

# BookMarks

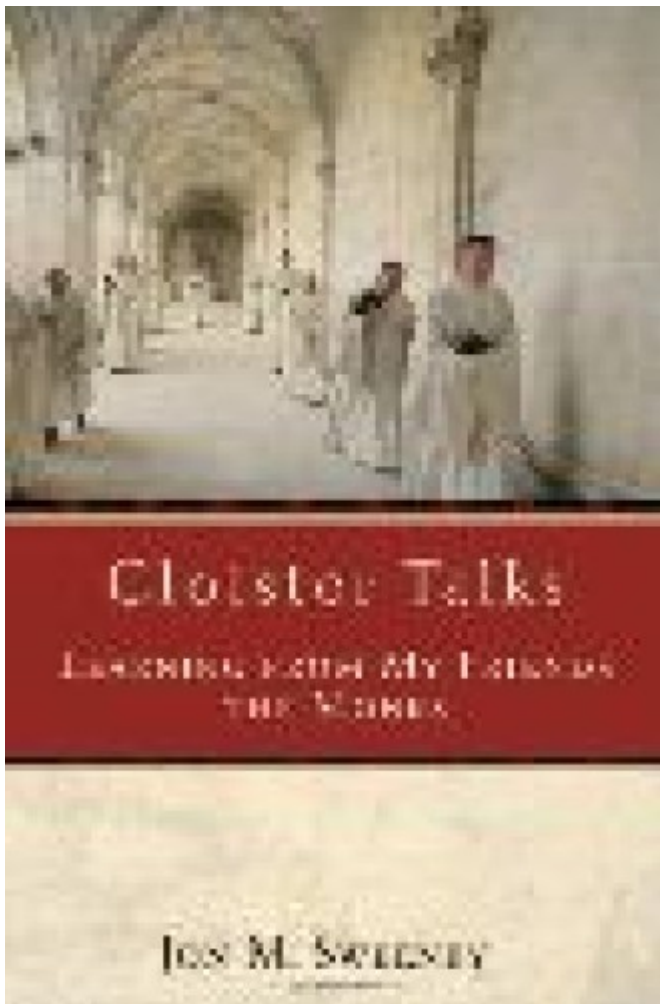
Books in the [March 23, 2010](#) issue

## In Review



### **You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto**

Jaron Lanier  
Knopf



## **Cloister Talks: Learning from My Friends the Monks**

Jon M. Sweeney  
Brazos

Lanier is the computer scientist who coined the term “virtual reality” after being part of “a merry band of idealists” in the 1980s who were thrilled by the possibilities of Web technology. For Lanier the glory of those days has faded. He’s written *You Are Not a Gadget* to protest the very Web 2.0 culture (the mutual communication of people across the Internet in forums, social networks, video blogs, etc.) that he helped create. Lanier calls himself a “digital humanist”; he decries what he sees as a decrease in individual expression in the Web 2.0 culture and worries that creativity in the Websphere has actually decreased. Instead of more individual creative expression, he says, we now have blog sites made from templates. Commenting is done anonymously, which detracts from valuing the individual.

Sweeney wonders whether he made a mistake as a young man; rather than getting married and having children, perhaps he should have become a monk. He was drawn to the monastic life initially as a college student through the writings of Thomas Merton, which led to frequent visits to monasteries in Kentucky, Georgia and Massachusetts. He made friends with some well-known monastics like Basil Pennington and Wayne Teasdale, as well as lesser known ones like Father Luke and Father Ambrose. He picks their brains about the contemplative life in search of ways to incorporate it into his life. He finds that the monks are like the rest of us, with similar distractions and no sudden enlightenment. Yet as Father Ambrose said to Sweeney, "When you finally quiet down enough you'll begin to hear a splinter of the divine voice."