

Spaceforsoul Newsletter

May 2018



Embracing the sea change

'Within each tradition, unsettling but needed voices are arising - prophetic voices, we might call them, voices of change, hope, imagination and new beginnings.'

Brian McLaren

Over the last two to three decades, a number of spiritual leaders and writers have begun to speak prophetically of the dawn of a new age of spirituality. In his book, *The Mystic Heart*, the interreligious monk, author and teacher, Wayne Teasdale argued that we are at 'the dawn of a new consciousness'. He called this 'the Interspiritual Age' and saw it as being evidenced by a number of significant shifts in our awareness and understanding.

Amongst these shifts are a greater ecological awareness and recognition of the fragility of our world; a growing realisation of the essential interdependence of all forms of life; an increasing openness to and sense of connectedness with the surrounding cosmos; and a deepening awareness of what he calls 'the spiritual interdependence' of the world's major religious traditions.

It is clear that Teasdale and other writers such as Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, Satish Kumar and Mirabai Starr see this is part of a process of ongoing spiritual evolution. Bill Kirkpatrick describes it as the evolving of a new form of spiritual life, one that embraces a broader understanding of spirituality and values each and every spiritual tradition for what it has to teach us of the inner life and of a radical way of being that has the potential to transform our world. Satish Kumar speaks of the gradual evolution of a new universal, divine mind which is in turn leading to the deepening of our sense of inter-connectivity and of our capacity for love and compassion.

Brian McLaren describes it as a sea change, a process of radical conversion and transformation, a profound shift in 'the centre of gravity' of all of our religious traditions which is creating an irresistible urge 'to rise and be on the move'.

Evolution is, however, a slow process and we cannot choose its pace. Sea changes may take decades or even centuries to unfold and it may be hard to hold onto our optimism in the face of the darkness we see all around us and the seeming upsurge in religious fundamentalism. What are falling apart, however, are the old world, the old consciousness, the old belief systems, the old spirituality, say Satish Kumar and others. And the chaos and trauma we are facing are their death throes.

They urge us to hold on to what Barak Obama called 'the audacity of hope', to trust in the process and go with the flow of the new world that is emerging around us. They ask that we commit ourselves both to playing our part in this evolving interspiritual community and at the same time to deepening our own inner life and pursuing our own unique pilgrimage and calling. Then we will discover that as Brian McLaren puts it, '...our faith can be reborn, not simply as a stronger purer system of beliefs, but as something bigger, deeper and richer: a way of life, which is the way of love.' That is, I believe, the greatest spiritual challenge that faces this and future generations.

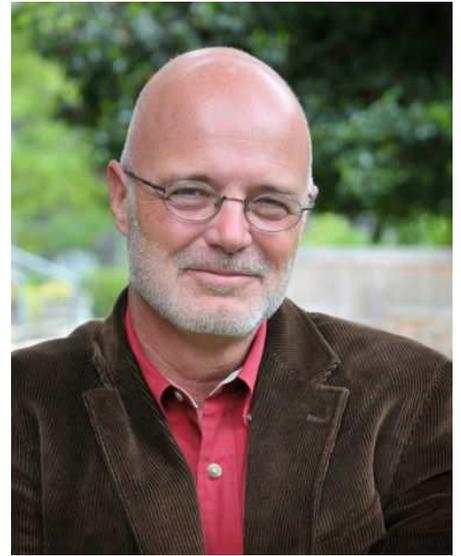
Kaitlyn Steele

'Interspirituality is the world music of religion; borrowing, fusing, blending and bouncing rhythms and riffs off one another not to create a homogenized spirituality, but to birth a radical new sound embedded in the ancient and timeless silence.'

Rabbi Rami Shapiro

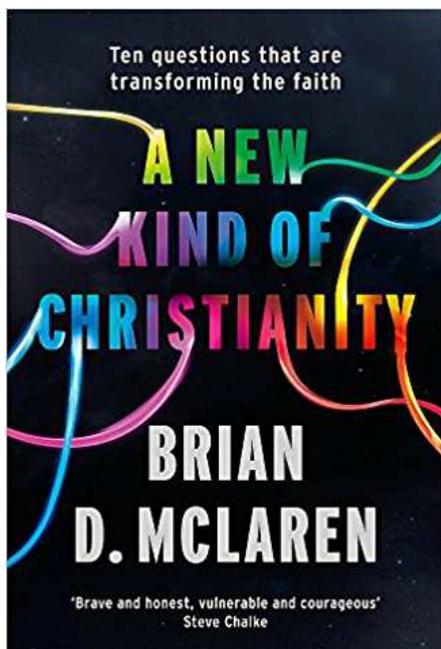
Progressive Voices: A portrait of Brian McLaren

Brian McLaren is a progressive Christian theologian, author, teacher and activist. Formerly the founding pastor of a ground-breaking, nondenominational community church in the USA, in recent years he has become a leading figure world-wide in the emerging church movement and a passionate advocate for what he calls 'a new kind of Christianity'. He is the award-winning author of fifteen books and is an internationally renowned teacher and speaker. He is closely associated with the progressive Christian Wild Goose Festival in the States and is also a leader of Convergence, the American network of progressive churches which believes in the equality of all people, advocates for the rights of immigrants, people of colour and LGBTQ people and seeks to create a more just and generous world.



Brian was brought up in a fundamentalist Christian tradition known as the Plymouth Brethren. His grandparents on both sides of the family were elders and missionaries in their church and as the firstborn son in his family, he was, as he puts it 'predisposed to join their ranks as a good Brethren boy, to stay put and play by the rules.' His journey from fundamentalist to progressive Christian began in his teenage years when his encounter with the Jesus Movement led him to embrace evangelical Christianity, a change which as a fundamentalist, he experienced as 'a big step into more freedom'. In his forties, as evangelicalism in the States started to draw closer to the religious right, his spirituality began to evolve in a more progressive direction and as a result, his links with evangelical Christianity weakened. 'Whether I emigrated or was deported is a question up for debate,' he comments in his latest book, 'but one way or the other, by fifty I was on the move again.' He has come to see this process of 'spiritual migration' not as a move to a new and settled location, but as the continuing unfolding of his spiritual journey. What matters most to him now, he says, is 'not our *status* but our *trajectory*, not where we are but where we are going.' Religion works best, he argues, when it acts as a catalyst for spiritual growth and change in us as individuals, but also for the cultural evolution of humanity.

It is very clear from reading Brian's books over the years that his spirituality and his thinking have evolved significantly since he wrote his first book, 'The Church on the Other Side' in the late 1990s. This is something he recognises himself when he writes that '... the titles of my books tell the story of a restlessness, a quest, spiritual journey or migration'. What he is in search of is a Christianity that is 'not... a problematic set of beliefs but... a just and generous way of life', that is more closely aligned with its founder and as such, a much richer resource for the journey.



You can find out more about Brian McLaren at www.brianmclaren.net and by following him on YouTube

And you can listen to a 2014 interview with Brian McLaren at OnBeing <https://onbeing.org/programs/brian-mclaren-the-equation-of-change/>

'When I was 22, I had almost everything completely figured out ... about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, theology. Strange ... by 30, I knew a little less, and the certainty/mystery ratio has only shrunk for me each decade since. But one thing has become more and more clear and sure for me, even as other things have become more and more mysterious: love is what matters most.' Extract from a Nomad blog.
<http://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/brian-mclaren-curriculum-love/>

Brian McLaren

Spaceforsoul news

The Spaceforsoul Facebook group

Our community now has its own Facebook group which is open to all followers, friends and members of Spaceforsoul. It is a closed group which means that only group members can post on the page or see what other people post.

Please note that you do have to have your own Facebook page to join us. To find the group, visit our Facebook page and click on Groups in the sidebar on the left of the news feed. To join the group, click + Join Group below the cover photo.



Spaceforsoul's Book Group has recently decided to broaden its focus a little by drawing on other media such as films and YouTube videos as well as books and articles. Hence the new name! The Book and Film group will continue to meet every six weeks and you are very welcome to join them. You don't have to commit yourself to coming to every meeting but can choose to come only to those that particularly interest you.

If you would like to join them, please contact Julian Clover at cloverjulian@yahoo.com

Rob Bell's tour of Britain 2018

The progressive Christian writer, Rob Bell, is touring Britain in July this year. He will be in Cheltenham on the 3rd July and in Cardiff on July 11th.

For further information and tickets, go to the events page of the PCN Britain website at:

https://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/events/detail/rob_bell_the_holy_shift_tour

For Rob Bell's weekly podcast, go to his website at:

<https://robbell.com/portfolio/robcast/>



Progressive movements: Westar Institute

www.westarinstitute.org

'Scholarship in public for the public'

Founded in 1985 by Robert Funk, an American biblical scholar, teacher and writer, Westar Institute is an independent educational and research community. Over the years, it has brought together over 200 scholars and theologians from around the world. It is not affiliated with any religious institution and does not advocate a particular theological point of view. It seeks to create a space where critical thinking about the Christian tradition and the Bible is not 'off the table', where people are actively encouraged to ask questions, challenge beliefs and explore radical new ways of thinking about God and faith.

Since 1985, it has sponsored a number of large-scale, collaborative research projects which have examined some of the important questions about the Christian religion such as what was early Christianity really like, who was the historical Jesus, what did Jesus really say and do and what part will God play in the future of humanity. It has also addressed a range of important faith-related issues which have cultural relevance for us today such as what the Bible actually says about homosexuality.

Based in Oregon in the USA, Westar holds two national four day meetings a year in the USA which are open to the general public. They feature workshops and lectures for non-specialists conducted by academic scholars and other leading figures in the scholarship of religion. In the past, these have included such progressive thinkers as Karen Armstrong, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Robin Meyers and John Shelby Spong.

Westar also runs a number of regional programmes every year across North America known as Jesus Seminars on the Road (JSOR). These seminars address significant issues in current biblical and theological research and scholarship and are designed to bring religious studies scholars into conversation with the general public.

Through the Westar website and Facebook page and through Associate membership of Westar, anyone with an interest in collaborative religious scholarship and



research can gain access to a range of resources such as a theological reflection blog, YouTube videos and a bi-monthly magazine called 'The Fourth R' which are specifically designed to be accessible to a non-specialist audience.

If you are interested in theology and want to keep in touch with contemporary biblical scholarship and research, this could prove an invaluable resource.

For an excellent introduction to Westar, see the following award-winning video called 'Westar on the Road':

<https://www.westarinstitute.org/westar-on-the-road/>

You can also find it on the Westar YouTube page along with a number of other short videos:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa3K98kRFRrRgeLaVasUrv8A?view_as=subscriber

'Westar is not a religion. It's not a church. It makes no theological claims... It owes no one anything except to search for the truth fearlessly.'

'We care about justice, equality and the future of humanity. If religion becomes a barrier to justice, equality and the future of humanity, it loses any value.'

Extracts from the 'Westar on the Road' video



Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina: the art of sacred reading

The practice of lectio divina - literally 'sacred reading' - is an ancient method of engaging with sacred texts. It is believed to have been developed by St Benedict in the fifth century but some argue that its roots can be traced even further back to an ancient Jewish practice of engaging with sacred texts known as 'haggadah'.

It is in a sense a form of contemplative prayer which invites us to engage with and experience the text 'with the ear of the heart' rather than interpret or reflect critically on it with the mind. In her book, '50 Ways to Pray, Teresa Blythe argues that '*lectio divina* is about what is evoked in you as you experience the text.' It is not, she says, about critiquing or interpreting the text, but about allowing the words to 'settle into the heart', take root within us and transform us from the inside out.

There are many different variations of this spiritual practice and it can be adapted to enable us to engage in a contemplative way not only with sacred texts, but also with other spiritual writings, music, nature or even a significant life event. The traditional method of lectio divina includes five steps, the first of which is sometimes omitted.

Step 1 Silence

After choosing a short passage from your chosen sacred text, spend some time in silence letting go of any worries, concerns or preoccupations that might distract you and stilling your mind and being.

Step 2 Reading

Read the short passage you have chosen slowly and carefully, either aloud or silently and then re-read it. Pay attention to any word, phrase or image that seems to have energy for you or that draws you in some way. Wait patiently for this word, phrase or image to speak to you, reading the passage slowly as many times as you like.

Step 3 Reflection

Allow yourself to ponder the word, phrase or image that has spoken to you. You may want to repeat it to yourself for a while like a mantra. This is in a way a process of fully receiving what it is that has spoken to you, of allowing it to sink in and touch you deeply at the core of your being. Be aware of what is surfacing within you as you ponder.

Step 4 Listening

Listen for what the word, phrase or image is saying to you. What are you hearing, how is it touching you, how is it speaking to your life, what is it asking of you, how is it inviting you to respond?

Step 5 Contemplation

Stay quietly with whatever is happening within you and trust it. Move beyond the word, phrase or image and allow yourself to simply be with what is and to rest for a while in the presence of the Divine.

Lectio divina can also be done in a small group or community setting. This adds another whole dimension to the experience giving us, as it does, the opportunity to share and explore what we have learnt and received with each other. This can be a particularly powerful and rich experience .

Some useful resources:

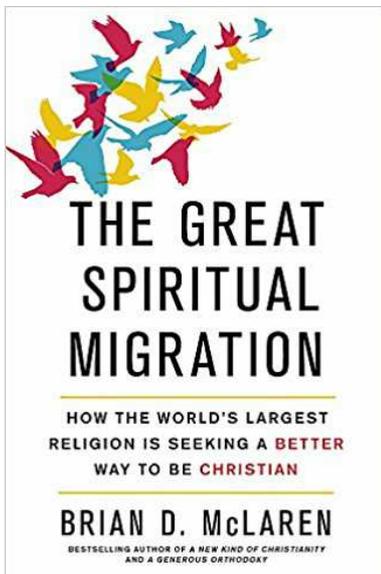
Teresa Blythe (2006) '50 Ways to Pray.' Includes a chapter on Lectio Divina which outlines several different ways of engaging with the practice, including working with it in a small group setting.

Lectio Divina: Heart to Heart - listening and living with God

An online course which teaches the practice of sacred listening. You can find it at:

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/course/view/169>

Resources for the journey...



Brian McLaren (2017) *The Great Spiritual Migration*. Hodder & Stoughton

Brian McLaren's latest book is a passionate call for a radical change in the direction of the Christian faith. He argues that the conventional understanding of the Christian faith as a system of belief to which we have to sign up must give way to a new vision of our faith as a way of being and of life which has the power to transform our world. He urges us to move towards a new image of God as the inclusive loving, healing, reconciling Spirit embodied in Jesus.

'... religion', he says, 'often becomes more of a cage than a guide, holding us back rather than summoning us forward, a buffer to constructive change rather than a catalyst for it.' The book invites us to join 'a great spiritual migration - not out of our religions, but out of our cages and ruts...' It is a challenging, inspiring and hopeful read.

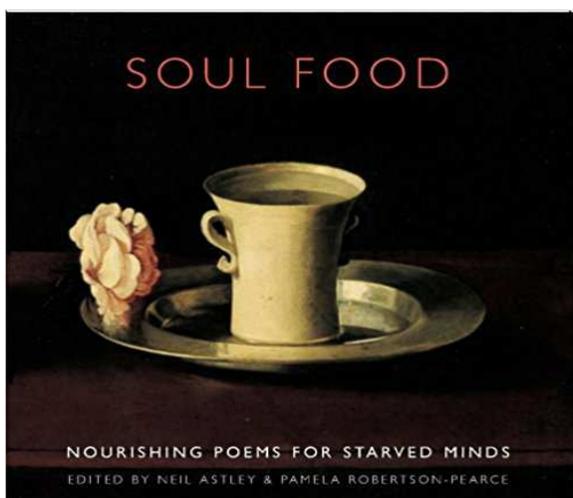
The Well: Centre for Spirituality

www.thewellcentreforspirituality.org.uk

The Centre is based at Elsie Briggs House, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol and offers a regular programme of events that encourage exploration of the contemplative tradition. All events and groups are open to anyone who might be interested. Information leaflets about the Well and what it offers can be found here:

http://www.thewellcentreforspirituality.org.uk/documents/The_Well_intro_trifold_16A.pdf

<http://www.thewellcentreforspirituality.org.uk/documents/The%20Well%20Programme%202018%20Summer.pdf>



Neil Astley and Pamela Robertson-Pearce (2007) *Soul Food: Nourishing Poems for Starved Minds*. Bloodaxe Books

A wide-ranging collection of inspirational poems drawn from many different spiritual traditions including the poetry of Rumi, Rainer Maria Rilke, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Merton, Mary Oliver, RS Thomas and many others.