

## Foreword

IT IS A GREAT honor to write a preface for this groundbreaking reflection on the passion for God in times of unbelief (*paixão por Deus em tempos de descrença*). The theme is not new, but the approach through a novel analysis of culture has yielded unexpected and valuable results. Passion for God is what we encounter in the Psalms, a book that contains the prayers said by Jesus himself. The English nun Mary Ward (1585–1645) displays that very same passion when she utters these well-wrought words:

I think, dear child, the trouble and the long loneliness you hear me speak of is not far from me, which whensoever it is, happy success will follow. . . . The pain is great, but very endurable, because He who lays on the burden also carries it.

Dorothy Day, the American Catholic journalist and founder of a newspaper and social movement called the Catholic Worker, cites the exact same words of Mary Ward as the epigram that introduces her autobiography, also titled *The Long Loneliness*. Dorothy measured her life with passionate words about the spiritual condition of humanity like these. Passionate words for a passionate God describe the life and social engagement of many in an age striving to transcend our disturbingly fluid addiction to consuming without reflection commodified ideas and marketable things.

Dorothy Day is just one of the religious writers invoked in this beautiful text to offer hope in the midst of the crisis. Etty Hillesum, the passionate Jewish diarist of Camp Westerbork (the last stop for the victims of the Shoah before Auschwitz), and Egide von Broeckhoeven SJ, a profound but little-known friend of God who died far too young in a Belgian factory, play equally significant roles. But, in from as director of a research center in Chicago, Dorothy is the witness who captures much that needs to be said about this particular book.

I had the pleasure of hosting the author in the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology (CWCIT) and enjoying her immense capacity for vibrant intellectual exchange during the months when this manuscript was gestating. This sojourn for her away from Rio de Janeiro offered, I hope, a Sabbath from administrative burdens and also a chance for a living immersion into the very topography of Dorothy Day's youth. I am referring to the fact that Dr. Bingemer stayed in a residence next to Lincoln Park. So to reach her office and write this book she walked on Belden Avenue, the street where, as Dorothy recounts in *The Long Loneliness*, she as a teenager took her baby brother for a stroll. The Psalms and the sermons of John Wesley were a part of Dorothy's Anglo-Saxon, Episcopalian childhood. Before joining the Socialist Party in college and later leaving that affiliation for the communion of being a Benedictine oblate and a disciple of Peter Maurin at the Catholic Worker, Dorothy experienced a rather ordinary, middle-class childhood in Lincoln Park. It was for her the domestic calm before the storm of her long loneliness. For Dr. Bingemer, too, the calm of being in Lincoln Park made way for the storm of passion for God that flows through this book.

Dorothy's childhood took place in the tumultuous early decades of the last century. We too live in turbulent times. Dr. Bingemer precociously asks whether theology in these times should focus on texts or on testimonies. St. Paul made this very point in 2 Cor 3:3 when he configured the testimony of his life as a living letter: "and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (NRSV). Abstract formulae do not move, but St. Paul's and Dr. Bingemer's point goes beyond the desire for an emotive bond with figures like Day, Hillesum, and Broeckhoeven who bear witness to the truth. We are called to read lives, including our own, precisely in order to transcend dichotomies between public and private, between sacred and secular. A certain form of postmodernism proclaimed nothing to be outside of the text, but here a life lived in passionate response to a passionate God is rediscovered at the juncture where text, testimony, and ethical responsibility for the human condition are woven delicately into an intimate and theologically powerful bond.

Forging bonds of solidarity and finding concrete ways to live out the vision of *Ecclesia in America* is one way to offer hope in the midst of epochal change. This project brought the spirit of Rio de Janeiro and that of Chicago closer together, while forging new ties between individuals and institutions. My prayer is that this book will find readers within and beyond the north-south route that joins these two cities. Dr. Bingemer is now an internationally recognized theologian whose early passion for journalism lends to this

scientific treatise a uniquely catholic mode of expression. Its passionate and brilliantly intercultural message of hope should not be confined to just academic theologians in Brazil and the United States. This work deserves to find new and unsuspecting readers whose passion for God mirrors that of Dorothy, Ety, and Egide. May the Lord provide safe passage to this message in a bottle as it finds its way to them.

—Peter J. Casarella

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(Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul)

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