
What's New?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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I would like someone to visit the grocery store and count the number of products whose boxes proclaim something like "new and improved!" No marketing effort seems complete without some form of that phrase: "new and improved!" These efforts reveal a universal human longing: we really do want something better. Something in us always wants something new.

Our western world begins a new year with these sorts of hopes. Many of us make "New Year's Resolutions," but most of us would do just as well by pulling out the same ones we came up with last year. From year to year, they follow a usual form: lose weight, get organized, get healthy, pay more attention to intimate relationships, find work that is satisfying. In fact, most of those recurring resolutions are about ourselves.

With the same old longings, and with the much the same sorts of resolutions that we had last year, what really is new about this year? What really is new about our lives right now?

Two of my favorite chapters in scripture are the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation, the last two chapters of the entire bible, Revelation 21 and 22. John writes that he sees "a new heaven and a new earth." A voice says "See, the home of God is among mortals. See, I am making all things new."

Our Christian tradition knows that we long for something new. Maybe that is why our culture often senses an urgency about when the last times will be, or when the second coming will be. I read a survey last week which revealed that 25% of the American population expects the second coming of Jesus in 2007. Really? (I think that longing is really about people psychologically wanting to escape.) How can we live faithfully with our internal hopes for something new? Do we have to rely on annual new year's resolutions, or the latest self-help health kick, or the latest second coming prediction?

I have been reading Brain McLaren's book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, as 2006 closes out. Our Cathedral chapter will use that book during our annual retreat January 5-7. McLaren describes there what it means to be a missional Christian: "Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did not come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did not come to create another exclusive religion. Missional faith asserts that Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God to everyone, especially the poor. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came on behalf of the sick. He came to save the world. His gospel, and therefore the Christian message, is Good News for the whole world" (pages 109-110).

God has in mind a "something new" that affects the whole world, not just our private and internal lives. Thus, I believe that the "something new" which God has in mind for us is not related to self-help, or self-health, or self-satisfaction, or self-salvation, as necessary as all those values might be. To be a Christian in this new world, and during this new year, means believing that God wants to make all things new. That's much larger than just my own personal life; God wants good for the whole world.

I am hoping, and praying, for missional Christianity in this new year, 2007. That is part of what a generous and orthodox

Christianity is all about. The phrase, "generous orthodoxy," was first used by Hans Frei, up at Yale; but it has become a rallying principle. There is something new, something wonderful and new, stirring in the hearts of faithful Christians around the world these days. In Jesus Christ, we have something healthy and graceful which the whole world needs. The world needs us. The world needs the Cathedral of St. Philip, and the Cathedral of St. Philip needs you. So, "happy new year" this week. But, more importantly, may your year truly be new!

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