

## **GOD AND THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE**

Wesley in Cambridge:  
Creative Ministry for Church Renewal in a Changing World

Prof Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D.  
dianabutlerbass@gmail.com

Cambridge University, Wesley House  
April 4-8, 2016

**Updated March 9, 2016** *There are several assignments that need to be prepared before you arrive in Cambridge. Please bring hard copies of these assignments with you as Wesley House does not have a printer you can use once you arrive there.*

\* Assignment that should be prepared and brought with you to Cambridge

\*\* Post class assignment to be posted to Blackboard. This is listed at the end of the syllabus.

### Overview:

This class will introduce students to the overall doctoral ministry “track” themes of creativity, renewal, and a changing world. During this week, we will explore the contours of the world in which we live, its challenges, and what it means for the future of faith. By the end of the course, you will have a clearer understanding of global shifts and the potential role that religion has in making a more just, peaceable world. It is hoped that this will give you context for your D.Min. work, opening a wide perspective on important issues, and fire your imagination for what is possible to do with these concerns in local congregations.

### Readings:

Bass, Diana Butler, *Christianity After Religion*

Bass, Diana Butler, *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On the Care of Our Common Home*

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

Sachs, Jeffrey D., *CommonWealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*

Volf, Miroslav, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*

### Course Evaluation:

Your work consists of reading the assigned books, discussing them in the classroom setting, writing daily response papers, and a final project. Discussion (25%) and daily writing assignments (25%) equal 50% of the grade; the final project equals 50%. Discussion and daily writing assignments will be graded with HP (high pass), P (pass), or NP (no pass). EXCEPTION: The final week paper on your question (see Friday assignment) will receive a letter grade. The final project will also receive a letter grade.

Final project: TBA. The project will relate course themes to your ministry setting, and must address theology and scripture in the mix.

### **Monday April 4: First Things**

Morning:  
Introductions

*Assignment:*

Bring to class the print out of a news story from your home city, region, or nation that you think illustrates the “spirit of the age.” Be prepared to share the story and to discuss why you think it is important in understanding the world in which we now live.

Afternoon:  
The World Today, the Spirit of the Age: Challenges

*\*Assignment: (bring to class)*

1. Read Sachs, Part I, pp. 1-53
2. Write a one page, single spaced paper on this question: Why begin a course called “God and the Spirit of the Age” with a book about economics and global political concerns?

### **Tuesday April 5: Global Challenges** **Focus: *Common Wealth* by Jeffrey Sachs**

Morning:  
Environment, Population, and Poverty: The World in Which We Encounter God

*\*Assignment: (bring to class)*

1. Read Sachs, Parts II-IV (focusing on chapters 3, 7, and 9)
2. Answer the following three questions, each answer should be a single paragraph (1-2 pages total):
  - What is the Anthropocene?
  - What is a population pattern and why does it matter?
  - What is a “development ladder”?

Afternoon:  
Solving Problems, Thinking Theologically

*\*\*Assignment: (post class assignment)*

1. Read Sachs, Part V
2. Choose one of the three areas of economic challenge – environment, demographics, or development – and write a concise sermon (3-4 pages) on *why* this is an important concern for Christians and *what* we might do about it.

### **Wednesday April 6: What Has Faith Got To Do With It?** **Focus: *Flourishing* by Miroslav Volf**

Morning:  
Faith and Globalization

\*Assignment: (bring to class)

1. Read Volf, Part 1, pp. 1-93
2. Write a one-page paper on this question: How does Miroslav Volf understand “religion”?

Afternoon:

A Peaceable and Pleasurable Kingdom?

\*Assignment: (bring to class)

1. Read Volf, Part 2, pp. 206
2. Write a one-page *response* paper to the claim Volf makes in the epilogue: “Attachment to God amplifies and deepens enjoyment of the world.” Does this claim theologically fit with your experience of faith, with the tradition of which you are part?

Evening:

Group dinner

**Thursday April 7: An Awakening?  
Focus: *Christianity After Religion* by Diana Butler Bass**

Morning:

Awakenings, Renewals, and Reformations

\* Assignment: (bring to class)

1. Read Bass, *Christianity After Religion*
2. Think about the ways in which Volf uses the word “religion” and how Bass uses the same word. Are the two authors writing about the same phenomenon or two different realities? Why do you think Bass might be more nervous than Volf in using the word “religion”?
3. Attached is a chart of chapters 4-7 to assist in class discussion. Look over the chart in relation to the narrative in the book.
4. Write a 1-2 response paper to this question: Do you think we are living in a time of spiritual (or religious!) awakening? Be specific and support your answer with insights from any of the books read for the course.

Afternoon:

Free time!

**Friday April 8: Spirituality in the World  
Focus: *Grounded* by Diana Butler Bass, *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis**

Morning:

Nature and Neighbor, the Locus of Earthy Faith

\*Assignment: (bring to class)

1. Read both *Grounded* and *Laudato Si*. Be prepared to discuss the relationship between “nature” and “neighbor” theologically.

Afternoon:

## Spiritual Revolution: Toward Religious Experience

### *Assignment:*

- What has church got to do with it? Be prepared to discuss in class how churches might address, adjust, or adjudicate the changes we have been studying this week.

### Post course Assignment:

Post the following assignments in one document on Blackboard no later than Friday May 20, 2016.

- Read Sachs, Part V; Choose one of the three areas of economic challenge – environment, demographics, or development – and write a concise sermon (3-4 pages) on *why* this is an important concern for Christians and *what* we might do about it.
- Reflect back on the week. What stands out most strongly for you? Something about our global common wealth? The tensions of globalization? The problem of religious intolerance? The relationship between the world and faith? The shift toward spiritual experience? The possibility of awakening? Frame a single question from your reading, class discussion, and your own experience. Write a 4-6 page paper with your question CLEARLY stated at the top of the first page. And then answer your own question! (This paper is intended to serve as a point of reflection for you when you get to the very end of the program.)