

Being church

Print and electronic resources for church renewal

Arlyn Friesen Epp

C *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, by Diana Butler Bass (New York: HarperOne, 2012). The data are 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 religion? Here, Bass offers a fresh interpretation of the “spiritual but not religious” trend. She argues compellingly that we are 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.

The Power of All: Building a Multivoiced Church, by Sian Murray Williams and Stuart Murray Williams (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012). Whenever renewal occurs, everyone in the church is drawn into involvement in the church’s mission. But within a generation or two, vitality wanes and ministry is left to religious specialists. In *The Power of All*, renewal leaders Stuart (author of *The Naked Anabaptist*) and Sian Murray Williams confront this dilemma by asking: How can a New Testament model help empower and renew the church in today’s post-Christian society?

Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to the Church, by James Penner et al. (Toronto: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2011). Are young people leaving your church? This 2011 Canadian study of 2,049 young people provides a wealth of findings and suggests ways to reverse the trend.

Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology in Aboriginal Land, by Chris Budden (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications,

2009). Christianity is never just about beliefs but is also about habits and practices, for better or worse. Theology always reflects the social location of the theologian—including her privileges and prejudices—all the time working with a particular, often undisclosed, notion of what is normal. Therefore, theology is never “neutral”—it defends particular constructions of reality, and it promotes certain interests. *Following Jesus in Invaded Space* asks what—and whose—interests theology protects when it is part of a community that invaded the land of indigenous peoples. Here the conversation dares to speak of God, church, and justice in the context of past history and continuing dispossession.

The Church Made Strange for the Nations: Essays in Ecclesiology and Political Theology, by Paul G. Doerksen and Karl Koop (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011). Christians have sometimes held that the church ought to be “in the world but not of it,” yet the meaning and significance of this conviction has continued to challenge and confound. In the context of persecution, Christians in the ancient world tended to distance themselves from the social and civic mainstream, while in the medieval and early modern periods, the church and secular authorities often worked in close relationship, sharing the role of shaping society. In a post-Christendom era, this latter arrangement has been the subject of heavy critique and has been largely dismantled, but there is no consensus in Christian thought about what the alternative should be. This collection of essays offers new challenging and provocative perspectives.

Winds of the Spirit: A Profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South, by Conrad Kanagy et al. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012). In this ground-breaking study, the authors make an unsettling claim: Anabaptist churches of the Global South have more in common with the church of the first three centuries than they do with contemporary churches in Europe and North America that claim the Anabaptist name. With data from eighteen thousand church members in ten countries, the authors show how historical patterns of church renewal are repeating themselves today in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The study does more than crunch statistics; it probes the sources and nature

of the renewal and growth. And it pushes readers to ask what these trends can teach the churches of the North in their own quest for faithfulness and vitality.

Church Matters Podcasts, hosted by Dan Dyck, Mennonite Church Canada. Monthly 15-minute podcasts explore why the church matters in the world today. Each episode features either a local or a global Mennonite or ecumenical guest who from his or her own experiences tells stories about why the church matters today. Podcasts are available for free download at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1893.

Lifelong Faith Journal: The Theory and Practice of Lifelong Faith Formation, edited by John Roberto. *Lifelong Faith* is a quarterly journal that helps congregations develop faith formation opportunities for all ages and generations, increasing the capacity of leaders and communities to nurture faith growth. Issues are available for free digital download at <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/>.

2012 Peace Audit Report, by Robert J. Suderman (Mennonite World Conference, 2012). This report summarizes the responses the MWC Peace Commission received to their question: “How is your church doing in its desire to be a Peace Church?” The audit reports: “The good news is that it is evident that the consciousness of being a Peace Church is deeply embedded in the identity of the MWC member-churches that responded. The bad news is the pervasive complexity in moving from what is desired and written on paper, to becoming a bedrock part of the life of the Christian life and community.” The report is available online in English, Spanish, and French at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1975.

Pilgrimage Project of Mennonite Church British Columbia. This series of short online videos highlights the work and ministry of MCBC leaders. Each church leader is asked questions about church ministry, missional church identity, today’s “Anabaptist vision,” our present cultural agenda, and the issues they expect that the church will face in the next two decades. Visit <http://www.pilgrimageproject.com/>.

What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches? Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Gathering, 2011. In the format of the seven letters to the churches from the book of Revelation, this set of videos available online brings you “letters” from several church leaders, including David Martin, Lucy Roca, Ralph Lebold, Brian Bauman, Rebecca Steiner of MCEC, Willard Metzger from Mennonite Church Canada, and author/activist Shane Claiborne. This set of videos is available online at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1976.

Embracing Emergence Christianity, by Phyllis Tickle (Denver: Morehouse Education Resources, 2011). A six-session study on DVD, with guide, based on Tickle’s book *The Great Emergence*. She examines the changing face of Christianity and culture, asking: “What are the implications of today’s ‘Great Emergence,’ both culturally and spiritually? What are the key questions and issues that need to be addressed? Are we an “emergence church”?”

About the author

Arlyn Friesen Epp is director of Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba; resources.mennonitechurch.ca. Within Canada, resources from the centre (including the items listed above) can be borrowed; items for sale or free download are available to all. Check www.resources.mennonitechurch.ca for more information.