

Diarmuid O'Murchu. *Beyond the Pandemic: Spiritual and Ecological Challenges*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022. 184 pages. \$25.

"What have we learned from it [Covid-19, S.L.]?" (XIV) This question marks the beginning of O'Murchu's search for a form of spirituality which "is an alternative way of serving both God and our created world" (135).

O'Murchu undertakes this search in three parts. In the first part (chapters 1 to 4), he outlines the originating conditions of his spiritual awakening. According to O'Murchu, the church responded to the effects of the pandemic by taking flight into the otherworldly and the sacred. Just like everyone else, the church was waiting for vaccines and the return of normalcy. People's lives and needs were slipping out of their sight and the church could barely communicate any sense of hope. As a result, it was becoming less and less relevant. O'Murchu makes it clear that a new form of spirituality is needed that can relate religion and life positively to each other. In doing so, he makes a strong case for the need for holistic healing that goes far beyond curing Covid-19, both individually and socially. Spirituality can play an important role in this endeavour if it can positively situate people in their environment.

The second part (chapters 5 to 9) focuses on the reasons for the church's loss of relevance and the way to a "new, earth-centered mysticism" (41). Here O'Murchu first introduces a concept of mysticism going back to Karl Rahner, which has its core in the unity of human being, world, and God. Starting from this concept and with reference to our response to Covid-19, O'Murchu shows that the way we deal with the world is characterized by alienation and exploitation instead of relationality and cooperation. He sees the cause of this problematic situation in the competitive and profit-maximizing behaviour of humans who thereby mentally detach themselves from their environment. For O'Murchu, the roots of this disturbed relationship with the world lie in theoretical precepts that go far back in history. The philosophical teachings of abstract thinking, the dualistic separation of body and mind, and the hierarchization of humans over the rest of creation on the basis of having a soul all lead to the alienation between humans and the world. The great religions take up these teachings and, with the separation of the sacred and the profane, they shift the essential into the beyond. The world then becomes a malleable and exploitable mass. How unsatisfactory these basic (religious) principles are for many people is shown by the high demand for spiritual meaning beyond what the church can offer. O'Murchu therefore wants to oppose the dualistic-hierarchical religious doctrine and to extend Rahner's concept of the mystical by examining the religious features of indigenous cultures. The Great Spirit of these cultures, identified as the Holy Spirit, becomes the centre of religion and spirituality. Humans can think of and experience themselves as part of creation, and spirituality can promote more cooperative and empowering lifestyles.

Part 3 of the book (chapters 10-15) further develops O'Murchu's new spiritual understanding with an eye toward theology and the environment. Theologically, O'Murchu interprets Jesus's miracles as the restitution or re-creation of the individual in relationships and the kin-dom of God correspondingly as the "companionship of empowerment" (111). In the human relationship with the environment, the effects of the new spirituality manifest as "eco-justice." If human beings know themselves as connected to the whole of creation through the Spirit, human problems can be solved cooperatively with nature. Theology and the environment are consequently related through a new understanding of incarnation. God is incarnated not only in Jesus, but through the Holy Spirit in all bodies of the universe. Subsequently, O'Murchu understands worship as perceiving the presence of the Holy Spirit through rituals and sacraments connected to everyday life through meditation and eco-justice. In the concluding summary, O'Murchu makes clear the joint responsibility of religions for

the current state of the world; he identifies the changes needed and summarizes his understanding of an “integrating spirituality” (162).

In close proximity to postcolonial discourse and process theology, O’Murchu offers an alternative, empowering and collaborative way of thinking and living Christian religion and spirituality. It has the potential to transcend denominational and religious borders in the search for a healing relationship between humanity, God, and nature. His identification of the Holy Spirit as a Great Spirit and its central role for spirituality and religion, reveals a dogmatic inventory at the same time, which fundamentally questions the self-understanding of Christian religion. This questioning, however, rests on attentive sociological, psychological, as well as scientific observations. His “New Spiritual Reset” (103) can be read far beyond academic circles as a thoughtful as well as pointed answer to the major problems of our time, even if their consequences for (practical) theology are hardly foreseeable.

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