

EXCERPT

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The Journey of God
Christianity in Six Movements

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J. D. Lyonhart (PhD, Cambridge) is a British-Canadian theologian, philosopher, author, and ordained minister, as well as an advocate for the learning disabled and neurodiverse. He is an associate professor of Christianity and philosophy at the University of Jamestown, a fellow at the Cambridge Center for the Study of Platonism at Cambridge University, and a cohost of the *Spiritually Incorrect Podcast*.

The Story of Christianity in Six Movements

I remember the first time I saw the *Lord of the Rings* as a kid. I apparently sleepwalked into my parents' room later that night, where I stood over their bed calmly informing them I was an elf and that doom was upon us all.

I remember rising early one morning before anyone else and catching *Ghoulies II* on TV. A ghoulish monster tunneled through the pipes and came out of an in-use toilet. Subsequently, I only squatted over—never fully sat down on—a toilet seat again until well into high school. Aerial precision was difficult from such heights, spawning a mythology at my local summer camp, where the staff often whispered about an unidentified youth known only as the “mad crapper.” The case remains unsolved to this day.

I remember the first time I saw the movie *The Matrix*, about how our material reality is a dream. I was walking home afterward and looked up at the sky, wailing through my outstretched throat, “I want to be woken up! Somebody help me! Please! I wanna wake up!”

In hindsight, I was a boy in desperate search of a story. Not merely to lose myself in entertainment but to find myself in a narrative. I think I was trying to glimpse a bigger journey in which to locate myself, my character arc, and what I was or was not scripted for. And while a thousand years ago I may have struggled to fit into the prevailing story stained in glass at the local cathedral, my much more contemporary problem was the exact opposite: there were a thousand stories coming all at once, in ever-multiplying mediums and screens, often with inconsistent visions, morals, aesthetics, and philosophies. Some of those stories even claimed that there was no story, no script, no plot, no higher meaning binding together each act in a grand play of existence; that life was a tale told by no one, signifying nothing.

I was not born into the Christian story, which might help explain why I was always searching for something in its place. I was raised in downtown Vancouver, Canada, where people are statistically more likely to meditate before meals than to pray. Vancouver has the lowest number of people going to church weekly (3 percent) in North America. And the household I was born into was not, at least originally, part of that 3 percent. Even when Christianity became a bigger part of my life, it initially did so as just one option amid a smorgasbord of other stories, religions, and philosophies to choose from, with seemingly nothing unique to make it stand out from the crowd. God was getting out-told by beat poets, songwriters, comics, playwrights, philosophers, scientists, and Quentin Tarantino. In comparison, I'd just never heard the Christian story told well enough. In fact, I hadn't really heard it *told* at all—Christianity only ever seemed to sputter out in fragmented pieces, cherry-picked to preach such and such a point, tied together more by appeals to faith than by any narrative logic, beauty, or moral power. If Jesus were still dead, he'd be turning in his grave.

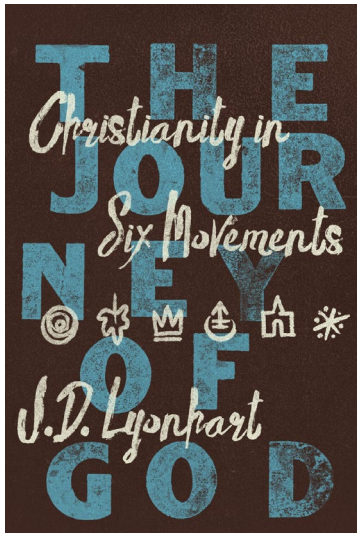
My wife likes to joke that I became a preacher because I couldn't stand to listen to anyone else talk. My goal as a pastor and now as a professor has always been to say things my younger Vancouver self might actually have bothered to listen to—to present the Christian story in a way that is deep with philosophy, science, or history yet also widens eyes with drama, play, and wit. I've tried to do the same thing with this book. I didn't write it for you; I wrote it for my younger self. But you are more than welcome to listen in.



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This book is the whole Christian story in six movements: *creation, fall, nation, redemption, church, end*. God creates the world, humans ruin it, God works through the Jewish nation to fix things, bringing about redemption through the Jewish Messiah (*cough* Jesus), leading to a community of supposedly redeemed people who like to call themselves the church, and then the whole thing ends with an apocalypse and dragons. I think it's a good story, a story worth telling even if it's not true. The crazy thing, though, is that I think it just might be. And so do billions of other people too. So if you're not going to read this book to understand God, the universe, or yourself, then perhaps you might read it simply to understand the rest of us and why we still believe in Bronze Age myths in an age of iPhones, nuclear warfare, gene editing, online dating, AI, VR, and 3D-printed cupcakes.

—Adapted from the introduction



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