

*The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living.*

By Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. xl + 215 pages. \$25.00 (paper).

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Authors Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko contribute in this book to the growing application of the term “new monasticism” by describing its use among a current generation of “spiritual but not religious” seekers and religious “nones.” In contrast to other traditions of new monasticism—evangelical, mainline Protestant, or Catholic—the authors offer an “interspiritual” foundation and manifesto for a new monasticism. After a lengthy introduction, the book identifies four “movements,” which include the manifesto itself and an unpacking of its meaning and implications. The authors describe new monasticism simply as “a total life commitment to the development and maturation of one’s spiritual life” (xxi), wherein the “very specific” orientation in life of a new monastic “is to live and walk in the presence of God” (xxix). The authors offer a “rallying call for these new types of spiritual life and community, lives that are dedicated to building a sacred world through commitment to one’s spiritual maturity, to the growth of community life, and to living out these values while fully engaged in the world” (xx); theirs is a vision of new monasticism wherein “communities and individuals live spiritual lives independent of celibacy and overarching rules and dogmas—free to follow their own conscience and guidance of the Holy Spirit in living a sacred life, yet united in the common cause of building a sacred world” (xix). The manifesto outlines this life by describing nine elements or vows of this new monasticism: actual moral capacity, solidarity with all living beings, deep nonviolence, humility, spiritual practice, mature self-knowledge, simplicity of life, selfless service and compassionate action, and prophetic voice.

This framework for a new monasticism “as a highly decentralized and yet interconnected way of incarnating unity in diversity” (24) is built around an “interspiritual” spirituality. The authors take the term “interspirituality” from Wayne Teasdale’s book, *The Mystic Heart*, wherein he describes as “the real religion of humankind” and “spirituality itself” an interspirituality that is “the sharing of ultimate experiences across traditions” (25). The authors further expand upon this sharing as a “dialogical dialogue” and “dialogical sophiology,” or wisdom (76–96). The description of interspirituality—and the entire text itself—cites the works of Raimon Panikkar, Teilhard de Chardin, Teasdale, Ewert Cousins, Thomas Keating, and Ken Wilber frequently (often in long block quotes). Readers familiar with these writers’ use of terms such as “global mythos,” “Second Axial Age,” “evolutionary consciousness,” “non-dual realization,” “false-self system,” and “integral spirituality”

may find that this book serves best as a synthesis of the ideas of these writers, packaged within a manifesto for new monastic “spiritual but not religious” seekers. The authors acknowledge three paths for such seekers within a new monasticism: “growing strong roots in one tradition, and from that vantage point branching out to drink deeply of the wisdom of varying traditions” (27); “multiple religious belonging” by “fully embedding oneself in multiple religious traditions” (27); and the authors’ own path, an interspiritual path that seeks to “assimilate many of our spiritual lineages without becoming fully embedded in, or beholden to, the religious frameworks that surround them” (29). The authors caution that such a path requires “the guidance of elders on traditional paths and a high level of integrity and responsibility” (28).

This reviewer thinks of a spirituality as something one practices, and the authors describe their conception of new monastic practices—a variety of daily practices, “formal study,” “shadow work,” “sacred activism,” and spiritual friendship and community—rather briefly (nine pages) within the introduction. After reading the book, the reader may still be left wanting to know more concretely what practices might constitute an interspiritual new monasticism. There is little sustained exploration of practice in this text, unlike other texts of “new monasticism” or traditional monastic texts. Nevertheless, the present book offers insights for a contemplative spirituality that may be profitable for members of intentional and new monastic communities themselves, as well as a manifesto for an emergent spirituality among some “nones.” For scholars of religion and spirituality, the text may best be recommended as an object for critical study rather than as a source of it.

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*Inventing American Religion: Polls, Surveys, and the Tenuous Quest for a Nation's Faith.* By Robert Wuthnow. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 256 pages. \$29.95.

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Polling and survey data are part of the lifeblood of American political sport and ideological ammo on the nation’s culture-war fronts. Politicians of all stripes use polling to their advantage. The media feeds on “polls show” and “the survey says” findings that, in turn, are integrated into news cycles and become mantras of other assessments of American life. Polls and surveys also play a powerful role in constructing, influencing—and distorting—how Americans understand religion.