



What is the New Spirituality Revolution? Summary of key themes

by Petra Griffiths

We have had a plethora of events in the UK in 2016 addressing what is called 'the new spirituality revolution'.

We have compiled here some of the main themes of these talks so as to help answer the question 'What is the new spirituality revolution?'. The summaries are of talks or books by Diana Butler Bass, David Tacey, Brian McLaren, Joan Chittister; the Modern Church event "Do we need a new Reformation? Reclaiming faith for the people" with Dr Lorraine Cavanagh; and Eley McAinsh's reflections on interviews with people about contemporary spirituality.

Feedback from you

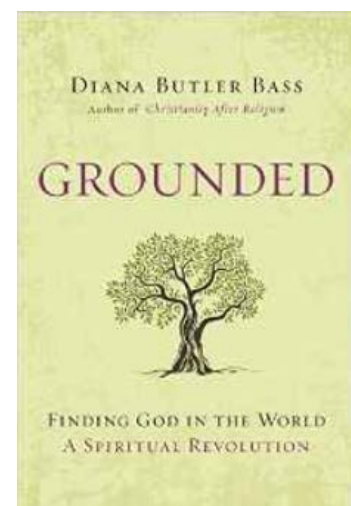
We should be delighted to hear from readers as to whether these themes ring true for you as a description of contemporary spirituality and how you are working them out in your life.

Please send your feedback or comments via the Contact Form on our website - www.livingspirit.org.uk/contact-us.

1. Diana Butler Bass

At a well-attended conference in Birmingham in May, Diana Butler Bass (an independent scholar who often lectures at academic institutions and in public settings in the US and writes on religion, spirituality and culture for The Washington Post) introduced the themes of her new book ***Grounded: Finding God in the World - A Spiritual Revolution***.

Diana Butler Bass's book provides a guide to the ways in which people are finding the sacred in everyday life,

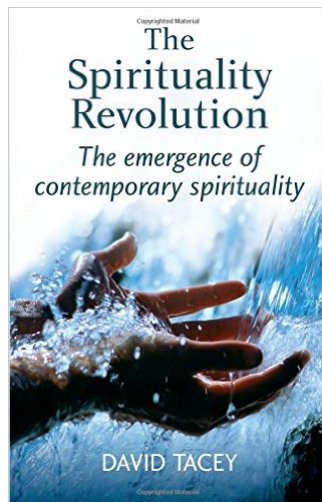


helping to co-create a future that is life-giving and a sustainable world of compassion. This change relates to developments resulting from the opposing forces of globalisation and personalisation, as well as the insights about the universe from science. The changed conception of God is a rebirthing of faith from the ground up. The aim of this book is to provide greater clarity and confidence for those walking this path.

We have included the review of this book from our Winter 2016 newsletter at the end of this article.

This stimulating event was put together by four collaborating UK organisations – the Progressive Christianity Network, Modern Church, Free to Believe and the Centre for Radical Christianity. It was an event to celebrate the work of Marcus Borg, who had named Diana as a key person taking forward the themes of his groundbreaking theological and spiritual work. Links to study guides and to an interview with Diana are included with the book review.

2. David Tacey



In September, Australian academic David Tacey, author of *The Spirituality Revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality* (2003), spoke at multiple events, updating his vision and particularly looking at the connection between ecology and spirit and what we can learn from indigenous spiritualities such as Aboriginal spirituality in Australia.

In the event at the Meditatio Centre, David answered the question ‘**What is spirituality?**’ by giving the definition “The art of making compassionate connections, the art of recognising and supporting pre-existing connections in the unity of creation – with others, with nature and the universe”. He presented deep ecological awareness as a spiritual state of consciousness, and the entry into ecological awareness as an initiation into the transpersonal and universal dimensions of spirit.

In his interview in the Spring 2016 Meditation News (Newsletter of the World Community for Christian Meditation in the UK: website:

www.christianmeditation.org.uk), David said: “*My favourite mystic is Meister Eckhart....he speaks almost uncannily to our need today to find the sacred at the*

depths of our common experience. He finds the extraordinary in the ordinary, and I feel that is what we are called to do today.

David Tacey's 2003 book *The Spirituality Revolution* described the revolution as a spontaneous movement in society; as interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life, health, community and wellbeing; and as secular society realising it's been running on empty and has to restore itself at a deep primal source. David Tacey wants to reach behind clashing ideologies and fundamentalisms and access a mystical source from which all belief systems emerge; and to uncover a universal spiritual wisdom that might transform us from within. ***"If we dare to enter the mystical ground of our being, we might find a source from which peace and compassion arise."***

This is the hope of the mystical traditions: to withdraw from the social violence of claim and counterclaim to access the life-giving currents that flow beneath a divided world, offering it an opportunity for healing and renewal. The birth of the new has never been easy.

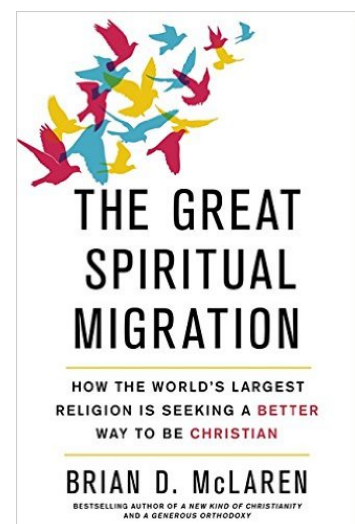
Individuals take authority into their own hands, and refuse to be told what to think. It's about personal autonomy and experimentation, with the use of direct experience of world as a laboratory of the spirit.

3. Brian McLaren

In October Brian McLaren (author, speaker, activist, public theologian and pastor) did a UK tour organised by the Progressive Christianity Network launching his new book ***The Great Spiritual Migration***, in which he says "Religion is at its best when it leads us forward, when it guides us in our spiritual growth as individuals and in our cultural evolution as a species"

Three migrations need to take place:

- a spiritual migration from a system of beliefs to a way of life and love
- a theological migration from a violent Supreme Being to a non-violent Holy Spirit/Spirit of Christ



- a missional migration from organised religion (for self-protection) to religion organising for the common good, forming and deploying spiritual activists.

If we allow our hearts to be broken open, the “wind, wine and fire of the Holy Spirit will fill us all”. All the Powerpoint slides from Brian McLaren’s presentations are available via the PCN website -

www.pcnbritain.org.uk/news/post/brian_mclaren_uk_tour_powerpoint_slides_now_available_online.

4. Modern Church day with Lorraine Cavanagh



October also saw a day organised by Modern Church (www.modernchurch.org.uk) in the South West: **Do we need a new Reformation? Reclaiming faith for the people** with **Dr Lorraine Cavanagh** (author of ***Making Sense of God’s Love: Atonement and Redemption*** and ***Making Sense of Christianity***) as the lead speaker.

The event blurb stated: “Organised Christianity is today facing serious challenges. The faith is widely regarded as not credible, Anglican church attendance has halved over 50 years, and most young people grow up without basic knowledge of the Christian stories”.

The Conference aimed to seek positive ways forward, including starting a South West regional group of lay and ordained people exploring these themes.

5. Joan Chittister

We have permission to publish extracts from ***Called to Question*** by Benedictine nun and author Joan Chittister.

In a recent e-newsletter from her organisation on the topic **What is Spirituality?**, her thoughts are very



much in line with the above writers on the spirituality revolution:

“For some, spirituality lies in the awareness of God in nature. For some, the cosmic God emerges through a life of service. For others, spirituality involves the development of meditative states that open the door to the nothingness that our complex and complicated lives otherwise obstruct. But for everyone, spirituality is not what we do to satisfy the requirements of a religion; it is the way we come into contact with the holy. However we do it, whatever form or shape it takes—the mantra of devotions, the rhythms of nature, the faces of the other, the mysterious nothingness of deep meditation—spirituality makes real what religion talks about.”

“Spirituality is the internal distillation of this externalized witness to the divine. Spirituality is what galvanizes us to do more than go through the motions. It spurs us to fill up the lack we feel within us. It is the desire for wholeness that evades us. It is the burning need to find the more.”

“It is the plight of the mystic to enter the universe of God alone where no charts or maps or signs exist to guide us and assure us of the way. It is a serious and disturbing moment, one after which we are never quite the same.”

The above are extracts from **Called to Question** by Joan Chittister (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2004), reproduced with thanks, and with permission from the author, Joan Chittister OSB. Website: www.joanchittister.org.

6. Eley McAinsh



In the last year of our predecessor organisation, the Living Spirituality Network, Eley (the Network Director) conducted research with network members about their view of spirituality and religion. Many of them mentioned David Tacey’s book on the Spirituality

Revolution as being important to them.

Eley was struck by the strong sense of independent enquiry and exploration in the interviews she conducted. People were deeply engaged in trying to make sense of their own spiritual experience. A number said they still regarded themselves as profoundly Christian but wouldn’t expect more traditional

believers to recognise them as such. They had a deep desire to orient their lives in response to the Divine Will. They are drawn more and more to silence and stillness, the riches of the monastic traditions, and the contemplative path. Connecting with the natural world is important.

Some people are choosing to stay within the church framework, while others have left temporarily or permanently. People who leave often do so because they want to go deeper than their church allows. There is also a deep longing for community and for the opportunity to connect with others who speak the same language. This can be hard to find (and is now a key inspiration for Living Spirituality Connections).

Eley quotes Mark I Wallace (author of **Finding God in the Singing River. Christianity, Spirit, Nature**) saying that the spirit calls us to take the leap of faith into the void of uncertainty, travelling the unmarked path.

At the closing event of LSN in April 2012, she concluded with a mention of Ann Weems' poem *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, to the effect that we can never predict the Advent of God. If we try to box the Christ in a stable in Bethlehem, **“that’s just the time that God will be born in a place that we can’t imagine and won’t believe. ...In the realm of the spirit, the end is never where we think it is.”**

[Beyond the Spirituality Revolution](#) – a talk by Eley McAinsh.

Feedback from readers

As I wrote at the beginning, we should be delighted to hear from readers as to whether these themes ring true for you as a description of contemporary spirituality and how you are working them out in your life.

Please send your feedback or comments via the Contact Form on our website - www.livingspirit.org.uk/contact-us.

Petra Griffiths is the UK Coordinator of **Living Spirituality Connections**.

Grounded: Finding God in the World - A Spiritual Revolution

by Diana Butler Bass

Reviewed by Petra Griffiths

Diana Butler Bass's new book provides a practical guide to the ways in which people are finding the sacred in everyday life, helping to co-create a future that is life-giving and a sustainable world of compassion. This change is connected with general developments in the world resulting from the opposing forces of globalisation and personalisation, as well as the rich insights about the universe that science has provided. People of today want to express their uniqueness and create environments to make meaning. The changed conception of God is a rebirthing of faith from the ground up rather than something that is hierarchically imposed. Through this book Diana BB wants to provide greater clarity, so that those walking this path are helped to do so with greater confidence.

Diana BB doesn't see this as about everyone needing to leave the church because the church has got it wrong. While some have left, others continue within their local faith community. However she does say that she and others are heart-broken that the faith traditions we love seem to be sleepwalking through the revolution. The new God that has risen just over the horizon is one of "intimate longing and infinite love", who has always been present in the vision of Biblical prophets and seers, and is now felt by people as "the love that connects and creates all things" – reminiscent of Matthew Fox's vision of the Cosmic Christ as the pattern that connects.

I like Diana BB's idea that instead of the transcendent God being seen as high up above the earth, what we now sense is a God who retains the aspect of mystery, and is experienced as "just over the horizon" rather than reigning above us. Diana BB develops Tillich's idea of the numinous presence of God at the centre of all things, which grounds humans within the sacred. Diana BB's vision is that the pattern of God all around us relates to contemporary concerns and provides meaning and hope for the future as well as being founded in rich insights from the wisdom of the past.

The book chapters cover many down-to-earth aspects such as dirt, water, roots, home, neighbourhood and the wider "commons". She provides many examples of hopeful developments where people are connecting with their local

neighbourhood and with people in places of suffering, giving form to their compassion for others and for the earth..

There is much to be encouraged about in this book. How exactly this is worked out in relation to Christianity, churches, and the role of Christ remains to be revealed.

A series of study guides for groups to use along with the book are available on Diana BB's website: <http://dianabutlerbass.com/books/grounded-finding-god-in-the-world-a-spiritual-revolution/resources-for-reading-and-studying-grounded/#guides>.

A 21 minute interview with Diana BB about the book is available at: <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/first-impressions-64-diana-butler-bass-and-the-emerging-spiritual-revolution>.