

CHRISTIAN DE CHERGÉ: A THEOLOGY OF HOPE. By Christian Salenson. Translated from the French by Nada Conic. Trappist, KY: Cistercian, 2012. Pp. xiii + 208. \$19.95.

The 2010 French film *Of Gods and Men* recounts the story of seven Cistercian monks who were abducted in 1996 from their monastery in Algeria and then killed by militants. Christian de Chergé was their abbot.

Although he did not leave extensive writings, Chergé's homilies, retreats, and lectures show that he had wrestled for years with the question of the place of Islam in God's plan. Salenson meditated on these posthumously published works and distilled them into what he calls the abbot's theology of religious encounter—a theology based on the hope of what might be achieved through dialogue.

Chergé's theology solidly grounded in experience—the experience of living in a mountainous region of North Africa, of being French in a former French colony, of being deeply moved by the sincerity and self-sacrifice of Muslim neighbors, of meditating on the Qur'an as well as on the Bible, and of conversations with prayerful and devout non-Christians. Beginning with the premise that the God of Islam and the God of Christianity are one and the same, and starting from a belief in the eschatological unity of all God's children in the divine heart, Chergé anticipates that the mystery of religious diversity will become understood only slowly, as the conversation partners reveal themselves to one another. There is no quick and easy path to an understanding of religious diversity—a goal that can be reached only through openness and receptiveness in a prolonged existential encounter.

Genuine interfaith dialogue leads to conversion, not of the one to the religion of the other, but of both coming to understand the plan of God. Such dialogue can occur in conversations with people of other faiths, and it can also occur through interaction with their sacred writings, such as the Qur'an. *Lectio divina* can be practiced with the Scriptures but also with any text through which God can speak to those who are receptive.

The Christian understanding of Christ as God's Word allows for the possibility that the same Word can speak even to those who do not recognize Jesus as the Christ. No one submits to God's will (the root meaning of *Islam*) without being guided by and filled with the Spirit, and so all children of God are united in the heart of the cosmic Christ (an idea Chergé borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin). Thus it is possible “to receive with good will what the Qur'an can say about Christ” (92). Going further, one can assert that Christ is the only true Muslim, since he alone submitted perfectly to the will of the Father.

Chergé's ecclesiology is at once cosmic and mystical, embracing the whole communion of saints rather than focusing on the institutional church: “The consecrated community is by vocation a sign of communion: of the

communion in the Church, of the communion of the whole people of God dedicated, in Christ, to appearing as an evolving mystery, the mystery of the communion of saints, in which it will disappear as the stream loses itself in the ocean" (100). Faith in God is not commitment to a set of beliefs but an attitude of surrender, praise, and adoration that unites spiritual seekers in the mystery of community.

From this perspective, difference is not an obstacle but a quasi-sacrament that betokens hidden unity. The diversity of creation, of individuals, and of cultures points to a transcendent unity that would not be perceptible were it not for variety. The unity of nature and of humanity springs from the oneness of God, who always creates differentiated unity, not homogeneity or uniformity.

"Difference conceived as an expression of unity, a unity that is greater and other than we can conceive it, opens us to the mystery of God and God's knowledge. It prevents believers from making an idol of their own religious traditions, their own formulas of faith; from constructing for themselves an identity based on opposition; and from an obsessive effort to affirm their uniqueness. Difference as a differentiated expression of unity allows us to let others take their place in the plan of God" (119–20).

Seeking unity through difference allows the eschaton to emerge in the present. What we seek in hope becomes incarnated in the here and now, first by living it, and only later by talking about it.

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PREDESTINATION: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PATHS. By Matthew Levering. New York: Oxford University, 2011. Pp. x + 228. \$110.

For a treatise on the doctrine of predestination, the thesis of this book seems deceptively simple. Levering argues "throughout this book that Scripture presents its theological interpreters with the challenge of holding together two particular affirmations about God's eternal plan" in Christ: (a) that his creative and redemptive love freely for all of his rational creatures is superabundant and perfect from eternity; and (b) that this God permits some of the same rational creatures to be lost ultimately (34–35; 199 n. 54). Key to his argument seems to be a sort of scriptural perspicacity and authority of the twofold affirmation (chapter 1).

The deceptive simplicity of the thesis apparently has less to do with the concision with which L. sketches two and half millennia of the doctrine's complex career; or with the scholarly economy in his self-consciously, though somewhat cryptically, Roman Catholic reading of more than 16 major "theological commentators" (34) from across traditions and time; or with L.'s especial attention to Augustine (44–54), Aquinas (75–83; 188–92; 200),