Seeking a New Way to be Christian

Part 1. The Old Way is Working as Designed
for slides - go to
www.brianmclaren.net
our systems are perfectly designed to yield the results we are now getting.
our system is perfectly designed to yield the results we are now getting.
how do we feel about our results? positive? negative?

we can’t get better results without changing the conditions of our systems
what were some of the original design specifications or our religious systems?
designed for control by men. (patriarchy)
designed to depend on donations derived from exploitation of the earth. (environmental unsustainability)
designed to depend on major donors who often derived wealth from exploitation of cheap (or slave) labor. (economic injustice)
designed for white Christian supremacy. (racism, religious domination)
designed to legitimize violence when deemed appropriate (just war theory, colonialism, doctrine of discovery)
designed to preserve power and resist change (authoritarianism)
uses the threat of social punishment to reinforce conformity to social hierarchy, social dogma, and social convention, and requires adherents to pretend to be certain about things they do not actually understand or believe. Having pressured you to perjure yourself, it subverts your genuineness and holds a mortgage on your loyalty.
In authoritarian religion, confession of boundary beliefs becomes a pledge of allegiance. Non confession can lead to banishment, which creates social anxiety, which pressures “false confessions” and insincerity, which turns belief into make-believe/hypocrisy, which fosters complicity and compliance, which squelches curiosity and wonder, which leads to spiritual death and social reward.
the role of statements of boundary beliefs in authoritarian systems:

- they define window of discourse
- they convey loyalty/allegiance
- they symbolize submission
- they preserve boundary maintenance
- they give authority figures the benefit of the doubt (and withhold it from others)
the benefits of doubt: if not for courageous doubt

we would still believe the earth is in the center of 6000 year old universe. (We might even believe the earth is flat.)

white people would still believe they are superior. And so would men. (Sadly, some haven't come to doubt this yet.)

we would think diseases are caused by curses, devils, or witches, not germs.

we would still believe in the divine right of kings and we would see democracy as a heresy.
boundary beliefs make it possible
to substitute being right for being good
to substitute speaking right for being right
to substitute good fruit for right words
to substitute not thinking (questioning) for thinking
to substitute love for conformity for love for truth
the courage to question is the escape tunnel out of authoritarian religion and into deeper faith.
THE GREAT SPIRITUAL MIGRATION

HOW THE WORLD’S LARGEST RELIGION IS SEEKING A BETTER WAY TO BE CHRISTIAN

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For centuries, Christianity has been presented as a system of beliefs. That system of beliefs has supported a wide range of unintended consequences from colonialism to environmental destruction, subordination of women to stigmatization of LGBT people, anti-Semitism to Islamophobia, clergy pedophilia to white privilege.

What would it mean for Christians to rediscover their faith not as a problematic system of beliefs, but as a just and generous way of life, rooted in contemplation and expressed in compassion, that makes amends for its mistakes and is dedicated to beloved community for all?
A spiritual migration

from system of beliefs to way of life
Religious Beliefs & Scientific Facts

Facts and “Method”
What cigarette do you smoke, Doctor?

The brand named most was Camel

According to a repeated nationwide survey:
MORE DOCTORS SMOKE CAMELS than any other cigarette!
Scientists are more loyal to their method than their facts.

To what are we more loyal than our beliefs?
Consider the meaning behind these beliefs:

- virgin birth
- incarnation of Christ
- miracles of Christ
- death of Christ
- resurrection of Christ

Some hold the belief with a contrary meaning (or no meaning at all). Others cherish the meaning without the belief.
Method = “Way”

What is the Christian Way of Life?
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
Respond to this statement:

Christian faith is a way of life by which people become life-long learners and practitioners of the way of love embodied by Jesus.
Imagine making this promise:

If you become part of our community, we will help you and your children become the most loving version of yourself you can be.
a story about learning how to love

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

repetition
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.
system of beliefs

way of life/
way of love
q & r
There is a rhythm, pattern, harmony, logic*, or wisdom* to creation.

* logos, sophia
form and freedom
cycles and linearity
diversity and unity
giving and receiving
struggle and rest
life and death
we humans sometimes choose an authoritarian path that rejects the wisdom of creation.
we seek growth without limits
control without relationship
power without accountability
receiving without giving
wealth without responsibility
life without death