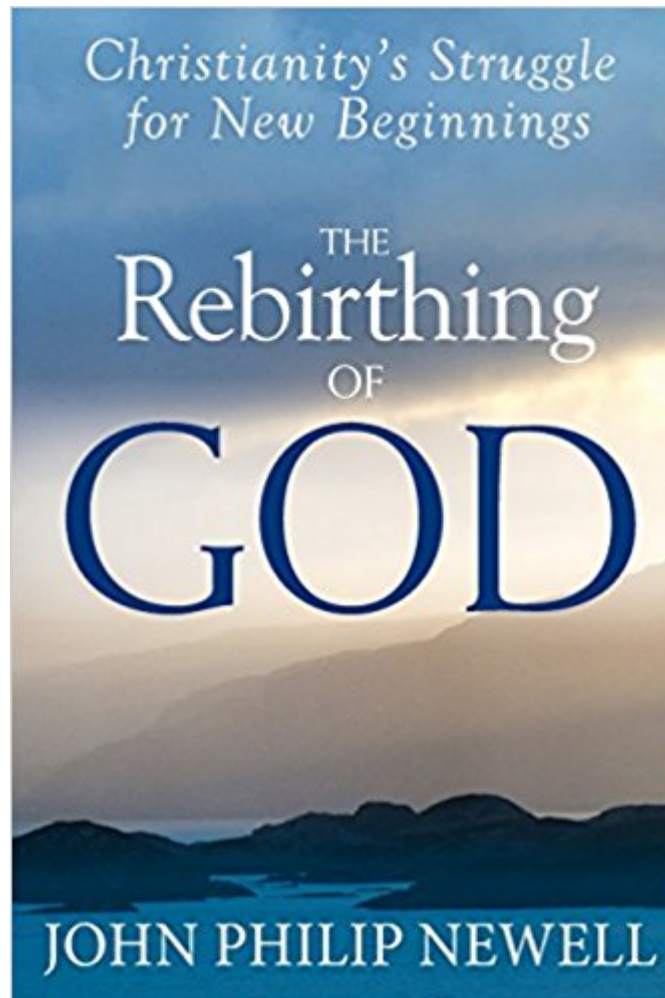




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# The Rebirthing Of God: Christianity's Struggle For New Beginnings



## Synopsis

Dare to imagine a new birth from deep within Christianity, a fresh stirring of the Spirit."The walls of Western Christianity are collapsing. In many parts of the West that collapse can only be described as seismic.... There are three main responses or reactions to this collapse. The first is to deny that it is happening. The second is to frantically try to shore up the foundations of the old thing. The third, which I invite us into, is to ask what is trying to be born that requires a radical reorientation of our vision. What is the new thing that is trying to emerge from deep within us and from deep within the collective soul of Christianity?"

—from the Introduction

In the midst of dramatic changes in Western Christianity, internationally respected spiritual leader, peacemaker and scholar John Philip Newell offers the hope of a fresh stirring of the Spirit among us. He invites us to be part of a new holy birth of sacred living. Speaking directly to the heart of Christians—those within the well-defined bounds of Christian practice and those on the disenchanted edges—as well as to the faithful and seekers of other traditions, he explores eight major features of a new birthing of Christianity:

- Coming back into relationship with the Earth as sacred
- Reconnecting with compassion as the ground of true relationship
- Celebrating the Light that is at the heart of all life
- Reverencing the wisdom of other religious traditions
- Rediscovering spiritual practice as the basis for transformation
- Living the way of nonviolence among nations
- Looking to the unconscious as the wellspring of new vision
- Following love as the seed-force of new birth in our lives and world

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Occasionally I read a book that leads me to think, 'I wish I had written that.' This is one of those

books."~ Marcus Borg, author, *The Heart of Christianity and Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, among other books "Draw[s] from fresh, deep springs of faith ... placing before us the challenge of our day: Will we allow God to be born anew in us, in the earth, in the cosmos? Will we embody the ever-new life of the Source from which we come?"~ Mary C. Earle, author, *Celtic Christian Spirituality: Essential Writings*~ Annotated and Explained~ "Wow.... This book will move you ... with fresh insight into the rebirth of everything. What a writer, what a book!"~ Rob Bell, author, *Love Wins and What We Talk about When We Talk about God*~ "From page one to the conclusion, John Philip Newell engages our imagination and as we read we are born anew. His writing is a blessing!"~ Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, former executive director, U.S. World Council of Churches; author, *Living into Hope: A Call to Spiritual Action for Such a Time as This*~ "Reconnecting is the word! The deep connection is already there and given, but this little book of wisdom will help you to find the essential message again~ and in fresh, intelligent ways."~ Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, Center for Action and Contemplation, Albuquerque, New Mexico~ "Courageous.... A refreshing cup of cool, clear water for our spirits that enlivens us for the journey beyond the stumbling blocks of unquestioned doctrine toward a reconnection with the earth and the human capacity for awareness, compassion and spiritual practices that restore awe and hope for our enacted faith."~ Thomas V. Wolfe, president, Iliff School of Theology

John Philip Newell, internationally acclaimed teacher, retreat leader and speaker, is the widely read author of several books, including *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, *Praying with the Earth*; *A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth & the Human Soul* and *Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings* (SkyLight Paths). Formerly warden of Iona Abbey in the Western Isles of Scotland, he is now companion theologian for the American Spirituality Center of Casa del Sol at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico and the co-founder of *Heartbeat: A Journey Towards Earth's Wellbeing*.

I found the book to be most inviting. I was initially annoyed by the title; I've never been part of the "God is dead" movement. But this book is about noticing the rebirth of God within us. It is founded on the Celtic understanding of God, which has much in common with the Mideastern and Asian religions and their awareness of the divine presence all around us. Newell invites us into that "thin" place of understanding and compassion. I have given this book to a number of my friends. I heartily recommend it!

John Philip Newell is a fresh extraordinary voice needed for our times. He understands better than just about anyone the precarious place of Christian Tradition in the West. He knows that so many of the traditional forms of Christianity are going the way of the dinosaur and he offers the touchstones that can offer hope and renewal in the midst of rampant decline.

A fascinating book with regards to the author's major ideas about how Christianity needs to revitalize itself. However, I found many of his underlying arguments to be exaggerated or distorted. For example, Newell takes an uncritically positive view of the utopian Auraville Community in India, which has a documented history of turning a blind eye to child abuse. Additionally Newell takes unfair liberties with the writings of Thomas Merton, selectively quoting Merton so as to manipulate Merton's voice in ways that I do not think Merton would have been comfortable with. In the final analysis, VERY disappointing support for admirable ideas.

This book looks at the kinds of spirituality and kindness that will be necessary if Christianity is to survive as more than an outdated curiosity. It offers a path to the future, while retaining the heart of the gospel.

John Philip Newell is highly regarded and respected in the field of Theology, particularly related to the disciplines of centering or contemplative prayer. This book concerns itself with the more narrow discipline of 'pilgrimage', in this book focusing specifically on the Iona Pilgrimages and the Celtic religious practices. The book is rich in painting word-pictures of the various 'stations' encountered along the pilgrimage route. My reason for other than a 5 star rating: a somewhat tedious and repetitious expansion of the thesis that God requires a "Rebirthing."

Years ago the Spirit directed my attention to "Listening to the Heartbeat of God" by John Philip Newell. It was a book that opened my heart and altered my worldview. Since then I have participated in retreats and workshops that Philip facilitated, one event in my home church in Kenilworth, IL. Simultaneously, I have continued to read and be nourished by Philip's inspired writing. He speaks what my heart knows to be true but my mouth often struggles to articulate. "The Rebirthing of God" is a gracious, abundant offering of Philip's inner Light. I heartily recommend It!

John Philip Newell's new book is an inspiring and prophetic meditation on one of the most important phenomena in the world today. Much is being said and written about the decline of traditional

Christianity, and people are simultaneously noticing the burgeoning interest in matters of faith and spirituality, contemplative prayer and healing, theology and spiritual practice. Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest, author, and much-sought-after teacher on centering prayer, has said that she can't decide if she is a hospice worker or a midwife. Clearly, something is dying, but something is also coming to life. John Philip Newell sees this dying and rising again as a sacred moment in history that calls for reverent attention. Throughout the book, John Philip provides vignettes that beautifully illustrate his reflections. In the introduction, he tells of a worship service he attended at the abbey on Iona. All of the worship leaders were women, the exact opposite of the tragic gender imbalance that plagued so much of Christian history, and John Philip was somewhat irritated that at least one or two men could not be found to serve. But then he remembered that it was the women in Jesus' day who stuck around as Jesus was dying and who even came to anoint his body for burial. "Instead of seeing [this worship service] as a communion procession," he writes, "I begin to experience it as a funeral procession. Instead of bread and wine being carried forward for the sacrament, it becomes in my soul's eye the Church as body of Christ being borne for burial.... The women have not fled at the death. They are faithfully tending the body with care, with reverence. And such huge sorrow. This is death. This form will be no more." John Philip goes on to say, "Much of what is happening within the four walls of our household - liturgically, theologically, spiritually - is irrelevant to the great journey of the earth today and of humanity's most pressing struggles. Nevertheless, we are being asked not to flee." After all, the women who tended to the dying Jesus were also the first witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection. In the insightful and easy-to-read chapters that follow, John Philip identifies eight harbingers of rebirth or resurrection that he sees in our world and in our daily lives today. He invites us not only to see what is happening deep at the heart of reality, but to join in. The opportunity is to live into the new life that is stirring to birth among us, even while we are reverently tending that which is dying. What is coming to birth is new, but there is continuity with the old. Each of the eight chapters in this book provides excellent material for deep personal reflection and group discussion. The invitation is to reconnect with Sacred Presence and Divine promptings that are stirring in the world around us, in our daily lives and interactions, and deep within the heart of all creation. We just need eyes to see and ears to hear, and the effect of the book is to sharpen our senses. The effect of these chapters is also to draw us into new ways of life and habits of being that align us with the rebirthing of God that is undeniably happening among us. In that sense, this book is not only spiritually sensitive; it is immensely practical, as well. Political divisions, terrorism, anxiety and sleepless nights, income inequality, climate change, and arguments about children crossing national borders...it's not hard to see the problems. And as the author points out in the

introduction, much of what is happening within the walls of our churches today is irrelevant to what is going on around us. But The Rebirthing of God is an invitation to see and live in the solution.

Informative on Celtic Christianity, a new perspective from traditional church. But I'm not sure how to apply some of it.

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