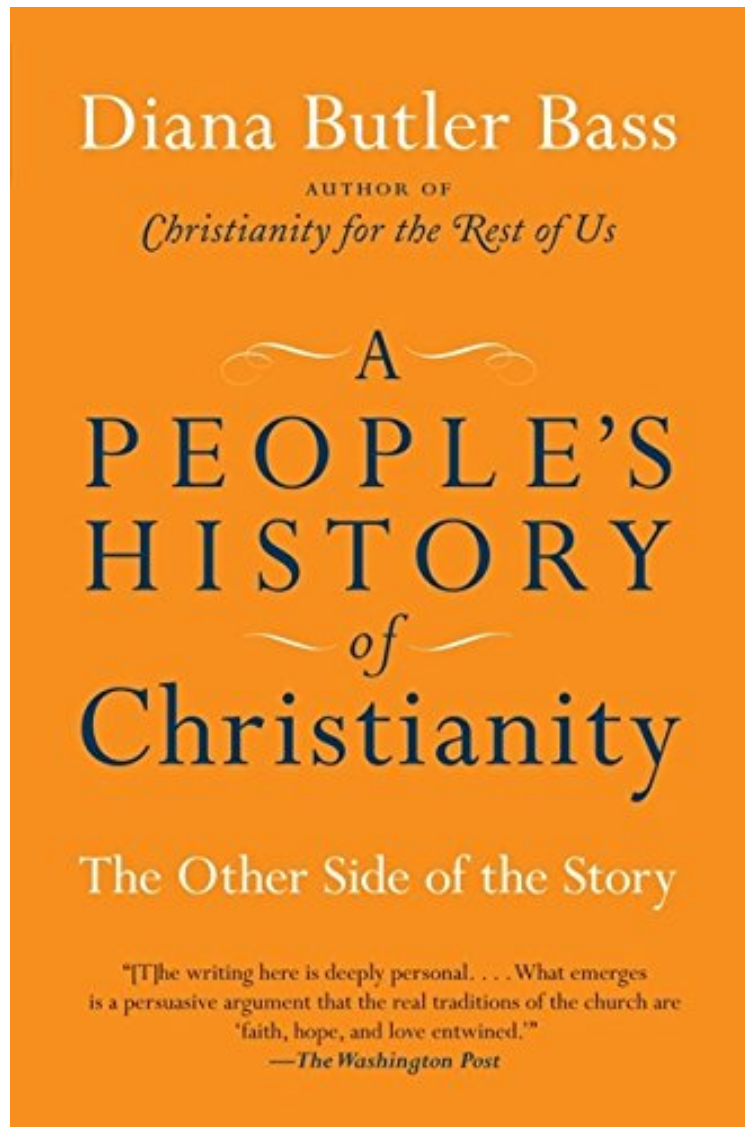


(Download) A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story

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Diana Butler Bass

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Diana Butler Bass : A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story:

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful. A People's History of Christianity By NickyCDiana Butler Bass is a scholar, author and speaker specialising in American religion and culture. In A People's History of Christianity: The

Other Side of the Story she presents a counter-narrative to what she calls the militant and triumphalist Big-C interpretation of Christian history Christ, Constantine, Christendom, Calvin, and Christian America. Bass claims that progressive Christians suffer spiritual amnesia because they have rejected church traditions understood through this Big-C story. But there is another history, of what Bass calls generative Christianity, based in the great command to love God and neighbour (Luke 10:25-27), that affirms different values from the conflict and conquest of the Big C story. It is a kind of faith that births new possibilities of Gods love into the world. A Peoples History sets out a history of Christianity that can inform and inspire moderate and progressive Christians who have little knowledge of church history. The title borrows from Howard Zinn's A Peoples History of the United States. Like Zinn, Bass tells stories of lesser-known and marginal figures, especially women, as well as surveying most leading figures of Western Christianity. A Peoples History is divided into five main sections, covering early Christianity (100-500), the medieval church (500-1450), the Reformation (1450-1650), the modern era (1650-1945), and contemporary Christianity (1945+). For each era, Bass chooses a few central religious ideas and practices grouped under the headings devotion and ethics, and explores them with a mix of personal anecdotes, historical context, and theological reflection. She focuses more on people than events or institutions, selecting individuals whose thought and especially actions exemplified generative Christianity, and drawing parallels with modern progressive Christianity. The result feels almost like a modern-day version of the medieval Lives of the Saints intended to inspire and affirm devotion, but not always perhaps historically objective. A Peoples History has limitations. Readers from elsewhere will find its cultural and political references distinctly North American. There is a certain irony in Bass attempting to repudiate the us an them mentality of Big C history with her own rival counter-narrative. She perhaps goes too far in projecting contemporary progressive values onto historical figures, for example calling Irenaeus a Christian Humanist, and comparing the biblical exegesis of Origen and Barack Obama. The book will not appeal to politically or religiously conservative Christians uncomfortable about the strong identification of the great commandment with progressive notions of social justice; or to secular historians seeking an objective and balanced view of Christian history. But these are not Bass's intended audience. A Peoples History sets out to provide and approachable an inspiring introduction to the history of generative Christianity for progressive and moderate Christians who have lost touch with their history and traditions. In this, it succeeds.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not what I wanted to read. By J. A. Donaghy Perhaps because I was hoping for a history like Howard Zinn's or Eduardo Galeano's. I was disappointed with this book. I was hoping to read stories of the underside of Christianity - or, better, to read Christianity from the side of the poor, of the underdog, of the marginalized. There are places where the author rises to the task, but I found the work plodding. The examples from her contemporary experience were, to be kind, distracting - except for a very few. I think this could better be called a "liberal's" history of Christianity, whereas I was looking for a radical history of Christianity where stories of Jan Hus, the Beguines, Mother Mary McCauley, and Dorothy Day would be treated in some depth. We need a radical people's history of Christianity. Maybe Robert Ellsberg's ALL SAINTS is a good starting point (though he does put his "saints" in a chronological order). A people's history should be about the people. I sometimes thought this was more a middle class people's history.

33 of 34 people found the following review helpful. Five stars if you get a bargain price. Very good read. By B. Marold Bass, Diana Butler, A People's History of Christianity, The Other Side of the Story (New York, HarperCollins, 2009) I would recommend this book to anyone who has never read any book on the history of Christianity. But be warned. This book is not a 'complete', or even a scholarly study of its subject. You may wish to graduate to a more conventional history after taking three or four evenings to finish this. It is patterned after Howard Zinn's essay, A People's History of the United States, which tells history from the viewpoint of social activism. However, while Zinn's book exceeds 760 pages to cover 400 years, Ms. Bass gives us 352 pages to cover 2000 years. Ms. Bass wishes to tell the story 'from the ground up', stressing those things which the average lay Christian, with eyes blurred by 'spiritual amnesia' may have no knowledge. Her example of 'spiritual amnesia' is the undergraduate's asking what the Protestants thought of the Crusades in 1095 CE. Her main target is what she calls 'Big C Christianity, whose highlights are Christ, Constantine, Christendom, Calvin, and Christian America, which 'then became the most important Christian nation in the world, a beacon of faith and democracy.' In spite of the fact that Ms. Bass is a card carrying member of the highly educated Christian scholarly fraternity, she does claim the imprimatur of what is known in Catholic theology as *sensus fidelium*, the wisdom or understanding of the individual believer within the community of the faithful. The book does not deal with orthodoxy, doctrines, dogmas, or theologies, but on those moments 'when Christian people really acted like Christians', even when, from our point of view, these people acted in ways which are simply un-Christian, as when John Chrysostom writes things which are deeply offensive to the Jews. Since our own actions will be similarly judged by our great grand children, Jesus' teaching to "judge not, lest you be judged". History, like Paul's law, offers lessons in how we can do better. Thus, an objective of the book is to help teach humility and discard the arrogant 'Big C' history of Christianity. Another limit to the narrative is that it deals exclusively with 'western' Christianity, giving no attention to the Orthodox churches. In order to address our 'amnesia', the book is certainly a decent chronology of the high points of Christian history, even if some important actors, such as Athanasius and Sren Kierkegaard are left out. But these are theologians, and this book is only very tangentially about theology. It is as if one were flying above the clouds, over

the Himalayas, and only the peaks of those 22 mountains which are taller than any other mountain range in the world, peeked up above the clouds, except that the seven or eight peaks which represent Eastern Orthodox confessions are fogged in and invisible to us. Since the story begins in 100 CE, it also seems as if our airport, including the Gospels, St. Paul, and the rest of the New Testament are also fogged in, temporarily. I am also surprised that the book does not mention today's great theological buzzword, 'post-modernism'. This may be more regrettable than it sounds, as one of Ms. Bass' believes one of the most important aspects of Christianity is hope in the future. If one is distressed about the lost influence of the church, the thought of going backward to ways of thinking which ruled in the age of glory (1945--1964) for American churches is simply not the answer. Nostalgia buys you nothing in the future. In a sense, this is a history of people who believed in Christianity, and what they did, rather than a history of beliefs. This is entirely appropriate, as one of the more important contemporary movements in Christian thought is that it is not what we believe, but what we do that is most important. This means an emphasis on 'Great Commandment' theology of working through love of others. Most chapters include an anecdote of experiences by the author or one of her friends, to help associate the musty events of the past with modern experience. The book is entertaining. For that reason, it is a book you will read rather than leave on the shelf to impress visitors with its title on the spine on your bookshelf. It has many odd observations, such as the fact that the early cathedrals had no chairs at all. This is offered as an antidote to those who insist on having pews in a new church, because 'we always had pews, because they are uncomfortable'. A more serious story connects Mother Theresa and Emily Dickenson, who were both filled with doubt, revealing that 'doubt is the primary language of God'. I believe that any book which either confirms a hunch you had, or offers a whole new avenue of thought, is worth the time it takes to read it. At the risk of contradicting the statement I made about the past, my most delightful find was the explanation of one reason why the early church was so successful in the years between Paul's missions and the 'nationalization' of Christianity by Constantine in 313 CE. This is the fact that Christians were willing to care for the sick when most non-Christians barred their doors to others when epidemics flowed through the cities of the Roman world (see the NT reading for Wednesday). Ms. Bass does not point out that there were other reasons for the early success, but this strengthens the picture that Christianity succeeded due to filling some notable 'holes' in the Greco-Roman Weltanschauung. It would seem that success in the future would be to bring hope and comfort to those still outside the great umbrella of the modern state. A metaphor from Ms. Bass regarding the Christian history is of a stream flowing among many rocks, which split the water into separate rivulets, each going in their own course, in spite of a common source. But one trend in history is to see the water rise, covering the rocks, to form a single course, moving forward unimpaired. The folly of looking backward applies to 'what worked' and what didn't work 50 or 500 or 2000 years ago. It does not apply to the world of ideas. In spite of our post-modern glitterati, we are still wrestling with 2400 year old ideas from Plato and even older ideas from the Bhagavad Gita, which was quoted at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions by Swami Vivekananda. This reflects an aim to have our waters rise high enough to join all faiths together.

The Grassroots Movements That Preserved Jesus's Message of Social Justice for 2,000 Years and Their Impact on the Church Today For too long, the history of Christianity has been told as the triumph of orthodox doctrine imposed through power. Now, historian Diana Butler Bass sheds new light on the surprising ways that many Christians have refused to conform to a rigid church hierarchy and sought to recapture the radical implications of Jesus's life and message.

From Publishers Weekly In this panoramic view of two millennia of Christian history, Butler Bass (Christianity for the Rest of Us) attempts to give contemporary progressive (the author prefers the term "generative") Christians a sense of their family history, refracted through little known as well as famous men and women whose work within and outside the institutional church fueled sometimes "alternative" practices as they tried to follow Jesus the Prophet. "Without a sense of history, progressive Christianity remains unmoored," argues Butler Bass, a former columnist for the New York Times syndicate. Organized chronologically, each section of the book includes a chapter on religious observance and one on social justice, illuminating the author's conviction that authentic Christianity can be discovered in the practice of loving God and neighbor. Laced with stories from the author's own life and with contemporary examples of "generative Christianity," Butler Bass's version of Christian history includes familiar figures like the fourth-century church father Gregory of Nyssa and lesser-known individuals like the 19th century American abolitionist Maria Stewart. Is this truly "the other side of the story," as the subtitle proclaims? It's definitely a start. (Mar.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Bass borrows Howard Zinn's perennial concept of history from the perspective of ordinary people to tell the story of Christianity by focusing not on institutions but on tales told down through the ages by the constituents of what she calls generative Christianity, who sought to live the Christian life by doing right in the eyes of God, as well as on those who rebelled against the church when they felt it necessary; that is, when the church became too rich or too comfortable with the wielding of power. Still, besides ordinary folks, she includes well-known authors, pastors, and theologians (e.g., Origen, John Calvin, Henri Nouwen). It's a messy story, incorporating plenty of personal anecdotes en route from the early

Christians (100500) through medieval (5001450) and Reformation (14501650) Christianity to modern (16501950) and contemporary Christianity (1945the present). Clearly, Bass intends this to be the alternative history of a complicated topic and an important contribution to the historiography of Christianity. --June Sawyers It would be difficult to imagine anyone reading thi book without finding some new insight or inspiration, some new and unexpected testimony to the astonishing breadth of Christianity through the centuries. (Philip Jenkins, author of *The Lost History of Christianity*)...immediately accessible, helped along by frequent and shrewd linkages to contemporary counterpoints. This presentation includes lots of folk along the way who never made the power lists. Readers will resonate with this inclusiveness and be grateful to Bass for making them fellow travelers in the on-going story. (Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary)Charmingly written and refreshing to read, yet rich in details and thorough in its mapping of the major themes and events that have shaped the evolution of the Western Church, *A Peoples History* is our story re-told with both clear-eyed affection and a scholars acumen. (Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Great Emergence*)In this beautifully written history, Diana Butler Bass reveals the living, beating heart of love at the core of Christian faith. (Sara Miles, author of *Take This Bread*)Butler Bass invites us into a deep conversation with the past which thrusts us into the future with hope. A must for Christians and seekers of all stripes... (Alan Jones, former dean of Grace Cathedral and author of *Reimagining Christianity*)Diana Butler Bass presents a wide diversity of Christian experience in her gallop through two thousand years of history. The curious but hesitant reader who wonders whether Christianity just might have something in it for them will find that the answer is YES. (Daniel Walker Howe, Pulitzer-Prize-winning author of *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America*)The prose is sparkling and the insights are manifold. (E. Brooks Holifield, Charles Howard Candler Professor, Emory University)An excellent introduction to grass-roots renewal movements as well as to the various shapes that Christian spirituality has taken through the ages. ...necessary reading for any who may have thought that history is irrelevant for present-day living. (Justo L. Gonzalez, author of *The Story of Christianity*)Intelligent and sassy, honest and redemptive. ...a warning that if we dont remember the blood-stained pages of the past, then we are doomed to repeat them., but also an invitation to participate in the next chapter of what it means to be the Church in this broken world. (Shane Claiborne, author of *The Irresistible Revolution*)...this book is so much more than a wonderful overview of Christian history. It is also a joyful apologetic for a new kind of Christianity. I already gave away my copy, because I knew it would help salvage the faltering faith of a disillusioned friend. (Brian McLaren, author of *Everything Must Change* and *A New Kind of Christian*)Interesting, insightful, illuminating, and remarkably relevant. (Marcus Borg, author of *The Heart of Christianity*)...a compelling refresher course in our common religious heritage. Bass reacquaints the reader to 2000 years of Christian voices whose faith called for social justice and radical love. By rendering their wisdom accessible, the author encourages the reader to a devotional and ethical renewal that is exhilarating and challenging. (Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, Ed. *Christianity and the Social Crisis for the 21st Century*)With her customary lucidity and charm, this time in the mode of Howard Zinns historical populism, Diana Butler Bass gives us this splendid account of the grassroots movements that have kept alive the spirit and way of Jesus for 2,000 years . . . enjoyable and illuminating. (Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics, Union Theological Seminary Professor of Religion, Columbia University)A Peoples History of Christianity is just that-a peoples history, describing the diversity of Christian thinking, ethics and practices over the centuries, and so important to the renewal of religious imagination today. (Wade Clark Roof, University of California at Santa Barbara)Bass presents here a fresh version of church history...a crucial book for churches today... (Sojourners)In a refreshing look at 2,000 years of Christian history from the bottom up, Butler Bass offers unique insights into the spirit has stirred the hearts and minds of faithful people over the centuries and brought renewal to Christianity during periods of upheaval and distress. (Christian Science Monitor)[T]he writing here is deeply personal and airily structured. What emerges is a persuasive argument that the real traditions of the church are faith, hope, and love entwined. (Washington Post)For spiritual seekerswhether inside the church or notand for believers who feel disconnected from their roots, she points the way toward important spiritual resources that have the potential to transform lives, churches and the world as a whole if people are willing to reencounter the riches of the Christian tradition. (Christian Century)