



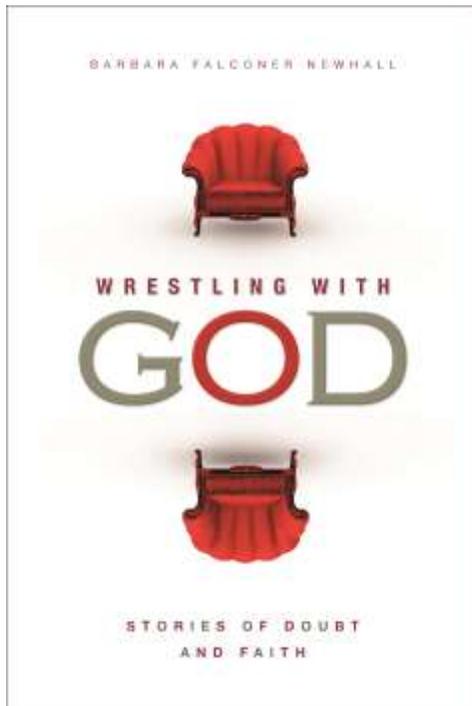
KAREN CAMPBELL
M E D I A

Journalist Barbara Falconer Newhall Talks with Americans about Their Doubt and Faith

Newhall takes her personal search for a way to believe to people of many faiths and temperaments. Her book, Wrestling with God, retells their intimate stories and explores how we grapple with tragedy and make sense of our lives

**“Any seeker of any faith will be blessed to read the words of this fine author and observer.” –
*Publishers Weekly, Starred Review***

San Francisco, CA, February 4, 2015—Veteran journalist Barbara Falconer Newhall has covered religion for years, but despite feeling God’s presence as a child, she was never secure in her religious beliefs as an adult. In *Wrestling with God: Stories of Doubt and Faith* (Patheos Press, Winter 2015), Newhall goes on a quest for a way to believe in God in the twenty-first century,



interviewing more than 50 religious believers of various stripes and traditions. “With any luck at all, their answers would open up a window on the God who’d gone missing from my life—for me, for my skeptical friends and newspaper colleagues, as well as for believers everywhere struggling to hang on to their faith in a globalized, secularized, multi-cultural, twenty-first-century world that privileges the scientific method.”

With a foreword written by award-winning journalist Don Lattin, these stories form a fascinating record of the ways in which people seek to make sense of their lives, relinquish their egos, and grapple with tragedy. Inspired by Newhall’s time as a religion reporter for the *Contra Costa Times* in the San Francisco Bay Area, the book reflects the diversity of the American religious landscape: it includes perspectives on Native American spirituality from a Californian whose mother was Northern Miwok, a disaffected Catholic from Wisconsin who makes a 650-

mile Buddhist bowing pilgrimage, a fundamentalist evangelical Christian who gives up his wild lifestyle, a Mormon who witnesses to a nurse from his Philadelphia hospital bed, and a Shamanic Witch in the throes of grief. Also included are a Nobel Prize-winning scientist who



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gives reasons for his faith in God, as well as an atheist software engineer who chooses *not* to believe.

The book's sixteen first-person narratives based on recorded interviews allow space for readers to draw conclusions about how each individual story might personally apply to them, and whether there are larger patterns to be found in this tapestry of true stories.

Newhall's own "rocky spiritual journey," as she calls it, is the thread that holds *Wrestling with God* together. Newhall notes that she wasn't struck by any "thunderbolts from God" during the writing of the book. And yet "slowly, over time, my conversations with the people who tell their stories here convinced me that we live in a miraculous world—that *something is going on*," writes Newhall, who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and attends an Episcopal church where her doubts and questions are welcomed.



Barbara Falconer Newhall has been a staff writer on *Good Housekeeping*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Oakland Tribune* and the *Contra Costa Times*. Currently, she blogs for the *Huffington Post* and posts weekly essays at her website, www.wrestlingwithgodbook.com.
[Twitter](#) @BarbaraFNewhall
[Facebook](#) Barbara Falconer Newhall Writer

Wrestling with God: Stories of Doubt and Faith

By Barbara Falconer Newhall

Paperback and e-Book

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About Patheos Press

Patheos Press is a publisher of multifaith resources, including printed books, eBooks, faith tradition resources, and devotional material. Patheos Press offices are located in Denver, CO. For additional information, please visit www.patheos.com.



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Suggested Interview Questions for Barbara Falconer Newhall

- 1) Of all the things you could've written about, why did you choose to explore this topic? Was it out of intellectual curiosity, or more a personal desire for revelation?
- 2) There's an interesting point in the book where you quote Huston Smith, author of the bestselling book *The World's Religions*, as saying that it is a mistake to try and sample something from different religious systems, a la carte, because each revelation is complete in and of itself. What do you make of this idea?
- 3) Put another way, an Islamic scholar you quote, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, says, "Religious divergence is itself the will of heaven." In your opinion, is it less a question of discovering the "truth," and more a question of fully entering into a particular tradition?
- 4) Why have you chosen to be part of an Episcopal church in California, and how has being a part of the Christian tradition shaped your life and thinking?
- 5) Do you believe in God?
- 6) Most of the book is told in the words of the interview subjects. Was it an intentional choice not to overwhelm the book with your personal spiritual journey?
- 7) Can you talk about "spiritual temperaments" and the role this plays in people's religious experiences?
- 8) Talk about your process in creating the narratives. How did you conduct the interviews? How did you create the finished stories? Any tips for people who would like to conduct oral histories with family members?
- 9) Have you changed how you practice or think about faith as a result of this book? How did you evolve in the process of writing this book? What did you learn? Did you ever find the lost God of your Christian upbringing?
- 10) Would you recount some of the stories in the book that you personally find most moving or challenging and describe what you learned from them? Do you have favorites?

To schedule an interview with Barbara Falconer Newhall, please contact Karen Campbell at 616-309-4390 or karen@karencampbellmedia.com



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Endorsements for *Wrestling with God*

In *Wrestling with God*, Barbara Falconer Newhall, a longtime religion reporter, combines the best of gracefully practiced and written journalism with the best of a personal spiritual quest. With a persistent seeker's humbleness, she asks good questions of thoughtful people from an astonishing range of backgrounds. —**Kay Campbell, *The Huntsville Times***

The search for God, or the gods, the Divine, the Great Spirit, is one of the oldest of quests. As timeless as it is, the search still tends to defy explanation. What is left is description, narrative, and story, all of which are in abundance in Barbara Falconer Newhall's riverflow of a book, *Wrestling with God*. Seekers of all persuasions will feel represented here, from priests, ministers, and rabbis to engineers, physicists, and avowed non-believers. Taken together, the storytellers of *Wrestling with God* give voice to the reality of the modern world, which is multiphonic, skeptical, but also longing for deep meaning. —**Phil Cousineau, author of *The Art of Pilgrimage* and host of *Global Spirit*, seen nationally on PBS and Link TV**

Wrestling with God is about revelation, with or without that thing we call "religion." Unlike many skeptics who've plowed these fields, Barbara Falconer Newhall approaches the big questions with an open mind and a commitment to truly listen to what her sources are saying. In the end, she finds God—not with thunderbolts or burning bushes—but through the heartfelt stories of people possessing a wondrous array of spiritual temperament. —**Don Lattin, journalist and author of *Distilled Spirits* and *The Harvard Psychedelic Club***

In a score of in-depth interviews with people from all walks of life—right and left, atheist and Christian, young and old—journalist Barbara Falconer Newhall incisively shows where these individuals find ultimate meaning. Some have had dramatic encounters with God while others discover the transcendent in personal relationships or the beauty of the earth. All, however, give thoughtful voice to the deepest questions of human life. —**Jana Riess, author of *Flunking Sainthood* and *The Twible***



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Excerpts from *Wrestling with God* by Barbara Falconer Newhall

“...We read Bertrand Russell, who took great pleasure in unleashing his wit upon Christianity and its adherents. Religion is based on fear, he wrote, ‘partly the terror of the unknown and partly . . . the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles.’ We must learn to stand on our own two feet, Russell admonished; we must get along without God. I was unable to stand on my own two feet against Russell, Sartre, and my philosophy professor. I decided that if I was to be taken seriously in academia and in the professional world beyond, if I wanted to think of myself an intellectual, I’d probably have to do without God.”

“...I met with people in restaurants, in offices, at their kitchen tables, on lawn chairs under the open sky. Often the interviews went on for hours. By the time I was done, I’d had heart-to-hearts about God with Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Native Americans, a Witch, and even an atheist or two. To my surprise, I found that most of the people I talked to were facing my same dilemma—the challenge of reconciling the irrefutable findings of science and modernity with a life of the spirit. Like so many Westerners, they faced a stubborn conflict between mind and soul, reason and passion. And their various responses fascinated me...”

“In observing people as a religion reporter and writer, I have noticed over the years that people often tend toward one spiritual temperament or another. Some prefer piety—loving devotion to God. Hindu tradition calls this the *bhakti* path. Others want nothing more than to do and to serve their fellow humans and the world—the *karma* path in the Hindu tradition. Still others are meditators able to retreat from the world for long hours in hopes of apprehending Spirit in a way that is beyond words—the *raja* path. The fourth type of person, the thinker, the intellectual, the theologian, philosopher and rabbi, the individual who is on what some traditions call the *jnana* path, likes to reflect on things. For these people, thunderbolts are not necessary. They like to observe, and arrive at—if not an ecstatic, sensual experience of the numinous—then a calm, sensible, thoughtful posture that, yes, God is here. God’s sanctifying presence is everywhere. That’s me.”

Sister Barbara Hazard: “I prefer silent meditation to verbal prayer now, because I like to think of prayer as the process of opening up to what already exists, which is the presence of God within us. To me God is a presence. God doesn’t have a form. I don’t think of God as Father or Mother. God is present in everyone and everything, and my awareness of that is heightened as I meditate and open up to God. I love the word marinate. To me, meditation is marinating in God.”

The Rev. Elizabeth Chandler Felts: “Under God’s watch, my heart has been hurt...but I won’t walk away from God. I won’t walk away from the table. As a good Congregationalist, I have learned to endure a lot of tension and a lot of uncertainty in a relationship. I’m not afraid of edginess. I have suspended the need to have all my questions answered. There is an inscrutable, unsettling complexity to God, which the contemporary Christian church is ill prepared to interpret to its flock.”