

Summary of

The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings

By John Philip Newell ^{1 2}

Big picture

Newell argues that Western Christianity is undergoing collapse and, within that breakdown, a fresh “holy birth” is possible. He frames this rebirth around eight reconnections—earth, compassion, light, journey, spiritual practice, nonviolence, the unconscious, and love—drawing on the Isle of Iona as a symbolic landscape and on wisdom figures across Christian and global traditions. [The Christian Century+2skylightpaths.com+2](#)

How the book is structured

The book unfolds like a pilgrimage around Iona—each stop illuminating one reconnection necessary for a renewed, life-giving Christianity. [The Christian Century](#)

Chapter-by-chapter summary

Introduction

Newell invites readers to “dream together of a reborn Christianity,” locating God’s rebirth not as something imposed from outside but arising from deep within creation and the human heart. He sets the horizon: the church’s walls are crumbling, but the Spirit is stirring a new beginning oriented toward the healing of the earth and the human family. [Turner Publishing+1](#)

1) Reconnecting with the Earth

Thesis: Return to intimacy with the sacredness of the earth.

Key moves: Iona’s open-sky nunnery becomes a “cathedral” of sea and sky. Newell affirms a cosmology where the divine heartbeat pulses at the center of matter, echoing Teilhard de Chardin and Celtic sensibilities of the universe as a “dance.” The chapter reframes spirituality as ecological kinship and reverence. [Barnes & Noble+1](#)

¹ John Philip Newell, *The Rebirthing of God - Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings*, (Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2014).

² Created using ChatGPT asking the question: Create a detailed summary of John Philip Newell's book: *The Rebirthing of God - Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings*. October 2025. ChatGPT included URL's with sources of summary. www.lifesjourney.us

2) Reconnecting with Compassion

Thesis: Compassion is the ground of true relationship.

Key moves: A “revolution of the Spirit” requires the courage to see suffering, to feel it, and to act. Compassion is not sentiment but energy for justice and healing; it names God’s way of being toward the world and becomes the criterion of Christian authenticity. [Barnes & Noble](#)

3) Reconnecting with the Light

Thesis: Honor the divine Light at the heart of all life.

Key moves: Newell retrieves the contemplative tradition that looks for the “light at the center of every cell.” The chapter invites practices of attention that unveil radiance in the ordinary and loosen our grip on false self so the inner light can shine outward. [Barnes & Noble](#)

4) Reconnecting with the Journey

Thesis: Live the Christian path as pilgrimage.

Key moves: The way forward is unfamiliar terrain requiring trust, ego-shedding, and discovering “the other half of our soul”—often through deep encounter with the other (people, places, traditions). Journey language signals movement from static belief to transformative practice. [Barnes & Noble](#)

5) Reconnecting with Spiritual Practice

Thesis: Practice is the basis for transformation.

Key moves: Newell commends a contemplative orientation—prayer, silence, meditation, labyrinth, simple tools—that help us rediscover our “diamond essence” (image of God) and plunge the heart into the world’s pain as seed-force for change. (This chapter is anchored in Iona’s Hermit’s Cell as a sign of solitude-and-community.) [St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church+1](#)

6) Reconnecting with Nonviolence

Thesis: Recover peacemaking as core to the gospel.

Key moves: Drawing on Gandhi and the Beatitudes, Newell urges “love-force, not brute-force,” cultivating response-ability, humility, and active peacemaking—from interpersonal conflict to global reconciliation. Nonviolence is portrayed as rigorous spiritual discipline, not passivity. [Barnes & Noble](#)

7) Reconnecting with the Unconscious

Thesis: Attend to dreams, imagination, and the deep psyche.

Key moves: Inspired by Jung and Celtic stories (e.g., Brigid), Newell invites a marriage of conscious and unconscious as a wellspring of new vision. Dreams and imagination expand discernment beyond rationalism, helping the church re-dream its future. [Barnes & Noble+1](#)

8) Reconnecting with Love

Thesis: Love is both source and goal of rebirth.

Key moves: God is Love; therefore the reborn church says “yes” to the heart of the other, yields the egocentric center, and enacts justice as love’s public face. Love becomes the seed-energy of personal and communal new birth. [Barnes & Noble](#)

Epilogue

Newell closes by calling readers to labor for this new birth—personally, ecclesially, and culturally—by embodying these eight reconnections in daily life and community.

[Barnes & Noble](#)

Core themes & distinctive notes

- **Eight reconnections as a holistic vision:** Earth, compassion, light, journey, practice, nonviolence, unconscious, love—presented as mutually reinforcing facets of renewal rather than isolated topics. [Google Books](#)
- **Pilgrimage frame (Iona):** Using places on Iona as icons, Newell ties inner transformation to physical landscapes and communal memory. [The Christian Century](#)
- **Interspiritual learning:** He reverences wisdom across traditions (e.g., Celtic Christianity, Julian of Norwich, Gandhi, Teilhard, Berry, Aung San Suu Kyi), modeling generous, dialogical faith. [Apple](#)
- **Practice over mere belief:** The rebirth of Christianity, for Newell, is practice-centered—contemplation, compassion, peacemaking—aimed at healing the earth and mending relationships. [skylightpaths.com](#)

Why it matters

Newell offers pastors, communities, and seekers a simple, memorable roadmap for renewal: reconnect with what is most real and life-giving—creation, compassion, inner light, courageous journeying, daily spiritual practice, nonviolence, depth-psyche, and love—and let those reconnections reshape church life and public witness. Even reviewers who question aspects of his analysis affirm the accessibility of this pilgrimage-shaped invitation to deepen inner life and communal practice. [The Christian Century+1](#)

Quick reference: full table of contents (chapter headings & subheads)

- **Ch. 1 Reconnecting with the Earth:** The Cathedral of Earth, Sea, and Sky; The Whole Universe Takes Part in the Dance; At the Heart of Matter Is the Heart of God; A Spirituality of Intimacy with the Natural World.
- **Ch. 2 Reconnecting with Compassion:** A Revolution of the Spirit; The Courage to See; The Courage to Feel; The Courage to Act.
- **Ch. 3 Reconnecting with the Light:** Turn But a Stone and an Angel Moves; The Light at the Center of Every Cell; Be Filled with Light and Shine; Letting Go to the Light.
- **Ch. 4 Reconnecting with the Journey:** Journeying into Unknown Territory; Traveling as Pilgrims; Shedding Our Attachment to the Ego; Finding the Other Half of Our Soul.
- **Ch. 5 Reconnecting with Spiritual Practice:** A Contemplative Orientation; Finding Our Diamond Essence; Plunging Deep into the Heart of the World; Nurturing the Seed-Force for Change.
- **Ch. 6 Reconnecting with Nonviolence:** Response-Ability; Love-Force Not Brute-Force; Love Is the Strongest Yet Humblest Force; Blessed Are the Peacemakers.
- **Ch. 7 Reconnecting with the Unconscious:** Opening to the Well of the Imagination; The Marriage of the Conscious and the Unconscious; The Promise of Union; Dreaming the Way Forward.
- **Ch. 8 Reconnecting with Love:** God Is Love; Saying Yes to the Heart of the Other; Giving Up Our Imaginary Position as the Center; There Is No Distinction between Love and Justice. [Barnes & Noble+1](#)