

writing for my life (1)

For 20 years, I've been writing for my life.  
Here are four things I've learned.

1. Writing has been part of my discovery process - an opportunity to be a scout entering new territory.

I have started with questions, not answers.

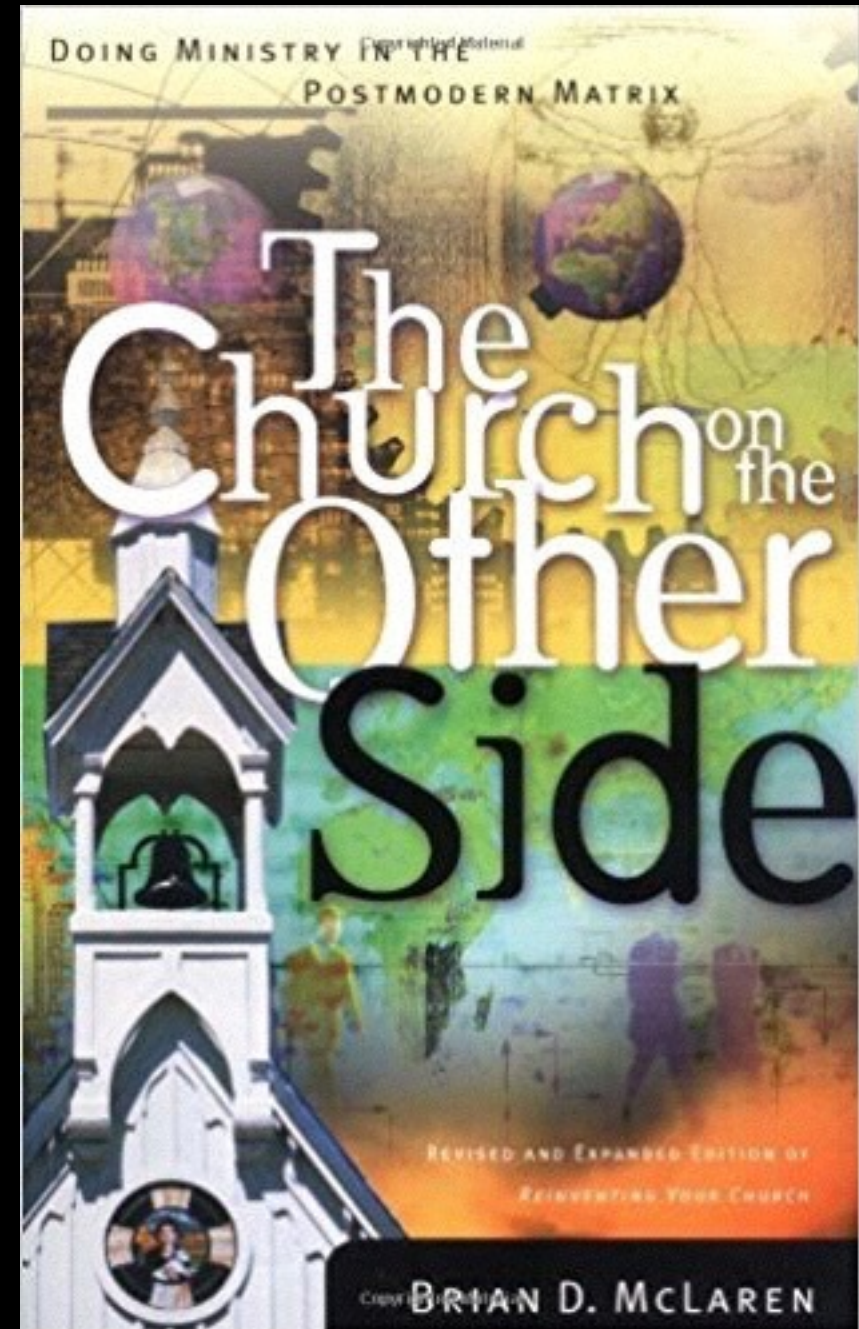
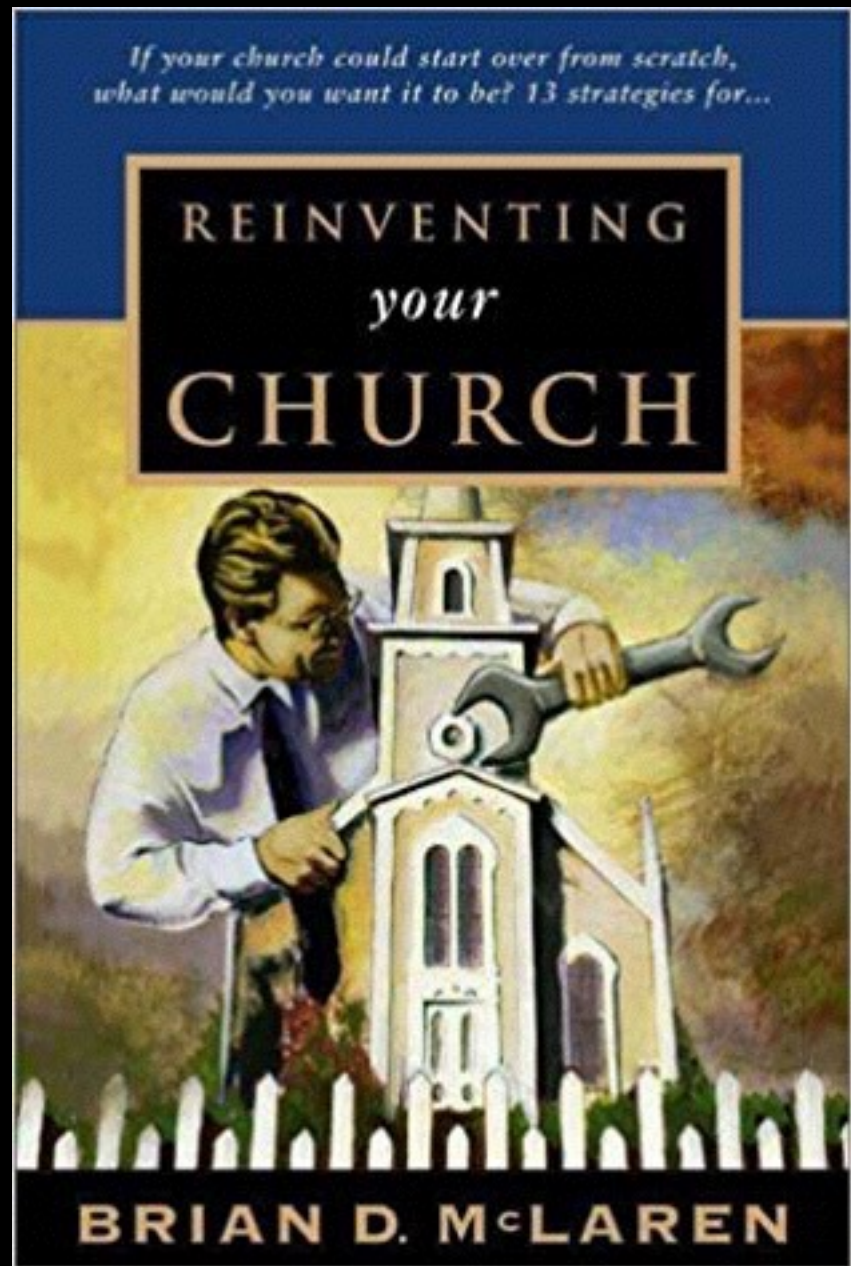
I have started with soul-sickness, not a cure.

I have started with problems, not solutions.

I have started with mysteries, not certainties.

Words ... are the blanket we throw upon the invisible to make it visible.

- Nick Cave (Australian singer/songwriter)



March 1, 1998

thesis:

status quo evangelicalism isn't working - here are 13 strategies for change.

audience:

mainstream evangelicals

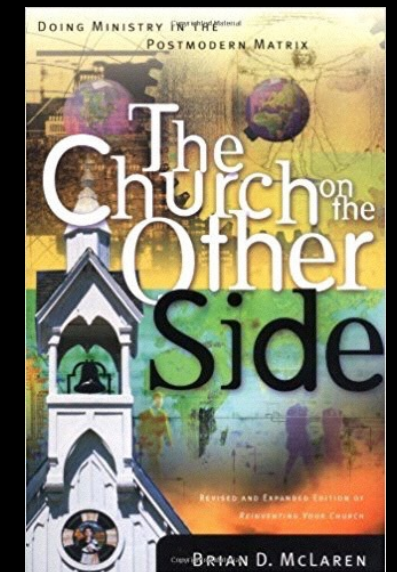
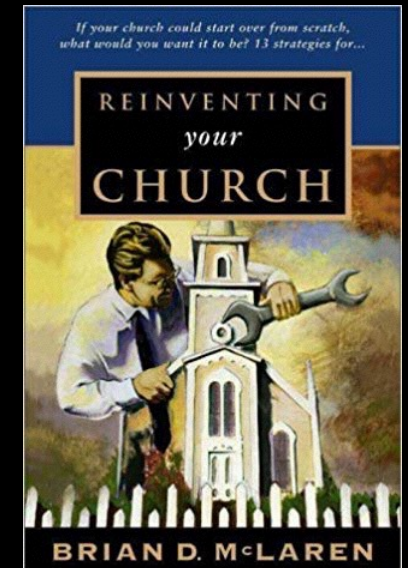
role:

Evangelical working pastor, struggling and experimenting

honest, incisive, critical, positive

purpose:

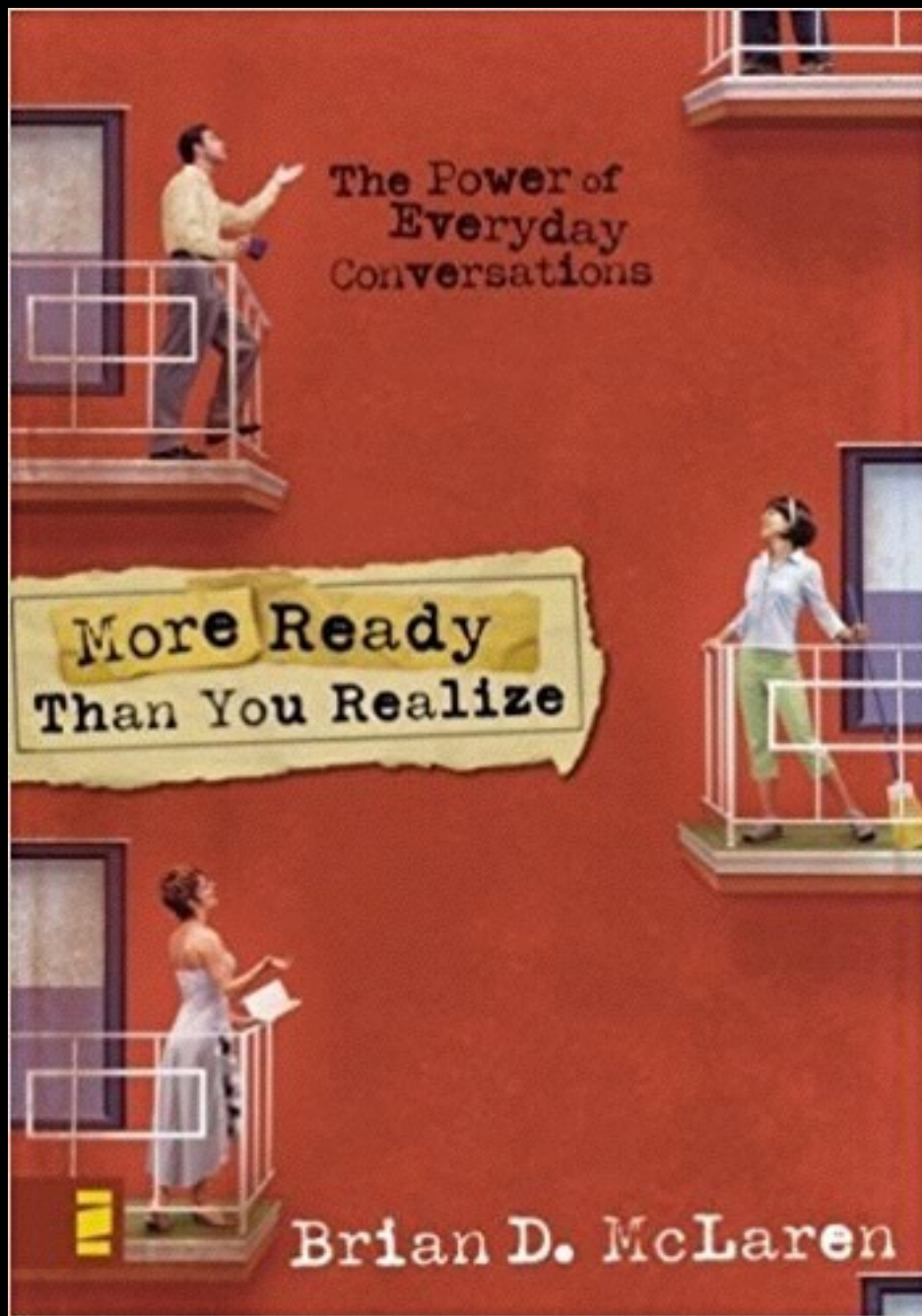
invite pastors into a safe zone for a dangerous but needed conversation



A reviewer:

If McLaren means what he says about postmodernism,  
he should be writing fiction, poetry, drama, screenplays.





2002

thesis:

you are more ready to share your faith  
(in a new way) than you realize

audience:

mainstream evangelicals, mainliners

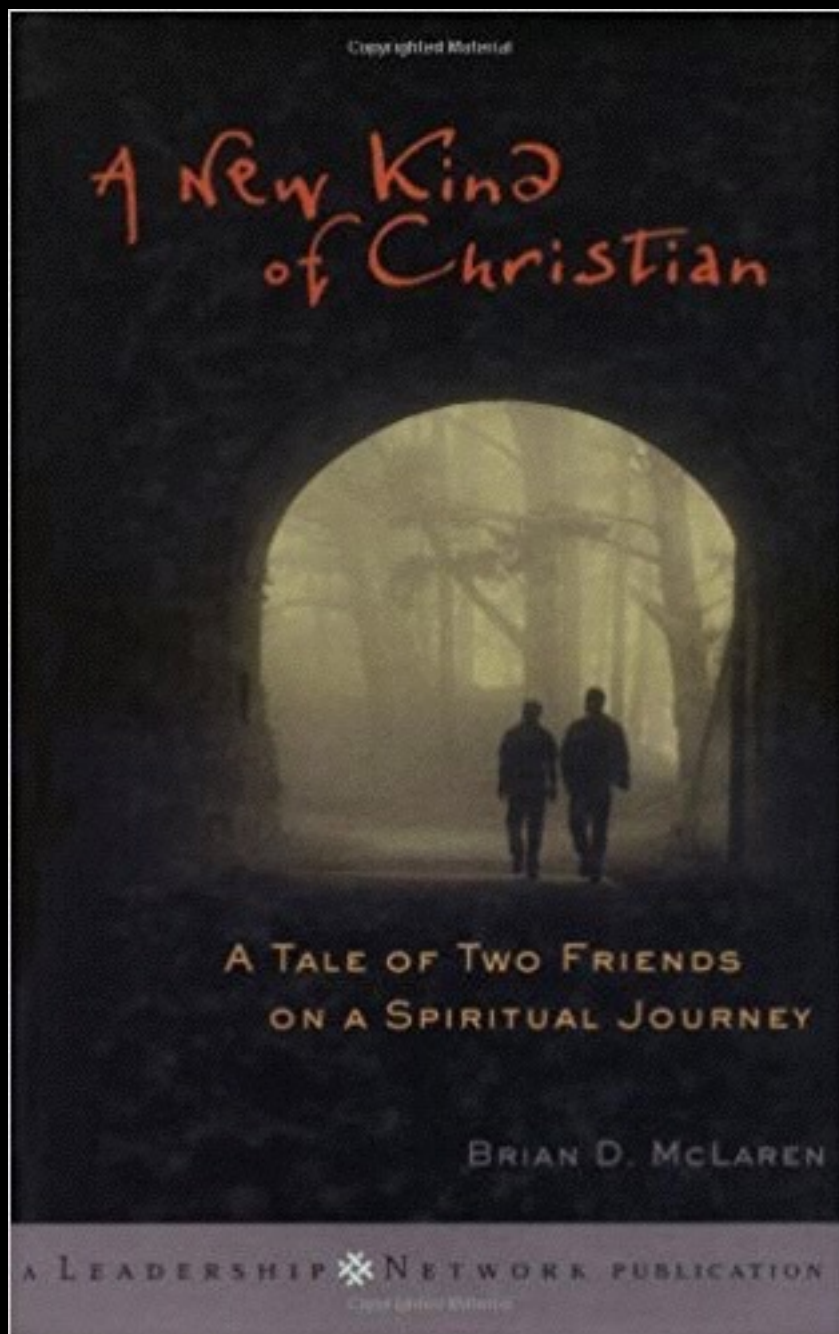
role:

working pastor, struggling and  
experimenting  
honest, incisive, critical, positive

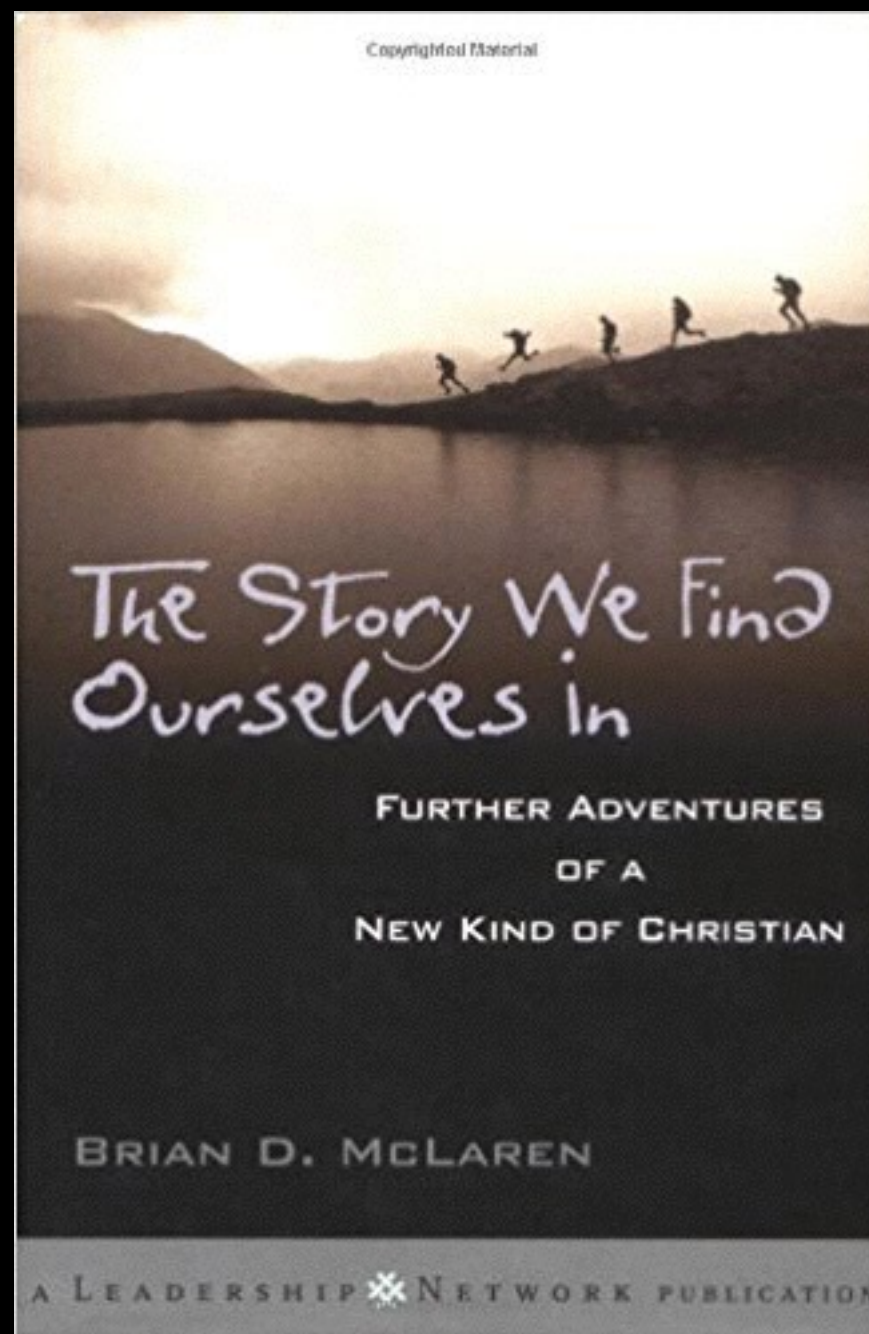
purpose:

invite christians to share their faith in a  
new way (and leave old-style  
evangelism behind)

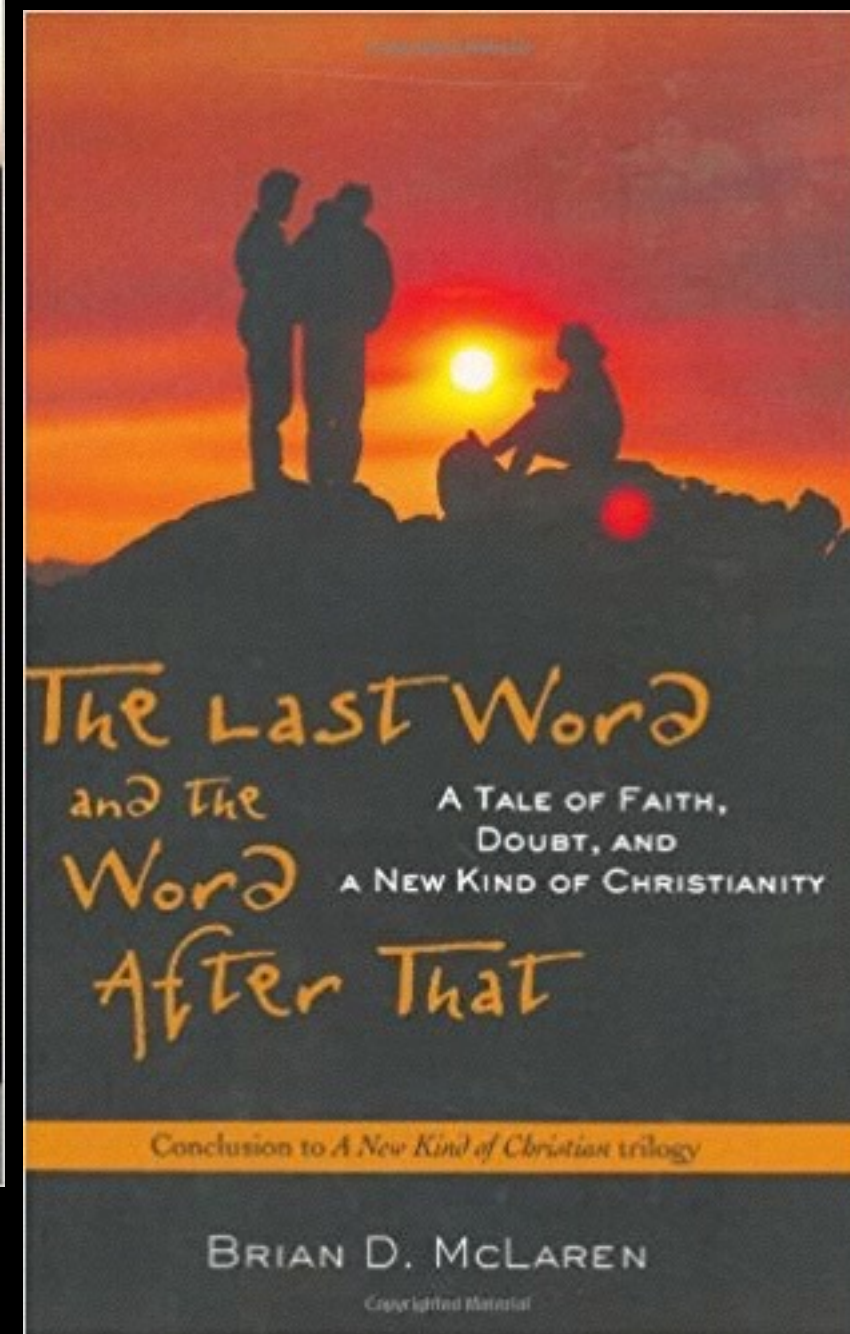




2001



2003



2005

thesis:

this postmodern transition is tough. we need to rethink our theological assumptions, our way of reading the Bible ... our understanding of heaven and hell ... everything.

audience:

mainstream evangelicals, emerging christians

role:

alienated Evangelical, working pastor, struggling and experimenting

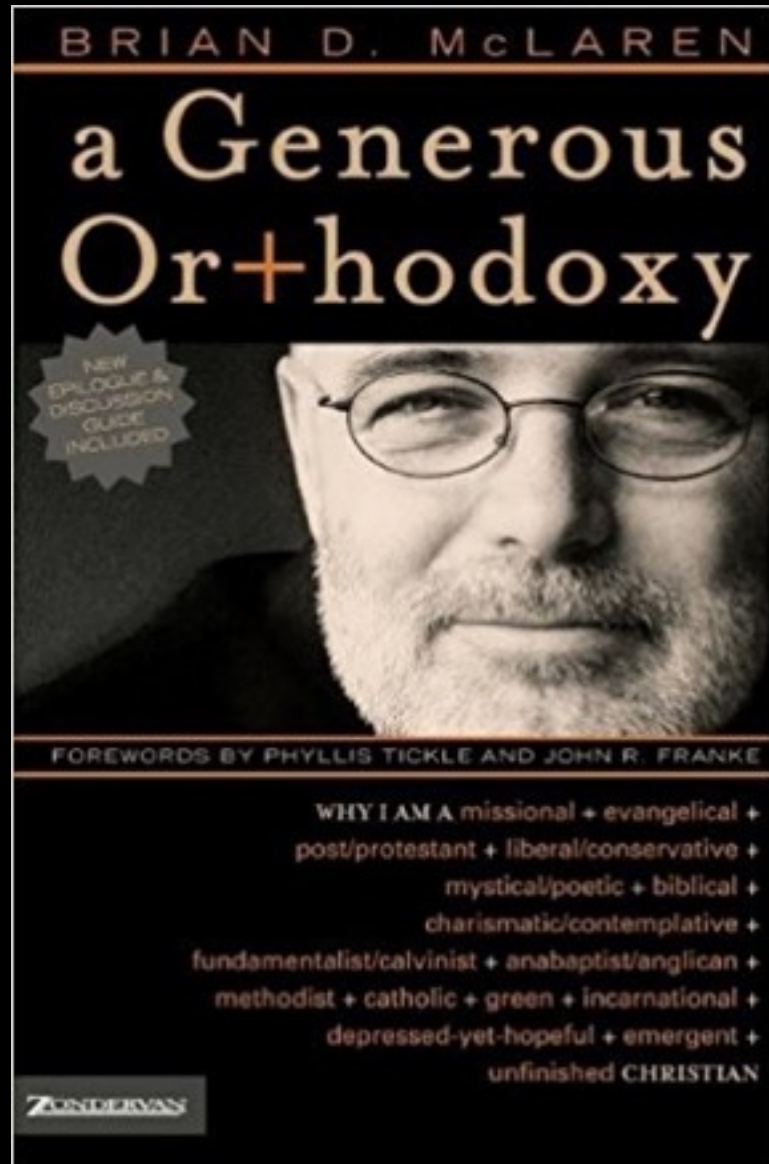
honest, incisive, critical, positive

purpose:

invite pastors into a safe zone for a dangerous but needed conversation

A reviewer:

McLaren is nothing more than warmed-over Raushenbush.



2004

thesis:

evangelicals, catholics, orthodox, etc.  
need each other to forge a new path

audience:

ecumenical

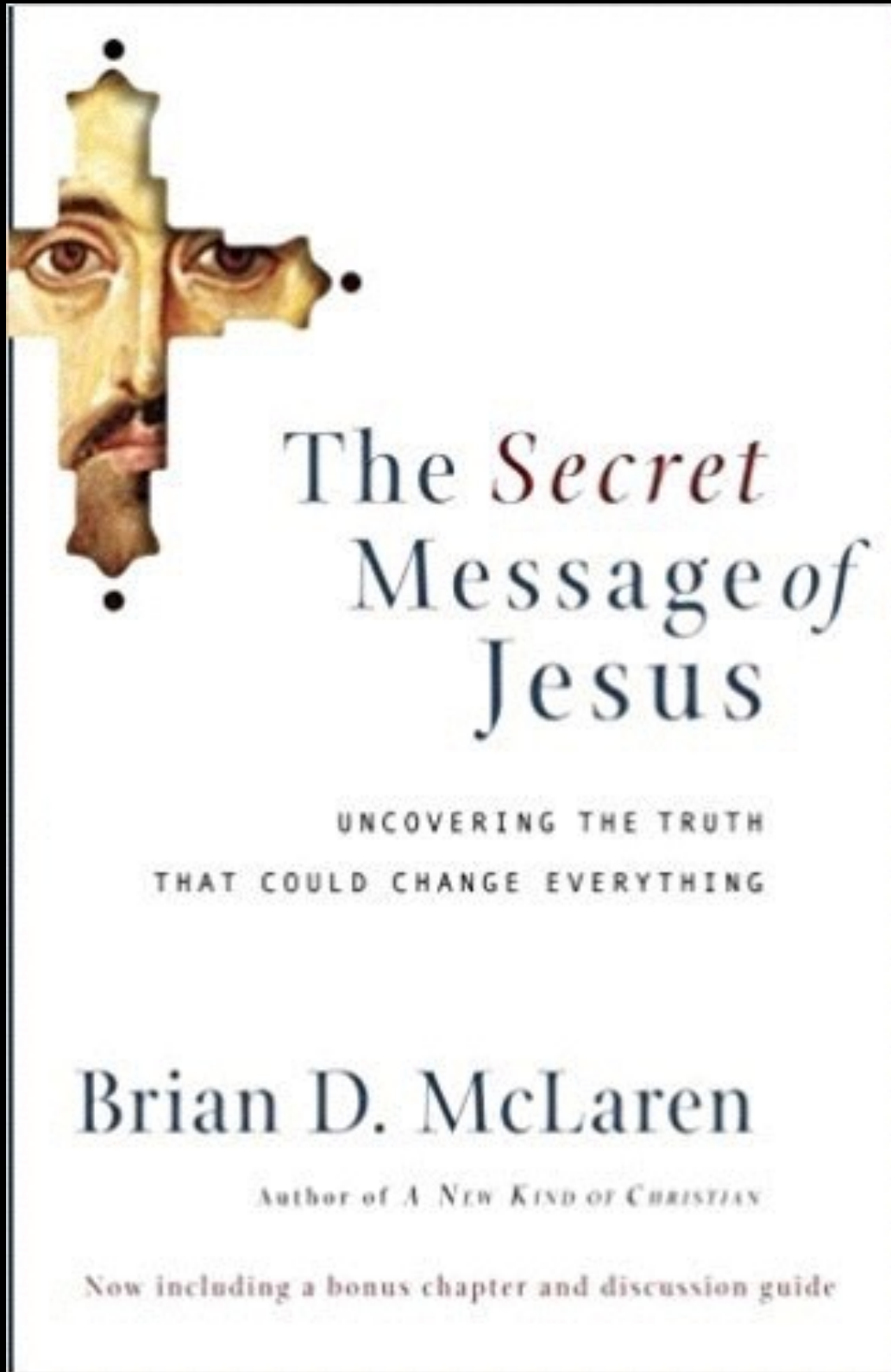
role:

post-Evangelical working pastor,  
ecumenical speaker, reflective  
practitioner

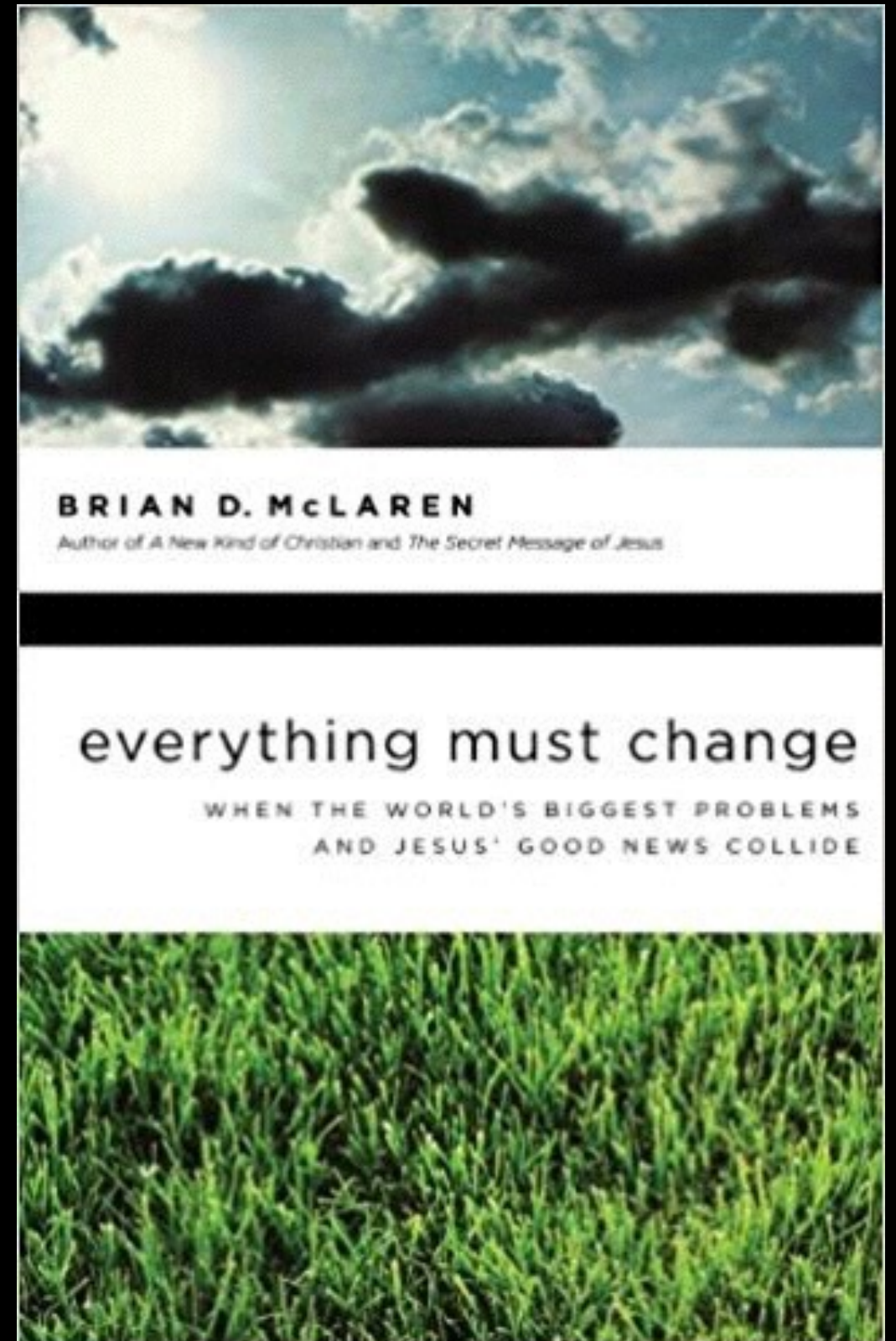
purpose:

begin to articulate a new pan-Christian  
ethos that draws from all traditions, but  
is captive to none.





2006



2007

thesis:

christians don't just have a packaging problem; we have a content problem. we need to rediscover Jesus' core message.

audience:

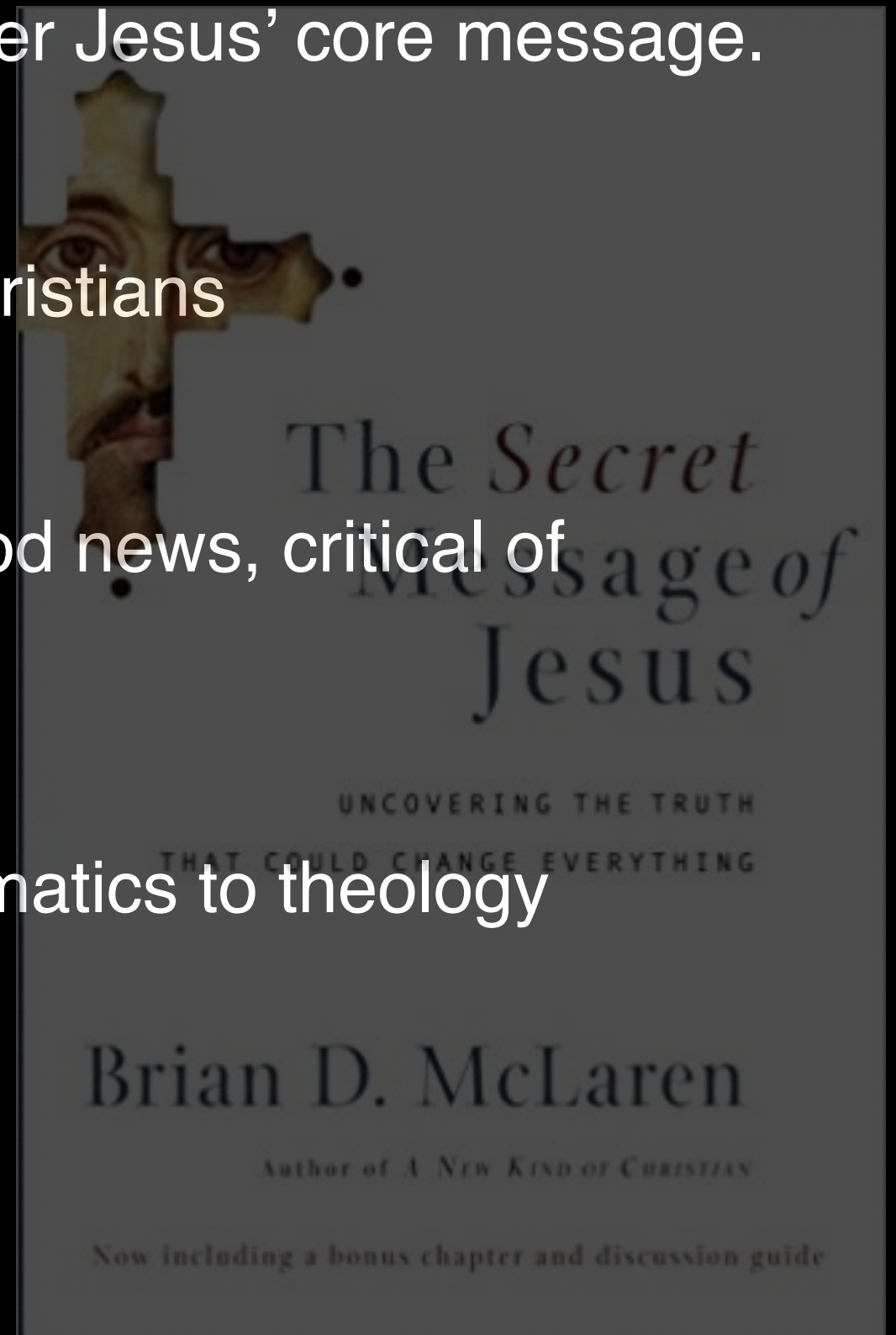
seekers, alienated & open-minded Christians

role:

working pastor, confident in Jesus good news, critical of American church.

purpose:

shift focus from style to content, pragmatics to theology





thesis:

Jesus' message addresses the world's four most urgent crises.

audience:

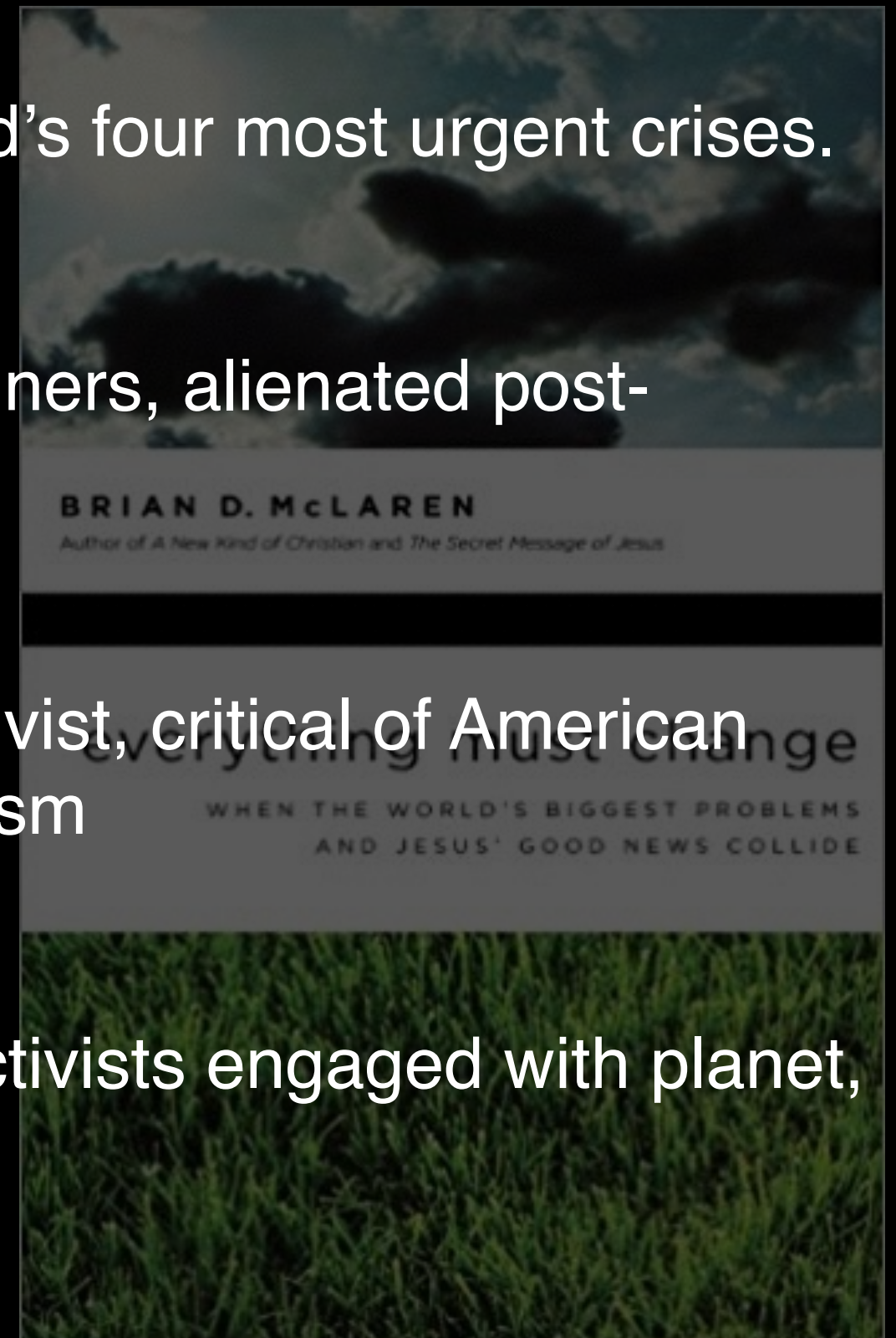
young evangelicals, missional mainliners, alienated post-Christians, seekers, activists

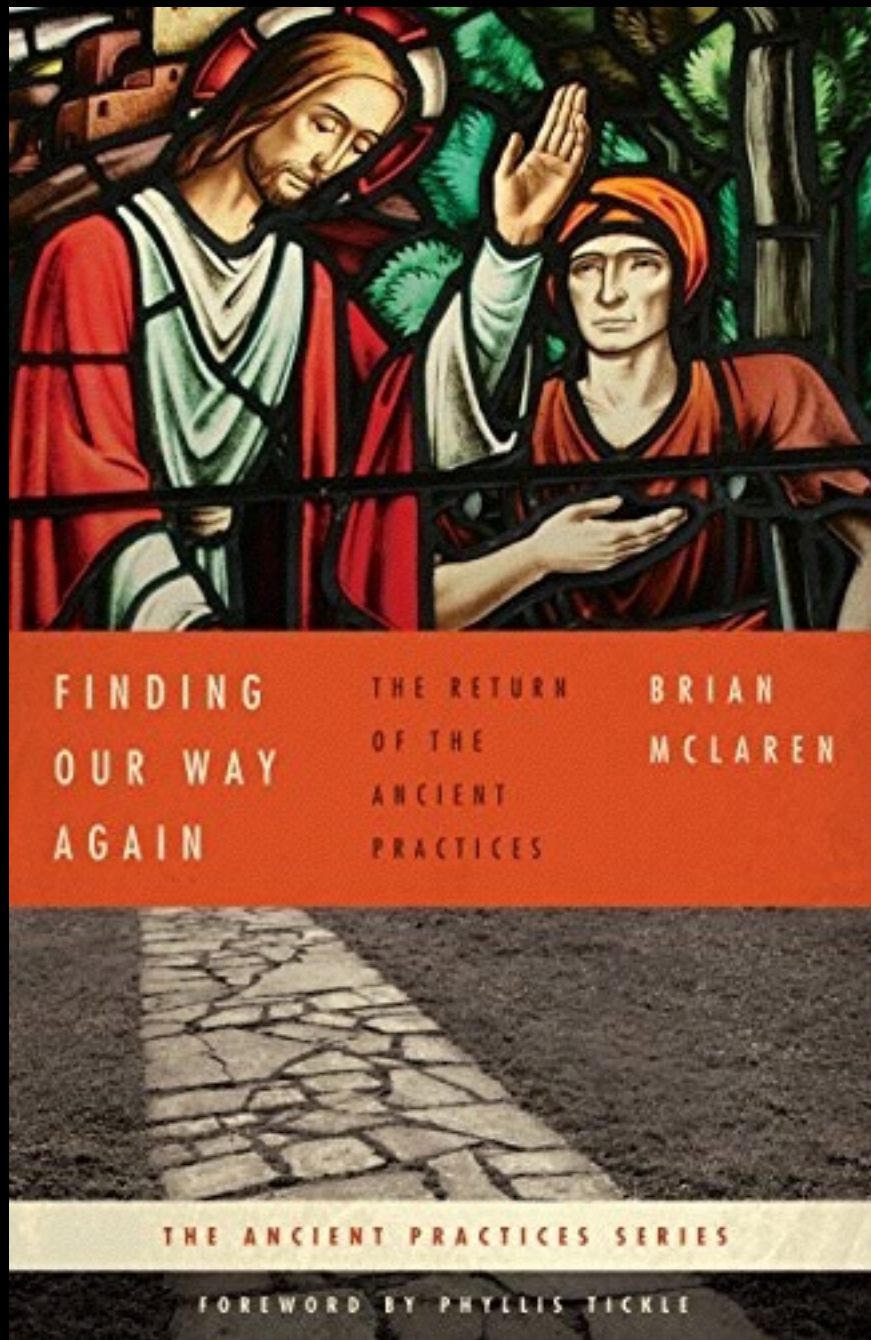
role:

working pastor, budding spiritual activist, critical of American church and global militaristic capitalism

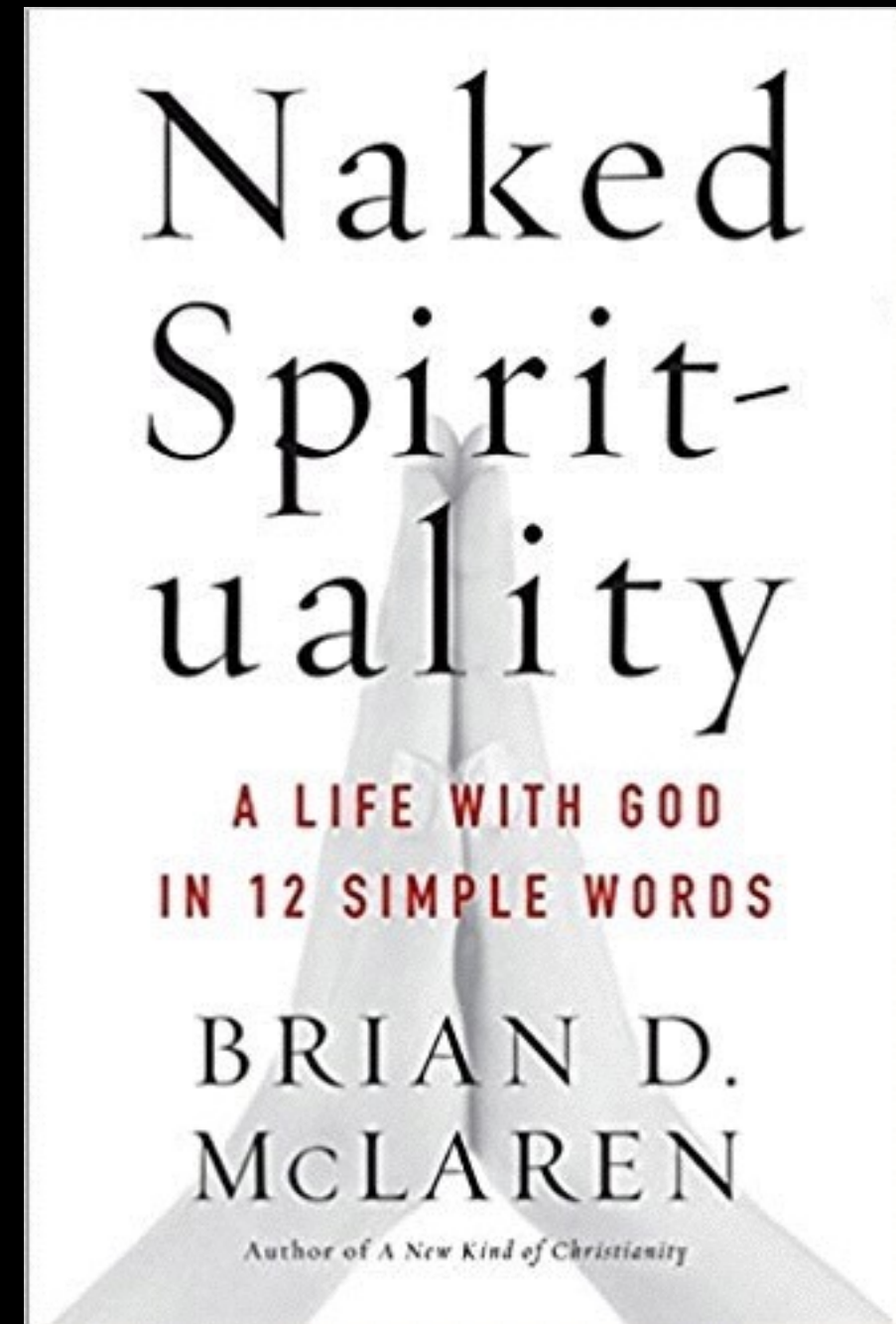
purpose:

disciples are meant to be spiritual activists engaged with planet, poverty, peace, and religion





2008



2011

thesis:

this new kind of christianity is deeply spiritual ... recovering ancient practices and fashioning new ones

audience:

christians ... spiritual but not religious

role:

experienced pastor, spiritual mentor, contemplative activist in multi-faith context

purpose:

demonstrate an open spirituality - contemplative/spiritual activism



"[McLaren] is packaging spiritual dynamite and shipping it to cells of believers nationwide who are so restless with the bondage of 'church life' that they want to blow the roof off and start again."—*Read the Spirit*

Brian D. McLaren



# A New Kind of Christianity

TEN QUESTIONS  
THAT ARE TRANSFORMING  
THE FAITH

2010

thesis:

we're getting clarity on what the key theological transitions are going to be ...

audience:

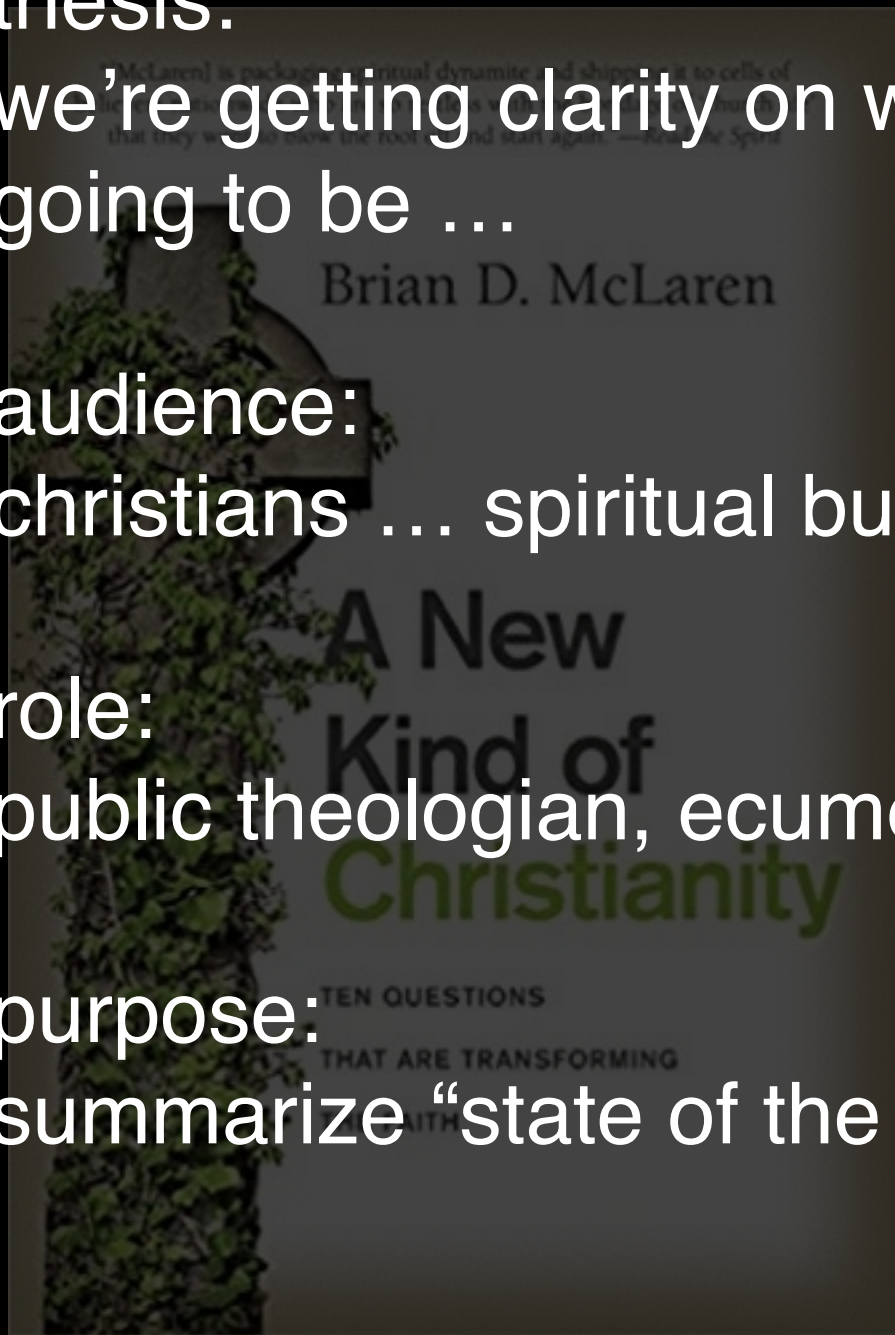
christians ... spiritual but not religious

role:

public theologian, ecumenical networker, former pastor

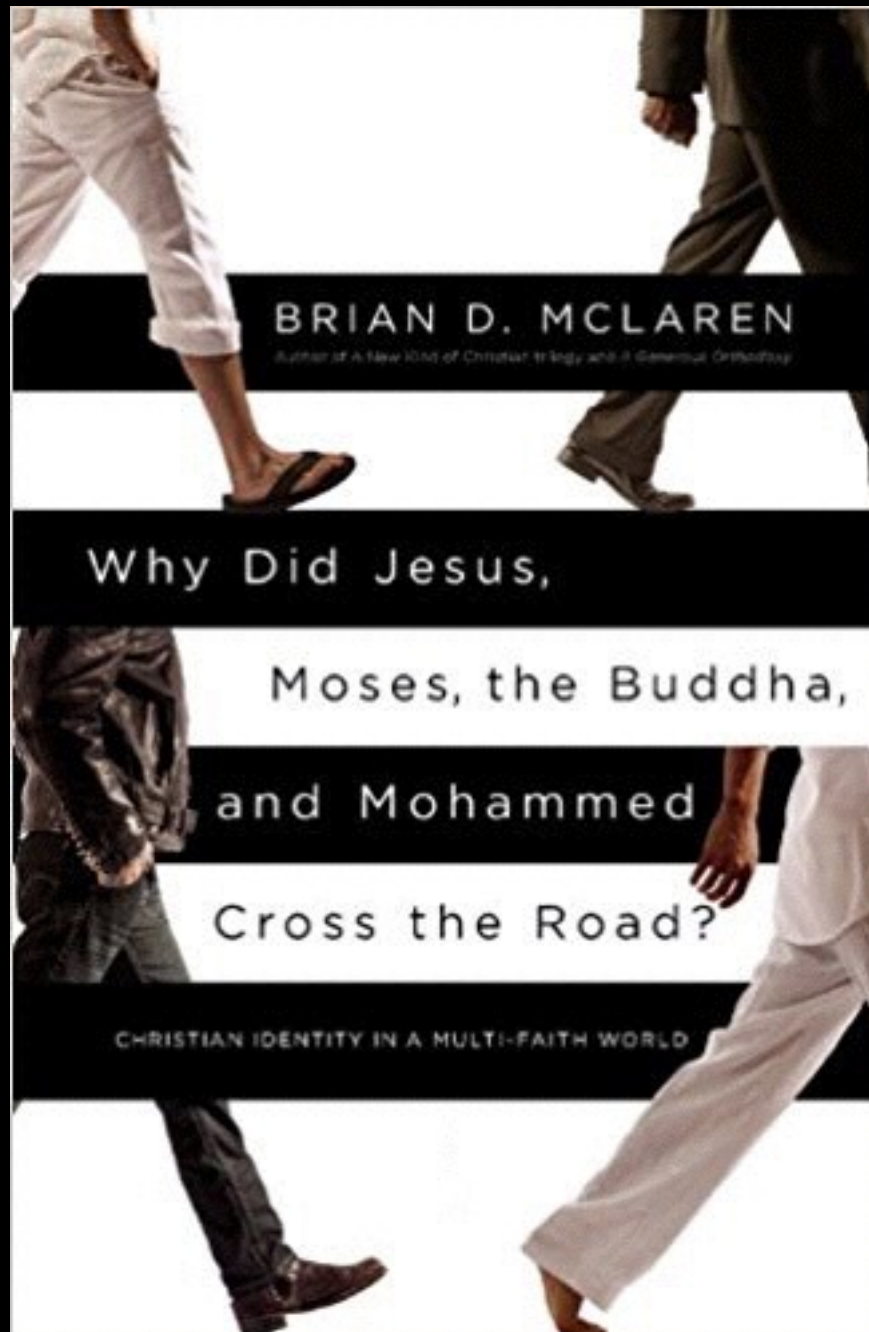
purpose:

summarize "state of the art" in emergence Christianity



A blogger, in an email sent to fellow bloggers:  
We need to learn from our mistake with Rob Bell. If we say anything about McLaren's next book, we'll just draw attention to it and more people will read it. We have to agree to not say a single word about it.





2013

thesis:

we need a new way of relating to people of other faiths - with a strong and benevolent christian identity

audience:

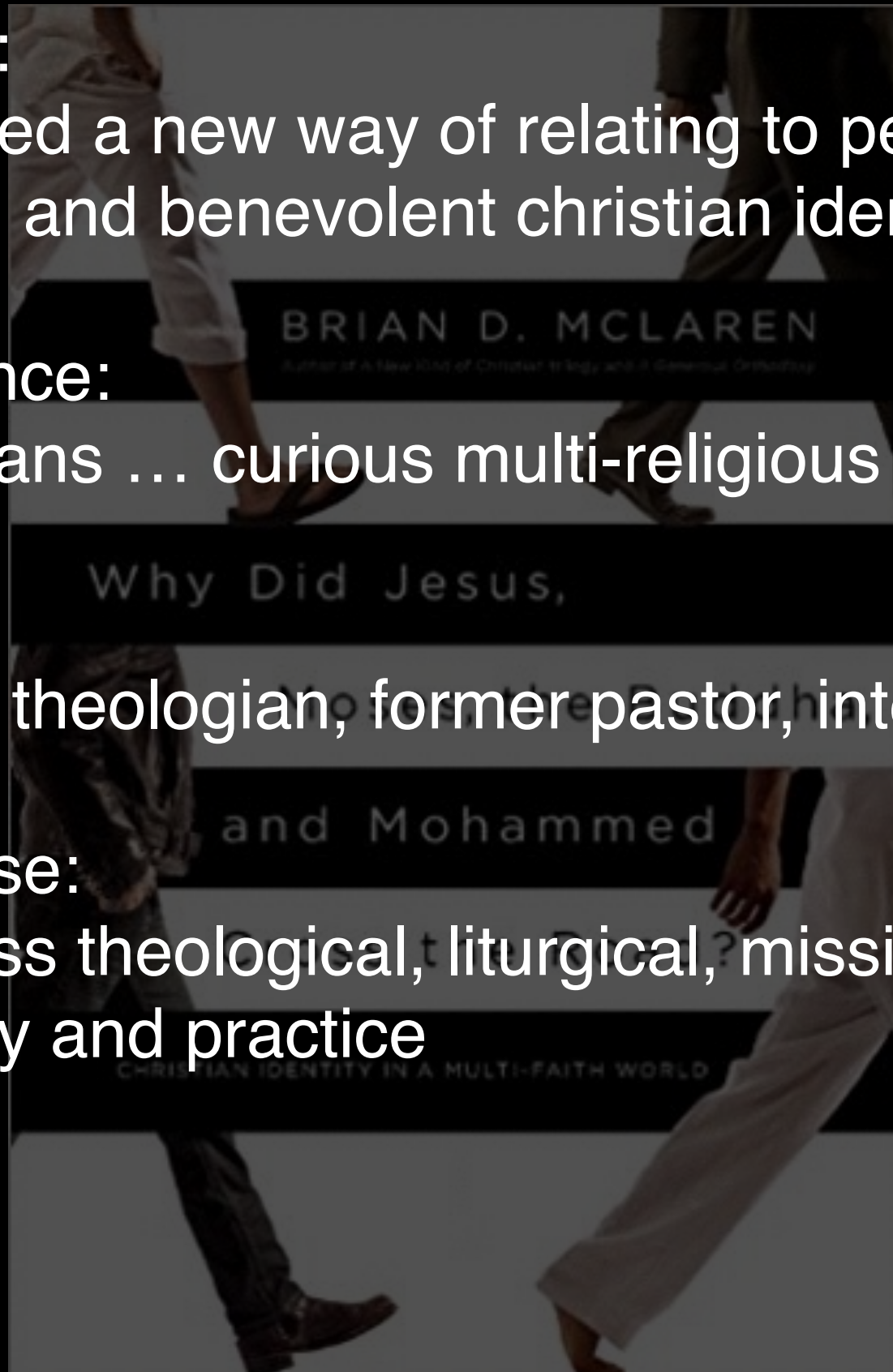
christians ... curious multi-religious readers

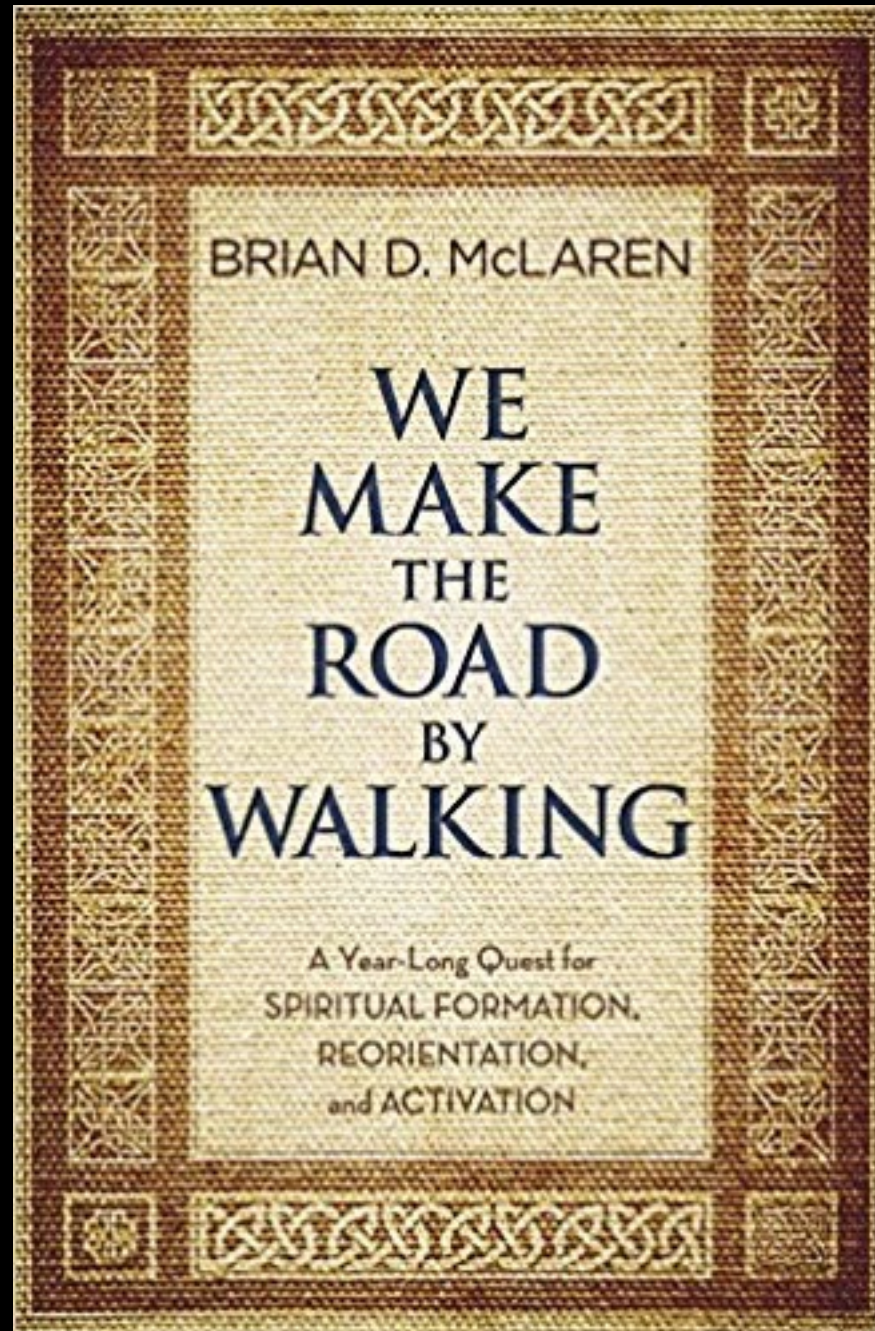
role:

public theologian, former pastor, interfaith activist

purpose:

address theological, liturgical, missional, and spiritual shifts in identity and practice





2015

thesis:

there's a great new way of reading the bible and understanding the christian story

audience:

christians ... curious multi-religious readers

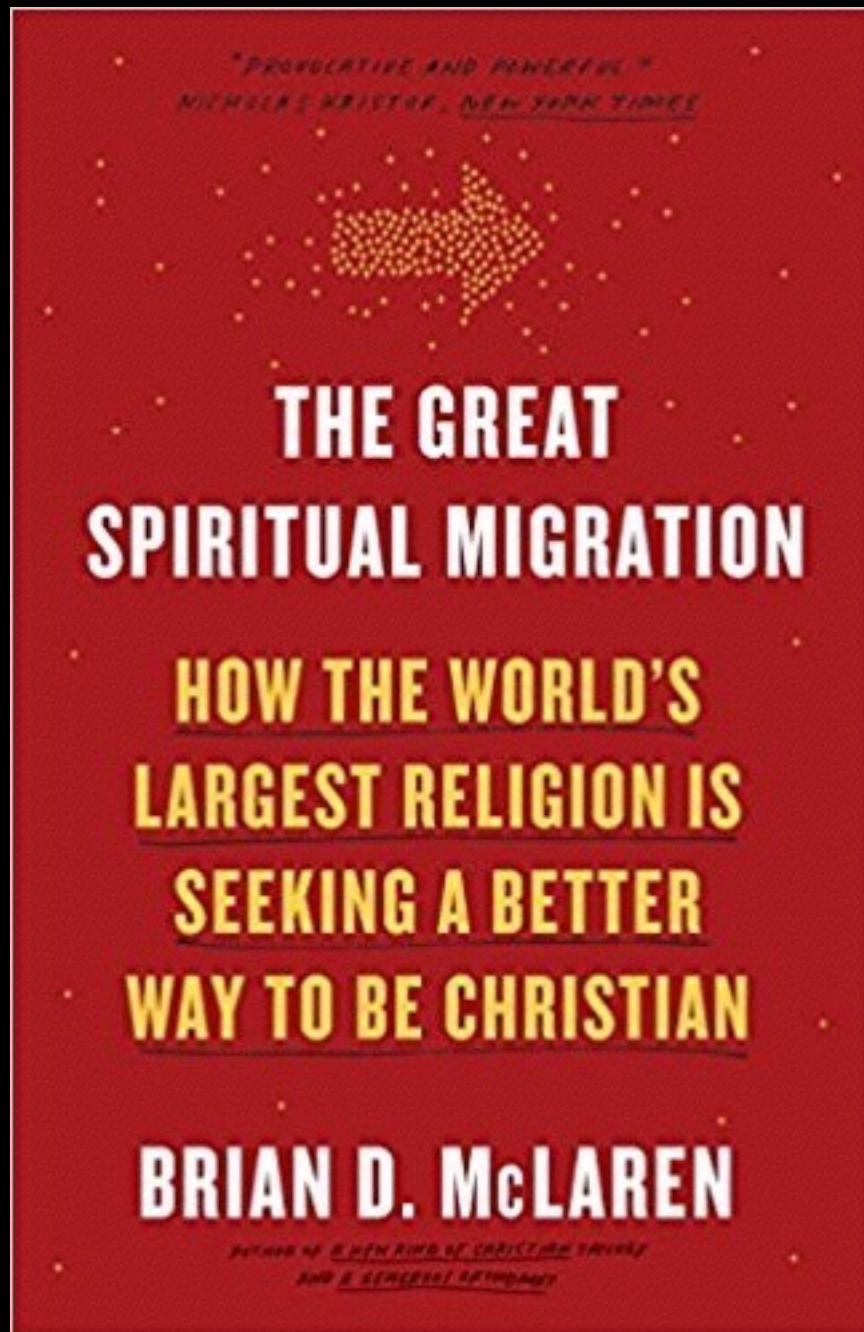
role:

public theologian, former pastor, preacher of the bible

purpose:

create a tool for new faith communities, model post-fundamentalist/post-liberal way of reading the bible





2016

thesis:

a progressive movement is taking shape  
in christianity

audience:

progressive leaning and alienated  
christians, observers

role:

public theologian, former pastor,  
interfaith activist

purpose:

summarize my work to date, invite  
people into the movement

1. Writing has been part of my discovery process - an opportunity to be a scout entering new territory.

What is your unique, highest and best contribution?

2. Everyone has his/her own writing method and habits.

Mine: Start with a problem or question.

Write fast and furiously.

Edit lightly until first draft is done.

Trust my instincts.

Test material in speaking and blogging.

Be willing to throw out a lot and start over repeatedly.



*"PROVOCATIVE AND POWERFUL"  
NICHOLAS KRISTOF, NEW YORK TIMES*



**THE GREAT  
SPIRITUAL MIGRATION**

**HOW THE WORLD'S  
LARGEST RELIGION IS  
SEEKING A BETTER  
WAY TO BE CHRISTIAN**

**BRIAN D. McLAREN**

*AUTHOR OF BEHIND THE SCENES OF CHRISTIANITY  
AND A GENERAL APPEAL*

I wrote about 240,000 words to end up with 60,000 words.

I changed title/thrust of book 3 times.

I ended up combining 3 books into one.

2. Everyone has his/her own writing method and habits.

What methods and habits best work for you?

3. I've had to adjust  
... as I've changed, my audience has changed, and the  
publishing industry has changed.

I've changed.

My writing changed my life before it changed anybody else's.

I tried out new ideas and found many stood the test.

They became the basis for new explorations.

I scouted new territory - and found the new territory to be a  
“promised land”

My audience has changed.

Losses and gains ...

Change among loyal readers ...

A note about religious audiences and “prophetic” messages:

Center to leading edge

Leading edge to ledge

Margins to marginalized

Jesus in his hometown (Luke 4)

The publishing industry has changed.  
“People are reading more than they ever have before,  
but it’s free on the internet. People will only pay to read a  
book that promises to help them with a significant  
problem or need.” - An editor



3. I've had to adjust as I've changed, my audience has changed, and the publishing industry has changed.

How can you become realistic about the real world of publishing today?

4. The world needs people who are willing to pay the price to create spaces for people to grow.

A book (or poem, song, script, or screenplay) as a  
“transporter” -

People normally live in stages.

But they can experience temporary states the signal to them the existence of stages they are incapable of experiencing long-term.

When they return to their normal stage, they now have a vision, a memory, a longing for a new stage, a new way of life ... to which they will aspire.

Writing is a tunnel through the rock of the status quo into  
the future.

4. The world needs people who are willing to pay the price to create spaces for people to grow.

What states, stages, or spaces have you discovered to which you want to invite, entice, introduce, and transport others?





writing for my life (2)

1. Writing has been part of my discovery process - an opportunity to be a scout entering new territory.

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2. Everyone has his/her own writing method and habits.

Mine: Write fast and furiously.  
Edit lightly until first draft is done.  
Trust my instincts.

Be willing to throw out a lot and start over repeatedly.

3. I've had to adjust as I've changed, my audience has changed, and the publishing industry has changed.

4. The world needs people who are willing to pay the price to create spaces for people to grow.

A book (or poem, song, script, or screenplay) as a “transporter” -



writing for your life (2)

What the Trump campaign taught me about writing and communication ...

people can't see what they can't see.

people can't see what they can't see ...  
because of 8 built-in biases we all share.

## Confirmation Bias

Our story or system excludes what doesn't fit.

## Complexity Bias

We prefer a simple myth to a complex truth.



## Community Bias

It's almost impossible to see what our community doesn't see.  
(Belonging/Social Identity & Desirability/Mimetic Theory)

## Complementarity Bias

If you are hostile to my ideas, I'll be hostile to yours -  
and vice versa.

(Complementarity Theory in Social Psychology)

# Competency Bias

We don't know how little (or much) we know,  
because we don't know how much (or little) others know.  
(Dunning-Kruger Hypothesis)

## Consciousness Bias

Some things simply can't be seen from where I am right now.  
(But I can make short leaps to a state beyond my stage.)  
(Integral Theory, Human/Moral Development Theory)

## Complacency Bias

I can't handle that much pain.  
(Psychic Numbing)



conservative/liberal bias

My political leanings help me see some things and miss others.

nurturing fairness & kindness!

or

strictly enforcing purity, loyalty, liberty, & tradition!

moral foundations theory

Lakoff's strict father vs. nurturing parent

confirmation  
complexity  
community  
complementarity  
competency  
consciousness  
complacency  
conservative/liberal

*people can't see what they can't see.*

?

*“people can’t see what they can’t see”*  
isn’t the whole truth.

*people can't see what they can't see  
until someone helps them see it.*

here's how Jesus helped (not forced)  
people to see more.

## Confirmation Bias

Jesus surprised and “abducted” people - through immersive or imaginative experiences: a field trip, unexpected guest, or powerful personal story.

Jesus changed the world by telling a bigger, better framing story.



# Complexity Bias

Jesus simply, briefly, confidently made and repeated his message.

He saved the details until people asked for it - as confirmation.

# Community Bias

Jesus created a welcoming, more desirable community  
with a clear onramp to his movement

# Complementarity Bias

Jesus flipped the script - “Do unto others” not as they do to you, but as you would have them do to you.

# Competency Bias

Jesus helped people admit they have a lot to learn ... and built their confidence that they'll enjoy learning and succeed at it.

# Consciousness Bias

Jesus introduced people to immersive and “transcendent experiences” (states) and offered practices for growth in and through stages

# complacency bias

Jesus would tell one story with feeling & provide one simple step within their current capacity.

not “how can I heal more people,” but  
“how can we deploy more healers?”

# conservative/liberal bias

Jesus started with compassion & fairness

and employed

Purity vs. Degradation, In-Group Loyalty vs. Betrayal,  
Liberty vs. Oppression, Tradition vs. Rebellion



*people can't see what they can't see until  
someone helps them see it.*

Jesus helped others to see more.

And so can we.



# Checklist

1. Jesus “abducted” his audience through imagination, surprise, unexpected vulnerability. (confirmation)
2. Jesus made 1, 2, or 3 memorable, simple points and trimmed away everything else. (complexity)
3. Jesus presented himself and his group as welcoming of opponents and pleasant to be around. (community)
4. Jesus showed script-flipping respect, kindness, patience and curiosity to those he hoped to influence. (complementarity)
5. Jesus celebrated people’s ability to change their minds & learn. (competency)
6. Jesus helped people experience a “state” that could later become a “stage.” (consciousness)
7. Jesus gave people one thing to do right now about one problem. (complacency)
8. Jesus led with compassion and fairness, but also appealed to purity, loyalty, liberty, and tradition.

