



OCN Bulletin

News about the Open Christianity Network, Ireland

www.ocnireland.com

Number 9: June 2015

Message from the OCN Steering Group

At a recent meeting, the Steering Group reviewed activity since the lecture by father Brian Lennon in Dublin in September 2103.

The Northern Group has continued to meet regularly (5 times in 2014 and once, so far, this year). At each meeting, a member has led the discussion of a book which most members have read beforehand. In recent times, the group has discussed books by Marcus Borg, Hans Kung, Roger Scruton and Geva Vermes.

The Steering Group is planning a further lecture in Dublin in late 2015 or early 2016. Details will be given in the next Bulletin.

News from OCN Groups

Dublin Group

The Steering Group would like to hear from those, living in or near Dublin, who would be interested in attending meetings – perhaps similar to the Northern Group's format of discussing books on religious topics. If you are interested in meeting in Dublin, please contact Peter Gibson on: mandpgibson@yahoo.co.uk

Northern Group

On 18th May the Group discussed Geza Vermes' book "Christian Beginnings" A synopsis of William Odling-Smee's introduction to the discussion is on page 2 of this Bulletin.

The next meeting will be on **Monday 21st September 2015 in St George's, High Street, Belfast at 6.30pm**. Bill Patterson will lead a discussion of Dairmaid MacCulloch's book "Silence – a Christian History" Penguin ISBN: 978-0241952320.

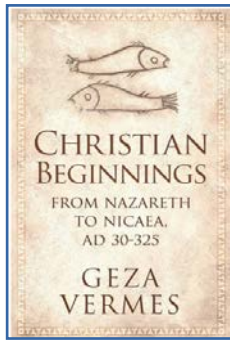
Some of us meet for a meal before the meetings, at 5pm in The Morning Star, Pottinger's Entry, High Street. All welcome.

Bill Patterson is the convenor of the Group. Contact: bill.patterson09@hotmail.com

ocni – OCN's email discussion group

ocni is an email group that enables members to discuss issues of interest. It can lead to a lively debate among the participants.

If you would like to learn more about ocni, or join the group, please contact Stan Milner, the moderator of the group, at stan.milner@live.co.uk



Geza Vermes “Christian beginnings – from Nazaraeth to Nicea AD 30-325” Penguin ISBN: 978-184614305

This book was discussed at the Northern Group meeting on 18 May 2105. The following is from William Odling-Smee’s introduction to the discussion.

Geza Vermes was born in Hungary into a Jewish family who converted to Christianity in 1931. Geza became a Roman Catholic priest; his parents were killed in the Holocaust. In 1957 he left the Roman Catholic Church and reasserted his Jewish identity. In 1958 he relocated to the UK and eventually became Professor of Jewish Studies in the University of Oxford. He died in 2013.

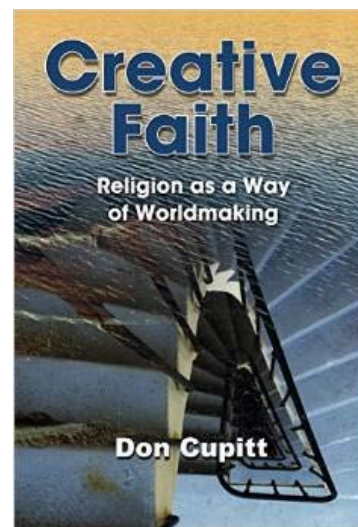
He was one of the first scholars to examine the Dead Sea Scrolls and became an international expert. He is author of the standard translation of the Scrolls into English. This book is a result of his researches into the historical Jesus, which emphasises the Jewish identity of Jesus. Vermes suggests that Jesus founded a renewal movement in Judaism. He also suggests that the historical Jesus is so different from the Christ of faith that Christians may want to rethink the fundamentals of their faith. This book demonstrates why he thinks like this.

Vermes explains that he wants to trace the historical community between Jesus as portrayed in his charismatic Galilean setting and the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which proclaimed the dogma of Christ’s divinity. He traces the thread of charismatic worship from Moses through the Prophets, and points out that this was a popular religion, cut off from priestly officialdom. This charismatic worship continued in semi-clandestine form

until New Testament times. He searches out the charismatic words and actions of Jesus.

He then shows how the influence of Greek philosophy changed the charismatic group that Jesus founded, mainly through the thinking of Paul and John, until we come to Nicaea in 325.

Finally Vermes urges his readers to reach back to the pure religious vision and enthusiasm of Jesus, the charismatic messenger of God and to leave aside the deifying message of Paul and John and the church attributed to him.

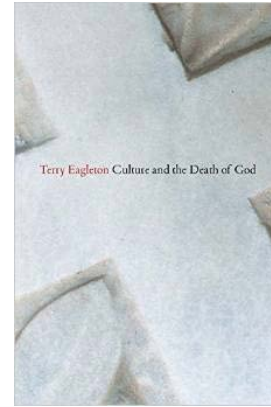
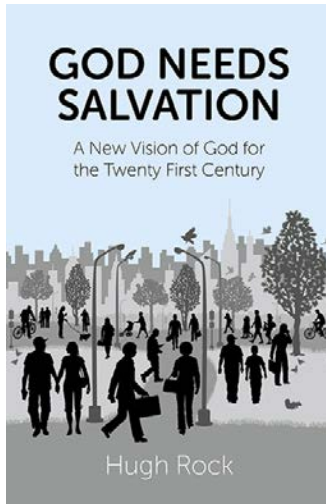


Don Cupitt “Creative Faith: Religion as a Way of Worldmaking” Polebridge Press ISBN: 978-1598151534

At some point very early on in its development, Christianity split between two different pathways: one path stayed with the teaching of Jesus and the primacy of ethics, the other started with the return of Jesus and, therefore, with supernatural belief.

Today, ethics has been largely sidelined, viewed as secondary or subservient to belief. Don Cupitt argues that the time has come to give ethics priority in defining and shaping religious life. As he puts it, "No longer should we aim to conserve the self, preparing for eternity: we must simply expend it, by living generously."

Publishers' notice



Hugh Rock “God Needs Salvation - A New Vision of God for the Twenty First Century”

Christian Alternatives

ISBN: 978-1-78279-399-1

Many people today have deserted the old forms of religion. But does this make them any the less religious? Hugh Rock's message is that people are inherently religious. The necessary task today is to articulate anew the reality of religion. In a wide-ranging survey, that draws together the past fifty years of liberal theology and sociological discussion about the interface of religion and popular culture, he concludes that it is in our new respect for the autonomous self-fulfilment of the potential of every person's life that can be found the message transferred out of the New Testament.

Publisher's notice

No matter what your Christian shade may be, fundamentalists through to progressives alike will be angered as Hugh Rock demolishes so many precious shibboleths. However, his arguments are coherent and it pays to read to the end. Unlike many books that simply knock down what has gone before, this book builds upon the past and makes a real contribution to what a God fit for purpose in the 21st century might look like. Every body who is concerned for the future of the God of the Church in our times needs to read this book!

Rev John Churcher, Progressive Christianity Network Britain

Terry Eagleton “Culture and the Death of God” Yale University Press

ISBN: 978-0300212334

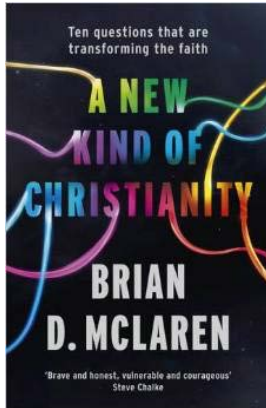
How to live in a supposedly faithless world threatened by religious fundamentalism? Terry Eagleton, formidable thinker and renowned cultural critic, investigates in this thought-provoking book the contradictions, difficulties, and significance of the modern search for a replacement for God.

Engaging with a phenomenally wide range of ideas, issues, and thinkers from the Enlightenment to today, Eagleton discusses the state of religion before and after 9/11, the ironies surrounding Western capitalism's part in spawning not only secularism but also fundamentalism, and the unsatisfactory surrogates for the Almighty invented in the post-Enlightenment era.

The author reflects on the unique capacities of religion, the possibilities of culture and art as modern paths to salvation, the so-called war on terror's impact on atheism, and a host of other topics of concern to those who envision a future in which just and compassionate communities thrive. Lucid, stylish, and entertaining in his usual manner, Eagleton presents a brilliant survey of modern thought that also serves as a timely, urgently needed intervention into our perilous political present.

Publisher's notice

Brian McLaren recently spoke at an event in Belfast organised by "Different Perspectives" - a group which promotes progressive Christianity.



Brian McLaren "A New Kind of Christianity". Hodder & Stoughton

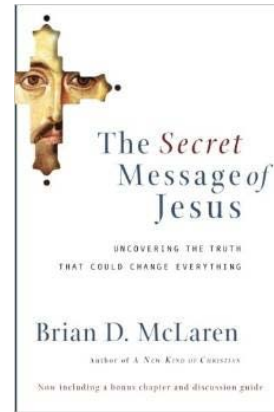
ISBN: 978-0340995495

Groundbreaking author Brian McLaren, voice of the Christian emergent movement and author of the 'New Kind of Christian' series, poses ten controversial questions that could lead to a radical redefinition of the Christian faith.

- What is the overarching storyline of the Bible?
- What is the Gospel?
- Why is sexuality such a divisive issue among Christians?
- How should followers of Jesus relate to people of other religions?

McLaren gives his own responses to these questions, inviting the reader to a new and generous way of thinking about Christianity.
Publishers' notice

I managed to miss train stops twice while reading Brian's book! A sure sign it had me gripped. Brian lays out ten questions that a lot of people are asking about Christianity, on things like the Bible, sexuality, Jesus, the gospel, church and the future, and in his relaxed style probes them in a way that often reframes the question. The most important thing about A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIANITY is that it lays open a space where asking questions and talking about them is a good thing to do, and not something to be afraid of; it's a book that shows that asking questions is often accompanied by passionate faith.
(Jonny Baker)



Brian McLaren "The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything".

Thomas Nelson. ISBN: 978-0849918926

In *The Secret Message of Jesus* you'll find what's at the center of Brian McLaren's critique of conventional Christianity, and what's at the heart of his expanding vision. In the process, you'll meet a Jesus who may be altogether new to you, a Jesus who is...

- * Not the crusading conqueror of religious broadcasting;
- * Not the religious mascot of partisan religion;
- * Not heaven's ticket-checker, whose words have been commandeered by the church to include and exclude, judge and stigmatize, pacify and domesticate.

McLaren invites you to discover afresh the transforming message of Jesus-an open invitation to radical change, an enlightening revelation that exposes sham and ignites hope, an epic story that is good news for everyone, whatever their gender, race, class, politics, or religion.

Publisher's notice

Contact OCN Bulletin

We welcome letters, news items and notices of books that would be of interest to our readers for the next bulletin. Please send these to Peter Gibson at:

mandpqibson@yahoo.co.uk

If you would like to be put on the OCN mailing list, please contact Peter.