

Spiritual but not Religious Book Discussion Group Book List 2012-2013

10/21 *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation*, Stephanie Sellers. Introduction and Parts I and II

Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation is a practical theological guide for congregations that want to move beyond mere inclusivity toward becoming a place where welcoming "the other" is taken seriously and engaging God's mission becomes more than just a catch-phrase. The book is based on two years of work and over 200 interviews with people in urban, suburban, and rural congregations around the United States. Each chapter introduces specific congregations and their challenges, and lays out the theological underpinnings of tackling fears head-on and embracing change as a welcome part of community life. Contents include: The Radical Welcome Journey; Mapping the Way; God of Welcome, God of Grace; With Hearts Wide Open; Getting Real; Facing Our Fears and Embracing the Dream, The Joy in the Struggle.

11/18 *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation*, Stephanie Sellers. Part III and Conclusion

12/16 *The First Christmas: What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' Birth*, Marcus Borg and John Crossan. Chapters 1-5

In *The First Christmas*, two of today's top Jesus scholars, Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, join forces to show how history has biased our reading of the nativity story as it appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. As they did for Easter in their previous book, *The Last Week*, here they explore the beginning of the life of Christ, peeling away the sentimentalism that has built up over the last two thousand years around this most well known of all stories to reveal the truth of what the gospels actually say. Borg and Crossan help us to see this well-known narrative afresh by answering the question, "What do these stories mean?" in the context of both the first century and the twenty-first century. They successfully show that the Christmas story, read in its original context, is far richer and more challenging than people imagine.

1/20 *The First Christmas: What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' Birth*, Marcus Borg and John Crossan. Chapters 6-9.

2/17 *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, Diana Butler Bass. Chapters 1-5

The data is clear: religious affiliation is plummeting across the breadth of Christian denominations. And yet interest in "spirituality" is on the rise. So what is behind the sea change in American religion? With the same comprehensive research and insider reporting that made *Christianity for the Rest of Us* an indispensable guide to cultivating thriving churches, Diana Butler Bass offers a fresh interpretation of the "spiritual but not religious" trend.

Bass—who has spent her career teaching the history, culture, and politics of religion, and engaging church communities across the nation—brings forth her deep knowledge of the latest national studies and polls, along with her own groundbreaking analysis, as she seeks to fully comprehend the decline in Christian attendance and affiliation that started decades ago—and has increased exponentially in recent years.

Some contend that we're undergoing yet another evangelical revival; others suggest that Christian belief and practice is eroding entirely as traditional forms of faith are replaced by new ethical, and areligious, choices. But Bass argues compellingly that we are, instead, at a critical stage in a completely new spiritual awakening, a vast interreligious progression toward individual and cultural transformation, and a wholly new kind of postreligious faith.

Offering direction and hope to individuals and churches, *Christianity After Religion* is Bass's call to approach faith with a newfound freedom that is both life-giving and service driven. And it is a hope-filled plea to see and participate in creating a fresh, vital, contemporary way of faith that stays true to the real message of Jesus.

3/17 Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening, Diana Butler Bass. Chapters 6-9

4/21 Girl Meets God: On the Path to a Spiritual Life, Lauren Winner

The child of a Jewish father and a lapsed Southern Baptist mother, Lauren F. Winner chose to become an Orthodox Jew. But even as she was observing Sabbath rituals and studying Jewish law, Lauren was increasingly drawn to Christianity. Courageously leaving what she loved, she eventually converted. In *Girl Meets God*, this appealing woman takes us through a year in her Christian life as she attempts to reconcile both sides of her religious identity.

Here readers will find a new literary voice: a spiritual seeker who is both an unconventional thinker and a devoted Christian. The twists and turns of Winner's journey make her the perfect guide to exploring true faith in today's complicated world.

5/19 Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis, Lauren Winner

In the critically acclaimed memoir *Girl Meets God*, Lauren F. Winner chronicled her sojourn from Judaism to Christianity. Now, in *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, Winner describes how experiences of loss and failure unexpectedly slam her into a wall of doubt and spiritual despair: "My belief has faltered, my sense of God's closeness has grown strained, my efforts at living in accord with what I take to be the call of the gospel have come undone."

Witty, relatable, and fiercely honest, Winner lays bare her experience of what she calls the "middle" of the spiritual life. In elegant and spare prose, she explores why-in the midst of the overwhelming anxiety, loneliness, and boredom of her deepest questioning about where (or if) God is-the Christian story still explains who she is better than any other story she's ever known. *Still* is an absorbing meditation combining literary grace with spiritual wisdom. It is sure to resonate with anyone looking to sustain a spiritual life in the midst of real life.