

lar fashion, perhaps lay monastics are holding up a mirror to cloistered monastics today.

2. In the past decade or so, there has been a plenitude of books on applying the principles and sensibilities of the Rule of St. Benedict to everyday life outside the monastery. To name just a very few on my shelf or that came up on a topical search ("Rule of Saint Benedict" on Amazon.com): Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (Crossroad Classic, 1992), and *Wisdom Distilled From the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*, 2nd edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001); Hugh Feiss, *Essential Monastic Wisdom: Writings on the Contemplative Life* (HarperSan Francisco, 1999); Father Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2002); David Robinson, *The Family Cloister: Benedictine Wisdom for the Home* (Crossroad, 2000); Laura Swan, *Engaging Benedict: What the Rule Can Teach Us Today* (Christian Classics, 2005); Benet Tvedten, *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job: An Invitation to Oblate Life* (Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2006) and Paul Wilkes, *Beyond the Walls: Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday/Random House, 1999). These are listed to show variety only, not necessarily to imply endorsement.

3. For more information on the Monastic Center at New Melleray Abbey, see www.newmelleray.org, click on "Guests" and then on "The Monastic Center." Other contact information for the Abbey: New Melleray Abbey, 6632 Melleray Circle, Peosta, IA 52068; Phone: 563.588.2319; e-mail: frsteve@newmelleray.org

4. For example, on the International Lay Cistercians website, www.cistercianfamily.org under "Resources," one finds three sections of documents entitled "Documents Related to the O.C.S.O., "Homilies and Presentations from Monks and Nuns," and "Documents from Lay Associates," all of which reflect on lay monasticism in some form or fashion.

Harry Wells

BILLY, Dennis, C.Ss.R. *With Open Heart: Spiritual Direction in the Alphonsian Tradition* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2003). pp. 128. ISBN 0764810901 (paperback). \$18.95.

Spiritual direction is a ministry that combines artistry, grace and specific skills. In the Catholic tradition, discussions about spiritual direction often turn to the work of Ignatius of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*, and for many, this particular approach has be-

come a *totum pro parte*. Fr. Dennis Billy's book, *With Open Heart: Spiritual Direction in the Alphonsian Tradition*, successfully persuades the reader to consider the value of different traditions. The general acceptance of varied approaches to spiritual direction makes it easier, with Billy's encouragement, to specifically consider the Alphonsian approach, one with which many may not be familiar. The practice of spiritual direction in the tradition of Alphonsus de Liguori is one in which prayer is emphasized and re-enforced by the very structure of the spiritual direction session.

In his first chapter, "Spiritual Direction, Toward a Communion of Traditions," Billy, an American Redemptorist of the Baltimore Province, affirms the broad nature of spiritual direction. "When understood under the general heading of the 'care for and cure of souls,' spiritual direction encompasses virtually every aspect of the Church's pastoral ministry" (p. 1). Spiritual direction can be described as anything that assists someone's movement toward God. Billy further asserts that the specific helping relationship between director and directee "displays unique characteristics in its own right and emerges as a highly specialized ministry" (p. 1).

Borrowing from Tilden Edwards' *Spiritual Friend* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) Billy offers the history of Christian spiritual direction as "a single river branching off into three streams: the Roman Catholic, the Protestant, and the Orthodox" (p. 3). The "gems" to be found in the Protestant branch are preaching, bible study, pastoral counseling, and small group prayer. The Catholic branch offers liturgy, confession, retreats and the liturgical life cycle. The Orthodox branch offers a mystical depth and the consistent emphasis on unceasing prayer (p. 4).

The narrowing of the historical discussion of spiritual direction to a Christian perspective is reasonable here since Billy's main goal is to explore the Catholic tradition, most especially the uniquely Catholic approach of Alphonsus. He arrives at his goal in rapid fashion. After acknowledging various religious orders and their contributions to spiritual direction (the Benedictine's *lectio divina* and liturgy; the Carthusian's "way of knowing"; the Franciscan's holy simplicity; the Dominican's teaching on virtues; the Carmelite's mysticism and Dark Night; and the Jesuit's Spiritual Exercises) (p. 6), Billy turns to his order, the Redemptorist, and its focus on conversion, prayer and confession as foundational for the practice of spiritual direction, but not until he stresses the

point that spiritual direction in the Catholic tradition is “one of diversity in the midst of an underlying unity” (p. 7). He quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, who, in discussing his relationship to other religious orders stated, “I belong to one of them by observance, but to all of them by charity” (p. 7). Billy applies the sentiment to spiritual direction and avoids the temptation to be competitive or suspicious of another’s orientation.

Some detail on the person of Alphonsus (1696-1787) and his own diverse influences is given in the chapter entitled, “Saint Alphonsus: Spiritual Master.” Notably, Alphonsus regarded himself a missionary. “The major projects of his life—his missionary preaching, his writing, the work of founding the Redemptorist Congregation, and his life of prayer—were all motivated by his profound desire to share the Good News of plentiful redemption in Christ with others, especially the poor and most abandoned” (p. 17). He patterned his life and work on the person of Jesus and his spirituality is, therefore, a Gospel Spirituality.

Alphonsus was well read in the Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers as well as other spiritual masters. Among his influences were Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Francis de Sales (1567-1622) (p. 21). Because of his openness to diverse spiritualities Alphonsus developed an eclectic, pragmatic style, keeping that which worked and developing an approach that was accessible to most. Emerging from this creative eclecticism was an approach to spiritual direction which was highly directive, rooted in prayer and closely attached to the practice of confession.

The incorporation of confession as part of spiritual development is worth underscoring as an integral part of the spiritual journey, but should not be mistaken for it. While Billy includes a discussion about the ministry of lay spiritual direction in his final chapter, entitled “Some Practical Concerns,” the clerical emphasis remains and should be understood as a particular strength of the Redemptorist tradition.

Alphonsus traveled to the places where the poor were forgotten, finding himself in the tiny mountain villages and back roads of southern Italy. His development of a simple formula (what he preferred to call “manner”) was in keeping with an effort to teach a practical method of prayer to as many people as he could. It speaks of his belief that prayer is essential in a relationship with God. For him, “Mental prayer is to the health of the soul as breath-

ing is to the health of the body" (p. 58). Prayer, for Alphonsus, was the means of salvation (p. 18). Indeed, prayer was the hallmark of all his teaching on the spiritual life, eventually earning him the title of "Doctor of Prayer" (p. 19).

Billy's main thrust in this brief work on spiritual direction is contained in his comparison of Alphonsus's teaching on prayer to the structure of a typical spiritual direction session. Alphonsus understood prayer as "a familiar conversation (and) between the soul and God" (p. 47). Although God was the initiator of this intimate conversation and sufficient grace to pray was given to all by God, people still need instruction in the basics regarding the practice of prayer (p. 48). To this end, Alphonsus offered techniques for helping a person foster such an intimate conversation. Those techniques, culled from the master spiritual writers before him, were outlined by Alphonsus to include three movements in prayer: (1) the *preparation*, (2) the *body of the prayer* itself, and (3) the *conclusion*.

The *preparation movement* uses time to ready the body and mind for the action of God. The *prayer time movement* includes meditation (cognitive reflection), attention to affections (heartfelt responses to God), petitions (requests for graces) and resolutions (practical applications). The *conclusion movement* ends the prayer time by thanking God and by making a firm commitment to the resolutions made earlier (pp. 48-53). These same movements in prayer are offered by Billy as an ideal order and structure for a typical spiritual direction session. "The great benefit of a model of spiritual direction based on the dynamics of the Alphonsian approach to mental prayer is that the various elements of a person's intimate conversation with God are transposed onto the direction process itself" (p. 73).

Alphonsus's approach to mental prayer involves the whole person and so too does Billy's attempt to parallel this teaching on prayer to spiritual direction. The author wants the reader to understand that the process of spiritual direction must take into account the humanness of the person. While this statement is not new, using an Alphonsian approach that parallels his concept of prayer is a useful tool for keeping this notion in the forefront of the spiritual direction process: "Alphonsus's guidelines for mental prayer can be taken as a metaphor for the spiritual direction process itself" (p. 67). By projecting the Alphonsian method of mental prayer onto the plane of spiritual direction the author hopes

to contribute to the rediscovery of this important form of prayer and its ability to consider the human person in relationship to The Divine (p. 67).

The maturing of the total self through reflection and expression is a crucial aspect of the spiritual direction process and an important aspect of the human journey to God. One may recall Thomas Merton's comments regarding spiritual direction, "The spiritual director is concerned with the *whole person*, for the spiritual life is not just the life of the mind, or of the affections, or of the 'summit of the soul'—it is the life of the *whole person*".¹ Since God is always dealing with the *whole person*, the enterprise of spiritual direction must, out of necessity deal with all aspects of the person.

This book can be a useful resource for stimulating discussion among seasoned spiritual directors, students of spiritual direction and those personally engaged in the process of spiritual direction. By using a flexible, pragmatic model of spiritual direction based on a manner of prayer that engages the *whole person*, Billy draws an important parallel between Redemptorist spirituality and the field of spiritual direction. He presents Redemptorist spiritual direction as one which values the importance of a contemplative lifestyle and emphasizes prayer as the most basic aspect of a relationship with God.

While there may be difficulties in distilling an eighteenth-century founder's thoughts on prayer into a modest volume, the application of these concepts to a modern approach to spiritual direction is well worth the undertaking. Drawing from my own experience in spiritual direction, both personal and professional, I find it difficult to disagree with the author that "The whole purpose of spiritual direction, after all, is not unlike the goal of mental prayer itself: to help a person draw closer to God" (p. 78). Dennis Billy successfully directs the reader's attention to a useful understanding of spiritual direction in light of Alphonsian prayer.

Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 14.

Mark A. Dannenfelser