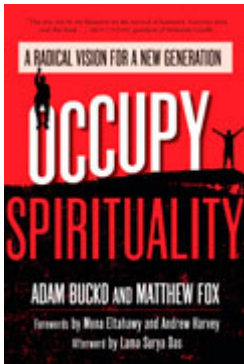


Two generations in a revolutionary dialogue

Michael K. Holleran | Nov. 20, 2013



OCCUPY SPIRITUALITY: A RADICAL VISION FOR A NEW GENERATION

By Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox

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The revolutionary figure is timeless. Of course, revolutionaries are firmly entrenched in their times, and their reforming ideas address specific issues. For Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox, the Occupy movement is just an instance of a revolution that is happening, and must happen, across the board: a dialogue of openness to the genuine needs and insights of the people. Jesus grappled with hardscrabble individuals and struggles throughout the Gospels, and popes in modern times, from Paul VI (*Ecclesiam Suam*) to Francis, have appealed for this sort of engagement.

In *Occupy Spirituality*, Bucko and Fox summon us to this dialogue, mirror it for us and remind us that it must address, above all, the "new generation." As claimed in this book, fully 75 percent of youth between 18 and 29 consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." There is a chapter here on the challenges and necessity of this intergenerational dialogue, and the entire book is a delightful practicing of what it preaches, in the form of a dialogue between Bucko, a 37-year-old activist, and Fox, a 72-year-old theologian. This makes for a rollicking ride, a pointed and energetic exchange in which love and mutual esteem is evident on every page. There is enough polish and elaboration in the presentation to convince the reader that the interplay was not simply caught on the fly, but this never detracts from the freshness and spontaneity of their sharing.

One of the most alluring features of the volume is its two autobiographical chapters, "Adam's Story" and "Matt's Story." These maintain the dialogue format, as both men share the highlights of their vocational search, personal struggle and spiritual exploration. Matt's story will be well-known to some, though I suspect many will be impressed by his descriptions of early contemplative experience, and his deeply affecting relationship with his mentor, Dominican Fr. Marie-Dominique Chenu. Adam's story is moving and inspiring: growing up in communist Poland, where he was enflamed by the example of activist Catholic priests; seeking a spiritual path in India and encountering it in the disenfranchised; founding the Reciprocity Foundation to work in pioneering ways with homeless youth in New York City. Equally riveting are the candid and pithy autobiographical comments from young adults that open each chapter.

Sections on spirituality and vocation vividly bring to the forefront the pivotal role of the quest in which each person discovers his or her unique call to be a mystic and a prophet (to employ Fox's pairing), sent by the God of life to be at the service of life.

Too often, though, as the authors note, these goals are not pursued, and are even opposed. Educational institutions are information factories, but do nothing to instill a deeper sense of life's purpose. Even organizations dedicated to the homeless focus on jobs and housing, but do little to provide inspiration to make life worth living. As for the church, despite the centrality of prophecy and mysticism in the tradition, these themes are often downplayed or ignored. Seminaries seem more liable to turn out defenders of the institution than spiritual leaders with any mystical depth. Moreover, such persons have seldom done the psychological shadow work that the authors rightly note is essential on any authentic spiritual path.

The final chapter speaks of birthing a new economics, new communities and a new monasticism. Solutions are largely seen in local, self-sustaining groups, as opposed to global institutions. One may question the viability of such transformations on the economic level, but many exciting and encouraging examples are given of spiritual, intentional communities in the midst of today's world. This reviewer believes these may represent the very future of monastic and religious life in our time. The book's discussion of what the three religious vows might mean today is splendid.

The conclusion's most startling feature is its texture of amazing quotes from Walt Whitman, who foresaw a central role for America in the planet's spiritual evolution toward a "spiritual democracy." The revolutionary is indeed timeless. Some readers may find themselves having a revolutionary reaction to this provocative book.

Not all will agree that traditional churches are "traveling down a path of death," as Fox suggests. Yet this volume is a heartfelt and potent wake-up call for the churches to re-engage in the radical and revolutionary task that has been theirs from the outset: to produce prophets and mystics for the world. As Jesus, with his risky moral courage, poked at the religious and social institutions of his time, so, too, should his followers in the name of the wild dream we know as the kingdom of God.

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