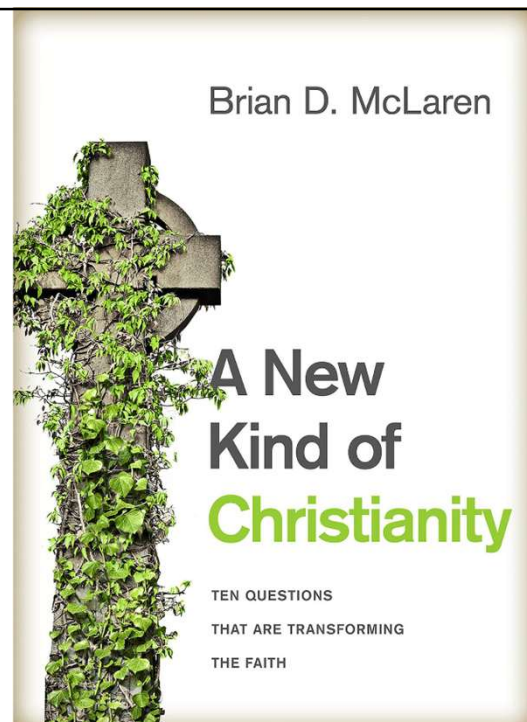


- **Book Two**
- **Part VII THE SEX QUESTION**
- Chapter 17: Can We Find a Way to Address Human Sexuality Without Fighting About It?

Much of the material in this presentation was taken verbatim or almost verbatim from the book “A New Kind of Christianity” by Brian McLaren



1

Part VII: THE SEX QUESTION

- McLaren begins the chapter with an extended metaphor
- I don't want to be closed-minded or judgmental, but in good conscience I simply can't approve of the lifestyle. I believe it's a choice, although upbringing and genetics may have a role. Freedom has limits – one limit being where others are hurt by a chosen lifestyle. And this lifestyle, there can be no mistake, is hurting a lot of people.
- This goes on for a few pages, with the intended implication that they are talking about homosexuality.
- But he's not. He's talking about “fundasexuality”, a neologism that describes a reactive, combative brand of religious fundamentalism that preoccupies itself with sexuality.

2

- The term does not apply to the quiet, pious, respectful fundamentalism of straightforward, sincere people, but rather to the organizing, angry, dominating fundamentalism that declares war on those who differ.
- Fundasexuality is rooted not in faith, but in an orientation of fear. Its proponents fear new ideas, people who are different, criticism or rejection from their own community, and God's violent wrath on them if they don't fully conform to and enforce the teachings and interpretations of their popular teachers and other authority figures.
- It is a kind of heterophobia: the fear of people who are different.
- It comes in many forms – Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, or even atheist.

3

- McLaren believes our preoccupation with sexuality is a symptom of our growing discomfort with conventional answers to the six questions we have already considered in this book.
- 1. The Greco-Roman narrative consistently fails to explain homosexuality for at least two reasons.
- First, the narrative assumes an inherent dualism in the universe, matter/spirit, natural/supernatural, male/female, etc.
- This dualism portrays the human being as a ghost in a machine – a spirit or soul that indwells a physical body. If a person has sex with a person of the wrong gender, it's the soul's fault.
- But new knowledge in biology shows that we are not male/female spirits riding around in male/female bodies.

4

- Second, in Platonic philosophy, words like “male,” “female,” and “marriage” have timeless, perfect essences. Fallen people in the cave of illusion need to understand and conform to those unchanging, transcendent, absolute definitions.
- Christ asked “Was the Sabbath made for humankind, or humankind for the Sabbath?”
- We can ask “Was humankind made to fit into marriage, or was marriage created to help humans – perhaps including gay humans? – live wisely and well in this world.
- There are many examples where humankind doesn’t fit into marriage.

5

- 2. Regarding the constitutional reading of the Bible, homosexuality today functions the way the retrograde motion of the planets functioned in the late Middle Ages.
- The constitutional reading of the Bible has been amazingly resilient to adjust for new realities.
- Copernicus, Darwin, evolution, slavery, segregation, apartheid, and the rights of women to vote.
- First they oppose, condemn, and reject new approaches. Then they modify and make small concessions. Then they go silent for a while, and finally they tolerate and accept what they once condemned.
- This pattern may be at work regarding homosexuality today.

6

- 3. The image of God as violent or even genocidal comes into play when people claim that God chooses one tribe and rejects or considers inferior other classes or types of people simply for being who they are – whether they're Gentiles, Jews, women, nonwhites, non-Christians, or gays.
- 4. The issue of Jesus's identity as ultimate Word of God comes into play as well. Jesus's treatment of the marginalized and stigmatized requires us to question the conventional approach. We have many examples of Jesus crossing boundaries to include outcasts and sinners and not a single example of Jesus crossing his arms and refusing to do so.

7

- 5. Sexual issues also demand reconsideration when we review the meaning and purpose of the gospel. If homosexuality is seen as a heinous symptom of original sin and therefore a hell-qualifying offense, then homosexuality is indeed a problem that must be solved. But homosexuals and heterosexuals stand equally in need of liberation.
- 6. What will the church be and do? One option views the church as an inherently conservative and change-averse community; the other, as an inherently creative and change-catalytic community.
- As the early church is about to be spread to the first of the "ends of the earth" (Africa), it will do so through a most unlikely person – Philip.

8

- Philip, one of the early leaders in the church in Jerusalem, has been sent by angelic vision to walk the “wilderness road” that leads to Gaza.
- Along comes a chariot carrying an official of the Ethiopian government, returning to his nation after a visit to Jerusalem.
- The man is described as a eunuch – a castrated male, reasonably common in the ancient world. In many ancient cultures, certain males were chosen for castration so that they would never marry and have a family.
- Without family, they would have no loyalty to anyone other than their king, which works for sensitive positions in the court – including manager of the king’s harem, taster of the king’s food (an important “homeland security” job), and overseer of the king’s (or in this case the queen’s) treasury, which was this eunuch’s position.

9

- The eunuch had visited Jerusalem to worship. The Spirit prompts Philip to run alongside the chariot, and Philip hears the Ethiopian reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” (Acts 8:32–33)
- Philip asks if he understands what he’s reading, and the eunuch invites Philip to join him in the chariot, to explain the text’s meaning. The eunuch raises this poignant question: “Is the prophet speaking of his own experience or the experience of someone else?”

10

- Why would this particular passage seize his attention?
- Would humiliation and the denial of justice strike a responsive chord with him? Would the word “generation” (or “descendants”) have special meaning?
- Philip responds by telling him the “good news about Jesus,” using this passage as a starting point. This good news, we must remember, is not the version shaped by the Greco-Roman narrative; it is the good news of the kingdom of God, the message proclaimed by Jesus and shaped by the Jewish narratives of creation, liberation, and reconciliation.

11

- As the chariot passes by a stream along the Gaza road, he asks, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:37).
- Many things might have prevented him from being baptized.
- Ethiopian (non-Jew), person of color
- Eunuchs couldn’t even enter the court of the gentiles Deut 23:1
- His racial and sexual identities excluded him from worship
- Philip takes him to the water and baptizes him!
- Christ quoted Isaiah 56:7 “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” when he cleansed the temple of money changers, not sinners, not Gentiles, not homosexuals, and not undocumented aliens.

12

- But the tension between insiders and outsiders continues.
- McLaren witnessed segregation, “those hippies”, Democrats, and then gays being classified as outsiders.
- As a pastor McLaren invited a Kenyan grad student to his church. Francis had attended a Kenyan Anglican Church most of his life. After the service, he saw Francis sitting and crying. “Oh, dear brother, these are tears of joy,” he said. “This is my first time celebrating the Holy Supper. I am a child of the third wife.”
- This “sexually other” eunuch brought the gospel of the kingdom of God back to Ethiopia.
- A nonheterosexual in missional leadership from the very beginning of the Jesus movement.

13

- McLaren then mentions several other significant sexual issues that may in the long run be no less important and even more difficult to address than homosexuality.
- Traditional marriage – one virgin man and one virgin woman coming together and remaining sole sexual partners for life – isn’t working as it’s supposed to for heterosexuals.
- Divorce rates are startlingly high for Christians as well, and not very different from their less religious neighbors.
- The opportunities for promiscuity may never have been greater, and the supports for chastity and fidelity have seldom if ever been weaker.

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