

**Book Review:**  
***Faith After Doubt***  
**By Brian D. McLaren**

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**Abstract:** *In Faith After Doubt, Brian McLaren formulates doubt as a means to enhance and enrich religious faith. In progressive fashion, doubt is reclaimed as a means to develop faith, such that believers can aim towards a greater solidarity with others and practice revolutionary love. By providing a nuanced analysis of faith, McLaren takes a phased approach where believers experience increased levels of wisdom and spiritual depth as they engage in different levels of doubt. This text may offer assistance to those who have been discouraged and fearful of entertaining doubt in their spiritual lives. Through invoking a healthy skepticism of inherited doctrines passed down by dogmatic Christianity, individuals are provided a means to further develop their faith as opposed to becoming disjointed from it. Much of this text constructs a progressive future for Christianity in an effort to ensure its relevance and continued survival. Beyond the complex analysis given to faith and doubt in this work, it is lacking a robust means to ensure that Christians will enact the revolutionary love McLaren aims to achieve. To impart such a vision of love requires practicing radical hospitality towards the most vulnerable, and believers cannot remain complicit to a toxic form of orthodoxy. Pursuing social justice aims necessitates an activist faith that critically probes dogmatic theology; and by making allowances for the faith commitments of all believers irrespective of consequence, this project remains a tepid means to further a truly progressive evolution of Christianity.*

**Keywords:** Faith, Doubt, Progressive Christianity, Theology, Brian McLaren

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**R**eligious doubt has been a thorny topic among Christian piety throughout history. According to Brian McLaren, doubt can cause much confusion for believers because it involves a kind of “double-vision or internal *division*,” whereby they see through the eyes of faith and skepticism simultaneously.<sup>1</sup> In a religion that prides itself on creeds and doctrinal statements as a means to cultivate a solidarity of faith, doubt has been something

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<sup>1</sup> McLaren, *Faith After Doubt*, 8.

which church authorities have not only shied away from but have gone further to preach about its sinful nature. *Faith After Doubt* provides a reimagining of doubt such that it may no longer be perceived as threatening to faith but, instead, can be understood as a means to strengthen and enrich the spiritual lives of believers. McLaren provides insight into various phases of faith, revealing the complexity of this notion, as well as the wisdom to be gained by those open to questioning the norms and assumptions of church doctrines and authority figures. Much can be gained by delving into this text, especially if one finds themselves disillusioned with status quo Christianity to the point where they are beginning to question ecclesiastical norms.

McLaren does not want doubt to be a source of shame among religious believers, and he entices readers to further study the practices and theologies of their congregations to ensure that their values line up with their faith commitments. To enact the revolutionary love he calls for in this text requires doubt to be a welcome component to faith for all individuals. He will argue that rather than be feared, doubt should be seen as a necessary means to question some of the policies of exclusion practiced among conservative communities. I will argue that to achieve the progressive vision of faith McLaren argues for requires doubt to be practiced among gatekeepers of toxic orthodoxy as well. In a society fraught with social disparities and divisiveness, now is not the time to employ a strategy of allowance towards those furthering these social ills. To exercise revolutionary love, Christianity must evolve out of its bystander-status, and there must be a call made to all believers, regardless of station, such that a new radical hospitality may be enacted towards the most vulnerable among us.

*Faith After Doubt* follows suit with much of McLaren's earlier work by primarily addressing readers who find themselves disconnected from the dogmatic mantras and conservative commitments coming out of mainline congregations in America. He is a recovering evangelical of sorts, having left the pastorate to teach with fellow progressives at the Center for Action and Contemplation. The thesis of his text further supports his liberal theological aims and is in accordance with the progressive mantras of his fellow colleagues at the Center who are doing work in a similar vein.

McLaren speaks not only to the disillusioned believer, but also those who have been so discouraged by mainline Christianity that they exiled themselves from it altogether. American congregations are facing a real existential crisis at the moment as most are experiencing dwindling numbers. According to McLaren, some individuals leave their congregations because they have begun questioning the Bible and the doctrines enforced by their church communities, others find the practices which alienate their faith

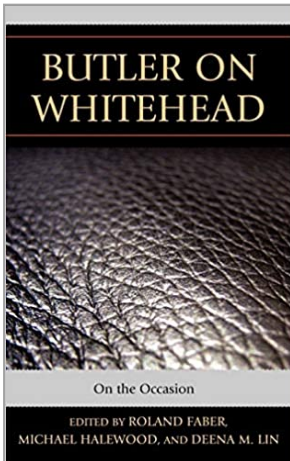
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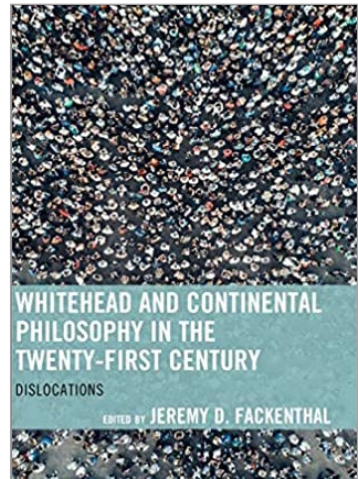
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deena M. Lin is a lecturer in philosophy and religious studies at California State University, East Bay and San Francisco State University, where she teaches courses in comparative religion and philosophy. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion and Theology from Claremont Graduate University, and her research interests are in philosophical theology, poststructuralist thought, mystical theology, and identity politics. She co-edited *Butler on Whitehead: On the Occasion* with Roland Faber and Michael Halewood (Lexington Books, 2012). She has also published various articles and chapters in edited volumes on Judith Butler, Alfred North Whitehead, Rosi Braidotti, and others in the areas of philosophy, philosophy of religion, and theology.

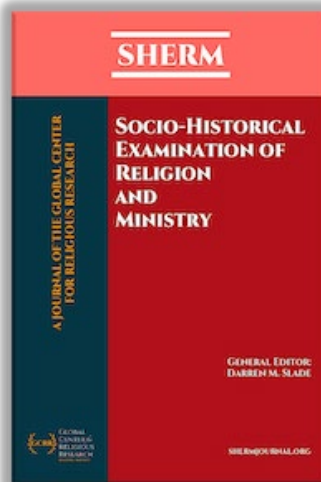
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