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The "Yes" answer

Chapter 16: Because Innocence is an Addiction, and Solidarity Is The Cure

Chapter 17: Because I'm Human

Chapter 18: Because Christianity Is Changing (for the Worse and for the Better)

Chapter 19: To Free God

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

Chapter 16: Because Innocence is an Addiction, and Solidarity Is The Cure

"Christianity in the United States has long been entangled with upholding white supremacy." – Talia Lavin

"White supremacists aren't real Christians"

This is exploiting the "luxury of individuality" and white Christian privilege.

But to feel both innocent and superior because of our innocence doesn't seem terribly innocent.

The cult of innocence works on a simple formula: an innocent victim to defend plus an evil villain to oppose equals innocence to enjoy.

This formula has a special appeal to those of us who are associated with Christianity, especially the "orthodox" white Christianity we evaluated in Part I.

But nobody likes feeling guilty, especially religious people, and most especially Christians who typically reduce Christian salvation to a cure for guilt. We want the fastest and most effective relief possible.

Chapter 17: Because I'm Human

Many Christians see Christian identity as a pathway to innocence. In identifying as Christian, they are seeking to be clean and separated from the unclean.

We're on the train bound for glory.

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Everyone else is on the train bound for eternal suffering. It doesn't sound too innocent, but this is the story many of us were indoctrinated with.

Purity and innocence are good, but how does it align with the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10.

Peter concludes "God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28)

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Peter continued to struggle with this insight, and later, Paul confronted him about his inconsistency (Galatians 2).

Paul understood the struggle, and he had a disruptive spiritual experience similar to Peter's (Acts 9:1–19).

Through his visionary disruption, Paul realized how he had been blinded by innocence.

Eventually, everything was different for him, so much so that he changed his name from Saul to Paul.

Paul also relapsed into clean-unclean thinking (2 Cor 6:17)

Later, Paul wrote "From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view" (2 Cor 5:16)

Jesus exemplified crossing the clean-unclean border. He touched lepers.

He protected a woman caught in adultery.

In two gospels He encounters a gentile mother begging for her daughter to be healed from an "unclean spirit".

Jesus initially reacts in a typical Jewish fashion to an unclean person.

Undeterred, she persists. Jesus declares "Oh woman, your faith is great" and heals the daughter.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) who cares more about helping his <u>neighbor</u> than remaining clean.

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Where does the quest for innocence stop?

If Christianity is the embarrassment that bothers us, what happens after we disassociate from Christianity?

Do we renounce our American citizenship?

Do we denounce democracy?

If we keep separating from whatever strikes us as flawed, whatever embarrasses us, we will eventually find ourselves as isolated misanthropes, hating humanity as a failed project. And we'd be ashamed of that too!

To quantify our options as humans:

- 1. There is no way. Humanity is doomed.
- 2. There is one way, and Christianity (or some other single religion or ideology) is it.
- There is one way, and it is the rejection of all religion.
- 4. There may be a way to draw the best resources we can from all our traditions, not to cure us of being human, but to help us become humane, because in the end, we humans are all connected, in an inescapable web of mutuality.

 McLaren chooses option 4.

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Chapter 18: Because Christianity Is Changing (for the Worse and for the Better)

McLaren believes that at this point in time major sectors of Christianity have never looked more misguided or regressive (at least in recent history),

but we are closer to a breakthrough than we've been in a long, long time.

The theological progress we've made is breathtaking.

McLaren credits the progress to women, people of color, LGBTQ folks, and other previously excluded minorities.

They are making inroads and inviting us to join them.

"By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in his midst." (Howard Thurman)

Pope Francis' *Laudato si* comes at a time of ecological and economic collapse.

In this his second encyclical the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action."

The pope's third encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, calls for more human fraternity and solidarity, and is a plea to reject wars.

Maybe in five hundred or a thousand years we should give up. But surely not now.

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Chapter 19: To Free God

If God is entirely separate from the physical world, then the world is just stuff—profane, cheapened, easy to exploit.

If God is in control of the world like an engineer controlling a big machine, when we or our neighbors suffer, we can logically conclude that human suffering is God's will.

If God chooses some for privilege and abandons others for damnation, God sets an example of us/them thinking that only the worst of us will follow.

If God likes to save people from predicaments through magic skyhooks, it becomes more spiritual for humans to pray for a miracle than to do the hard work required. Traditionalists issue this ultimatum: Either speak of God using old language and metaphors or don't speak of God at all.

Atheists issue the same ultimatum as the traditionalists, but they go with the second option - don't speak of God at all.

McLaren sees a third option: "God, rid me of God" (Eckhart)

McLaren believes we need to echo his prayer with resolve - to find new names, metaphors, frameworks, languages, and contemplative practices that will help us experience the God who rids us of the God we need to be rid of.

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