

Falling in Love with Life

A Foreword to Holy Daring

Adam Bucko



It is an honor to write the Foreword to this important book on the spirituality of the Wild Woman of Avila.

I originally came across the author of this book in 1995. I was a young emigré, studying theology, spending my summers at a monastery, and trying to live the ascetical path of emptying and detachment in the urban wilderness of New York City. My understanding of detachment at that point in my life was a bit misguided. I practiced what can more accurately be called disengagement and, as a result, spent years separated from feelings, my self, and ultimately life itself.

One Friday evening I went to a talk offered by a Carmelite hermit. Walking into the venue, I spotted her, dressed in her Carmelite habit. The space was immediately infused with aliveness. In her I could feel a deep prayerfulness that was wild and earthy, completely different from what I was familiar with. She was there not to deny life but to maximize it and turn into something worth living.

Her name was Tessa Bielecki, and that night she talked about St. Teresa of Avila. It became immediately clear that St. Teresa is among Tessa's best friends and an intimate companion. That evening Tessa said something that completely changed my path and my life. She said that "falling in love with life is the first step on the mystical path." I remember hearing those words and feeling confused. My ascetical discipline had not led to a love of life. In fact, I wasn't even really alive.

Self-Spending Service

It took me many years to unpack exactly what Tessa meant. Her work took me from a desire to find God in the silence of the Himalayas to finding God in the broken bodies of children living on the streets of New York City. Ultimately, that statement called me from a detached and disengaged state back into life: life that calls us to demanding and "generous, self-spending service," life that asks us to be who we were born to be and offer that in service of God's dream of compassion, non-violence and justice.

The book that you hold in your hands is truly extraordinary. The woman who wrote it is the best guide I know to the beauty and wildness that is the earthy and mystical St. Teresa of Avila. After living 50 years as a hermit monk, building monasteries in three different countries, and, not unlike St. Teresa, developing a new format for a more feminine form of monasticism, Tessa continues to speak to us from her desert hermitage where she now lives as a lay hermit, sharing the gift of her life-long friendship with St. Teresa with all of us.

At a time when patriarchal models of unhealthy disengaged spirituality are failing to equip us with tools for life in a world dominated by ecological and economic injustice, this book does just that. It will help us all discover our true aliveness in God and offer it in service of a world awaiting our caring response.

May the words of this book become your prayer. May you pause often while reading it and delight in the gift being shared with you. May you develop a new friendship with St. Teresa and be changed by it. May you begin to live with holy audacity and holy daring!

Adam Bucko is an activist, spiritual director to many of New York City's homeless youth, and co-author of the award-winning Occupy Spirituality: A Radical Vision for a New Generation and The New Monasticism. The photo with Tessa Bielecki was taken in August 2015 near Seattle.