

## BOOKS FOR A FURTHER AWAKENING

We all have a limited reading time. Yet there are so many enticing books available. Where do we start? What do we read next? CANA members have suggested that it would be helpful to have a few titles recommended, on a number of subjects. This is what is offered here.

To obtain an overall picture of the new thinking abroad today, we suggest starting with one in the first category and then progressing to any of the other subjects which especially appeal to you.

The books have been chosen on the basis that they are 'easy reading', non-specialist, and that they are up to date: almost all have been published since 1990. The list will be updated from time to time. The editors welcome your recommendations.

### AWAKENING TO A NEW AWARENESS

Adrian B. Smith, *The Creative Christian: God and Us, Partners in Creation*. "0" Books, Winchester. 2006.

This book gathers together the process and development of Science, Religion and Spirituality. It identifies the deep shifts in perspective that are taking place as we move towards globalisation.

Adrian B. Smith. *A Reason for Living and Hoping*. St Paul's Publishing, London. 2002

"This is the book I have been waiting for. 239 pages of intelligent introduction to the things we are waking up to, without the use of technical terms or at least if they are used they are carefully explained. It is packed with a wealth of introductions in readable form, set out as it suggests in Part One, Interpreting our Times, then Unravelling the Vision of Jesus, and only then a short three chapters on Living the Vision Today."

Diarmuid O Murchu. *Our World in Transition*. Temple House Books, Sussex. 1992.

The author, a priest and social psychologist, argues that the coming together in recent years of ecological concerns, scientific exploration, human seeking and spiritual consciousness, is causing us to re-think some of our long-held beliefs and values. Each of his twelve chapters deals with a different factor of life and in each case takes the reader from the traditional understanding to the new perspective.

Lloyd Geering. *The World to Come: from Christian past to Global Future*. Bridget Williams Books Ltd. Wellington, New Zealand. 1999. (Obtainable from Sea of Faith, 15 Burton St, Loughborough, LE11 2DT.)

The author is an Old Testament scholar and Principal of Knox College Theological Hall, Dunedin, New Zealand. The book is divided into two parts: 'The End of the Christian Era' and 'The Beginning of the Global Era'. With a wide-angle lens the author takes us through the various reasons for the present decline in belief that the Christian truths are absolutes, and all the consequences thereof. Globalisation is inevitable and coming fast. While we often hear of its negative effects, Geering sees the positive in the growth of a global consciousness.

Keith Ward. *The Case for Religion*. One World, Oxford. 2004

This is a useful study of what good religion may be and what it is not. It reviews the objections to religions from a range of philosophers, scientists and psychologists both now and in history. It helps one better to understand the past, the present and the possibilities for the future.

Graham Hellier. *Free Range Christianity*. Author House 2009.

170 topics or themes with two-page spreads plus some extras covered by quotations, comments and points. A wonderful compendium and ideal bed- or chair-side companion to promote thought and stimulate the imagination. An improvement on his earlier *The Thoughtful Guide to Christianity*.

## DIFFERENT AVENUES TO BE EXPLORED

### SPIRITUALITY

Duncan S Ferguson *Exploring the Spirituality of the world Religions: The Quest for Personal, Spiritual and Social Transformation*. Continuum 2010 243pp. 978-1-4411-8737-6.

An excellent college textbook with bibliography in the text and chapter ends which not only explores the nature of spirituality from earliest times and in the major religions but also ends with a chapter on Finding a Spiritual Pathway.

Marcus Braybrooke *Learn to Pray* Duncan Baird 2001.

Although using the word “pray” in the title, this is a non-directive introduction to the different ways of relating to God. He draws on the insights of all religions.

Eileen Caddy. *Opening Doors Within* Findhorn Press. 2007. A collection of short meditations for each day of the year. An excellent tool that can help the process of personal change into greater awareness.

Robert Forman, *Grassroots Spirituality: What it is, Why it is here, Where it is going*. Imprint Academic, Exeter. 2004.

Forman is writing about the “Spirituality Revolution” from his experience in the USA. He writes: “The Movement has clearly found a response to our culture’s felt dissatisfaction with science and rationality”. Searchers are turning to a pick-and-mix spirituality, especially towards the mystical tradition in each religion. He claims that in sheer numbers, the Movement dwarfs any denomination, most religions and nearly every social movement of the past century.

Bede Griffiths. *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*. Collins. 1989.

This Benedictine monk, writing from his ashram in India, invites us to take a fresh look at Christianity in the context of both modern physics and Eastern mysticism and seeks to demonstrate the basic unity underlying all reality.

William Johnston. *“Arise my Love”: Mysticism for a New Era*. Orbis Books, New York. 2000.

This Irish Jesuit, steeped in Buddhism from his forty years spent in Japan, presents the thesis that the future of Christianity depends upon our moving away from the priority given to doctrine (head stuff) to the experience of the Spirit (heart stuff) particularly through meditation (or, contemplation, as we call this prayer in the West).

Diarmuid O Murchu. *Reclaiming Spirituality*. Gill & Macmillan, Dublin. 1997.

The spiritual story of humanity is at least 70,000 years old, whereas formal religion has existed for a mere 4,500 years. The author claims that in many ways religion has subverted spirituality. We need to re-establish its primary significance to give meaning and purpose to human life.

Eckhart Tolle. *The Power of NOW*. Hodder & Stoughton, London. 2001

*Practising the Power of NOW*. Hodder & Stoughton. 2002

In the early 18th century Jean-Pierre de Caussade gave a series of talks now published in a book *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (Harper, San Francisco, 1989). It is named a spiritual classic but it is a spirituality that does not speak to our times. Tolle's books on the same theme, do. Subtitled: *A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, they are psychology-based but no less spiritual for that. For "God" he uses the word "Being". He borrows much from *A Course in Miracles*. Two excellent books (his second is more useful) for enabling us to live at a deeper level.

Eckhart Tolle. *Stillness Speaks*. Hodder & Stoughton, London. 2003

A collection of 200 aphorisms arranged into 12 related themes. Each provides an entry into meditative prayer. He offers these thoughts as a means for the "transformation of human consciousness".

Eckhart Tolle *A New Earth*. Michael Joseph, Penguin Books. 2005

Humanity is now faced with the challenge of taking a great leap forward or running into extinction. The book aims to help bring about the necessary shift in consciousness, to awaken us to what is going on.

David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality*.

Brunner-Routledge, Hove. 2004.

A most informative book by an Irish Catholic who lectures in an Australian University, from where he has done most of his research into this phenomenon – especially among the young. He does not see the new spirituality replacing religion, but speaks for religion (though not as practised in its present form) as necessary to ground one's spiritual experience.

Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality*. I.B.Tauris. 2007.

Announced as: "An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the 21<sup>st</sup> century". The author names four characteristics of this new spirituality: 1) Moving from a God 'out there' to the Divine as the guiding intelligence behind the evolutionary process of the Universe, 2) Understanding Nature/Creation as infused by God as energy, 3) Seeing the human as a manifestation of the Divine intelligence and energy, 4) The development of spirituality through meditation.

Willigis Jager, *Search for the meaning of Life*. Triumph Books, USA. 1995

A best-seller in its original German edition. A far-ranging, thought-provoking discussion of the mystical experience. This book speaks to everyone who journeys on the path to conscious understanding, cosmic awareness and ultimate reality.

## **JESUS**

David Boulton. *Who on Earth was Jesus: the modern quest for the Jesus of History*. O Books 2008

This readable book is written by a journalist author who has acquired a depth of understanding that one would wish for theologians. It makes clear the relevance of theologians, past and present, whilst also clarifying many distracting views.

Clinton Bennett. *In Search of Jesus*. Continuum 2001.

This is a large book. Almost 400 pages. That is its value. You can start with the last chapter and find so much falling into place. But then go to other parts of the book for elucidation. Reading it all would be rewarding: it explains so much. So many other books are about the author's picture of Jesus. This book explains the diversity of views.

Marcus Borg & Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' final days in Jerusalem*. SPCK 2008

You can read this just for yourself, but it is designed as a ten-session study guide and comes strongly recommended. It also has a helpful continuation biography.

Albert Nolan. *Jesus before Christianity: The Gospel of Liberation*. Darton, Longman & Todd, London.

The portrait of Jesus that this Dominican priest offers is convincing, challenging and different. He asks: Does Jesus really have anything to say to our troubled world? We are introduced to the Jesus as he was before he became enshrined in doctrines, dogmas and ritual: a man who was deeply involved with the real problems of his time. And how similar they are to our own.

Albert Nolan. *Jesus Today*. Orbis Books, New York. 2007.

Starting with reading "the Signs of the Times", Nolan moves on to show the relevance of Jesus' spirituality – a spirituality of radical freedom – and how it calls for our personal transformation today.

John Dominic Crossan. *Who is Jesus?* HarperCollins. 1996.

This paperback was published to answer the many questions that this Biblical Scholar was asked following his best-selling *The Historical Jesus*, (HarperSanFrancisco 1991 which he abridged and updated in *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography*, HarperSanFrancisco 1994) So the matter is presented in question and answer form. In a straight forward way Crossan addresses every subject from Jesus' conception to the miracles, his baptism, his resurrection and more.

John R. Yungblut. *Rediscovering the Christ*. Element Books. 1991.

The author, a graduate of Harvard College and Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, USA, takes a radical approach to making the Christ come alive again for those who can no longer reconcile the traditional doctrines about Jesus as the Christ with their present world view.

Neil Douglas-Klotz. *Prayers of the Cosmos: The Aramaic Words of Jesus*. Harper & Row, San Francisco. 1990.

*The Hidden Gospel*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, USA. 1999

Aramaic was the common language throughout the Middle East in the time of Jesus. All that we know about Jesus is in written form and this is clothed in the cultural and linguistic forms of our western languages. The author, is able to show us in these two books that Jesus' words can take on a quite different meaning when understood in the perspective of their original Aramaic expression.

## CHRISTIAN LIVING

Adrian B. Smith. *Tomorrow's Christian: A New Framework for Christian Living*. John Hunt, O Books, Winchester. 2005

This book with 36 brief chapters, complements the author's *A New Framework for Christian Belief*. The author has given an insight into what future Christians will believe, feel, think and hope... It lends itself to use by discussion groups.

Keith Ward. *A Vision to Pursue: Beyond the Crisis in Christianity*. SCM Press, London. 1991.

A few of the chapter headings provide the flavour of the book. "The Problem of Saying the Creeds," "Is the Old Testament real History?", "The Uniqueness of Jesus", "Critical Thinking and Religious Authority". Many such contemporary questions are discussed.

Keith Ward. *Religion and Community*. Oxford UP. 2000.

This is not just on the Christian Churches in their different forms but also the other major world religions in their different manifestations. It will give a greater understanding and appreciation of religion in its social forms.

John Heaps. *A Love that Dares to Question*. Canterbury Press, Norwich. 2001.

An Australian Roman Catholic bishop challenges his Church on a number of contemporary issues that are facing many loyal but wounded Catholics. While the Church is called to be open and reconciling, many are excluded because of its strict ruling on a variety of moral issues.

*The Emerging Christian Way*. Copperhouse, USA. 2006.

An anthology including such authors as Marcus Borg, Matthew Fox, Thomas Berry, Sally McFague. Sharing their thoughts, stories and wisdom for a Faith of Transformation.

John Shelby Spong. *Eternal Life: A new Vision* HarperOne, HarperCollins. 2009

This is not just about the end of life, but about living, learning to be. It is illuminated by Jack's own life story and that of others. It clarifies his relationship to the institutional church, but more so about God in us. I believe that you will find the journey helpful (ds).

## **CHRISTIAN BELIEF**

Adrian B. Smith. *Tomorrow's Faith*. "O" Books, Winchester. 2005

30 short chapters that provide a comprehensive contemporary alternative to traditional expressions of belief.

Adrian B. Smith. *The God Shift*. The Liffey Press, Dublin. 2004.

In all aspects of life - scientific, sociological, political, cultural, ethical, psychological - we no longer express ourselves nor understand our world as our parents did. Yet we are expected to believe in and worship a God with concepts that have remained unchanged since the Middle Ages. Hence, Smith claims, there is a sense of unreality today about God, about religion, about the Church.

Reinhold Bernhardt. *Christianity without Absolutes*. SCM Press. London. 1994.

The source of a great deal of conflict in the world is not simply between Religions but because of the absoluteness claimed by these Religions. Reinhold, of the University of Heidelberg, makes the point that Christianity with its absoluteness - held especially by 'fundamentalist' Christians and conservative Catholicism - has much to answer for.

John Shelby Spong. *Resurrection: Myth or Reality: A Bishop's Search for the Origins of Christianity*. HarperCollins. 1994.

This Anglican Bishop's challenging writings are known to many Christians. Here is another challenge. Spong argues that because of the strong formative influence of Jewish tradition on the first Christians, most of the details of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are not historical. He offers a fascinating and clear suggestion of what really did happen.

John Shelby Spong. *A New Christianity for a New World*. Harper SanFrancisco. 2001.

Spong is beginning the process of reconstructing the Christian Faith as intelligible and relevant in the third millennium.

Lloyd Geering. *Is Christianity going anywhere?* St Andrew's Trust, Wellington, New Zealand. 2004. (Obtainable from Sea of Faith, 15 Burton St, Loughborough, LE11 2DT)

A mere 50 pages in which Geering offers an extremely clear summary of the essence of Christianity as a religion. Three of his four chapters are: "Excavating Jesus", The Recovery of Jesus' Teaching and The Diverse Futures of Christianity.

Keith Ward *Christianity: A Short Introduction* One World, Oxford. 2000.

A welcome introduction from a philosopher-theologian who can write simply and engagingly, and give you options on fifteen doctrines.

Steve Chalke & Anthony Watkis. *Intelligent Church: A journey towards a Christ-centred Church.* Zondervan 2006. There is also a DVD.

They are challenging contributions towards exploring what kind of Church we want and how to start getting there.

Karen Armstrong. *The Case for God.* The Bodley Head 2009.

Karen is a good author with excellent academic competence. If you are ready for a reasonably heavy exploring how people have perceived God from pre-history up to today, with a bias towards the Abrahamic faiths, but an awareness of others, do get this book. It is particularly good in exploring God in relation to Science, Agnosticism and Atheism.

Diarmaid MacCulloch. *A History of Christianity* Allen Lane 2009. This is the book related to the BBC series. Diarmaid reads so easily despite his immense knowledge: an historian who brings his characters to life. Well indexed so that you can find topics, the book can be read in instalments. You may well be enticed to read all of it for the light it shed on both the past and the present.

## SCRIPTURE

Marcus Borg. *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time.* Harper, San Francisco, 2002

The book is divided into three parts. The first is about our approach to reading the Bible, as he says "Taking the Bible seriously but not literally". The other parts deal with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in turn. A refreshing book.

John Barton & Julia Bowden *The Original Story: God, Israel & the World.* 2004 DLT/Erdman's 2005. 0-8028-2900-7)

An O level textbook which gives an excellent introduction to the Jewish Bible or Old Testament but by and for Christians.

## GLOBAL ETHICS AND INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Marcus Braybrooke *A Heart for the World: The Interfaith Alternative* 2005 O Books.

A distinguished activist and priest involved in interfaith gives a message of hope. Back then he wrote a chapter on a new economy needing a new morality, and much more.

Hans Kung. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic.* SCM Press. London. 1990. Kung sets out a programme which he believes it is urgent to pursue if the human race is to survive. He sets it out in three, now widely-quoted, statements. There can be no ongoing human society without a world ethic for the nations. There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.

Marcus Braybrook (Ed.). *Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic*. SCM Press. London 1992.  
The Editor provides a valuable introduction to and copies of 19 declarations and other documents produced as global documents on ethical issues. Starting with the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1945 it goes on to The Earth Charter in 1992. It was intended to show the range of what had already been produced before the 1993 Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions but also as a resource for future work. It is still relevant after the 1999 Parliament's *A Call to our Guiding Institutions* which reinforces the need for legislation and action to implement declarations.

Richard Holloway. *Godless Morality: Keeping Religion out of Ethics*. Canongate Books, Edinburgh. 1999.

We are all confronted with a moral maze, but the retired Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh proposes that we are not helped in finding our way through it by arguing whether this or that alleged claim for moral truth genuinely emanated from God. Instead, he offers a human-centred justification for a particular moral approach.

Maurice Wiles. *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue*. SCM Press, London. 1992  
Professor Wiles believes that at a time of increasing conservatism and opposition to inter-faith activity in the Churches, a narrow Christianity is not the way forward for our world today. He explains the controversial verse (John 14:6): "No one comes to the Father but by me".

Paul F Knitter *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* 2009 Oneworld Publications.  
A leading advocate of globally responsible interreligious dialogue uses his insights from Buddhism to remain a Christian at heart.

## RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Judy Cannato. *Radical Amazement* Sorin Books, Indiana. 2006  
This is a book bridging the very limited biblical cosmology of our Christian tradition with today's understanding of the vastness of our universe. It gives us a new Universe Story. Each chapter ends with reflections for our contemplation and a suggested prayer.

Peter Russell. *Waking up in Time*. Cygnus Books, UK. 2009  
One might call this 'A Gospel for the Third Millennium' in that it is the Good News of Liberation in today's language. It is a book of deep spirituality: a call to personal conversion written for the person with a scientific approach to life. It explores evolution from both a scientific and mystical point of view.

Peter Russell. *From Science to God: The Mystery of Consciousness and the Meaning of Light*. Privately published. 2000. (Available from GreenSpirit, 14 Beckford Close, Warminster. BA12 9LW.)

What is consciousness? This book challenges science's assumption that the "material" is primary reality. He proposes that consciousness is as fundamental as space, time and matter - perhaps even more so. He integrates a deep knowledge of science with his own experience of meditation.

Robert Barry. *A Theory of Almost Everything: A Scientific and Religious Quest for Ultimate Answers*. One World, Oxford. 1993.

Dr. Barry argues that the Grand Unified Theory (that is supposed to explain everything!) will not be found in science alone but in a synthesis of physics, psychology and religion. The Irish News

called it: "A major contribution to the debate on who or what we are and where we might be going".

Lloyd Geering (see above). *God and the New Physics*. St Andrew's Trust, New Zealand. 1995. (Obtainable from Sea of Faith, 15 Burton St, Loughborough, LE11 2DT)  
A 50-page "pamphlet", in which very succinctly Geering discusses the religious implications of the contemporary physical sciences.

Dr. Manjir Samanta-Laughton. *Punk Science: Inside the Mind of God*. O Books. 2006  
As the title implies, a wonderfully simple model of the Universe where consciousness generates life. Ideal for someone stepping into the field of science for the first time.

Dr Frank Parkinson. *Science and Religion at the Crossroads*. Imprint Academic, Exeter. 2009.  
The author, a speaker at a past CANA conference, argues that current paradigms of both science and religion have broken down. He argues that a future science and religion must be mutually supporting and illuminating. A controversial idea but based on sound scholarship.

## **COSMOLOGY**

Brian Swimme & Thomas Berry. *The Universe Story*. HarperCollins. 1994.  
These two theologians take us from the Big Bang into this new millennium, tracing the unfolding of the Universe. They suggest the boundless possibilities for our future. The basis of their knowledge is not Revelation but what the Cosmos has to say about itself. It took them ten years to write!

Denis Edwards. *Creation, Humanity, Community: Building a New Theology*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. 1992.  
In this slim book a Catholic theologian reflects on the challenge to the human community made by our ecological crisis and the advances made by modern science. The work is divided into three main parts and at the end of each are points for further reflection. Edwards provides a theological grounding for Christian involvement in the ecological movement.

Fritjof Capra. *The Hidden Connections* Flamingo. 2003  
"An impressive, interesting book which challenges contemporary wisdom, provides insights into social and economic pitfalls and offers light at the end of the tunnel" (Sunday Times)

Fritjof Capra. *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter*. Flamingo (HarperCollins). 1997.  
Based on ten years of research and discussion with scientists, Capra offers a brilliant synthesis of many of the recent theories of science and on that basis proposes a new foundation for ecological policies that will allow us to build and sustain communities.

D.M.A.Leggett. *Facing the Future: Towards Planetary Welfare*. Pilgrim Books, Norwich. 1990.  
The planet's future is too important to be left to scientists alone. Leggett, formerly Vice-Chancellor of Surrey University, explores the spiritual implications of today's environmental threats. He bridges the chasm which separates the scientific and religious interpretation of life.

Ervin Laszlo *The Chaos Point: The World at the Crossroads*. Piatkus 2006.

A concise overview of the present world situation and how we got here. Where we are, Laszlo tells us, is at a critical juncture in history where we face both global collapse and the opportunity of worldwide renewal. This is the end of a phase from which a new world could dawn.

David Storey  
Adrian Smith

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