

# Book Reviews

## **Dialogue of the Heart: Christian-Muslim Stories of Encounter**

Martin McGee OSB

Veritas Books, Dublin, 2015

ISBN 978-1-84730-599-2 (pbk) 150 pages

£9.99

*Dialogue of the Heart* follows McGee's *Christian Martyrs for a Muslim People* (2008); both books pointing to the example of the priests and sisters assassinated by Islamist terrorists in Algeria in the 1990's. Prompted by the Charlie Hebdo murders and the rise of ISIS, McGee pays attention to the particular stories of the 'Monks of Tibhirine', portrayed in the 2010 film *Des Hommes et Des Dieux (Of Gods and Men)*. Vignettes from their lives, and the broader tale of the Algerian Church, model an ethic of love and service in vulnerable hope, recognising Muslim neighbours as spiritual companions: 'We are people of prayer in the midst of other people of prayer.' (p. 24) The murder of Father Jacques Hamel as he presided at the eucharist by an ISIS-inspired French Muslim in Rouen in August of this year gives added weight to the relevance of their testimonies.

McGee does not attempt a thoroughgoing theological analysis but rather lightly connects stories and excerpts from letters written by various of the brothers to the openings of Vatican II for Christian-Muslim relations, sacramentalism and Christological ethics. Fr Christian, as those who have seen *Of Gods and Men* will know, was the brother who was most determined to explore the theological resonances between the faiths, and his seminal article in *Islamochristiana* is appropriately

signalled. He offers an eschatological vision of an inclusive communion of the saints which provides an opportunity, indeed a duty, 'to show it visibly, like all the other mysteries of the Kingdom ... by loving as of now, gratuitously ... and by living with them the Eucharistic sharing of the everyday'. (p. 57) This is a compelling vision underpinning the faithful, neighbourly witness of the martyred brothers and sisters that comprises the testimonies in *Dialogue of the Heart*.

A useful Appendix includes the 'Testament of Christian de Chergé', a letter that recirculated on social media after the murder of Fr Jacques Hamel, and whose moral authority does not fade. A 'Doctrinal Note on How Christians and Muslims Speak of God' from the French Bishops' Conference in 2008 concludes the book and gives the venturesome and risky ethics that constitute the testimonies of the Algerian martyrs ecclesial weight.

*Dialogue of the Heart* is an accessible book that could be usefully recommended to lay Christians perplexed and troubled by events such as the murder of Fr Jacques Hamel, offering a way forward for Christian-Muslim relations rooted in narratives of hope in the midst of suffering and despair. While the questions posed by extremist violence to the integrity of Islam are left unanswered, arguably the prior task for Christians, as articulated so persuasively by McGee, is to live faithfully and peaceably with our Muslim neighbours.

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## **A Way to God - Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey**

Matthew Fox

New World Library, Novato, California, 2016

ISBN 9781608684205 (pbk) 308 pages

\$18.95

The title of this book is adapted from a letter that Merton wrote to the author, then a Dominican novice, in 1967 in response to his request for advice. Merton's reply included the phrase, 'What people want of us, after all, is the way to God.' In 1993 Fox was expelled from the Dominican Order by Cardinal Ratzinger for teaching Liberation Theology and