

WITH A LETTER of INTRODUCTION by
POPE FRANCIS

JOHN 17

THE HEART OF GOD

EDITED AND WITH A PREFACE by
JOSEPH TOSINI

JOHN 17

THE HEART OF GOD

JOHN 17

THE HEART OF GOD

With a Letter
of Introduction
by
Pope Francis

Edited and with a Preface
by
Joseph Tosini

Published by New City Press
202 Comforter Blvd.,
Hyde Park, NY 12538
www.newcitypress.com

©2018 New City Press

Cover design by Peter Petrov
Book design and layout by Miguel Tejerina

JOHN 17, The Heart of God (paperback)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018943200

ISBN: 978-1-56548-642-3 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-56548-651-5 (e-book)

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	7
Preface	9
Finding My Identity - <i>Joseph Tosini</i>	15
Unity: God's Plan - <i>Mike Herron</i>	21
Charity in All Things - <i>Don Curry</i>	30
Jesus, Our Peace - <i>Gary Kinnaman</i>	38
A New Creation - <i>Bishop Eduardo Nevares</i>	45
Friends in Christ - <i>Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted</i>	55
New Brothers and Sisters - <i>Sharon and Peter Poppleton</i>	57
A Humble and Welcoming Shepherd - <i>Joshua Butler</i>	64
Open to God's Heart - <i>Linda Morris</i>	73
With Jesus' Eyes - <i>Cal and Lisa Jernigan</i>	76
God of Surprises - <i>Bishop Peter Smith</i>	84
Children of One Father - <i>Peter Petrov</i>	89
The Father's Heart - <i>Brian and Gina Kruckenberg</i>	93
God Is Love - <i>Pat Markey</i>	101
Seeds of Love - <i>Michael Rudzena</i>	106
A Change of Heart - <i>Ryan Nunez</i>	110
To Love Is to Serve - <i>Ken Costa</i>	118
Finding Strength - <i>Mark Buckley</i>	125
A Common Hymnal - <i>Matt Maher</i>	135
A New Understanding of Peter - <i>Bishop James Massa</i>	141
Conclusion	151
Authors' Biographies	156
Letters	165

Introduction

Letter to John 17 Gathering held on October 24, 2017 in Phoenix, Arizona



Vatican, October 2, 2017

Dear beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, May grace and peace be yours in abundance!

I rejoice to hear that on October 24 you are gathering together again to worship our one and only Savior and Lord Jesus Christ and to strengthen one another in the path of unity and reconciliation that you have undertaken.

During your visit, here in Rome, I was blessed to listen to you tell of the encouraging developments in your journey, to celebrate Pentecost together, and to observe the degree of brotherly friendship that has come to exist among you.

My prayer is that the testimony of your lives may draw many others to Christ and that your experience of fellowship may inspire an ever-increasing number of Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Catholics to rediscover one another, coming together in a mutually redemptive walk of reconciliation. Our desire is to continue to practice and promote an ecumenism based on the unity of the Spirit. This will increasingly bring all of us to free ourselves from the reservations and prejudices that until now have prevented us from walking together, as has always been the will of the Lord.

May Jesus' prayer, which I know is honored among you, be our guiding star... Against every form of intolerance and sectarianism, may it encourage us to walk together, with mutual love, so that our witness to the world may become more and more credible, visible, and effective. My beloved sisters and brothers, we all need the Lord's blessing. For my part, I bless you and I ask for your blessing upon me as I embrace you with all my heart. Please do not forget, all of you who are taking part in this Meeting for Reconciliation, to pray for me.

May the Lord bless you all. Brotherly greetings in Christ,

Franciscus

Preface

Division is the culture of today. Racial, religious, gender, political, and generational differences can no longer be discussed with civility and respect. Ridicule and disdain are the platforms for debating opposing opinions, and too often hatred resulting in violence is the preferred method of finding a solution. Yet in this book you will find a diverse group of Christian leaders declaring that the world is on an ever-faster journey toward unity. And we are not just declaring it; we are deeply convinced that this is the future.

To hold such a solid conviction when the world increasingly embraces a message of liberation from institutions with archaic ideologies and practices probably seems naïve to some readers. To believe it as Christians when there are thirty-four thousand denominations (and growing) in the world, each professing a different understanding of what it means to be the Body of Christ, seems absurd. In the mind of many, unity is not something to strive for but an evil to avoid. The 2017 New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square climaxed with John Lennon's song "Imagine." Lennon sings of a new order where countries and religions are gone, implying that without them, greed, hunger, and war would vanish and be replaced by true brotherhood. *Unity* would be the result; we could, as the song concludes, "live as one." As nice a sentiment as this may be, this is not the unity that this book and its contributors have in mind.

The contributors to this book, starting with the author of the Foreword, have their eyes wide open and are aware that there are no easy solutions to the divisions growing among us and around us. We take with great seriousness the January 1, 2018, "red alert" message of the Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres. "When I took office

one year ago, I appealed for 2017 to be a year for peace,” he said. “Unfortunately—in fundamental ways, the world has gone in reverse. . . . I urge leaders everywhere to make this New Year’s resolution: Narrow the gaps. Bridge the divides. Rebuild trust by bringing people together around common goals. Unity is the path. Our future depends on it.”¹ Destroying institutions is not the answer, he cries, but instead contributes to our demise.

Division is spreading and unity is direly needed. As Guterres clearly states, it is an imperative for the future. Why are the contributors to this book so convinced that things will turn out for the better, that unity is possible? The answer lies in the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel. It is known as the testament and final prayer of Jesus. In it he prays to the Father that his disciples will be one. The goal of this book is to help crystallize Jesus’ prayer for unity. It is the only solution for the Church’s diminishing effect in a world that is relationally broken at its core. The basis of Jesus’ message is found in his actions that follow this prayer, which are expressions of his love. Those who are part of this book are part of a much larger movement of the Spirit that desires to live out John chapter 17. In fact, that is the name we have given ourselves: the John 17 Movement.

I am certain most would agree that love is not only the answer but also the most powerful force in all creation. Scripture states clearly, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love is the fuel and foundation of true generosity, justice, mercy, forgiveness, genuine faith, and hope. Epistemologically it is the starting and finishing point of all knowing. The most notable civil rights leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously stated, “I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism; but of practical realism. Far from being the pious

1. “New Year’s Message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres: An Alert for the World” December 31, 2017. <https://unama.unmissions.org/new-year%E2%80%99s-message-un-secretary-general-ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-alert-world>.

injunction of a Utopian dreamer, love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization.”²

A close study of John chapter 17, and the entire New Testament, reveals that the outcome of love is unity. It turns out to be the necessary ingredient for the Church to be “the light of the world,” the “salt of the earth,” and “the city on a hill” as Jesus intended.

At this point, the important question is, what does this unity we are speaking about look like? Is it highly subjective, requiring unique insight or superior intelligence? Does it demand certain political allegiances? Is it confined within the boundaries of ethnic identities? Is it limited to those who agree on all points of denominational and religious dogmas?

In Luke’s Gospel an expert in the law asks Jesus a similarly important question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered with a question of his own, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” The expert in the law recited, “You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus’ reply is key to understanding God’s will for all of us. “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5).

The lawyer’s response is (and I’m paraphrasing here), “Hold on a minute, who is my neighbor?” Jesus replies, “I’m glad you asked.” He then tells the now-famous Good Samaritan story of the Jewish man who, while traveling on a deserted road, was robbed, beaten, and left to die. Two religious people who were also Jewish passed by without stopping to give assistance. Then a Samaritan, considered a second-class person, came by and acted with compassion, not considering the sociological division of the culture. He

2. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Advice for Living,” November 1957, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, eds. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, and Kieran Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 306.

physically assisted the wounded man, then took him to a safe place and paid for his care. Jesus then asked the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” The end of this exchange is key to the vision of this book and how its contributors understand John chapter 17. Jesus said, “Go and do likewise” (see Luke 10:29-37).

The pursuit of that expression of love will produce the unity for which Jesus prayed. This kind of unity will result in the satisfaction and rest the human heart is longing for. Augustine of Hippo said it best, “You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.”³ In Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin’s book *To Pray as a Jew*, he argues, “technology may have advanced, cultures may have changed, but human nature and the human condition have remained constant.”⁴ King Solomon, with the gift of wisdom God gave him, said, “He has also set eternity in the human heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NIV). What is that heavenly download all about? Relationship. The deepest joy and sorrow come from our relationships, not our things or accomplishments. There are myriads of examples to prove it, but rather than give some, I would like you to take a moment and ask yourself these questions: *When was the happiest, most satisfying time in my life? When was the saddest?* I suspect both will involve relationships.

The last night of Jesus’ life on earth has one clear overriding theme: God’s love for us and his desire that we love one another *as* he loves us. I like to place two bookends on that last Passover meal: the washing of the disciples’ feet and Jesus’ prayer prior to exiting for Gethsemane.

3. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, OSB, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2001), 14.

4. Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Pray As A Jew: A Guide To The Prayer Book And The Synagogue Service* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 6.