

Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues*. Hyde Park: New City Press, 2011. Pp. 200, \$16.95.

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The fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) presents us with a valuable opportunity to celebrate and take stock of the council’s legacy and its continued import for Christian life. Among the many fruits of the council, the emergence of ecclesial movements in the post-conciliar period is certainly worthy of reflection and analysis. To this end, the Irish systematic theologian Brendan Leahy offers a helpful overview of the history, development, and contribution of these dynamic and sometimes controversial movements.

Leahy constructively offers a more general overview of the complex phenomenon of ecclesial movements with the aim of drawing

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the reader’s attention to what he argues is a significant “sign of our times which must be heeded in order to perceive what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (8). These movements and communities, he asserts, have much to offer the church in the present moment. As manifestations of specific Spirit-given charisms, Leahy sees the movements as examples of “new things that God is doing in the world and in the church” (183). Throughout the study, Leahy explores the spiritual, ecclesiological, and pneumatological significance of these movements. He impressively puts into dialogue the experiences of the movements with a diversity of theological voices, including Karl Rahner, James Suenens, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Avery Dulles.

The study is organized into three parts. The first part (chapters 3–7) offers a historical overview of the emergence of the new ecclesial movements from the pre-conciliar period through the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Particularly noteworthy here is his treatment of Vatican II. In chapter four, Leahy takes up the challenging task of summarizing the ecclesiological vision of the council in nine pages. Examining the council through the lenses of mystery, communion, and mission, the book highlights several aspects of the council’s teaching. An adequate understanding of the council and its “theological, canonical, and pastoral perspectives” (35) is necessary in understanding the phenomenon of the ecclesial movements. At the same time, as Leahy asserts here and later in chapter eight, an understanding of the movements, and especially of a spirituality of communion, is important if we are to understand the council and its reception.

The second part of the book (chapters 8–12) lays out five important “keys” for a theological reading of the phenomenon of the movements: conciliar reception, institution-charism, apostolic

succession, evangelization, and the Marian principle. Since each of these chapters could easily constitute its own independent study, a deeper reflection on any of them would require other texts to complement their brief treatment here. Nevertheless, Leahy's framework, especially his treatment of charism, offers building blocks for future theological scholarship. For example, his treatment of the "collective" or "communitarian" sense of charism in chapter nine is an important insight that merits deeper reflection.

The final part (chapters 13–18) addresses more practical challenges for the life of the movements today. These challenges are found both within the movements themselves, and between the movements and other entities in the church. For instance, Leahy addresses the thorny problems of the relationship of the movements to parish structures, the status of priests within the movements, and the challenge of some movements to adequately fit into the provisions of Canon Law.

In comparison to other books that discuss the "new movements," Leahy's work is striking in the way in which it takes into account some of the fair and unfair critiques levied against the ecclesial movements. While he might not offer as robust a response as some readers might want, he is not afraid to address some criticisms directly. In chapter thirteen, he is insistent that like the church as a whole, the movements themselves are always in need of reform. In order to better respond to their own charisms, they must deepen their own sense of self-criticism and humility.

I was particularly struck by how the text in several places affirms the necessity of ecclesial movements to collaborate with others groups, communities, and structures within the church. The movements, he suggests, have both much to offer and much to learn from the so-called "old" institutes (135). Due to the validity of

this point, I was disappointed that little mention was made of the other dynamic lay and religious structures within the church. For example, in the *Directory of International Associations of the Faithful*, not all of the 122 organizations listed, as Leahy suggests, are "new movements" (9). Forty-one of these associations, those once considered as "International Catholic Organizations," are among the largest and most active lay associations in the world. While the book is comprehensive in many respects, a more complete study would take into account the contributions made by other lay associations and religious congregations to the broader context.

*Ecclesial Movements and Communities* is a particularly timely study in light of the church's present concern for the "new evangelization" and the increased attention offered to these movements. Indeed, the preparation document or *Lineamenta* for the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization affirms Leahy's thesis by specifically citing the "generosity of the Holy Spirit in the newness and vitality" of ecclesial movements (15).

As Leahy himself acknowledges, the present moment is particularly decisive for the movements themselves. With the relatively recent loss of many charismatic founding figures such as Chiara Lubich of Focolare, many movements are experiencing an "era of transition" (11) as they struggle to find ways to remain faithful to their founding charisms and distribute leadership within the associations. In their discernment on how to move ahead in the future, the movements will do well to reflect on this study and in particular its perspectives for reform in the third section.

Despite the important impact of these movements, relatively few books or scholarly articles have been published in English that detail the phenomenon of the movements as a whole. As such, the text would make a good and accessible addition to a course on

ecclesiology, ministry, or pneumatology. While, perhaps, not entirely objective given his close proximity to the movements, Brendan Leahy offers a helpful theological and practical tool for those seeking to learn more about the movements and the resources they offer the church today.