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New kind of Christian

McLaren's first book, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, (Zondervan, 1998, rev. ed. 2000) has been recognized as a primary portal into the current conversation about postmodern ministry. His second book, *Finding Faith* (Zondervan, 1999), is a contemporary apologetic, written for thoughtful seekers and skeptics. His third book, *A New Kind of Christian* (Jossey-Bass/Leadership Network, 2001) further explores issues of Christian faith and postmodernity, and won Christianity Today's "Award of Merit" in 2002. His fourth, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (2002) presents a refreshing approach to spiritual friendship. *A is for Abductive* (coauthored with Dr. Leonard Sweet, Zondervan, 2002) and *Adventures in Missing the Point* (coauthored with Dr. Anthony Campolo, Emergent/YS, 2003) explore theological reform in a postmodern context, and a sequel to *A New Kind of Christian*, entitled *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), seeks to tell the Biblical story in a new context. He is one of five co-authors of *Church in the Emerging Culture* (Emergent/YS, 2003).

The book "*A New Kind of Christian: a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*" by Brian McLaren (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) won a Christianity Today Award of Merit in 2002 and has found a wide audience in "evangelical" circles. The author is a prolific writer and an international traveler. He lectures at seminaries as diverse as Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Wesley Seminary, George Fox Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Princeton. Some of McLaren's articles are posted at a website founded by Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*. McLaren is one of five co-authors of "*Church in the Emerging Culture*" (2003).

"*A New Kind of Christian*" was the first in a proposed trilogy. The second volume, "*The Last Word and the Word after That*," was published in 2005 and "*The Secret Message of Jesus*" is scheduled for publication in 2006. "*A New Kind of Christian*" presents theological liberalism in the guise of a wiser, kinder, and gentler type of Christianity called "Postmodern." It is also known as the "Emerging Church." The semi-fictional account is about an evangelical pastor who has a crisis of faith and submits himself to the guidance of a liberal Episcopalian who is a graduate of Princeton Divinity School and a former Presbyterian pastor.

This Postmodern guide is named "Dr. Neil Oliver" and is called "Neo" by his friends. Neo resigned the pastorate because he was too liberal for his denomination and is teaching high school when we meet him in McLaren's book. The book recounts the evangelical's journey from a fairly solid "fundamentalist" type faith in the Bible as the absolute standard for truth and in which doctrine is either right or wrong, scriptural or unscriptural, to a pliable, philosophical

position in which "faith is more about a way of life than a system of belief, where being authentically good is more important than being doctrinally right" (from the back cover of "A New Kind of Christian").

Gary E. Gilly hit the nail on the head in his review of "A New Kind of Christian" by observing: "More specifically, McLaren rejects absolute truth, authority, theology, objectivity, certainty and clarity. He embraces relativism, inclusivism, deconstructionism, stories (to replace truth), creative interpretation of Scripture, neo-orthodoxy, and tolerance." As the evangelical pastor in "A New Kind of Christian" begins his sad journey into theological liberalism (which he wants to call "postmodern") he describes himself in these words: "I feel like a fundamentalist who's losing his grip--whose fundamentals are cracking and fraying and falling apart and slipping through my fingers.

It's like I thought I was building my house on rock, but it turned out to be ice, and now global warming has hit, and the ice is melting and everything is crumbling" (p. 22). When he first begins talking with "Neo," the evangelical pastor admits that he is afraid that Neo's ideas are corrupting him and turning him into a heretic (p. 26), but he quenches the fear and proceeds on the path of error. Instead of opening his Bible and seeking the face of God alone and finding out what God has to say in His Word and re-orienting himself to the eternal Word of God, instead of confiding in a man of God who believes the Bible, this evangelical pastor turns, in his hour of doubt, to a clever unbeliever and is led into the deepest error.

This is exactly what is happening to men and women throughout the evangelical world, because they have been brainwashed not to separate from false doctrine, have been brainwashed to think that a "positive, non-judgmental" approach to Christianity is preferable to absolutism and separation, and as a consequence evangelicalism, over the past 50 years, has been infiltrated with every sort of heresy. A visit to a typical evangelical bookstore is evidence of this.

On the shelves of such a bookstore you will find Chuck Colson's radical ecumenism, Robert Schuller's Self-esteemism, C.S. Lewis's Anglo-Catholicism and his denial of the crucial doctrine of substitutionary blood atonement, and all sorts of Psycho-heresy. You will find Mother Teresa exalted as a model Christian, even though she was committed to a false gospel and thought Jesus was a Catholic wafer and believed Hindus could go to heaven if they believed sincerely in their gods. You will find books by Bruce Metzger, who believes that Jonah is "popular legend" and Job is an "ancient folktale," and books by Kurt Aland, who rejected the infallibility of Scripture and claimed that even the canon of Scripture is yet unsettled. You will find Greek New Testaments edited by the Roman Catholic Cardinal Carlo Martini. You will find books by men who claim that Matthew and Mark and Luke didn't write their Gospels directly by divine inspiration but that they used various mythical sources such as a "Q" document. You will find church histories that present the Roman Catholic Church as an authentic form of Christianity. You will find heretical "church fathers" such as Augustine and Origen exalted as great men of God. You will find books by charismatics who believe that the Holy Spirit knocks believers onto the floor and glues them there and that the supernatural gift of tongues is a talent that can be learned. And we have only begun to describe the dangers that are found in a typical evangelical Christian bookstore today.

Brian McLaren's "A New Kind of Christianity" is a dangerous book that ridicules a staunchly Biblical, fundamentalist position on every hand. It slanderously labels such a position as

Phariseeism and likens it to medieval Roman Catholicism. In the very beginning of the book, the Postmodern guide, who is called "Neo," says: "I don't dislike fundamentalists, taken individually--they tend to be pretty nice folks. Get them together in a group though, and I get nervous. I start to twitch and break out in a rash" (p. 9). That is the best thing the book has to say about those who hold a strict Biblicist stance, but liberals and Romanists are depicted in a much more sympathetic light. Though purporting to represent a more intellectual approach to Christianity, the book is filled with strawman arguments, shallow reasoning, and Scripture taken wildly out of context.

It teaches that the Bible is not the infallible Word of God and that all doctrines and theologies are non-absolute, that we need to approach the Bible "on less defined terms" (p. 56).

It teaches that the Bible alone should not be our authority, but that the Bible should be only one of many authorities, such as tradition, reason, exemplary people and institutions one has come to trust, and spiritual experience (pp. 54, 55).

It teaches that it is wrong and Pharisaical to look upon the Bible as "God's encyclopedia, God's rule book, God's answer book" (p. 52).

It teaches that the authority of the Bible is not in its text itself but in a mystical level above and beyond the text (p. 51).

It teaches that Christians should not try to judge right from wrong in an absolute sense because all of our understanding of the Bible is colored and conditioned by extra-biblical things such as one's time and culture. It teaches that the postmodern Christian is one who "relativizes your own modern viewpoint," thus understanding that everything he believes about the Bible and Christianity is only relative and uncertain (p. 35).

It teaches that there is no such thing as "the Christian worldview," that every doctrinal position, "no matter how resplendent with biblical quotations--can claim to be the ultimate Christian worldview, because every model is at the least limited by the limitations of the contemporary human mind, not to mention the 'taste in universes' of that particular age" (pp. 36, 37).

It teaches that ecumenism is good and that all "denominations," including Roman Catholicism, can contribute to a proper type of Christianity. We are informed that "there are good Catholics, good Greek Orthodox, good Pentecostals, and good Episcopalians" (p. 73).

It teaches that labels such as Catholic, Protestant, liberal, evangelical "are about to become inconsequential" in a postmodern Christianity (p. 41).

It teaches that mystical Catholic practices are authentic and desirable (p. 58).

It teaches that people should not ask pastors questions such as, "Do you believe in inerrancy?" or "What's your position on homosexuality?" because to make them answer such questions is to "cheapen" them and to make them sell themselves (p. 61).

It teaches that the real issue for Jesus is "goodness, not just rightness" (p. 61), as if righteousness and truth were in some sort of conflict. It teaches that there is much good in pagan religions that that they have been good for the world. "My knowledge of Buddhism is rudimentary, but I have

to tell you that much of what I understand strikes me as wonderful and insightful, and the same can be said of the teachings of Muhammad, though of course I have my disagreements. ... I'd have to say that the world is better off for having these religions than having no religions at all, or just one, even if it were ours. ... They aren't the enemy of the gospel, in my mind..." (pp. 62, 63).

The man needs to spend a few years living in India or Nepal to see how the Hindu religion has corrupted and debased the people, how it has turned women into chattel, cows and snakes into gods, certain classes of people into untouchables, and human life in general into something of little value.

"A New Kind of Christian" teaches that Jesus' objective was "holistic reconciliation." "I think what Jesus was about ... was a global, public movement or revolution to bring holistic reconciliation, a reconnection with God, with others, with ourselves, with our environment" (p. 73).

Here the author is not referring to what Jesus will do when He returns to establish His kingdom but what he is allegedly doing today. It teaches that the proper objective of churches is not merely the salvation of souls but the renewal of the world and saving the planet from destruction (p. 83).

It teaches that it is right for Christians to use pagan practices such as the Native American sweat lodge, peace pipe, dance, dream catcher, and smoke (pp. 26, 74-78).

It teaches that unbelievers and pagans can possibly be saved without personal faith in Christ (p. 92).