

Is God still an Englishman? – How we lost our faith (but found new soul)

by Cole Moreton

Little, Brown 2010

Cole Moreton has produced a highly entertaining and engrossing social history of Britain, refracted through the prism of religious faith. His own background as a teenage Christian evangelist and fundamentalist informs much of his writing and enables him to shine a very harsh light on that which he knows best, the Church of England.

Is God still an Englishman? Is divided into three sections – Creation, Fall and Revelations, the first two of which consider the ways in which attitudes to religious institutions and religious faith have changed in England during the twentieth century. This is set against the background change in position towards all aspects of the Establishment – politics, monarchy and Church especially – which has become more dismissive, disrespectful, angry and even contemptuous.

Moreton concludes that conventional religion no longer satisfies or inspires, though that doesn't mean that the English have lost their sense of the numinous, merely that they/we seek new means of reaching out to it and new channels, not least some of the pagan/earth oriented faith groups that have grown exponentially in very recent years. He also considers the Christian evangelical, happy clappy, phenomenon and is unflinching in bringing to light its negative side.

Cole Moreton writes very well, and the reader is immediately engaged with his text; he also has a fine wit and his turns of phrase are often amusing and sometimes very funny indeed. His conclusion is a positive and hopeful one, suggesting that there is a spiritual side to the English, and a yearning for spirituality held by many searching for a place that suits them and a faith that enhances their lives.

My only caveat about this book is that the invective used by Moreton about the Royal Family is harsh and slightly hysterical at times, out of keeping with the tenor of the rest, and could have been modified to very good effect; but overall this is an excellent social survey of the religious state of England and the English, and an important read for all religious professionals.

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