

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.

MARC LAVALLEE
Barry University

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.

doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.104

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.

Inventing American Religion offers a historical narrative of how the nation's religious behavior came to be measured as yet another American social and cultural project. While there were various late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century efforts at canvassing for religion-related data, it was George Gallup who, in 1935, designed the first national poll about American religion based on innovative scientific sampling methods. A diverse polling industry followed, with Gallup's efforts remaining one of the most important long-term diviners of religion trends.

As a sociologist and one of academe's most prolific scholars of religion, Robert Wuthnow is no stranger to the topic. As Wuthnow tells the story of how American views of religion have been shaped by polls and surveys, his concerns become obvious. These include a standard fare of methodological criticisms relating to questionable poll and survey wording; treating religion as an objectified thing; multiple forms of response bias (time and fatigue factors, question sequencing, etc.); confidence intervals that are no longer meaningful; self-deceptive reporting of beliefs and practices; and bad or inadequate sampling strategies. This latter problem has become especially egregious in the face of plummeting response rates that have led to reported trends based on exceedingly small numbers of actual respondents.

Wuthnow's larger concern here is what gets distorted about our perceptions of religion by way of polling and survey approaches. Both—but especially the former—have often done little more than affirm many of the nation's shared beliefs about its nature and destiny, reflected generalizations pertaining to white middle-class Protestants, or shown religion always to have favorable consequences. Both have also produced factually mistaken assertions. One classically misleading “finding” has been the overestimation of the number of people who actually attend religious services.

Wuthnow also draws attention to the failures of polls and surveys to touch much of the local, personal, and familial nature of religion. Nor have they been reliable measures of the cultural meaning of religious symbolism, or of what actually matters about religion in America's increasingly diverse cultural milieu. The author attributes this latter shortcoming to “inadvertent white norming” surrounding much of what we assume about the topic. Wuthnow also examines some of the tensions between pollsters and survey research by academic scholars of religion who are generally more interested in establishing causal relationships than in reporting information.

Since the 1990s, public confidence in polls and surveys has declined dramatically. Bias, scientific unreliability, and widespread recognition that polls can show nearly anything and be interpreted in multiple ways have produced ever greater skepticism about their merit—in the measure of any social or cultural domain.

Wuthnow's overall take is that while polling and survey information can be helpful in establishing some of the general parameters of religion in American culture, neither is sufficient in itself. Better to scrutinize both, but never rely solely on either. In the context of survey research in particular, ethnographic strategies enhance the possibilities of richer insight.

Inventing American Religion is an important read for social and behavioral science researchers. It is an essential read for scholars and nonscholars alike (especially journalists and religious leaders) concerned with a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the complexities of the American religious landscape. More attention might have been given to why some faith traditions (mainline Protestantism) have been more receptive to polling and surveys—along with social science scrutiny in general—than others (Catholicism). Nevertheless, Wuthnow's study is a solid and engaging exploration of the "invention" of American religion—past and present—by polls and surveys, and the pluses and minuses of each.

WILLIAM D. DINGES

The Catholic University of America

We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics. By Neil J. Young. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xiii + 412 pages. \$34.95.

doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.105

A substantial revision of a doctoral dissertation, *We Gather Together* is an ecumenical genealogy of a powerful, conservative religious coalition that has exercised cultural and political influence over the last five decades of American history. Neil J. Young, a historian and independent scholar, argues that the religious right is not monolithic. Nor was it a political strategy created on the eve of the 1980 presidential election. It was and is a series of morphing alliances between conservative Roman Catholics, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, and Mormons around social issues and political convictions. Young's book is also noteworthy because his historical investigation foregrounds a diverse and intricate network of fragile alliances riven by theological and moral beliefs; he exposes the religious right as constantly pulsing to a rhythm of "internal tensions, denominational divisions, and often competing agendas" (7).

Theology is a key feature of Young's argument. In particular, he reveals through his excellent historical research that in the 1950s and 1960s Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and Mormons were all deeply concerned with the liberal ecumenical movement coming out of mainline