

BOOK 1

# A New Kind of Christian

A TALE OF TWO FRIENDS  
ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

BRIAN D. McLAREN

A LEADERSHIP ✦ NETWORK PUBLICATION



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A New Kind of  
Christian

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# Preface to The Paperback Edition

WHEN I BEGAN WRITING *A New Kind of Christian*, I had no idea it would become the first of a trilogy or that now, nearly a decade later, all three books would still be finding a growing audience—not just in North America, but on every continent, in a growing number of translations. Just in the last twenty-four hours, I’ve heard from readers in Germany, Brazil, East Africa, and India, thankful that the trilogy had put into words what they had been feeling in these very different settings. What can I feel but surprise, humility, and gratitude in light of these responses?

Of course, the books have evoked a bit of ire along with interest. But the wrath of the books’ critics now seems well worth enduring in exchange for the privilege of helping the people for whom the books were written—people for whom the religious status quo simply isn’t working. “I wouldn’t be in ministry today if it weren’t for *A New Kind of Christian*”—“I wouldn’t be a Christian anymore if it weren’t for *The Story We Find Ourselves In*”—“I was about to give up on the Bible and

God together, but then someone gave me *The Last Word and the Word After That*—these kinds of responses repeatedly touch me and give me the courage to risk another round of critique from the people who can't figure out why “a new kind of Christian” is needed at all: the old kind is good enough for them, thank you very much.

The books' popularity has shown the simultaneous discontent and hope simmering beneath the surface in and around many of our faith communities—from the center among leaders to the fringes among younger and marginalized members, to beyond the fringes among those who have left the church.

Just today I received an e-mail from a young woman in the latter category who said it like this: “As a graduate student at Berkeley, where “Christian” automatically means “Christian Right” and “Christian Right” stands for pretty much everything against which the academy sees itself as pushing, I have struggled to even begin articulating how faith might produce the kind of life I want for myself and for the world. . . . [For] the first time in a long time I feel like I want, again, to identify as a Christian. So thank you very much for the work you are doing.”

I've been asked, with this new edition, to answer the question whether I would change anything in *A New Kind of Christian* if I got a “do-over.” Maybe one small thing. Maybe I would de-emphasize the word “postmodern” some and emphasize other *post-* words more—words like postcolonial, post-Enlightenment, post-Holocaust, post-Industrial, and so on. As I've explained elsewhere, in the last few years I've come to see more deeply how our epistemology or theory of knowledge is inseparable from our ethics and politics. Or to put it more simply, I've seen how our search for truth can't be unhinged from

our desire to seek justice. The word “postmodern” has been limited (by some anyway) to an intellectual conversation about truth and knowing, while the word “postcolonial” and its cousins are associated more with an ethical conversation about power and justice and way of life. So if I were writing the book now, I would be unable to deal with the former subject without dealing more extensively and explicitly with the latter ones.

Of course, *A New Kind of Christian* implicitly grapples with postcolonial issues. For example, in Neo, a black man of Jamaican descent, the history of colonialism and its discontents finds embodiment. The story of the Native Americans (Chapter Nine) similarly resonates with postcolonial sensibilities. Neo’s desire at the book’s end to travel around the world reflects an impulse to get a global perspective and break out from what I will later call the echo chamber of the United States.

Beyond that small adjustment, I think *A New Kind of Christian* was an honest book and I feel one dominant emotion now at its release in a paperback edition: grateful that I have been given the opportunity to think and write freely, and grateful to find I was not alone in my discontent and hope, and grateful to think that it may be of value to another wave of readers in its new form. Thanks be to God!

*This book is dedicated to Grace, my wife of twenty-one years. She has been a true partner and friend on this spiritual journey, and together we have enjoyed four of life's greatest privileges and pleasures . . . raising Rachel, Brett, Trevor, and Jodi.*



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# Acknowledgments

OF THE MANY, MANY PEOPLE deserving thanks for their role in the production of this book, four groups of people stand out.

First, my spiritual mentors from my early days engaged me in many conversations like the ones in this book. I am deeply grateful for the hours that Rod Conover, Rev. David Miller, Dave Rickert, Dr. David Dunbar, Tom Willett, and several others have invested answering my questions, sharpening my thoughts, challenging my blind spots, giving me good books, exposing me to ministry opportunities, and being my friends. Back in the 1970s, they believed in a thin, raggedy-looking, blue-jeaned, guitar-playing, long-haired and bearded young guy without standard credentials. They echoed to me Paul's words to Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth. . . ." Now, as a balding, unthin, and middle-aged guy (still blue-jeaned whenever possible), I realize that without their encouragement back then, I wouldn't have much to say, or the confidence to say it, today.

Second, my colleagues in the emergent conversation (emergentvillage.com, including Jeff Bailey, Rudy Carrasco, Brad Cecil, Tim Conder, Todd Hunter, Ron Johnson, Andrew Jones, Tony Jones, Jason Mitchell, Sally Morgenthaler, Doug Pagitt, Dr. Alan Roxburgh, Chris Seay, Danielle Shroyer, Molly Smallen, Brad Smith) have been "Neo" to me in many ways in

recent years, as have many other conversation partners (including Dr. John Franke, Dr. Stan Grenz, Chuck Smith Jr., Brent Brooks, Dr. Skip Smith, Tim Ayers, Stephen Freed, Doug Koenigsburg, Neil and Renea Livingstone, Dr. Dallas Willard, Dr. Len Sweet, Robert Kang, Pamela Bateman, Stephen Shields, Doug Flather, Lisa Holloway). Special thanks to Dr. Dave Dunbar, Dr. Alan Roxburgh, Todd Hunter, and Chuck Smith Jr.; they read an early version of the manuscript and gave me needed and helpful feedback and encouragement. When friends and colleagues truly communicate and collaborate, it's hard to tell where one person's thinking ends and another's begins; I feel that these pages reflect *our* best thoughts, not just mine.

Third, the congregation I belong to and serve among, Cedar Ridge Community Church, deserves my deepest thanks. It can be scary having a pastor who asks questions like those found in this book. Some congregations would restrict their shepherd to tending them in familiar pastures in their own backyard. But the staff and members of Cedar Ridge have explored new territory with me far beyond the backyard fence, and they have accepted me not just as a pastor, but also as a growing Christian, a human being, a quirky and curious guy who is by nature (and perhaps calling) drawn to innovation. They've prayed for me, encouraged me, challenged me, and taught me more than I've taught them.

Finally, the people of Jossey-Bass and Leadership Network have been an unmitigated delight to work with on this project.

Of course, in naming these names, I want credit for any value this book has to be shared among all. But any blame (for faults, errors, episodes of ignorance or naiveté, and other reckless stupidities) belongs to the author alone.

—B. D. M.



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## INTRODUCTION

# The True Story Behind This Story

SOMETIME IN 1994, at the age of thirty-eight, I got sick of being a pastor. Frankly, I was almost sick of being a Christian. My crisis of faith deteriorated to the point that one beautiful August afternoon a year later, in the Pennsylvania mountains—on a day with one of those high-pressure Canadian air masses coming in from the northwest on a cool breeze and with the humidity so low and air so clear the distant mountains looked touchable—on this perfect summer day I felt as gray, low, foggy, dismal, and miserable as I ever have felt. I was sitting in a rocking chair, on a porch overlooking a stunningly beautiful valley shining with light, and in the dazzling brightness I wrote in my journal, “One year from today I will not be in the ministry.” I think that dark sentence was both despairing and hopeful.

My prediction was wrong. Now, seven years later, I am still a Christian, still in ministry, and enjoying both more than I ever have.

But at that low tide of faith, my soul was trying to tell me something important, something I needed to listen to. Just as



feelings of suicide are often an exaggerated way for our soul to tell us something we have been denying, something like, “The life you’re living is insupportable; you can’t keep living this way,” my ministry death wish and urge for spiritual escape were telling me something I needed to attend to.

## **Only Two Alternatives?**

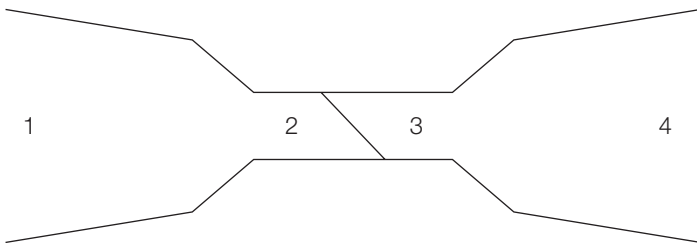
At the time I could only see two alternatives: (1) continue practicing and promoting a version of Christianity that I had deepening reservations about or (2) leave Christian ministry, and perhaps the Christian path, altogether. There was a third alternative that I hadn’t yet considered: learn to be a Christian in a new way. That is the subject of this book. Beginning that August day, when the gloom inside my heart was so dark and the sunshine around me was so blazing and stark, a process of reevaluation was somehow set into motion. Perhaps I was like a person who spends a few days feeling suicidal and then decides, “If I could seriously ponder ending my life, then I can do anything. I can change anything in my life. So instead of ending my life altogether, I’ll end my life as I’ve been living it and start a new kind of life. I can now see a third alternative to the status quo and suicide.”

M. Scott Peck says that depression often accompanies the collapse of a mental map or paradigm; it is a natural and necessary expression of grief, grief over the loss of something perhaps as dear to us as a brother or mother: our worldview, our way of seeing life. Alan Roxburgh, a colleague in the emergent conversation (an initiative to explore how Christian faith will reconfigure in the postmodern matrix), teaches people that this painful process of letting go of life as we have known it and embracing a new life on new terms (the process of paradigm change) typically follows five phases:

1. Stability, when life is fine, current theories explain everything adequately, and questions are few—perhaps like Dorothy of *The Wizard of Oz* living happily in Kansas
2. Discontinuity, when the old system seems to be working less well—reflected socially in Dorothy’s conflict with her witchy neighbor, psychologically in her ambivalent desire to run away from home, and physically in the approaching thunderstorm
3. Disembedding, when we begin feeling that the current system is insupportable and we begin to disconnect from it—like Dorothy being carried away from Kansas by the tornado
4. Transition, when we haven’t fully left the old world and we haven’t fully entered the new world—like Dorothy newly arrived in Oz, trying to get her bearings
5. Reformation, when we decide to make a go of it in the new world we have entered—like Dorothy setting out on her journey to see the wizard, invigorated with new hope and passion

This in many ways mirrors my experience through those shadowy times.

Andrew Jones, another colleague in the emergent conversation, once drew a diagram for me that created a similar scenario. It looked something like this:



Area 1 refers to the old paradigm, the old mental map or way of seeing things. Over time, it becomes increasingly cramped and feels more like a prison than freedom. Area 2 describes the early transition period, where there is a high degree of frustration and reaction. An individual or group in this phase turns against the old paradigm and can't stop talking about how wrong, inhumane, or insupportable it is. In area 3, people gradually turn from deconstructing the past to constructing the future and begin the hard work of designing a new paradigm to take the place of the old one. This is a time of creative exhilaration, challenge, and perhaps anxiety—because the discovery of a new paradigm that will be superior to the old is by no means assured and because the wrath of the defenders of the old is likely to be unleashed on those who dare propose an alternative. If the creation of a new paradigm succeeds, the group moves into area 4, where the new era develops and expands freedom and possibilities. (Of course, one must anticipate a time when the new liberating paradigm itself becomes confining and old.)

## **Understanding My Frustration**

These images and illustrations describe, at least in part, why I had grown frustrated with the way I was being a Christian and the way I was helping others to be Christians. The old way was, as an old Bob Dylan lyric puts it, “rapidly aging,” and I needed to disembled and reevaluate and begin a journey toward a new home—for my sake, for the sake of the people I was called to lead, and perhaps even for God's sake. But the new way hadn't been created yet. We were barely into area 2, maybe sticking our toes into area 3. Hence the anxiety.

There is a dimension to this experience of disembedding from modern Christianity that none of us can fully understand

or describe. That's the theological dimension. What if God is actually behind these disillusionments and disembeddings? What if God is trying to move us out of Egypt, so to speak, and into the wilderness, because it's time for the next chapter in our adventure? What if it's time for a new phase in the unfolding mission God intends for the people (or at least some of the people) who seek to know, love, and serve God? What if our personal experiences of frustration are surface manifestations of a deeper movement of God's Spirit? In other words, what if this experience of frustration that feels so bad and destructive is actually a good thing, a needed thing, a constructive thing in God's unfolding adventure with us?

Maybe Martin Luther felt this way in his life as a monk. Maybe when he was told to preach about indulgences or to make room for emissaries from Rome to do so, he thought to himself, "I can't take this anymore. Maybe I'll go back to being a lawyer." His experience seemed bad to him. (He must have been frightened: Am I losing my faith? Am I falling away from God?) But Protestants would agree, at least, that something good was afoot.

That August day, I felt miserable, and I continued to feel miserable for some months. But gradually, although giving up in despair remained tempting, hope started becoming more interesting.

## **On to Something**

I began to feel like one of those rumpiled detectives on TV who finds a clue that opens up a whole new twist in the plot. Or better, I began to feel like a scientist in a movie, doing a routine run of experiments. I'm looking over my data and this icy feeling starts back between my shoulder blades and crawls up

my neck, and I think, “Something’s not right here. This pattern in the data just doesn’t make sense.” The camera comes in over my shoulder, and all you see are rows of numbers, but I pull out my cell phone and call my partner and say, “Jack, you’ve got to get over here to the lab. No, now. We’ve got something major here.” Or better yet, I felt like Eleanor Arroway in the movie *Contact*, at that moment when she is sitting on her car listening through headphones to the random noise of space picked up by the array of radiotelescopes that surround her. Suddenly comes this sound, like a clothes dryer with a really bad bearing that is drying a pair of rollerblades. “This is no random noise,” she thinks. “There is a pattern to this noise. This noise is data, trying to tell me something.”

Of course, my data isn’t numbers. My data is my experience—my general experience as a committed Christian and my specific experience as a pastor. Experiences like these:

1. I drive my car and listen to the Christian radio station, something my wife always tells me I should stop doing (“because it only gets you upset”). There I hear preacher after preacher be so absolutely sure of his bombproof answers and his foolproof *biblical* interpretations (in spite of the fact that Preacher A at 9:30 A.M. usually contradicts Preacher B at 10:00 A.M. and so on throughout the day), his five easy steps (alliterated around the letter *P*), his crisis of the month (toward which you should give a “love gift . . . if the Lord so leads”). And the more sure he seems, the less I find myself wanting to be a Christian, because on this side of the microphone, antennas, and speaker, life isn’t that simple, answers aren’t that clear, and nothing is that sure. (Paradoxically, at that moment I might consider sending him money, hoping that by investing in his simpler vision of the world, I myself will be able to buy into it more. But eventually I will stop throwing good money after bad.)

2. I preach sermons that earn the approving nods of the lifelong churchgoers, because they repeat the expected vocabulary and formulations, words that generally convey little actual meaning after hearing them fifty-two times a year, year after year, but work like fingers, massaging the weary souls of earnest people. Meanwhile, as the initiated relax under this massage of familiar words, as they emit an almost audible “ahhh” to hear their cherished vocabulary again, these very massaging messages leave the uninitiated furrowing their brows, shaking their heads, and shifting in their seats. They do this sometimes because they don’t understand but even more when they do understand—because the very formulations that sound so good and familiar to the “saved” sound downright weird or even wicked to the “seekers” and the skeptics. These people come to me and ask questions, and I give my best answers, my best defenses, and by the time they leave my office, I have convinced myself that their questions are better than my answers.

3. I do the reverse: I preach sermons that turn the lights on for spiritual seekers but earn me critical letters and phone calls from the “veterans” of the church often because the expected fingers didn’t reach through my message to massage them as expected.

4. I have counseling sessions in my office, year after year, during which many wonderful people, people whom I love, people who have a lot of Bible knowledge, Christian background, theological astuteness, and “pew time,” prove to have the same problems, make the same mistakes, harbor the same doubts (though more often unexpressed), indulge the same vices, and lack the same “spark” that unchurched people often do, the only major differences being that (a) the church people tend to use more religious language to define their problems, (b) their problems are further complicated by guilt for having these problems in the first place, and (c) these religious

people nevertheless consider themselves superior to their non-religious counterparts. (I read recently that divorce rates among evangelical Christians—supposed guardians of traditional family values—are actually higher than those in the culture at large. What?) After these counseling sessions, I am left troubled, wondering, “Shouldn’t the gospel of Jesus Christ make a bigger difference than this? And does pew time have to result in spiritual pride and inauthenticity?”

5. I realize that as people come into our church, everybody needs conversion. The not yet committed Christians need to be converted to a vibrant twenty-first-century faith, and the already committed twentieth-century (and nineteenth-century!) Christians need the same, myself included.

6. I realize, as I read and reread the Bible, that many passages don’t fit any of the theological systems I have inherited or adapted. Sure, they can be squeezed in, but after a while my theology looks like a high school class trip’s luggage—shoestrings hanging out here, zippers splitting apart there, latches snapping, clothes pouring out on the floor like a thrift store horn of plenty. My old systems—whether the Dispensationalism of my childhood, the Calvinism of my adolescence, the “charismaticism” of my early adulthood, or even my more mature, moderated, mainstream “evangelicalism”—can’t seem to hold all the data in the Bible, not to mention the data of my own experience, at least not gracefully.

7. I read what other people who are having similar experiences are saying, including people writing outside of the religious context—like this from Peter Senge: “In any case, our Industrial Age management, our Industrial Age organization, our Industrial Age way of living will not continue. The Industrial Age is not sustainable. It’s not sustainable in ecological terms, and it’s not sustainable in human terms. It will change.



The only question is how. Once we get out of our machine mind-set, we may discover new aptitudes for growth and change. Until then, change won't come easily."<sup>1</sup> As I read, I feel that "industrial age faith" faces the same fate.

8. I pick up most religious books, like the one you're holding, and know from somewhere midway through page one what the entire book will say, and I read on anyway and find out that I was right. I wonder: Doesn't the religious community see that the world is changing? Doesn't it have anything fresh and incisive to say? Isn't it even asking any new questions? Has it nothing to offer other than the stock formulas that it has been offering? Is there no Saint Francis or Søren Kierkegaard or C. S. Lewis in the house with some fresh ideas and energy? Has the "good *news*" been reduced to the "good same-old same-old?"

9. I meet people along the way who model for me, each in a different way, what a new kind of Christian might look like. They differ in many ways, but they generally agree that the old show is over, the modern jig is up, and it's time for something radically new.

Enough of this data accumulates (my list could go on and on) . . . and a pattern becomes perceptible, and a realization comes like a good cry: Either Christianity itself is flawed, failing, untrue, or our modern, Western, commercialized, industrial-strength version of it is in need of a fresh look, a serious revision.

## Secrets and Sparks

You can't talk about this sort of thing with just anybody. People worry about you. They may think you're changing sides,

turning traitor. They may talk about you as if you came down with some communicable disease. So you keep this sort of thing like a dirty secret, this doubt that is not really a doubt about God or Jesus or faith but about our take on God, our version of Jesus, our way of faith. You let it out only when you feel you have found someone you can trust.

And when you do, and the other person says, “I can’t believe you’re saying this. I have felt the same way, but I thought I was the only one”—that’s a good moment. Relief. Company. Affirmation. It’s like you’re both pieces of flint, and when your secrets strike one another, a spark of hope flies: “Maybe we’re not crazy. Maybe there’s a better way. Maybe there’s a new way of being a Christian.” And then, over time, the two of you discover you’re not the only two, that there are many more out there, including some respected people, “important” people, people with “names,” who are wrestling with the same discontent, experiencing the same disembedding. You begin to wonder if maybe you’re at the front edge of something—if your tentative and anxious steps “off the map” are actually the beginning of a new adventure into *terra nova*, new ground, fresh territory.

I’ve never been all that good at keeping my own secrets, so I’ve probably let my disillusionment out more than I should have. But as a result, I have seen a lot more sparks of hope fly than most people have, which has given me the courage and enthusiasm to write this book, which is a kind of bag of flints that when shaken together may produce a bunch of sparks that can catch fire in very hopeful ways.

In my first book, *The Church on the Other Side*, I hinted that a book like this might be rumbling around in the rear lobes of my brain. I said:

You see, if we have a new world, we will need a new church.  
We won’t need a new religion per se, but a new framework

for our theology. Not a new Spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination. . . .

I began to doubt that any of us Christians are actually Christians. I relate this experience simply to illustrate the importance of our challenge: to reopen the question of what makes a good Christian. . . . If need be, would we be willing to confess that we are hardly Christians at all and that we need to become as little children and start again?<sup>2</sup>

My second book, *Finding Faith*, was written to help people who are agnostics or atheists (or spiritual seekers wandering somewhere north of monotheism) in their journey to a good faith, which would open the door to a good relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> But I realized as I was writing it (and even more since it was published) that I was creating a problem. The kind of people who would come to faith along the path I was trying to clear for them would probably not end up just like the people waiting for them in church. They would be like a bunch of wild-eyed artists and excitable children and rugby players walking into a roomful of buttoned-down accountants and engineers. To be sure, that could be a great learning experience for all concerned but not the makings of a fun party.

And so in *A New Kind of Christian*, I explore, albeit indirectly, several questions:

1. Why am I not the same kind of Christian I used to be?
2. What might a new kind of Christian be like?
3. How might one become a new kind of Christian if one is so inclined?

## An Apology

Before proceeding, I should say something about who I think you are. I'm assuming you're either a Christian of some sort ("hot" fundamentalist, "warm" evangelical, or "cool" liberal; charismatic or noncharismatic; denominational or nondenominational; Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox; modern or postmodern, or amphibious) or else a non-Christian of some sort who is interested in Christianity (the kind of person who has perhaps read my second book, *Finding Faith*, and is interested in continuing the conversation we began there). If you are the latter, I must apologize because in several places I will, for the sake of my primary audience, have to belabor points that present little problem for you. The reverse may be true as well, but probably less often.

If you are a new kind of non-Christian considering becoming a new kind of Christian, you face different (and in many cases, I think, easier) issues than if you are an old kind of Christian becoming a new kind of Christian. Or if you are a postmodern non-Christian considering becoming a postmodern Christian, you face different (and in many cases, I think, easier) issues than if you are a modern Christian becoming a postmodern Christian. (Believe me, the previous two sentences will make more sense after a few more chapters.)

I should also add that my primary tribe has been the evangelical Protestant wing of the church. For readers from Roman Catholic, liberal Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, or other backgrounds, at times you may feel like you've just tuned in Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* and are listening to the news from Lake Wobegon, Keillor's fictitious largely Lutheran Minnesota town where all the men are good-looking, all the women are strong, and all the children are above average. Neither Minnesotan nor Lutheran, I'm still able to see my-

self in Keillor's characters and their "it was a quiet week in Lake Wobegon" stories. Similarly, even if your background is far different from mine, I hope you'll be able to see yourself in the stories and conversations that follow. If at times I seem to be addressing concerns of another part of my audience, I hope you'll take that as an opportunity to eavesdrop. (Eavesdropping can be a pretty interesting way to learn, sometimes more interesting than being addressed directly.)

I think that Christian leaders—pastors, priests, lay leaders, parachurch workers, missionaries—may have a special interest in this book. Many of them have experienced twinges of discontent similar to my own and, like me, are hopeful that we will find some new ways of being Christians as we enter the postmodern world. If you are in this category, I'm especially glad to have you along for the journey.

Beyond this, I'll try to assume as little as possible about you, except your basic sincerity, goodwill, intelligence, and desire to become a better person and help create a better world.

### **Three Points of Orientation**

To prepare you for what you're about to step into, I can offer three additional introductory comments. First, as you'll see, I'm going to blur the line between fiction and nonfiction in the pages that follow. I think you will understand why I have done so as we proceed. This book started as a work of nonfiction but evolved steadily toward fiction with each revision. Knowing that I was not trying to commit a work of artistic fiction from the start will help lower your expectations about character development, plot, and other artistic concerns. Things will go much better for both of us if you consider this more in the category of a philosophical dialogue than a novel.

I am reminded of a man who was in a situation similar to ours, a man who lived at the boundary between the medieval and modern worlds. He had become convinced of some ideas that were in his time considered unorthodox, odd, crazy. He couldn't explain his new ideas in straight expository prose for a variety of reasons. So he resorted to an ancient form of writing. He said, "I have thought it most appropriate to explain these concepts in the form of dialogues, which, not being restricted to the rigorous observance of mathematical laws, make room also for digressions, which are sometimes no less interesting than the principal argument." I hope, as Galileo did, the dialogues that follow will be judged neither by the rigorous standards of mathematical laws nor by the equally rigorous standards of good novel-writing. And I hope that the digressions will prove no less interesting than the principal argument, as Galileo's were.

Second, you will soon meet Neil Edward Oliver, Dan and Carol Poole, and Casey B. Curtis. Please don't assume that any of these characters can be fully identified with the "I" who wrote this Introduction.

Third, this book is just a beginning. There are a number of other questions, important questions that follow on from these, that I will only nod toward in this book. Please don't be disappointed that you didn't get the last word. When you're on a really long voyage, you have to get beyond asking, "Are we there yet?" and instead start asking, "Are we making progress?" I hope that you will feel you have made real progress when you turn the last page, even though our destination will still be far ahead of us. The fact is, whatever a new kind of Christian will be, no one is one yet. At this point, we're more like caterpillars cocooning than butterflies in flight. But every transformation has to start somewhere. The sooner we start, the better.

It is my hope that these imaginary conversations will prompt you to engage in real-life ones and that those conversations will take you where these cannot. I'd be most happy if you share the book with a small group or maybe read it with one good friend. Then take some long walks or share a few meals together and see where those conversations lead you. If you'd like to learn more about my work and connect with other resources, please go to [brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net).

*Spencerville, Maryland*  
*February 2001*

BRIAN D. McLAREN



CHAPTER

1



# Sometime The Peacock Wish To Be The Seagull

“CAROL, I’M NOT SURE how long I’ll last. I know this must be scary for you. I’m sorry.” I was leaning against the counter, and Carol was sitting across the kitchen with her chair angled away from the table, her legs crossed, left elbow on the table behind her, facing me but not meeting my gaze.

She got up, turned her back to me, and began picking up the dinner dishes—quietly, deliberately, maybe a little more slowly than normal. Our twin ten-year-old sons, Corey and Trent, were at a birthday sleep-over (badly named—they stay up half the night and come home wired) at a friend’s house, so there had been only three of us at the table. Carol put the dishes in the sink and stood beside me. She crossed her arms as mine were, and we stared at the same spot on the kitchen floor for a couple of seconds. “Well, Dan,” she said, “if you quit, I’m sure we’ll make it somehow. But I don’t relish the thought of moving. I’d hate for the kids to have to change