

Book Review:

Brendan Leahy, *Going to God Together*

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Bishop Brendan Leahy's book *Going to God Together* is a spiritual treat for all seekers and pilgrims in the Christian Way. The author speaks incessantly to the heart of whoever intends to join him and embark on this journey towards the transcendent. He proposes the reader to surrender to a mysterious sense of the Absolute that can be seen "in a Buddhist temple and in a mosque; in a Passover celebration and in a Hindu *Diwali* festival" (p.7). Leahy seeks to present "traces of an insatiable thirst" that can be experienced throughout the world. In this sense, the book emerges as a gentle invitation to bow down spiritually before the mystery that surrounds life.

Two things need to be said here. First, for Christians, this mystery has not remained nameless. Leahy develops his reflection by referring to Jesus Christ as the face of God. The journey involves recognising the truth that in Christ, God has been "humanised". Secondly, Christians are called to lead a life in the Spirit to shape their day-to-day relationship with God and with others in a manner that gives meaning and harmony to their lives. A journey should be undertaken together and must not be travelled alone. Leahy finds support in the communitarian spirituality practised by the Focolare movement founded by Chiara Lubich. A journey that could be both beautiful and disastrous, to use Jean Vanier's words, necessitates "going to God together" and "sharing with one another experiences of the Gospel lived" (p.8).

In this book, the Irish renowned theologian presents an opportunity to begin again in faith, in hope and in love. All the eleven chapters succeed to transmit a sense of joy and encouragement to persist in the journey until the true Way is discovered and followed. Each chapter resonates the spirituality of both the

Gospel and that of the Focolare movement, that is, to be in communion with God and with others. The gist of the whole book can already be captured in the different chapter titles: "Putting God in the first place," "Cast everything onto the Father," "The unique plan for each of us," "At the end only love remains," "Keep going ahead," "We go to God together," "The adventure of the Word," "The *why* that answers all our questions," "Where two or three," "Taking Mary into our home," and "Holy Spirit, Friend of the Soul."

Leahy's reflections, short and simple, indicate a sense of an urgency to reach out and move beyond all that is human. Since every journey begins with a first step, the author suggests that what should be done is "to dig deep within us" (p.7) and to know the desires of the Christian heart to be "in the one Being truly worthy of our love" (p.11). One cannot fail to notice which Leahy's preferred sources are. Almost all references are to masters in Christian spirituality or recent popes, with some others references to a few philosophers like Descartes and Martin Heidegger and other inspirational texts or figures like Martin Luther, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Jean Vanier, Chiara Lubich, Chiara Luce Badano and Václav Havel.

It becomes clear that Leahy's soul seeks the light of God to understand and believe. God is other and ever more. He is not simply what the human eye can see. Nonetheless, God is to be found in his Incarnate Son and really present in each neighbour. God is who the Christian longs for. Leahy echoes Charles de Foucauld who addresses God as a Father into whose hands he abandons himself. Inspired by the Hindu mystic text *Bhagavad Gita*, the author insists the "Abba, Father... envelops me with his secret and infinite, loving and merciful presence" (p.21). There must be a "definite service" for which God created us. Leahy speaks of a unique plan which requires a human yes to God's yes (p.31). This is all the art of loving where love "hurts" and justice "costs" (p.41). Drawing on insights of saints and spiritual writers, including John of the Cross, St Ignatius of Loyola and St Therese of Lisieux, Leahy speaks a language of love: "For every human heart is worth God's own heart and God has offered himself up for every human being" (p.50).

Travelling the journey together means therefore to begin anew, to rectify one's intention and to follow a spirituality of communion. This involves the need to be pervaded by the Word of God. It means to let the Word build up and create community. It is "Jesus among us." The author says: "We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong" (p.75). Along the way, the pilgrim quickly realizes that the Holy One is present. There is a one line that surely captures Leahy's experience of God: "I would like to express the awe I sense" (p.94). His becomes another

attempt to seize “the inscape” of the soul with its moments of harmony and times of turbulence.

Mary is presented as a company in the journey. She is described as the artist of life and who totally centred her life on Jesus. She searches for each person in the journey and does not fail to remember those who seek her in prayer. Mary is portrayed as “wisdom pleasing to God [that] is gained ... in the distillation of life’s everyday’s ups and downs” (p.100). In reference to Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and the Irishman Frank Duff, Mary is equally presented as “the mould that shapes us as Christians” (p.101). There is equally another comforter in the journey. Leahy refers to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit as “the friend of the soul.” With Irenaeus, he sees the Holy Spirit as he who “keeps the vessel of faith ever young” (p.106). The Spirit of love is always active and rejuvenating. He helps those on the way do the one thing necessary: to love God.

To conclude, there is no doubt that Leahy’s book shall remain a good reference point to all those who tirelessly seek and long for God in the midst of their hectic everyday life. Through the short and simple reflections, the goal is clear, that is, to desire God and to be in him. *Coming to God together* is then nothing else than discovering ourselves in God’s love, “the one-not-to-be-divided Love: God-love” (p.18). Leahy’s book should appeal to everybody for three simple reasons: it is easy to follow; it touches the soul; it changes one’s heart.

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