



# WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?

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Good Christian vs. Good Person:  
Does it Matter?

Dr. Kathleen Staudt, Christ Church  
Georgetown, September 25, 2016

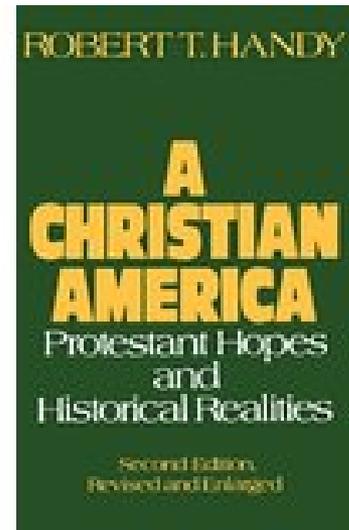


# Some propositions to guide practice: Post Christendom Christianity

- Incarnation reclaimed: Body is good, non-dualistic
- Trinity and Participation in Divine Life
- Recovery of experiential/contemplative
- Ecumenism and Radical Welcome
- Liturgy and Spiritual Practice
- Intentional Communities
- Discipleship: Following Jesus. Purpose is *“to be & to make followers of Jesus for the sake of the world”*  
(Brian McClaren in *A Generous Orthodoxy*)

# Being a Christian, Being “Good”: What’s at Stake?

- “That’s not very *Christian* of you?”
- “We are /(are not) behaving like a *Christian* country.”
- I can be a good person without being a Christian!
- I’m not *that* kind of Christian.



The Christian “brand”:  
Propositional, and  
insisting on social  
conformity.

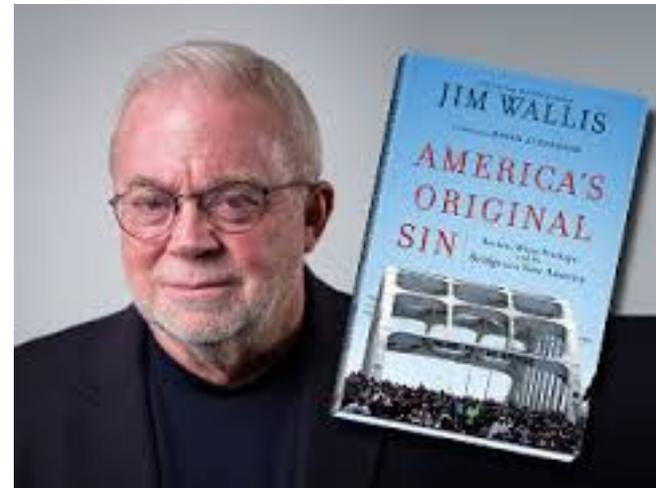
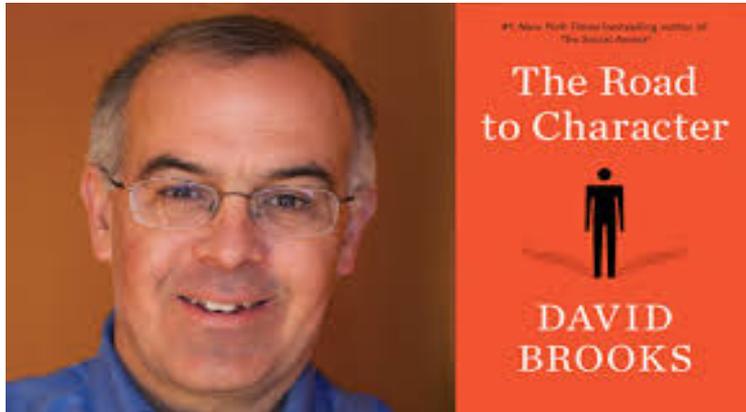
The traps of  
perfectionism and  
exceptionalism



# A Common Denominator?: “Moral Therapeutic Deism”

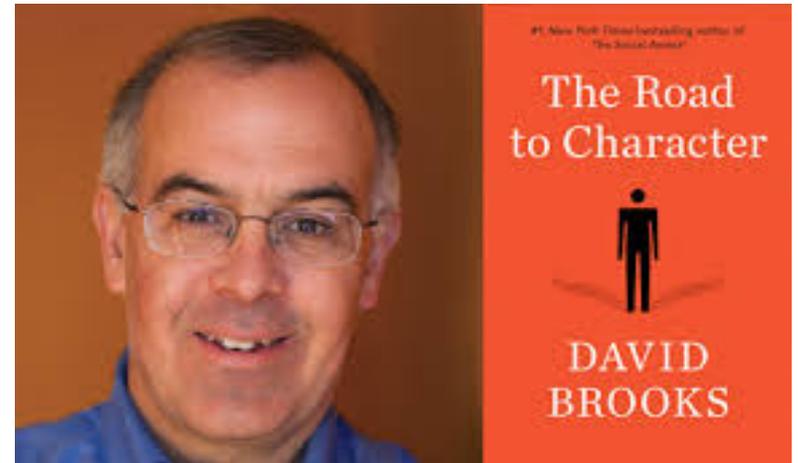
- A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- *The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself*
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem
- Good people go to heaven when they die.

# “Character” and “Sin” as guideposts



# “Good Person”: an overrated goal? Reclaiming “Character” and “Virtue”.

- “Adam I” and “Adam II”:  
Rugged Individualism vs.  
communal identity.
- Character formed in adversity,  
often in self-definition against  
dominant culture.
- Discipline/Obedience, Humility,  
and “Sin” as oft-neglected  
concepts.

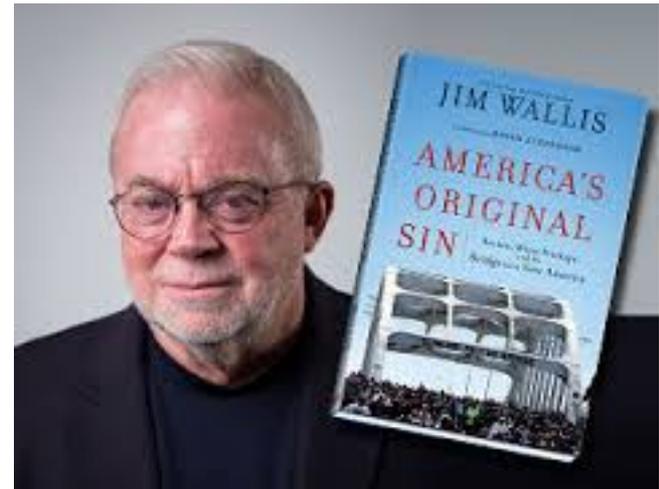


# “Good Christian”: Too Painful? The categories of “Sin” and Conversion

Moral therapeutic Deism (MTD) says “God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions”:

What does MTD lose by avoiding category of sin (which requires “feeling bad.”)

“Sin,” justice and the human condition: a Christian understanding?



# Being “good”: A gospel perspective.

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.” ’ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Mark 10:17-



Christ and the Rich young Ruler, Heinrich Hoffmann  
(Riverside Church NY)



# So why be good?

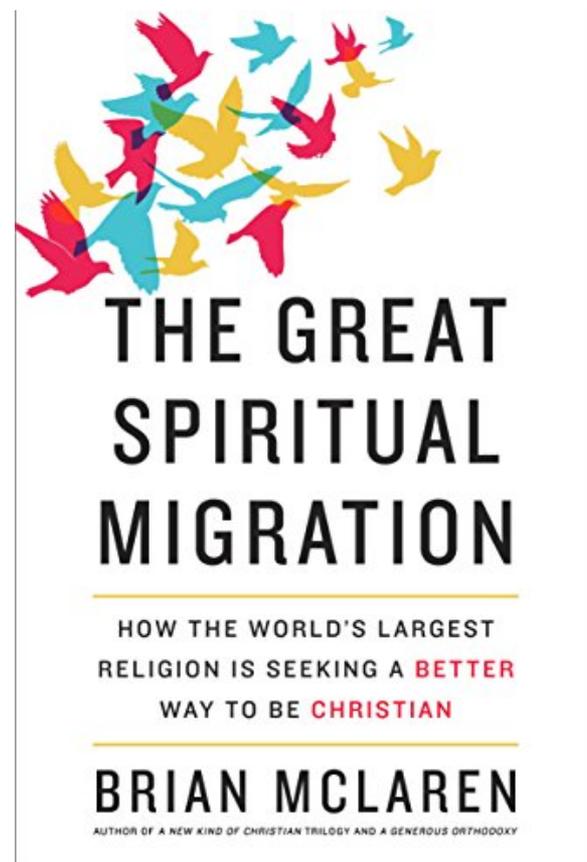
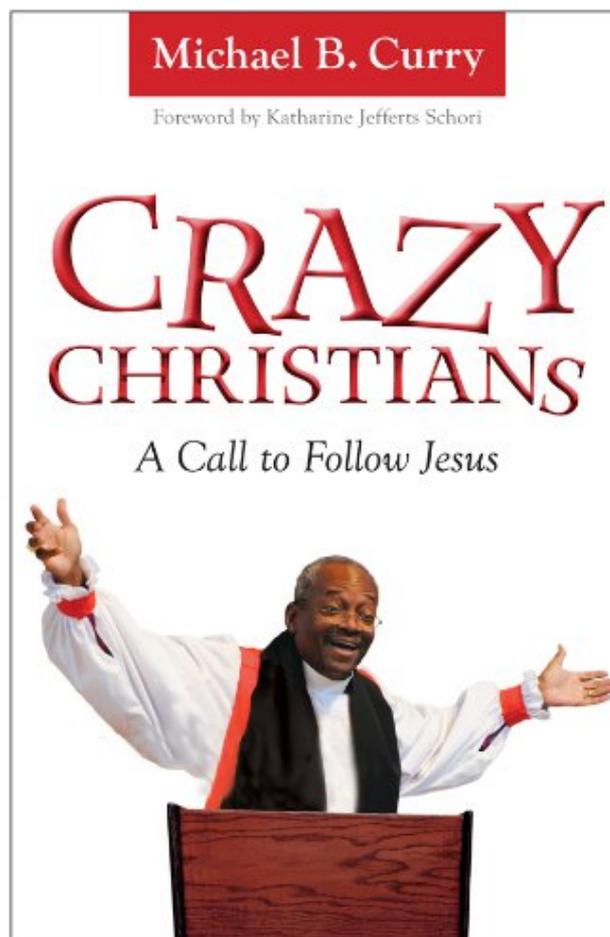
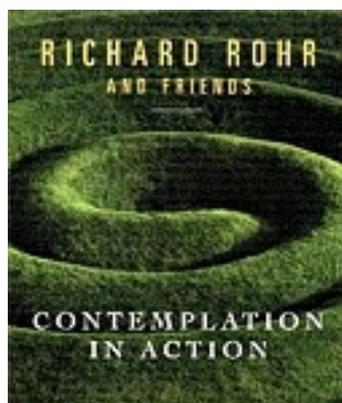
- (Brooks's "Adam I v Adam II)
- Goodness and love are "caught not taught" (Evelyn Underhill)
- Reinterpreting "Sin" and "Salvation" apart from fear of damnation
- Perfectionism v. "No one is good but God alone." Possibility of conversion
- Practice for Participation in God's work and life, rather than for self-improvement. Contemplation, discernment, action.



# Following Jesus

- Sometimes might mean *not* being a “good person” by societal standards (M. L. King: Jesus as “extremist”)
- “Follow me”
- “Believe in me” (i.e. “Trust me”)
- Importance of tradition and (yes) revelation
- Embraces *hope*: death to resurrection; recognizing sin leads to reconciliation; obedience (listening) leads to transformation (But means we don’t always “feel good about ourselves” ) – always.
- Practice more important than Propositional belief
- Participation in something larger than ourselves: in what God is doing . A “Way” rather than an arrival.

# Coming up: What does it mean to be “followers of Jesus?” in our time?



# “Moral Therapeutic Deism”

- A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- *The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself*
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem
- Good people go to heaven when they die.

## vs Following Jesus

We belong to something larger: Revelation in Scripture and the STORY told in our tradition is “go to” resource –”

“Follow me”, “Believe in me” (i.e. “Trust me”) (*pisteuo*)

Embraces hope: Belovedness; death to resurrection; recognizing sin leads to reconciliation; obedience (listening) leads to transformation. Conversion beyond shame.

Participation, however imperfectly in something larger than ourselves: in what God is doing. God involved with us and we with God – ongoing growth, renewal, hope. A “Way” rather than an arrival. A Story that contains our story.



# What about “eternal life?”

## Christian hope and belonging

*Lastly let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we forevermore are one.*

- (Bidding prayer from the service of 9 Lessons and Carols for Christmas)