

Leaving the Shore: Experiencing Poetry as Prayer

Reviewed by Greg Richardson

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Colette Lafia is a spiritual director, retreat facilitator and teacher, and poet. Leaving the Shore is her fourth book, and I enjoyed reading two of her previous books, Seeking Surrender: How My Friendship with a Trappist Monk Taught Me to Trust and Embrace Life and The Divine Heart: Seven Ways to Live in God's Love for Presence.

Reading Lafia's books as a group gives us the opportunity to appreciate her spiritual journey and how her insights and questions have brought her to where she is now. Her writing, along with her teaching and retreats, has always given people plenty of kindling to fuel their own contemplation. Her poetry in Leaving the Shore is filled with sparks to ignite personal and small group reflection.

Leaving the Shore is structured into three parts, each of which is full of suggestions for further reflection, journaling, and conversation. The poems in the first section introduce contemplative insights and practices that invite us to continue. One favorite of mine is "Into the Mystery": "It's not my own voice, but it's not another voice, either" (50). Lafia's poetry in this first section draws us in and shows us ways we can listen, reflect, respond, and rest into the inner work that has brought us this far.

The second section of Leaving the Shore is described as a series of triptychs, altarpieces which invite us into correspondence with the Divine. Lafia suggests we practice these three-part reflections as conversations with the Divine, growing from the ways we name the Divine in our own lives.

The third part of Leaving the Shore is an invitation to visio divina sparked by Lafia's experience with sculptures of mourners at the Legion of Honor Museum near her home. Her reflections on the images of the mourners spark our own contemplation, particularly as we

reflect on the loss and mourning we experience in our own lives. “In this solitary practice, we find companionship. In the engagement with poetry, we find connection” (introduction).

Leaving the Shore is a valuable resource for spiritual directors. Lafia’s poetry, insights, and reflections are potentially useful tools as we work with people from a variety of backgrounds and in diverse situations. While Lafia comes from a Christian background, the poetry and reflections in Leaving the Shore are accessible and meaningful to people coming from many different places.

About the reviewer

Greg Richardson is a certified spiritual director in Pasadena, California, USA. He is a mentor and trainer with the Education for Ministry program administered by the University of the South, has served as an assistant district attorney, and is a lay Oblate with New Camaldoli Hermitage near Big Sur, California.

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