

FOREWORD

As a rule, forewords, when they occur at all, speak their truth about one particular volume of work and only one. Having been always just slightly less than compliant by disposition, though, there is a kind of perverse joy for me every time I find a way to violate such a rule both with impunity and to good purpose, which is why I think you probably need to know right up front that as I write this foreword, I am joyful.

Most of us know, either by instinct or by deliberate investigation, that Christianity is going through a time of enormous upheaval. When last our faith went through such a dramatic and total reconfiguration, we gave our reshuffling the portentous name of the Great Reformation. Now the church is changing again, working and chafing under the heat of severe cultural shifts and earthquakes.

One thing is certain, nevertheless: some of us are sure we don't like it. Others are more sanguine and assume the whole thing will settle down in God's good time without requiring any particular engagement on their part. And a few of us look at what is happening as the old denominations falter and nondenominational communities increase and as worship becomes more passionate and communal and incarnational, and are ready to say, "Ah, there's a new movement of the Spirit among us, a new form of the kingdom, a new under-

standing of vocation and its totality.” Young men and women of faith, especially, are crying everywhere, “Give us a faith that costs us something! We want to feel the passion of those who knew and know Christianity is worth dying for! Teach us the things that will mark us as children of God! Make of us a holy nation before our God!”

Their demands swell out with heat and vision, and what they foretell is that Christianity must be a way of living life as much as it is a system of belief. What they envision are Christians who belong to each other in common cause, regardless of place and circumstance, a tribe of people marked by how they are and live as a nation peculiar unto God, regardless of where they may exist on this earth. It is a soul-shaking concept. Yet, it is as old as the Judaism out of which we come and in terms of which we Christians see ourselves as inheritors of an eternal promise.

Such battle cries have not been heard for a while, at least not in most of the first world. They startle, offend, and accuse—and they also pierce. But regardless of where one is in the wide family of Christian affiliation, it is impossible not to discern that their demands also come bearing blessings for the whole body of Christ on earth assembled.

That is why the entire church is being forced to prayerfully re-examine the character and practices of our ancient forefathers and foremothers in the faith. We must begin again, as once our forebears did, to live not as culturally safe Christians, but as observant ones, the markings of our faith becoming so inherent in each of us as to be the faith incarnated in us. We must, in other words, find our way again—and thus the title of this book.

In its pages and in its lines of lucid argument, Brian McLaren writes a no-holds-barred overview of both the grandeur and the odium of living fully Christian in a post-Christendom society. He underscores the necessity for that commitment and revisits the means

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by which Christians and Jews have always dared to fashion themselves before God. What he has to say will not persuade all of us, but it should unsettle every one of us, accusing us each and every one of being less than we must be, and inspiring us with the hope that still there is time, that still we can strive toward fuller citizenship.

What McLaren does in these pages, in other words, is to brilliantly lay before us an absolute call for every practicing Christian to assume the characteristic faith-marking ways of our spiritual elders.

So then, in writing the foreword to his book, I am doing two things. First and most gratefully, I am taking advantage of an opportunity to praise a piece of work and a religious posture that I passionately believe in. But I have another purpose as well. With equal gratitude, I am using this foreword as a way to introduce a whole series of books for which the present one serves as both the first of eight volumes and as the context for them all.

Those books are listed, along with the names of their authors, on the fly leaf of this volume. As you will see from their titles, each of the seven outstanding books is concerned not with a theory of spiritual discipline, as is this one, but rather with a particular and specific spiritual practice. In aggregate, these, with McLaren's persuasive *Finding Our Way Again – The Return of the Ancient Practices*, illustrate seven ancient ways of spiritual and religious formation that have shaped the Abrahamic faiths from the beginning of time. I believe that they will evoke in each of us a prayerful reconsideration of how Christians are called to live, as well as to believe.

And that, in sum, is why I am, with joy, signing my name here.

Phyllis Tickle
General Editor
Ancient Practices Series