THE GREAT SPIRITUAL MIGRATION

BRIAN D. McLAREN

CONVERGENT

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Swallow-tailed Kites
2014 Southbound Migration
7 Jul - 9 Sept 2014

- Palmetto
- Bluff
- Gulf Hammock
- Pace
- Day
- MIA
- PearlMS

www.arcinst.org
THE RETURNS OF JEWISH EXILES TO JUDAH

THE EDICT OF CYRUS: EZRA 1:2-4; 6:1-4
see also EZRA 1:5-8:35
NEH. 1-3

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- Sheshbazzar’s and Zerubbabel’s route
- Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s route
- Cyrus’s Persian Empire

First Sheshbazzar, then Zerubbabel led groups of Jewish exiles back to Judah between about 537 and 522 B.C.

Ezra leads a group of Jews back to Jerusalem. He was appointed minister of religious affairs by Artaxerxes 458 B.C.

Temple rebuilt and dedicated in 520 B.C.

Nehemiah hears of dire conditions in Judah and returns to Jerusalem under royal appointment 444 B.C.

Area conquered by Cambyses in 525 B.C.; Egypt frequently rebelled against Persian rule from ca. 500 B.C. onward.
THE GREAT SPIRITUAL MIGRATION
Religion is at its best when it leads us forward, when it guides us in our spiritual growth as individuals and in our cultural evolution as a species. Unfortunately, religion often becomes more of a cage than a guide, a buffer to constructive change rather than a catalyst of it.

In times of rapid and ambiguous change, a regressive turn in religion may be understandable, but it is even more tragic. When a culture needs wise spiritual guidance the most, all it gets from religious leaders is a big dose of nostalgia.
Today, millions of us—Catholics, Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Orthodox Christians—share something that we seldom verbalize: we’re worried that the “brand” of Christianity has been so compromised that many of us are barely able to use the label anymore.

Our religions often stand for the very opposite of what our founders stood for.
Visionary/Prophetic Religion leading forward

Cautious/Conservative Religion holding firm

Nostalgic/Regressive Religion taking back
A spiritual migration

from system of beliefs to way of life/
way of love
Christianity is currently defined for many by adherence to a list or system of beliefs.
What is the one greatest commandment?

“You shall have the correct beliefs system!”

(not)
What is the one greatest commandment?

Love ...

and the second is equally important ...
Jesus
Paul
John
James
a story about learning how to love
a story about learning how to love

invitation
exposure to models
experience
relationships
reflection
more challenging experience
training
celebration/consecration

repetition
church as beliefs defense center

church as school/studio of love
what curriculum?
Love 101:

neighbor

stranger

outsider/outcast

enemy
Love 201:

self

not selfish

not self-hating
Love 301:
the earth
all creation
for neighbors & self
for God’s sake
Love 401: God
People who are learning to love their neighbors, themselves and the earth will not find it hard to learn to love God, because God will not be for them a doctrine or theory separate from or inconsistent with what they already love. Rather, in their experience of love for neighbor, self and creation, they will already have experienced God, because, as Richard Rohr says, ‘God is an event of communion.’

They will already have come, as the Quakers say, to love and reverence ‘that of God in every one’. So in Love 401, people learn to recognize and love the familiar light they see radiant in everything they already love. They learn to inhabit God as the loving reality in which they ‘live and move and have their being’, the all-encompassing ‘event of communion’ in which they have experienced countless events of communion. Each experience of love itself, they will realize, has been an experience of God, for, as John said in the New Testament, ‘Love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God … for God is love’ (1 John 4:7–8).
Yes, loving a distant and theoretical God who must be approached through complex belief systems can indeed be tough – even exhausting, mentally and emotionally. But loving the God who is experienced in love for neighbor, self and creation comes as naturally as breathing. A character from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* captures it perfectly:
Love all of God’s creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love.
Love can only begin from knowing God, as love comes from God. As we live out the mandate of loving others, self and creation, we must continue to know, in order to love better. This is a cycle, not a linear process. As we go through the outer circle, we are learning to love God. It is ONLY through loving people, self and creation that we are able to love God in a real way. As you continue to go through the love cycle, the breadth and depth of your capacity to love increases.
5 minute meeting …

What one thought or idea most interested, challenged, angered, inspired, surprised, or comforted you so far? And why?
If love is the point ...
A theological migration:

from violent Supreme Being
to nonviolent Holy Spirit/Spirit of Christ
In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety-Two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

In Fourteen Hundred and Fifty-Two, Pope Nicholas told European Christians what to do.
“...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.” - Pope Nicolas V, Romanus Pontifex, 1452-4, Doctrine of Discovery
1495

2nd Voyage Return Cargo: 1600 male and female Taino slaves for Spain

“It is possible, with the name of the Holy Trinity, to sell all the slaves which it is possible to sell ... Here there are so many of these slaves ... although they are living things they are as good as gold.”
As a result of the sufferings and hard labor they endured, the Indians choose and have chosen suicide. Occasionally a hundred have committed mass suicide. The women, exhausted by labor, have shunned conception and childbirth.... Many, when pregnant, have taken something to abort and have aborted. Others after delivery have killed their children with their own hands, so as not to leave them in such oppressive slavery.

- Bartolome De Las Casas
“We can estimate very surely and truthfully that in the forty years that have passed, with the infernal actions of the Christians, there have been unjustly slain more than twelve million men, women, and children. In truth, I believe without trying to deceive myself that the number of the slain is more like fifteen million.”
From this vantage point, Christianity has nothing – absolutely nothing – to teach Indigenous people about how to live in a good way on this land. In fact, Christians have only demonstrated that there is something profoundly wrong with the cosmology and worldview behind more than five centuries of carnage—carnage that has yet to even slow down. Christians have so much negative history and dogma to overcome within their own tradition, I do not believe the religion is even salvageable. The world is deep in the throes of an ecological crisis based in Western economies of hyper-exploitation. The planet will not survive another 500 years of Christian domination.

- Waziyatawin, PhD, 2012
It’s time to disarm our understanding of God
and cut up the genocide card

Christian Genocide
How to Read the Bible: 6 Options

(beyond liberal and conservative)
Literal:
Like a newspaper, science text, or work of nonfiction - attempting to tell objective, literal, observable, scientific facts.

Literary:
Like a poem, novel, journal, or movie - attempting to convey meaningful, mysterious, multi-faceted beauty and truth.
Post-Critical/Integral:
Seen as a whole, with internal tensions, with potential for instruction, inspiration, even revelation.

Innocent:
Taken at face value. Unquestioned. Univocal. Treated as divine, transcendent, incorrigible, or absolute.

Critical:
Questioned. Tested. Scrutinized. Evaluated. Treated as human, situated, constructed, and interpreted.
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<th>Literal</th>
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<td>1. Innocent Literal</td>
<td>2. Innocent Literary</td>
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This grid illustrates a framework for categorizing different literary approaches and perspectives.
Option 1: Innocent Literal

The Bible is a divine text, akin to a

- Textbook
- Instruction manual
- Objective historical account
- Audit report
- Constitution

that states simple & clear facts about the universe and God.
Option 2: Innocent Literary

The Bible is a collection of literary artifacts, akin to ...

- an anthology of moralistic fables
- a collection of magic chants or mantras
- a source of inspiring stories and quotations

through which we may gain personal inspiration, personal guidance, and/or experiences of mystical revelation.
Option 3: Critical Literal

The Bible is a human text, akin to

- a collection of myths
- a collection of folk tales
- a collection of propaganda
- a collection of misinformation

that contains many falsehoods and disprovable assertions, along with a window into the minds of original authors and audiences.
Option 4: Critical Literary

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to

- a museum
- an heirloom quilt
- a family scrapbook or photo album
- a refrigerator door or classroom bulletin board
- a specialized library

through which we may gain personal inspiration, personal guidance, and/or experiences of mystical revelation, along with insight into the cultures that produced them.
Option 5: Integral Literal

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to ...

- a museum
- an heirloom quilt
- a family scrapbook or photo album
- a refrigerator door or classroom bulletin board
- a specialized library

through which we may learn facts about the views of original authors and audiences, and which may provide a mirror to better understand ourselves.
Option 6: Integral Literary

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to:

- a museum
- a family scrapbook or photo album
- a refrigerator door with kids’ art
- a specialized library

through which we can gain vital wisdom and through which God can speak to us today.
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Why Integral Literary?

1. Takes the text seriously
2. Takes art of interpretation seriously
3. Takes humans seriously (producers/readers)
4. Takes God seriously
5. Takes Jesus seriously
6. Takes the Spirit seriously
7. Takes the living tradition seriously
8. Takes both liberal and conservative concerns seriously
9. Focuses on meaning (actuality) that transcends factuality
10. Addresses our moral, ethical, and spiritual predicament as living human beings.

11. Eliminates the genocide card & disarms the Bible.
From this perspective …
The Bible leads us to Jesus.

Jesus imaged God as nonviolent, nondiscriminatory, loving to all.

After Jesus, the word “holy” changes in meaning.

From markers of “clean” to qualities of nonviolence.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love, the nonviolent Spirit, the Spirit of peace, reconciliation, and harmony.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is being filled with the non-violent power of reconciling love.
5 minute meeting …

What one thought or idea most interested, challenged, angered, inspired, surprised, or comforted you so far? And why?
If love is the point ...

and if God is non-violent and loving toward all creation and all people (no exceptions) ...
A missional migration:

from organized religion (for self-protection)

to religion organizing for the common good

(institutions and movements in romance, forming & deploying spiritual activists)
From Greg Leffel

Faith Seeking Action: Mission and Social Movements
A movement is born when 3 things happen:

- 2 or more people agree what’s wrong.
- They agree what should be done.
- They begin to do it.
Leffel’s 6 Characteristics of Vibrant Social Movements

1. Opportunity Structure
2. Rhetorical framing
3. Protest (messaging) strategy
4. Mobilization strategy
5. Movement culture
6. Participant Biography
Jesus says the kingdom of God is like gardening (an organic movement) not warfare (institutional action): It spreads through seeds ... sown into systems to grow.

The seeds of the message.

The seeds of people who personally embody the message.

The seeds of communities who socially embody the message.
Jesus seizes the opportunity structure provided by conflicted elites (Pharisees/Sadducees; Herodians/Zealots) and struggling masses (Galilee/Judea)
He provides rhetorical framing on hillsides, in houses, on retreats, in public teach-ins, in debates, through parables, through rituals and practices. He repeats key themes - commonwealth of God, life to the full, life of the ages, liberation - rooted in dynamic tension with tradition.
His protest (messaging) strategy includes public demonstrations (healings & miracles), teach-ins (sermon on mount), civil disobedience (turning tables), guerilla theatre (exorcisms), festivals (feasts & feedings), naming evil (woes), naming heroes (blessings).
He develops a mobilization strategy based on 3, 12, 70, and multitudes. He entrusts freely with responsibility and expresses high confidence in his agents (greater things shall you do ... )
He associates his movement culture with love, joy, justice, risk, hope, creativity, courage, service, willingness to suffer, nonviolence.
He provides his disciples challenge, rest, retreat, encouragement, recovery after failures. They testify that their participant biographies have been forever changed for the better.
What spiritual movement is trying to be born among us today?

What are its demands/proposals?

What role might we play in its emergence?
A movement of Spirit-empowered revolutionary love in the way of Jesus,

to save the planet
to join in solidarity with the poor
to work for peace
to the glory of God.
May we feel in our innermost being a beautiful and holy dissatisfaction.

May that holy dissatisfaction ignite in us a holy refusal
To remain stuck where we have been.

May that holy refusal break open our hearts to a holy hope,
So that the wind, wine, and fire of the Holy Spirit will fill us all.
May we learn to live in the way of revolutionary love,
And may we experience and embody God as Jesus did,
As the radiant light of perfect compassion for all creation.

And may we find or form our flocks,
And may ten thousand flocks and more arise together
In a great spiritual migration of justice, joy, and peace.

But first,
May we feel in our innermost being a beautiful and holy dissatisfaction.