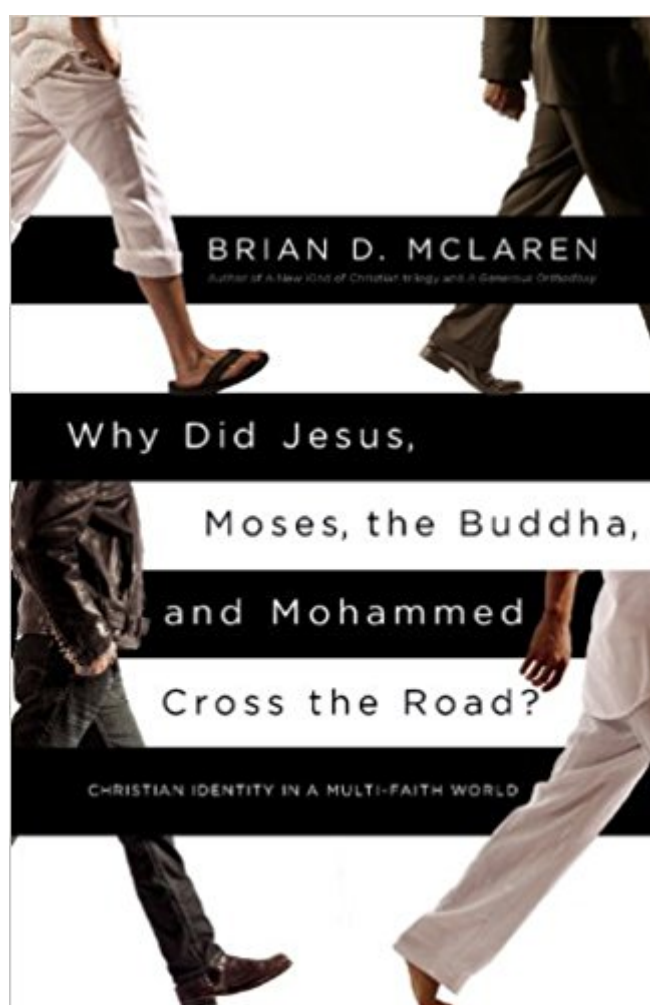


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# Why Did Jesus, Moses, The Buddha, And Mohammed Cross The Road?: Christian Identity In A Multi-Faith World



## Synopsis

When four religious leaders walk across the road, it's not the beginning of a joke. It's the start of one of the most important conversations in today's world. Can you be a committed Christian without having to condemn or convert people of other faiths? Is it possible to affirm other religious traditions without watering down your own? In his most important book yet, widely acclaimed author and speaker Brian McLaren proposes a new faith alternative, one built on "benevolence and solidarity rather than rivalry and hostility." This way of being Christian is strong but doesn't strong-arm anyone, going beyond mere tolerance to vigorous hospitality toward, interest in, and collaboration with the other. Blending history, narrative, and brilliant insight, McLaren shows readers step-by-step how to reclaim this strong-benevolent faith, challenging us to stop creating barriers in the name of God and learn how affirming other religions can strengthen our commitment to our own. And in doing so, he invites Christians to become more Christ-like than ever before.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's easy to mistake Brian McLaren's newest book as "another interfaith book," exploring wise strategies for building bridges between various world faiths. Given the cover and the title, one might expect it to be much like Samir Selmanovic's *It's Really All About God: How Islam, Atheism, and Judaism Made Me a Better Christian* or Miroslav Volf's *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* or the WISDOM women's *Friendship and Faith* That's a strong temptation especially since, opening the cover, one finds Selmanovic and Volf and others with long experience in interfaith relations endorsing *Why Did Jesus ...* Given the ongoing series of violent incidents

around the world that are fueled by violence, I can also argue that this book is an important contribution to interfaith peacemaking. As a journalist who has specialized in covering religion around the world for several decades now, I can affirm how important McLaren's insights are to any possibility of ending this seemingly endless cycle of conflict. But the primary audience for this book by one of America's most important Christian writers is quite simply: Christians. In 300 very practical and provocative pages, the overall message is: Interfaith peace begins at home.

9/11/2012 marked the release of Brian McLaren's book *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Muhammad Cross the Road?: Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*. The date, of course, is significant. It's been 11 years since the tragedy of 9/11 - a tragedy that had religious overtones, but also political and economic overtones as well. The question I often ask myself about religion is simple: What needs to stay and what needs to go? Jesus might have asked, "What's the wheat in religion and what's the chaff that needs to burn away?" (See Matt 3) Brian's book has helped me discern an answer to that question. Peace journalist Bob Koehler and I interviewed Brian about the book last week on our podcast *Voices of Peace*. At the end of the show, I asked him about the title of his book. "So, Brian, why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Muhammad cross the road?" Brian responded, "To get to the other." Of course, one can get to the "other" to do harm or to do good. But the point of Brian's book is that Christians need to have a strong identity based on the love of Christ. Christ loved the "other." He loved people as they were and for who they were. For Christians, that's the point of our religious identity in the post 9/11 world. Some bloggers are suggesting that Brian is somehow watering down Christ. That Christ would help people, sure, but Christ would also demand that they worship him, or he'd send them to hell. That's not the Christ I see in the Bible. Brian has helped me see that Christ had no superiority complex. He didn't get into a rivalry with people by demanding that they worship him; rather, he did things like wash 1st century filthy, nasty, sandal-wearing Mediterranean feet! Jesus came to serve, not to be served!

How should followers of Christ treat members of other religions? That question is the subject of Brian McLaren's new book, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?: Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*. Because mimetic theory claims for Christianity a unique demystifying power, McLaren's question haunts our work. If "the only true religion is the one that demystifies archaic religions," as René Girard succinctly summarizes his Christian apologetics in *Battling to the End* (xv), and Christianity is the sufficient and necessary source of demystification, how indeed are we to treat other religions, both in our academic work and in our personal lives?

McLaren is not writing for academic audiences here. His tone is pastoral, his purpose to shift the thinking of people in the pews and the pastors and educators who have their ear. And yet his primary tool for engaging them is an explicit use of mimetic theory to answer the very questions that it has raised for Christians who engage with it. Before referring to mimetic theory by name, McLaren frames the question of interfaith relations as a question of identity. Christians seem to be quite good, he says, at having strong identities that are hostile towards other religions, or weak identities that are kind and benevolent. Though left implicit, he is clearly referring to the ubiquitous use of scapegoating to create false differences (strong and hostile) or its inversion into political correctness (weak and kind). His book is an argument for a third alternative: Christian identity that is both strong and hospitable toward other beliefs.

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