suppose this is because McLaren is also no longer concerned with holding back. In the past, McLaren has always been hard to pin down. His opinions

are vague because he will never make a claim of truth in what he writes. He has said that what he writes is merely a contribution to the ongoing “conversation” we humans are invited to engage in about God and seems to think that the moment someone claims an actual truth regarding God the conversation is muffled. The problem is that McLaren seems to apply his relativist outlook to the rock solid truths of the Bible leaving us all swimming around in a sea of uncertainty.

In *A New Kind of Christianity* McLaren comes as close as he ever has to showing his cards. In this book he denies hell, the fall of man, human depravity, and seems to think the greatest Christian minds throughout history have all been reading the Bible in the wrong way. McLaren submits that for millennia Christians have been reading the Bible through a faulty Greco-Roman world view. He claims that this worldview has led us all to come to fundamentally wrong conclusions concerning Jesus’ role in our lives. Thank goodness McLaren has come along to save us from the false teachings of the greatest minds the world has ever known. While McLaren doesn’t explicitly state it, if he is correct concerning the things he writes, than the likes of the apostle Paul, Saint Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and C.S. Lewis have all been wrong. McLaren’s claims reek of arrogance.

Rather than reading the Bible through our faulty Greco-Roman reading glasses (according to the author, these glasses lead us to read the Bible as a constitution that reveals too much truth), McLaren suggest we should read it as an ongoing conversation. The most attracting aspect of this “conversation” is no doubt that it will never lead us to a certain or definite conclusion. What McLaren has done is invent a new way to read Scripture due to his inability to juxtapose the God of the Old Testament with the Savior of the New Testament. McLaren submits that the Bible is evidence of the evolution of mankind’s thought processes. In the Old Testament, when man’s thoughts were the most primitive, God was painted as a violent and cruel God that no savvy Christian such as McLaren could ever worship. After a few thousand years, Jesus was portrayed in a much different light because thought had evolved to the point that mankind could imagine a God that was closer to the truth. McLaren takes this theory far enough to imagine a future where Christians will imagine a God that is even more perfect than Christ. In his future, Christians (and God) are vegetarian, earth worshiping pacifists who throw up in their mouth a little when they remember those barbaric Christians who laid the foundation of the church. It seemed to me that McLaren’s God of the future is very much like McLaren himself. McLaren’s book is one of the grossest forms of idolatry I have ever witnessed another Christian commit. Because he is unable (or unwilling) to accept God as He is revealed to us in Scripture, McLaren resorts to recreating Him in his own image. It is the ultimate form of humanism and arrogance.

Personally, I’ll join the early church fathers and fundamental Christians over the last two millennia who wished to understand the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as revealed by God Himself in the Holy Scriptures. McLaren’s teaching in this book are so far removed from traditional fundamental Christianity that it is virtually indistinguishable from atheism.

Christ taught that the world would hate us because of Him. This was evidenced in the church fathers who gave their lives to promote the Gospel. It is witnessed to today in various parts of the world where Christians are persecuted and killed for their beliefs.

In this book, McLaren spits on the memories and sacrifices of those Christians and sides with the world. He disregards the revelation of God Almighty and creates a disgusting idol.

Eric says

Reading this book brings a stage of my journey to a close. I started reading the author's blog about half a year ago, when this book was first getting ready to be released. Because he hyped it so much (what else is an author to do?), I decided that it would be an interesting read. Previously McLaren had been a little taboo to me--he was the "bad" kind of "emergent" that doesn't take the Bible seriously enough. I resolved to read several of his previous books to understand the context in which this one was being released. They were quite enlightening and got me well underway on my journey. (See my reviews of his other books.)

In this book the author shares much of his philosophy which brings him to espouse his beliefs. First and most importantly is dispensing with what he calls the "six line greco-roman narrative" of Christianity. This is the common concept that all of the Bible and Christian theology should be understood in the context of 1) Eden 2) Fall 3) Condemnation 4) Salvation 5) Heaven 6) Hell/Damnation. The author supports the argument throughout his book that (although you can take this from the Bible if you are looking for it): it is not the main message of the Bible; it is not what the authors intended (e.g. the "fall" wasn't meant as humanity losing innocence, but was understood as humanity coming into its own); and it creates more problems than it solves.

Instead of trying to piece a dogmatic theology together inside this "six-line" framework, the Bible should be read as progressing from one stage through to the next: everything written after Genesis needs to be interpreted in light of the Genesis story, everything written after the Exodus needs to have the flavor of the Exodus added, everything in the NT needs to reflect the prophetic voices calling the people and priests to embrace justice.

Several important topics are explored, including sexuality, eschatology, and pluralism. All of the answers are explained in light of McLaren's hermeneutic and show that perhaps the "six-line" hermeneutic may be not only be missing important points but actually doing damage. It is important to understand that these views are not trying to criticize evangelicalism; they are simply an author's honest attempt to make sense of God and the revelation in the Bible.

Of particular interest to me was the section addressing whether God is violent. It is an honest question to ask, "How could God in the Old Testament, especially in Joshua and Judges, really expect his people to be so cruel to their enemies?" None of the answers I have received have ever been satisfactory. McLaren's teaching that perhaps God reveals himself a little at a time to bring people in to truth only as fast as they can accept it.

This book is going on my list of important books that would be helpful for other people to think through. Even if you can't agree with the teaching in the book, it is worth putting the thoughts in your mind to see what kind of reaction you get.

Lynnea says

I'm always hesitant to rate anything five stars (books, films, beer, etc.) but this one gets a five star rating due to its very nature. Obviously, as the title suggests, this is a book about questions, and I really enjoy books that make me question which is exactly what this one does. It raises inquiries about long-held beliefs and structures and dogmas and turns lots of ideas on their heads. I'm not saying I agree with everything in it, but if you'd like a book to shake up your thinking then read this.
