

Journey Into God: A Forty Day Retreat with Saint Bonaventure and Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, 2002

Review by Hermann Schalück ofm

A theologian of the middle ages as an inspirator of faith in post-modern times? Spiritually not as a kind of transcendence and esoteric ecstasy but as practiced faith in everyday life thought about? Well, that's it: down to earth mystic. Faith as a journey with endless little steps and many searching attempts, supported by the human original desire to transcend limits and to find traces of the endless God. This is the book's tenor.

"To journey towards God" because God constantly is inkindling this desire. The authors, both members of the franciscan family, unfold a scholastic classical writing for a faithful understanding today. B. who very often seems far away from earth and has brought the intuitive Francis into a theological system - Cirino and Raischl succeed in bringing his "journey" courageously down to earth again. They show that a basic impulse of christian spirituality is to be found in the paradigm of the "journey", even for our days. They offer a book for the practice of following Christ today, a work which is "inductive". They have proved it for many years and invite us now to a forty days retreat.

"To journey towards God" for a modern mysticism means to start from the experience of our everyday, from the contemplation of one's own biography, of growth and of interruptions, of the singing animal to the music of the galaxies, of praise and of pain, of life, of death and of hope dying at the end.

The authors succeed in an excellent way - in an original franciscan view, which lies in a deep grasping of the concrete, in creating connections between the human and all the artistic, being open for the signs along the way. They recall associated themes and address deeper levels. Whatever the pilgrim is looking at or experiencing, it can be almost a sacramental sign and image of something else: a readable symbol for the unseen reality. A hint at the biblical sources, at the deep levels within us or in creation. A trace of God who is source and perfecting aim in all.

I like especially the dialogue and the critical and self critical character of the work. The one who is journeying along life should stay in relationships, should continue to question and be attentively listening to the experience of the others. Cirino and Raischl integrate links not only to the Gospel and to Francis and Clare. Other voices are heard like Teilhard, Erich Fromm and Carl Rogers, Erich Fried and Nelly Sachs, Albert Camus and Hermann Hesse.

This volume is encouraging to follow the footsteps of Christ today. It shows the possibilities of "journeying towards God" without excluding creation, the others, our desire for good human relationships and the poor. The book impressively points out how important for future christians it may be to live a holistic and inclusive spirituality which is discovering in all created things God at work and approaching us. This is a spirituality which is looking out and searching rather than a wellness trip. This spirituality is looking for God today and contributing "for God's sake" to peace and reconciliation among peoples, races and sexes. This spirituality is leading us to life and to a future which can be lived by all.