

A Responsibility for Our Tradition

To be part of a life-giving tradition brings with it a moral responsibility to make it even better as we pass it on to future generations.

—Brian McLaren, “Engaged Contemplative Christianity”

In the latest issue of the CAC's journal ONEING, Brian McLaren reflects on the moral responsibility we carry toward our traditions, inviting us to discern if they are life-giving, death-dealing, or somewhere in between:

Traditions are cultural communities that carry on, from generation to generation, ideas and practices (what I call *treasures*) in which they see great enduring value. Like everything in this universe, traditions are constantly changing, even if the change occurs at a glacial pace. (Though these days we know that sometimes even glaciers change quickly.) Sometimes they change for the better. Sometimes they change for the worse. Even if a tradition were to stay exactly the same, to be the same thing in a different environment is not the same thing....

We have no choice as to the tradition into which we were born. As we grow older, we must decide: Is this inherited tradition life-giving, death-dealing, or a mix of both? If it is in an unhealthy condition right now, is it improvable or salvageable? Does participating in it perpetuate harm? Is it time to migrate to a new spiritual tradition?

When we choose to invest our precious time in the most life-giving tradition we can find, we have a responsibility—we might call it a moral responsibility—to understand the tradition's core

treasures: its deepest values, vision, practices, and insights; its origins, history, and leading figures. We also have a responsibility to face its shortcomings, missteps, imbalances, and current needs for growth, so we can someday, if possible, pass on an even better version of the tradition than we have received.

McLaren describes the healing power of discovering contemplative Christianity:

Every day, more and more of us find ourselves unable to perpetuate the religious traditions in which we were raised. We have experienced them as taking more than they give, or, in some cases, we fear they do more harm than good. We have made a great spiritual migration: We have left, often with tears, beloved inherited traditions we considered death-dealing and stubbornly resistant to change. If we hadn't found (or been found by) the tradition of engaged contemplative Christianity, many of us couldn't consider ourselves Christians anymore. We would find ourselves spiritually homeless.

As we rejoice in this growing, life-giving, living tradition, we face important questions: How will we help our tradition to grow, mature, and expand its influence for good? How will we enrich and improve the tradition as it stands? How can we discern its present weaknesses, not in order to criticize and condemn the tradition, but in order to heal, strengthen, and energize it for greater fruitfulness in the future? What might the growing edges of our tradition be?