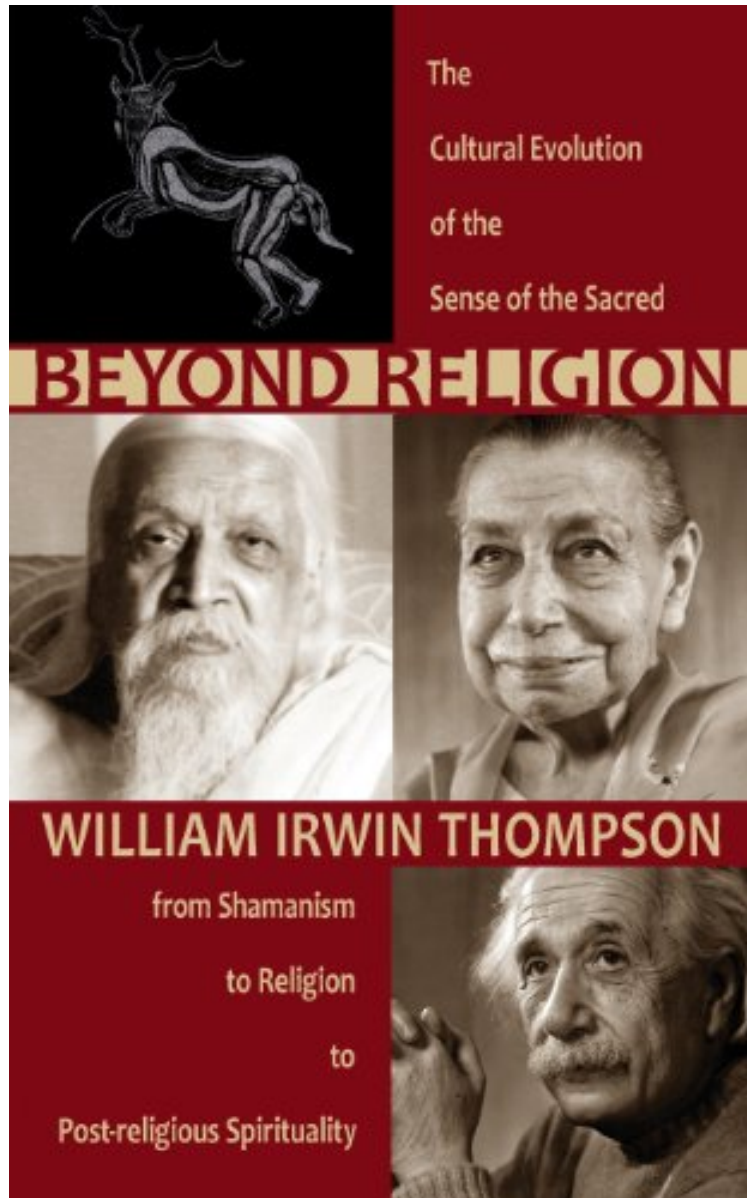


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Beyond Religion: The Cultural Evolution of the Sense of the Sacred, from Shamanism to Religion to Post-religious Spirituality

William Irwin Thompson

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Shamanism to Religion to Post-religious Spirituality:

31 of 31 people found the following review helpful. Important Meditations on Religion and Mysticism in 21st Century
By Jeremy D Johnson
I've just finished this book, Thompson's latest work, yesterday while sitting at a breakfast shop. It's good to see his writings in print again, as this book like his earlier works takes the reader on a "mind jazz" experience. Though certainly shorter than previous works, it is by no means lacking. If anything, Thompson's brevity distills and enfolds his insights so that, sometimes, you have to go back and read the sentences to unpack what they have to say - not like a philosophy book, but like a poem. This particular work couldn't be more timely. In a world wracked by religious extremism and political meltdown, Thompson offers decades of research into human culture, spirituality, mysticism, consciousness and the soul. He is unique in this regard for having been involved as a counter-cultural leader since the 1960's, and founder of the Lindisfarne Association, a former intentional community turned fellowship of scientists, mystics, economists and poets. Throughout all of Thompson's work, and this book included, he elucidates a trajectory of human cultural evolution, and argues that if we are to survive, we must enact what he calls a "planetary culture." What's unique about this book's thesis is that Thompson advocates a radically anarchic and decentralized vision of human spirituality for the future. From guru to fellowship, or nation to emanation, Thompson sees the future of spirituality as one guided by the inner teacher, the Higher Self, Daimon, or Sri Aurobindo's "Psychic Being." No outward authorities will do, and indeed, as we see religious authorities imploding on themselves, literalizing their teachings, and turning towards violence and sexual scandal, Thompson's understanding of the evolution of religion hits the mark. Like the cultural philosopher Jean Gebser suggests, when a new relationship to the world - a structure of consciousness - becomes efficient, the older structures become deficient. Parodies, demonic caricatures of themselves. As religion enters this phase, many of us are seeking a new way to embrace spirituality without sliding back into these now troublesome mindscapes. I believe Thompson's articulation of this *new* form of spirituality has a strength in its emphasis on fellowship *through* individuation. Fellowship is an important word here, as it implies a relationship without hierarchy. In the spirit of collaboration. Perhaps it couldn't be more timely as we enter an age of digital networks, collaborative projects and heightened transparency, that our spirituality would begin to encourage this as well. Thompson gives us three examples: Paramahansa Yogananda, who threw out the Guru model and embraced a spiritual fellowship, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who were esoteric partners calling for an evolution of consciousness and the 'descent' of the supramental, and Albert Einstein, a scientist who nevertheless had a deep sense of spirituality and did not adhere to a guru principle. Einstein worked alone, as a peer and fellow contemplative of our mysterious cosmos. There's much more in this book, but I'll save it for the reader. If there's one thing I would have liked to have seen, it would be more examples of 'post-religious spirituality' - more fellowships, or even Thompson's own experience of fellowship with the Lindisfarne Associations: Lynn Margulis, James Lovelock, Francisco Varela, Spangler and many others who were involved there and certainly demonstrated what Thompson is calling a 'planetary culture' and a post-religious spiritual discussion. There seems to be a wave of material coming out recently from many different angles on world religions. Amir Nasr's *My Isl@m*, *The Coming Interspiritual Age* by Kurt Johnson, and *Gabriel Roberts Born Again to Rebirth*. I think we're beginning to see exactly what Thompson is articulating here, as authors come forward with their own unique confrontations and developments throughout a diverse, religious world, offering new kinds of spirituality that are no longer singularly bound to tradition, but embrace an eclectic and planetary-oriented style of fellowship in the mystery. *Beyond Religion* is a must-read for those curious seekers and readers of the Way. It's a wild ride through Thompson's brilliant and esoterically imaginative scholarship. Do check it out!
10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Bravo
By Michael Garfield
William Irwin Thompson is one of the most important authors alive - a visionary that not only lived through, but had a personal hand in, organizing the trans-disciplinary discourses that have shaped our world today. And yet most people don't even know who he is. Do yourself a favor and buy this man's book; get acquainted with a profound source of insight and wisdom whose eagle-eye view of the interwoven crises of our age points us all toward a whole and healthy engagement of the human condition.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I will read all books by William Irwin Thompson. ...
By Barbara NI will read all books by William Irwin Thompson. He is a guiding light that enriches our already held views and takes us to places of new understanding.

In an age of religious fundamentalist violence around the world, it is heartening to read poet and cultural historian William Irwin Thompson's contention that a new form of post-religious spirituality is emerging in our planetary civilization, one that is more appropriate to our new electronic and globally interconnected noetic polities. This little book is a *Vade Mecum* of the cultural evolutionary news to keep in one's pocket to read along with the days emotionally manipulative political news. Thompson shows us that, like a dying star in supernova, the explosion of religious violence is a sign of medieval religions' death and not their rebirth. The brilliant thirteenth-century Renaissance that gave us the Gothic Cathedrals and the *Convivencia* of Christian, Jews, and Muslims in southern Spain was followed by the Black Death and the Inquisition, but the Italian Renaissance still took off in fifteenth-century Florence, as Giotto was followed by Fra Angelico and the syncretic school of Chartres was followed by

Cosimo di Medicis Florentine Academy. The Big Picture that the poet and cultural historian can provide enables us to participate in the larger processes of cultural transformation at work in our world.

About the Author William Irwin Thompson, Ph.D., was born in Chicago in 1938 and grew up in Los Angeles. A poet and cultural philosopher, received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to study at Cornell in 1962 and a Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellowship to do his doctoral research in Dublin in 1964. He received his doctorate from Cornell in 1966 and published his first book, *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* in 1967. Thompson has taught at Cornell, MIT, and York University in Toronto. His interdisciplinary interests are indicated in that he studied anthropology, philosophy, and literature at Pomona, and literature and cultural history at Cornell. He has served as visiting professor of religion at Syracuse University (1973), visiting professor of Celtic Studies at St. Michael's College, the University of Toronto (1984), visiting professor of political science at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (1985), Rockefeller Scholar at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco (1992-1995), and Lindisfarne Scholar-in-Residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in the autumn of each year from 1992 to 1996. In 1995, he designed an Evolution of Consciousness Curriculum for the Ross School in East Hampton, New York, and still serves as a Founding Mentor. His best known works include *At the Edge of History: Speculations on the Transformation of Culture* (1971); *The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light: Mythology, Sexuality, and the Origins of Culture* (1981); and *Coming Into Being: Artifacts and Texts in the Evolution of Consciousness* (1996). He was a founder and president of the Lindisfarne Association, a group of creative individuals in the arts, sciences, and contemplative practices devoted to the study and realization of a new planetary culture, and the seed for Lindisfarne Books. Dr. Thompson has been a professor at MIT and York University in Toronto, and held visiting positions at Syracuse University, University of Toronto, and University of Hawaii. Joy E. Stocke is founder and Editor in Chief of Wild River and founder of Wild River Publishing. She has published fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and has written about and lectured widely on her travels in Greece and Turkey, as well as on religion, ancient and modern. Her memoir, *Anatolian Days and Nights: A Love Affair with Turkey, Land of Dervishes, Goddesses Saints*, based on more than ten years of travel through Turkey and coauthored with Angie Brenner, was published in March 2012 by Wild River Books.