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AN EXPOSITION OF  
ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI'S DOCTRINE  
ON SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

EXCERPT OF A DISSERTATION  
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LIST OF SPECIAL ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	—	<i>Acta Apostolica Sedes</i>
ASS	—	<i>Acta Sanctae Sedes</i>
BAC	—	Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid. Publishes works under the direction of the Pontifical University of Salamanca
Camino-E	—	St. Teresa of Avila, <i>Camino de perfección</i> , in the Escorial codex
Camino-T	—	Same work in the Toledo codex
Camino-V	—	Same work in the Valladolid codex
CAW	—	<i>Complete Ascetical Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori</i> (in English), ed. Eugene Grimm. New York, 1886-1892 <sup>1</sup>
CIC	—	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i>
CL Digest	—	T. Lincoln Bouscaren and James I. O'Connor, <i>Canon Law Digest</i> . Milwaukee, 1934-1963
COD	—	<i>Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta</i> . Bologna, 1972
Concessionis	—	S.C. of Rites, <i>Concessionis Tituli Doctoris in Honorem S. Alphonsi Mariae de Ligorio</i> . Rome, 1870
Denz-Schön.	—	<i>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum</i> , ed. H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer. Barcelona, 1973
Devout Life JKR	—	St. Francis de Sales, <i>Introduction to the Devout Life</i> , tr. John K. Ryan. Garden City, N.Y., 1972
Exercises-Mottola	—	<i>The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius</i> , tr. Anthony Mottola. Garden City, N.Y., 1964
Fontes	—	<i>Codicis Iuris Canonici Fontes</i> , ed. Pietro Card. Gasparri. Rome, 1923-1925
HA	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Homo Apostolicus</i> ( <i>Opere</i> , vol. 7)
MG	—	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
ML	—	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
OA	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Opere ascetiche</i> . Rome, 1933-1968
Obras	—	St. Teresa of Avila, <i>Obras Completas</i> , BAC 212. Madrid, 1972
Opere	—	<i>Opere di S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori</i> . Torino, 1845-1855
Pratica	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Pratica del confessore per ben esercitare il suo ministero</i> , ed. Giuseppe Pistoni. Modena, 1948
Praxis	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Praxis confessarii ad bene excipiendas confessiones</i> (TM, vol. 4)
Selva	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Selva di materie predicabili ed istruttive</i> ( <i>Opere</i> , vol. 3)
Spiritual Life	—	Adolphe Tanqueray, <i>The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology</i> , tr. H. Branderis. Westminster, Md., 1930
Subida	—	St. John of the Cross, <i>Subida del Monte Carmelo</i>
Teol. Perf.	—	Antonio Royo Marín, <i>Teologia de la perfección cristiana</i> , BAC 114. Madrid, 1968
Theol. Spir.	—	Alexius Benigar, <i>Theologia Spiritualis</i> . Rome, 1962
Three Ages	—	Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, <i>Three Ages of the Interior Life</i> , tr. Sister M. Timothea Doyle. St. Louis, 1948-1949
TM	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Theologia Moralis</i> , ed. L. Gaudé and G.M. Blanc. Rome, 1905-1912
Vera Sposa	—	St. Alphonsus, <i>Vera Sposa di Gesù Cristo</i>
v. f., v. fin.	—	<i>versus finem</i> , toward the end of a text cited
v. i., v. init.	—	<i>versus initium</i> , toward the beginning of a text cited
v. m., v. med.	—	<i>versus medium</i> , toward the middle of a text cited
Vida	—	St. Teresa of Avila, <i>Libro de la vida</i>
Vida y Obras	—	St. John of the Cross, <i>Vida y Obras Completas</i> , BAC 15. Madrid, 1972
Vie Dévote	—	St. Francis de Sales, <i>Philothea</i> , or <i>Introduction a la Vie Dévote</i>

<sup>1</sup> Volumes 7 and 8 of CAW are bound together with a single page sequence, as are volumes 10 and 11. They will be designated before page references as 7-8 and 10-11.

FOREWORD

The plan of this dissertation is twofold: First, it presents in an expository way the teachings of St. Alphonsus Mary Liguori on ordinary spiritual direction. Secondly, where mere exposition does not suffice, our endeavor will be to interpret and develop his teaching in the light of his sources, of his treatment of related matters, and of insights gathered from documents of the Church and well-accredited authors who are sympathetic and familiar with his thinking or at least with his sources. The section captioned "Points Developed" at the end of various chapters is for this purpose.

I said this is on ordinary spiritual direction. St. Alphonsus' excellent and ample material about mystical and diabolical phenomena<sup>1</sup> will not be treated.

Some reasons for selecting St. Alphonsus as the subject of this study were:

1. His recognized position not only as an authority on the spiritual life, but also as a synthesizer and compiler. One of a number of testimonies to this is a conclusion declared by the Teresian Congress held at Madrid in May, 1923, that "no confessor or spiritual director ought to be unfamiliar with the tract *Praxis confessarii* of St. Alphonsus Mary Liguori, where we find a compendium of all the mystical and ascetical doctrine of St. Teresa of Jesus and of St. Francis de Sales as well as of St. Alphonsus himself."<sup>2</sup>

2. St. Alphonsus' greater proximity to our own time than other Doctors.

3. The acclaims he has received from the Church, as assembled and evaluated in the *Acta Sanctae Sedis* (1:497-501) and as found in Pius XII's appraisal of April 26, 1950, which summarizes the acclaims as follows:

... It is no secret that St. Alphonsus marvellously excelled in doctrine, prudence, application, and patience, as tireless preacher of the divine word and as father confessor to the faithful; that as Bishop of the diocese of St. Agatha of the Goths, which he ruled in a very holy way, he gave excellent directions to many ministers of the Sacrament of Penance, and he himself chose quite often to sit in the sacred tribunal and absolve sins. ... Finally, for the training and guidance of confessors, he imparted by mouth and pen a masterful set of teachings in moral and pastoral matters — teachings that have the highest merit throughout the Catholic world, even for our present day — teachings which Popes have frequently and seriously recommended as offering secure guidance for ministers of the Sacrament of Penance and for directors of souls.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pratica*, nn. 93-94 and 104-122 (corresponding to *Praxis*, nn. 110-113 and 126-144), and *Theol. Moralis*, L. 3, n. 5-28 and an appendix to n. 193, cover such matter.

<sup>2</sup> Rodrigo Bayon, *Como Escribió Alfonso de Ligorio* (Madrid: Editorial El Perpetuo Socorro, 1940), pp. 344-345.

<sup>3</sup> "... Doctrinam denique moralem et pastorem confessariis instituendis et dirigendis ore et scriptis tradidit eximiam, in toto orbe Catholico ad hanc usque aetatem probatissimam et a Summis Pontificibus quasi tutam Sacramenti Poenitentiae administrorum animarumque moderatorum normam saepe ac graviter commendatam." (AAS, 42:595-596.)

## THE PLAN OF THIS ABSTRACT

The present volume contains the fundamental material of the original dissertation, with the addition of an appendix containing St. Alphonsus' instructions in his *Practica concerning the direction of mortification* (nn. 123-124, translated by us). This appendix abridges what was chapter V, which we have omitted.

The material in this edition has been selected with a view of serving this aim: to clearly set forth the basic principles of St. Alphonsus' doctrine on spiritual direction, seen as a doctrine which draws from sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium, and which pertains to an important science for the priest and seminarian. A reminder of this importance is a declaration of Vatican II that priests should be "accurately trained in the art of directing souls" so that they can form the faithful in a "fully enlightened and apostolic Christian life" as well as for the Christian discharge of "the duties of their state;" and that priests should be equipped to "help religious so that they may persevere in the grace of their vocation and may advance according to the spirituality of their respective institutes" (*Optatam totius*, n. 19 [AAS, 58:725-726]). The Council wants priests to achieve a zeal and skill whereby, while testing spirits of the laity to see "if they be of God," they may "discern with the perceptions of faith, recognize with joy, and foster with care, their manifold charismatic gifts," whether they be "humble gifts or exalted ones;" and we must expect to find gifts "deserving special care" whereby "not a few are drawn to the higher spiritual life" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 9 [AAS, 58:1006]).

## CHAPTER I PRELIMINARY FACTS AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

### A. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH<sup>1</sup>

Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, born of noble parents at Marianella in the Kingdom of Naples in 1696, lived out his ninety years in that kingdom. He had successfully begun the career of a lawyer when, in 1723, he experienced a conversion and, upon consultation, judged himself called to a more perfect life. The following year he received tonsure and minor orders, and he was ordained to the priesthood in 1726. Under the spiritual direction of Thomas Falcoia (who became Bishop of Castellamare) Alphonsus became notably successful in giving missions and spiritual exercises and in inspiring young men to work with him for the salvation of the poor peasantry.

As one who gave evidence that he himself was quite advanced in the spiritual life, he became confessor and guide to various chosen souls. Providential encounters with one such soul, Venerable Sister Maria Celeste Crostarosa, and with certain others, notably Thomas Falcoia, led him, on November 9, 1732, to found the Congregation of the Most Holy Savior, later named the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, "whose priests have the special duty to preach to the people living scattered in the country."<sup>2</sup> In 1762 he was chosen Bishop of St. Agatha of the Goths.

Somewhat late in life the Saint became a writer. Except for a few poems, his first work, the opusculum *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin*, appeared when he was nearly fifty. In 1748 the first arrangement of his major work of moral theology appeared, containing the text of Hermann Busembaum's compendium of the subject (*Medulla theologiae moralis*) with Alphonsus' notes and six appendices. The Saint esteemed Busembaum, a German Jesuit (1609-1668), as a compiler and organizer of material, but rejected a number of his views, considering some of the differences serious, as his statements show.<sup>3</sup> After the first edition the work bore the title *Theologia Moralis* and went through nine editions

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Austin Berthe, *Life of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori*, trans. Harold Castle, 2 vols. (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1905); *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913 ed., s.v. "Alphonsus Liguori, Saint," by Harold Castle; *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, 1949 ed., s.v. "Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, santo," by Giuseppe Cacciatore.

<sup>2</sup> Pius VII, September 6, 1816, quoted in the editor's Preface to the *Complete Ascetical Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori*, ed. Eugene Grimm, 22 vols. (New York: 1886-1892), 1:5. These volumes are hereafter cited as CAW.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettere di S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori*, 3 vols. (Rome: Società S. Giovanni, 1887), vol. 3, letters 260 and 284 (pp. 419 and 459). *Homo Apostolicus*, Tr. 1, n. 78. This latter work of St. Alphonsus is hereafter cited as HA.

in Alphonsus' lifetime, always using much of Busembaum's material and enclosing it in quotes. Meantime he wrote extensively<sup>4</sup> in the fields of moral and ascetical theology and to some extent in mystical and dogmatic theology, in addition to a few biographical works. He died in 1787 at Nocera de' Pagani and was canonized in 1839.

Some authors have challenged the theological soundness of Alphonsus' writings, as Giovanni V. Patuzzi<sup>5</sup> and Antonio Ballerini.<sup>6</sup> However, the excellence and reliability of his teachings have been acknowledged by high authority in the Church a number of times.<sup>7</sup> Pius IX declared him a Doctor of the Church and Pius XII ranked him as heavenly Patron of confessors and moralists.

#### B. ALPHONSUS' TREATISE ON SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND ITS SOURCES

While many of Alphonsus' ascetical and moral writings offer paragraphs here and there setting forth some teaching on the practice of guiding ordinary devout Christians in the spiritual life, the treatment expressly ordered for this is contained in his *Pratica del confessore per ben esercitare il suo ministero*,<sup>8</sup> and its Latin version, called *Praxis confessarii ad bene*

<sup>4</sup> Alphonsus' more notable writings, besides the *Theologia Moralis* and its abridgment, *Homo Apostolicus*, include *Glories of Mary* (*Glorie di Maria*), *Preparation for Death* (*Apparecchio alla morte*), *Prayer, the Great Means* (*Del gran mezzo della preghiera*), *True Spouse of Jesus Christ* (*La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo*), a dogmatic work refuting heretical reformers (*Opera dogmatica contro gli eretici riformati*), and a dogmatic and moral treatise on the end of the world and eternal life (*Dissertazioni teologico-morali appartenenti alla vita eterna*).

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Vincenzo Patuzzi (pseud. Adelfo Dositeo) (1700-1769) is referred to as a tutorist in *Concessionis*, p. 4/105 (a work we describe in footnote 7 below), which tells of his opposition to Alphonsus. Alphonsus makes various references to him; e.g., in *Theologia Moralis*, L. 1, n. 86 (hereafter cited as TM, as found in *Opera Moralia S. Alphonsi Mariae de Liguorio*, 4 vols. [Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1905-1912; reprint ed. 1953]).

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Ballerini (1805-1881) was a moral theology professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. His opposition to Alphonsus' teachings in various areas is explained in *Concessionis*, pp. 5/1-10 and passim. V. de Buck supported Ballerini's side in *Vindiciae Ballerinianae* (Brussels: 1878), according to Celestino Testore (*Enciclopedia Cattolica*, 1949 ed., s.v., "Ballerini, Antonio").

<sup>7</sup> Sacra Rituum Congregatio, *Concessionis Tituli Doctoris in Honorem S. Alphonsi Mariae de Liguorio* (Rome: Typographia S. Congr. de Propaganda Fide, 1870). (This work, hereafter cited as *Concessionis*, has five sequences of arabic paginations, which we distinguish by prefixing 1/, 2/, etc. to the page numbers that we cite). See unnumbered pages at beginning, also pp. 1/21-24, and passim. See also our Foreword.

<sup>8</sup> This work is cited hereafter as *Pratica*. The material in question is contained in the *critico-pratico* edition edited by Giuseppe Pistoni (Modena, Italy: Tipografia Editrice Immacolata Concezione, 1948), in nn. 81-85 (pp. 127-135), 99-106 (pp. 160-170), 123-138 (pp. 190-219), and Sec. III of Appendix I (pp. 240-247). We observe that not all the various editions are uniform, having two principal divergences: The ones cited differ in the numbering of paragraphs, the Latin translation becomes often so free as to be not a faithful translation but a paraphrase, and sometimes the material varies a bit. Speaking of the *Pratica* as a whole, Canon Pistoni observes in his introductory remarks (p. XI) that the Italian text is the genuine work of Alphonsus, whereas the Latin version, though checked and approved by him, is almost entirely the work of others ("è quasi interamente opera d'alteri").

*exciptendas confessiones*.<sup>9</sup> Our references to this work will follow the most recent annotated Italian edition, that of Giuseppe Pistoni, except where we indicate otherwise.

Besides the holy Scriptures and documents of the Church, the chief sources for St. Alphonsus' treatise on direction, ranked in the order of frequency of direct and indirect quotes and other explicit borrowings, are various writings of St. Teresa of Avila,<sup>10</sup> of St. Francis de Sales, of St. John of the Cross,<sup>11</sup> and of St. Thomas Aquinas — the last two having equal frequency. Works of St. Teresa from which Alphonsus chiefly draws material are, first, her *Way of Perfection* (*Camino de perfección*) and second, her *Libro de la Vida* (autobiography).<sup>12</sup> St. Alphonsus draws more frequently from the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (*Introduction a la vie dévote*), or *Philothea*, of St. Francis de Sales than from any other work of that author. He mostly cites the *Summa Theologica* when he draws from St. Thomas Aquinas.

#### C. MEANING AND AIMS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Catholic literature on spirituality provides some discussion<sup>13</sup> on the distinction between that guidance and instruction by confessors which pertains rather essentially to the Sacrament of Penance, and a more extended guidance called spiritual direction.<sup>14</sup> Alphonsus' treatise described above has

<sup>9</sup> This work is hereafter cited as *Praxis*. As found in vol. 4 of Gaudé-Blanc's critical edition of the *Opera Moralia S. Alphonsi M. de Liguorio* (described in footnote 5 above), the *Praxis* contains the Latin of the treatise on direction in nn. 95-101, 121-128, 145-171, and 217-226. Marietti's ten-volume *Opere di S. Alfonso Maria de Liguorio* (Turin: Giacinto Marietti, 1845-1855) (hereafter cited as *Opere*), has an Italian text of the treatise in vol. 9, pp. 9-11, 632-633, 816-819, 826-834, and 840-843, and has it in Latin in vol. 7, pp. 4-5, 650-652, 659-663, 671-681, and 748-753.

<sup>10</sup> S. Teresa de Jesús, *Obras Completas, Edición Manual*, ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1972). (This is BAC 212, a one-volume edition, hereafter cited as *Obras*.)

<sup>11</sup> *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, ed. Crisogono de Jesús, Matias del Niño Jesús, and Lucinio Ruano (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1972). (This is BAC 15, a one-volume complete edition hereafter cited as *Vida y Obras*.)

<sup>12</sup> Making explicit citations, St. Alphonsus draws from St. Teresa thirty-three times in his texts described above on our topic. The distribution is as follows: from the *Camino de Perfección*, thirteen times; from the *Vida*, eight times; and from her other writings, thirteen times. By comparison, the total borrowings from St. Francis de Sales, who ranks next in frequency, is sixteen.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Royo Marín, *Teología de la Perfección Cristiana* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), n. 674. (This work is BAC 114, hereafter cited as *Teol. Perf.*) See also Joseph de Guibert, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, tr. Paul Barrett (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), nn. 183-185; Alexius Benigar, *Theologia Spiritualis* (Rome: Secretaria Missionum O.F.M., 1964), nn. 1205-1207 (hereafter cited as *Theol. Spir.*)

<sup>14</sup> Is it needful that the spiritual director be also the ordinary confessor of the individual? The direction that is described in *Pratica*, as we interpret it (from the wording, e.g., throughout n. 99), presupposes this combination. A search has not disclosed to us any explicit statement by St. Alphonsus as to whether he would impose a rule about it. He seems to implicitly favor the practice in the case of women penitents in *Pratica*, n. 98. He seems to implicitly favor the practice in the case of women religious, since he would have them take and especially with penitents who are women religious, since he would have them take their direction in the confessional, according to *La Vera Sposa de Gesù Cristo*, Cap. 10,

in view that spiritual direction, that instruction, that guidance by a confessor, undertaken with enough detail to educate souls in the need and manner of making fruitful mental prayer and to conduct them step by step to Christian perfection, enabling them to escape the snares they might meet on the way. St. Alphonsus describes this as "a work very dear to God, of beautifying spouses for Him; i.e., cultivating souls to make them completely God's own ... introducing them into the way of perfection and divine love" — a work of "guidance by the confessor".<sup>15</sup>

Thus the spiritual direction of which we speak must be distinguished from the minimal guidance and instruction which a confessor must be ready to offer all souls, even those whom he knows to be taking regular direction from another priest. While the subject matter here generally supposes direction in the confessional, the emphasis is on the direction and not on the Sacrament of Penance, and much of what St. Alphonsus teaches will obviously apply equally well to direction outside the confessional; e.g., to direction by a Master of Novices who does not hear anyone's confessions.<sup>16</sup>

Besides fruit and progress in one's prayer life, what, in a more moral way, does worthy direction hope to achieve? This work of "cultivating souls" in which director and directees cooperate, importantly supposes an endeavor to eradicate all sin, even venial.<sup>17</sup> We say "all sin," but here St. Alphonsus distinguishes between venial sins that spring rather from absent-mindedness, drowsiness, or other weaknesses whereby they are not deliberate and "fully voluntary," and those that are committed with eyes open and are deliberate, whereby we are fully responsible. Of the former "there is no one in the world who is exempt ... All men, even the Saints [except our Lady], have committed faults." Of the deliberate ones he says: "All these can be indeed avoided, as holy souls successfully avoid them who live always with the firm resolve to suffer death rather than commit a venial sin with eyes open."<sup>18</sup> Those reaching the stage of being "more spiritual persons, ought to resolve to avoid all deliberate venial sins; and as for the indeliberate ones (since it is impossible to avoid them all), it is enough to resolve to guard against them as far as one can;"<sup>19</sup> and one should hope to make progress against them in the course of cultivating virtue as he takes direction.

II, n.6 (found in *Opere*, 4:150). (This latter work is hereafter cited as *Vera Sposa*.)

Royo Marin presents good arguments that the combination is most desirable, but admits that it is not necessary and that where a Master of Novices or his Socius directs certain novices, it would be scarcely compatible with Can. 891, CIC, for either of them to be their ordinary confessor (*Teol. Perf.*, n. 674).

<sup>15</sup> *Pratica*, n. 99; cf. *Praxis*, n. 121.

<sup>16</sup> Royo Marin would allow, by way of exception, that sometimes one may pick a prudent, experienced person who is not a priest to direct him. He gives as examples, besides the Fathers of the Desert and early Benedictine abbots who were not priests, the cases of St. Francis of Assisi and (before ordination) St. Ignatius Loyola, and even women, as St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila. (*Teol. Perf.*, n. 673.)

<sup>17</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 5, n. 1 (*Opere*, 4:47).

<sup>18</sup> "... Questi col divino aiuto ben possono tutti evitarsi, come ben li evitano le anime sante che vivono sempre colla risoluzione ferma di patire prima la morte, che commettere un peccato veniale ad occhi aperti." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 5, nn. 2-3 [*Opere*, 4:47-48].)

<sup>19</sup> "... in quanto agl'indeliberati (mentr'è impossibile evitarli tutti) basta proporre di guardarsene quanto più si può." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, I, n. 7 [*Opere*, 4:275].)

## CHAPTER II

### EVALUATION OF DIRECTION AND DIRECTORS

#### A. THE NEED TO PROVIDE DIRECTION

Alphonsus believed confessors could do great good by applying the "bit of diligence" necessary to direct souls that are ready for guidance in the spiritual life. "And what an accounting of it they must render to God," he exclaims, "if they are slack about it!" For confessors are bound to achieve the good of their penitents "as much as they can." By directing these souls in the way of prayer and then "asking them at least in the beginning of the spiritual life, whether they made their prayer or not," confessors could prevent many "relapses into grave sin" and "put many on the road to perfection."<sup>1</sup>

Assuming a priest acknowledges the need and duty in general to provide direction, on what occasion specifically can he recognize this demand as arising? St. Alphonsus gives no clear statement of a priest's duty when a penitent asks him to become his director. Surely he must have zeal, but he may have to weigh priorities as he considers conflicting demands on limited time and the availability of other competent men to whom he may refer a soul. Alphonsus has this to say: "As soon as a good confessor sees a soul shrinking from mortal sin and desiring to advance in divine love, he ought to ... guide it to the making of mental prayer, that is, meditation on the eternal truths and the goodness of God;"<sup>2</sup> and the Saint then proposes a follow-up. Moreover, one will at times find it desirable to persuade penitents who come burdened with mortal sin, even habitual, to receive his guidance in the ways of mental prayer;<sup>3</sup> and this easily leads the conscientious priest to full responsibilities of direction.

#### B. HAVE SOULS A NEED TO SEEK AND TAKE DIRECTION?

"Every Christian is bound to strive for perfection," St. Alphonsus writes; and he adds that the obligation

arises from the command we all have to love God with all our powers. Moreover, bound as we are to keep ourselves in the grace of God, we are likewise bound to always be perfecting ourselves in di-

<sup>1</sup> *Pratica*, n. 102; cf. *Praxis*, n. 124. See also *Pratica*, App. 1, I, n. XVIII, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Pratica*, n. 100; *Praxis*, n. 122.

<sup>3</sup> "E perciò l'orazione mentale non solo deve consigliarsi a' timorati, ma ancora a' peccatori, i quali spesso per mancanza di riflessione ritornano al vomito." (*Pratica*, n. 102; *Praxis*, n. 124. See *Pratica*, nn. 14-15.)

vine love; for in the way of the Lord, it is certain that one who does not advance, goes backward and puts himself in danger of falling into sin.<sup>4</sup>

This duty to pursue perfection is greater for religious, he declares, and so much so that "the religious sins mortally who definitely decides [*firmiter statuit*] not to tend to perfection or in no wise to care about it."<sup>5</sup> The reason lies in the religious profession, by virtue of which "one is bound to tend to perfection."<sup>6</sup> He tells priests that they have a yet greater obligation to such holiness. He argues, quoting St. Thomas, that this is because

by sacred orders a man is assigned to the most exalted ministry whereby Christ Himself is served in the Sacrament of the altar. For this, greater interior sanctity is required than even the religious state demands. Thus the cleric in sacred orders sins more gravely, other things being equal, if he does anything contrary to sanctity, than a religious who does not have sacred orders.<sup>7</sup>

How important does Alphonsus regard spiritual direction as a means to the goal of perfection and as an aid to remaining in the grace of God? He nowhere declares it to be necessary for men in general for keeping in God's grace. However, he quotes St. Philip Neri as saying, "Those who want to gain fruit in the ways of God should entrust themselves to a learned confessor whom they should obey as holding God's place; one who does this is safeguarded against rendering an account to God for the actions he does." Arguing from this and other considerations, he tells the faithful in general that "it is well" for a person to pick a good confessor "from whom he may receive direction in all undertakings of the spiritual life and even in temporal affairs of consequence, and not to afterwards leave him without grave cause."<sup>8</sup>

As for a true need to seek and take direction, the holy Doctor cites Pope St. Gregory the Great as teaching that this is indeed the normal rule of Providence, which we should guide ourselves by, "lest everyone become a

<sup>4</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 3, n. 12 (*Opere*, 4:35.)

<sup>5</sup> "Peccat mortaliter religiosus qui firmiter statuit non tendere ad perfectionem, vel nullo modo de ea curare." (TM, L. 4, n. 10.)

<sup>6</sup> "...quilibet religiosus vi suae professionis tenetur tendere ad perfectionem, dum tenetur observare ea quae sunt sui status propria; quae quidem sunt consilii, non autem praecepti. Ideoque graviter peccat religiosus contra hanc obligationem, ... si absolute statuit nihil habere perfectionem." (HA, Tr. 13, n. 2.)

<sup>7</sup> "Dice s. Tommaso che altra santità più grande ricercasi ne' sacerdoti che ne' religiosi, per ragione degli altissimi ministeri a cui son deputati i sacerdoti, specialmente nel celebrare il sacrificio della messa: *Quia per sacrum ordinem aliquis deputatur ad dignissima ministeria quibus ipsi Christo servitur in sacramento altaris: ad quod requiritur maior sanctitas interior quam requirat etiam religionis status* [*Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 184, a. 8]. *Unde gravius peccat, soggiunge, caeteris paribus, clericus in sacris ordinibus constitutus, si aliquid contrarium sanctitati agat, quam aliquis religiosus qui non habet ordinem sacrum.*" (*Selva di Materie Predicabili ed Istruttive*, P. 1, cap. 3, n. 8 [*Opere*, 3:20; CAW, 12:55]). This work is hereafter designated as *Selva*.

This position is reasserted in Antonio Royo Marín and Jordan Aumann's *Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque: Priory Press, 1962), pp. 140-141.

<sup>8</sup> This passage is found in the opusculum *Regolamento di vita di un Cristiano*, in its appended article "Altro Regolamento in compendio," n. IX (*Opere*, 1:890; CAW, 2:506-507).

master of error as he disdains to be the disciple of a man." Where some nuns would imagine that their rule and obedience to the superior suffice without a director, Alphonsus tells them that they err; except that "when a religious would not find a director who could guide her well to perfection, God then supplies the deficiency." But to refuse the guidance of God's minister when one can have it, "is rashness; and on this account the Lord will thereupon permit the soul to fall into many errors." God could guide all of us Himself; "but to render us humble, He wills that we submit to His ministers."<sup>9</sup>

Some have said that it easily happens, even in an ordinary Providence where suitable direction is available, that rightly trained priests need no spiritual direction. We submit that this was not the mind of the holy Doctor; for, besides his own example as one who submitted to direction<sup>10</sup> when his heroic proficiency in wisdom, prudence, and priestly virtue<sup>11</sup> might suggest that he could as well direct himself, we also have his notable share and support of the 1764 Redemptorist Constitutions, in which par. 349 provides that it "is necessary for every member to have a director of his conscience appointed for him; but it is not lawful that they pick for themselves others than members of the Congregation."<sup>12</sup> Further evidence of his mind in this is seen when, presenting a "Rule of Life for a secular priest," he declares: "Let him not fail to have his own particular director on whom to depend in all spiritual undertakings as well as all temporal affairs that can help or harm the spiritual life."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in his *Selva* he tells priests in gen-

<sup>9</sup> "...le monache, oltre le regole e la superiora, conviene che abbiano ancora il direttore. ... È vero, dice s. Gregorio, che alcuni santi sono stati guidati immediatamente da Dio; ma tali esempi, soggiunge il santo, *veneranda sunt, non imitanda; ne dum se quisque discipulus hominis esse despiciat, magister erroris fiat.* [St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum lib. 1*, cap. 1 (ML 77:156-157).] Quando alcuna religiosa non trovasse alcun direttore che potesse ben guidarla per la perfezione, allora supplisce Dio; ma il ricusare la guida di alcun suo ministro, quando può averlo, è temerità, per cui permetterà poi il Signore che ella cada in molti errori. Potrebbe Iddio guidarci tutti da se stesso, ma, per renderci umili, vuole che ci sottomettiamo a' suoi ministri, e dipendiamo dalla loro ubbidienza." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, I, n. 17 [*Opere*, 4:281; CAW, 10-11:541].)

<sup>10</sup> The editors of the *Lettere di S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori* report in a note that on Thomas Falcoia's death, Paul Cafaro became Alphonsus' spiritual director, and on Cafaro's death, Alphonsus submitted to Andrea Villani "all the obedience given to Don Paul and the other directors":

"Dalla morte di Mgr. Falcoia, il P. Cafaro era stato il Padre spirituale del nostro Santo, che si elesse poscia per direttore il P. D. Andrea Villani, come si rileva dal suo giornale, ove si leggono queste parole: 'Tutte le ubbidienze, date da D. Paolo e dagli altri direttori, confermate da D. Andrea, oggi 15 agosto 1753.' " (*Lettere di S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori*, 3 vols. [Rome: Società S. Giovanni, 1887], 1:227.)

<sup>11</sup> Austin Berthe, *Life of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori*, trans. Harold Castle, 2 vols. (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., 1905), 2:683, 725; AAS, 1:497-501; *Concessionis*, p. 1/23 and passim.

<sup>12</sup> "Quilibet congregatus aliquem sibi delectum conscientiae moderatorem habeat, necesse est; at non licet alios quam congregatos sibi deligere." This provision had become par. 350 by the time of the 1936 edition of the Constitutions and remained in force until the 1963 General Chapter.

<sup>13</sup> "E non manchi di tenere il suo direttore particolare, dal quale dipenda in tutti gli esercizi spirituali, ed anche in tutti gli affari temporali che possono giovare o nuocere allo spirito." (*La messa e l'ufficio strapazzati*, Appendice, I [*Opere*, 3:859; CAW, 12:434].)

eral that one who would walk in the way of perfection needs, "besides obeying his prelate," at least to submit his will "to obedience under a spiritual Father" so that he may "guide him in all the activities of the spiritual life as well as in temporal matters of greater import which are related to the profit of his soul." He adds that "what is done of one's own will is of little or no advantage." A few sentences further on he says:

"Whoever makes himself his own disciple," writes the Saint [Bernard], "becomes the disciple of a fool." One needs to understand that our whole good lies in uniting ourselves with the divine will: "and life in His good will" [Ps. 29:6]. But, ordinarily speaking, God lets us know this will of His ... by means of our superiors, that is, prelates and directors. "He who hears you, hears me," He says; and then adds, "and he who despises you, despises me." In the Scriptures, not to submit to the obedience of superiors is called a species of idolatry: "like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey" [I Kings 15:23].<sup>14</sup>

This is developed elsewhere in a "spiritual plan" ("regole di spirito") for diocesan clergy who would perfect themselves. Alphonsus advises them that "in order to do assuredly for God the things we set about, we must do all with dependence on our director." Otherwise we run the risk that, failing in purity of intention, "all will be lost, and instead of a reward we receive punishment."<sup>15</sup>

### C. HAVING A QUALIFIED DIRECTOR

Sometimes spiritual souls may ask advice about starting direction, or about changing directors, or about finding one in the city where they are going. The conversation may offer occasion to commend these people for the importance they attach to direction and give them some aid. St. Alphonsus has certain points in his *Homo Apostolicus* (Tr. Ult., n. 43) and chapter 7 of his *Pratica* which his followers would want to bear in mind:

(1) A confessor should not "appear solicitous about wanting to get a soul under his direction," nor should he resent his penitents, especially women, going to another confessor. In fact he should show pleasure that a penitent has done so and "at times prescribe that they go to others;" unless a soul is very scrupulous and the priest fears that by going to another who does not know his conscience "he would become notably disturbed."<sup>16</sup>

(2) Without necessity he should not speak of the defects of other confessors; rather, he should "carefully seek to excuse them from an error they may have committed."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Selva, P. 2, c. 8, nn. 17-18 (*Opere*, 3:156; CAW, 12:358-359). Cf. St. Bernard, *Epist.* 87 (ML, 182:215).

<sup>15</sup> "Ma tanto più è necessario poi che gli esercizi spirituali si facciano solo per dar gusto a Dio, e non già per fine d'interesse o di propria stima o compiacenza; altrimenti tutto sarà perduto, ed in vece di premi ne riporteremo castighi. Perciò affine di far sicuramente per Dio quanto facciamo, è necessario il far tutto colla dipendenza dal nostro direttore." (*Regole di spirito per un sacerdote che attende alla perfezione*, v. med. [*Opere*, 3:861; CAW, 12:439].)

<sup>16</sup> HA, Tr. Ult., n. 43 (*Opere*, 7:651).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

(3) Someone may contemplate leaving his present director to seek another. One should not show approval or agree to become the new director

without an urgent cause, ... for from this there later arise ... disturbances and at times scandals. For changing a confessor it is not enough that the penitent sense a certain aversion for him or that he no more experience trustfulness in his proposals; for often this is a temptation of the devil, as St. Teresa says. Thus St. Francis de Sales teaches: "It is not good that one change his confessor without a great reason; ... [but this] rule ought not to be inflexible when a legitimate reason for a change arises."<sup>18</sup>

A reason for changing, as cited by Alphonsus, is deficiency in doctrine; but here a penitent would do well to "consult other learned directors" to make sure of the deficiency. Also a good reason to change would be that the confessor-director is deficient as to goodness ("mancanza di bontà"). In some cases it may be hard to determine just where St. Alphonsus and St. Teresa of Avila<sup>19</sup> (whom he cites) would draw the line in this. But if the priest appears to be given to any vanity, the teaching is that one should leave him; for "when he is vain, he will make others vain."<sup>20</sup> In another work St. Alphonsus would have nuns avoid disclosing their temptations to persons who do not "love perfection," since this "would harm themselves and others."<sup>21</sup>

Some penitents seem to expect, before they would submit to anyone as their director, that he display the heroic virtue one expects in a canonized Saint. St. Alphonsus treats them as over-demanding.<sup>22</sup> Yet he warns that

<sup>18</sup> "Né basta per mutar confessore, che il penitente senta un certo abbominio verso di lui o che non trovi più confidenza ne' suoi detti, perché spesso questa è tentazione del demonio, come dice s. Teresa [*Camino de Perfección*, c. 4]. Onde insegna s. Francesco di Sales: *Non bisogna mutar confessore senza gran ragione; ma* (dice all'incontro) *non si dee neppure essere invariabile, sopravvenendo cagioni legittime di mutazione*" [*Lettere a la Mere de Chastel*, April 2, 1620, in *Oeuvres*, 19:176]. (*Practica*, n. 85; cf. *Praxis*, n. 100.)

<sup>19</sup> St. Alphonsus draws from St. Teresa's *Camino de perfección*, which will hereafter be cited with a distinction: *Camino-E* will refer to the Escorial codex, *Camino-T* to that of Toledo, and *Camino-V* to the Valladolid codex. The Italian text of St. Alphonsus does not literally translate the Spanish original that he used (or from which a translation he perhaps used, was made), which appears to be in *Camino-E*, cap. 7 (*Obras*, pp. 211, 212), though it presents well enough Teresa's teaching.

<sup>20</sup> *Practica*, n. 85; cf. *Praxis*, n. 100.

<sup>21</sup> "... non debbono comunicare le loro tentazioni che colle anime le quali amano la perfezione; perché se le comunicano colle imperfette, faranno danno a se stesse ed alle altre." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 6, n. 12 [*Opere*, 4:60; CAW, 10-11:125]; cf. *Practica*, n. 138, III.) In an *Avvertimento* introducing *Vera Sposa* (*Opere*, 4:5; CAW, 10-11:12), Alphonsus addresses the work not merely to nuns, but to others as well, even lay persons ("anche a' secolari"). We submit that the passage quoted is intended for all who are serious about perfection. From the context, the restriction on revealing temptations does not seem to us intended to hinder the disclosure of temptations involving grave matter from being duly made to any confessor who seems competent, especially when he dutifully inquires (*Practica*, App. 1, I, n. 8; cf. *Praxis*, n. 180).

<sup>22</sup> "Non occorre che voi mi stiate a dire: *Se avessi s. Bernardo per confessore, anch'io ubbidirei alla cieca: Ma il mio confessore non è san Bernardo*. ... prendete errore: poiché



one should not choose his spiritual father "haphazardly nor through predilection," but should pick the "one he deems best suited in relation to the profit" of his soul, a man of "learning and experience . . . and prayer" who "walks in the way of perfection." If he reproves one's faults, "that is no reason for leaving him, but rather for never separating from his guidance." He adds that there "is no worse confessor than one who does little rebuking and shows too much sympathy for his penitent's faults;" for in this way he "will cause the penitent to think lightly of them."<sup>23</sup>

In an exceptional case Alphonsus advises penitents to turn elsewhere than to their director, though he be competent and blameless: Some persons who take direction may lapse into mortal sin, and because of inordinate shame will neglect confession altogether (or make a bad one) rather than confess their fall to their confessor-director. In such a case it would seem better that they make a good confession to another priest. Addressing nuns that suffer undue shame about revealing a mortal sin and are sorely tempted to neglect confession, saying, "I have no confidence in my confessor," the holy Doctor replies: "Then go to another. Ask your bishop for one, or else tell one of your Sisters that you want to seek counsel from her director, and in this way you can remedy your need."<sup>24</sup>

Persons may easily be mistaken in judging that they "have been badly directed," even when "other spiritual fathers" say so. Alphonsus proposes a presumption in the director's favor, even against adverse appraisals they might have heard in some cases; and he would have them ask themselves whether the apparent bad direction has not been because "in certain things you have obeyed and in others not. God is not bound to cooperate in such defective obedience." He tells the nun he so addresses:

Place yourself entirely in your director's hands with the intention of obeying him in everything; then the Lord will never permit you to go astray. Although your confessor may not have all the learning that is convenient, God will take care to supply the deficiency; for it is not possible that a soul wanting to be a saint and trusting in God, should become deluded when being faithful to obey His minister.<sup>25</sup>

non vi siete posta in mano d'un uomo, perché è dotto o santo, ma perché egli v'è stato assegnato da Dio per vostra guida." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, II, n. 8 [*Opere*, 4:287].)

<sup>23</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, I, n. 18 (*Opere*, 4:282).

<sup>24</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, I, n. 11 (*Opere*, 4:278). Cf. Can. 521-523, CIC.

<sup>25</sup> "Ma forse voi mi direte che, per seguir la condotta del vostro direttore, vi siete trovata mal guidata, siccome poi altri padri spirituali ve ne hanno accertata. Primieramente rispondo che difficilmente voi avete potuto errare, facendo in ciò l'ubbidienza; ma, ancorché ciò fosse stato, sapete perché forse voi siete stata mal guidata? perché in certe cose avrete ubbidito ed in altre no; ed a tale ubbidienza così difettosa Dio non è tenuto concorrere. Ma mettetevi tutta in mano della vostra guida con animo di ubbidirle in tutto, ché allora non permetterà mai il Signore che voi erriate. Allorché il vostro confessore non avesse tutta la scienza che conviene, Iddio avrà cura di supplire; perché non è possibile che resti delusa un'anima la quale desidera di farsi santa e si fida di Dio, quando è fedele in ubbidire al di lui ministro." (*Vera Sposa*, cap. 18, I, n. 19 [*Opere*, 4:282].)

Some insights into a protective Providence favoring the director's authority (at least when, having been chosen with upright motives, he continues to so serve his role that one judges he may be followed with right motivation) may be gathered from *Vera Sposa*, cap. 13, II, n. 7, v.f., and cap. 18, I, nn. 19-20 (CAW, 10-11:401 and 543-544).

We may add that St. Alphonsus, speaking about the director's important supporting role of confessor on which all should be able to rely (and even more so the souls under his direction), ranks it as having "supreme importance" and as the "most difficult of all" offices.<sup>26</sup> For success in it, a "goodness that is not just ordinary is needed. One will never attain it who is not a man of prayer, making daily meditation; otherwise he will not have the light and the graces needed to fill this role well."<sup>27</sup> Even apart from a director's obvious need of filling well this role of confessor, we submit that this goodness and prayer life are called for by the mere fact that the work of direction is to lead souls to perfection. The Saint further declares that prayer can scarcely continue to be fruitful in us if we resist grace by remaining attached to what is vain and worldly.<sup>28</sup> As a director cannot give what he does not have, he is expected to have a well-disciplined and developed spiritual life with its program of prayer, study, and the practice of virtue.<sup>29</sup> As for study, he tells of the harm a director sometimes can do who does not know well enough his spiritual theology.<sup>30</sup>

St. Alphonsus offers a motive of zeal for priests to become good directors, in the reflection that "a work very dear to God is that of . . . cultivating souls to make them wholly God's own. Before the Lord one perfect soul is worth more than a thousand imperfect ones."<sup>31</sup>

#### D. POINTS DEVELOPED

##### 1. Providence with Regard to Direction

Among the points presented in this chapter which seem to us to call for the development spoken of in our Foreword there is one that is particularly

<sup>26</sup> HA, Tr. 16, n. 99 (*Opere*, 7:415).

<sup>27</sup> *Pratica*, n. 1; cf. *Praxis*, n. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Molte anime poi si lamentano che vanno all'orazione e non vi trovano Dio; perché vi vanno col cuore pieno di terra. . . . Per trovare . . . Dio nell'orazione bisogna che si spogli l'anima dell'affetto alle cose della terra ed allora Iddio le parlerà." (*Dell'amore divino e de' mezzi per acquistarlo*, n. 19 [*Opere*, 1:469].) (Here Alphonsus addresses souls that lament "that they go to prayer and do not find God," since they go with a heart "full of the world." He tells them that to find God in prayer one must "detach his soul from the love of things of earth, and then God will speak to him." He develops this further in *Vera Sposa*, cap. 6, n. 12, and cap. 7, n. 6 [*Opere*, 4:60, 63-64; CAW, 10-11:125 and 132-133].)

<sup>29</sup> Selva, Parte I, c. 3, nn. 15-16; Parte II, ist. 2 (*Opere*, 3:23, 99-104). Cf. Canons 124-143, CIC.

<sup>30</sup> Distinctions and details calling for study are evident in the material for the guidance of advanced and favored souls presented in the *Pratica*, notably in nn. 104-122 (*Praxis*, nn. 126-144). Alphonsus comments on the confessor-director's responsibility when a soul comes who is favored with contemplation, a gift which indicates one's entry into advanced prayer life: "Quando viene qualche anima favorita col dono della contemplazione, bisogna che l' confessore stia bene inteso del come dee guidarsi e liberarla dagl'inganni, altrimenti le farà gran danno, e, come dice s. Giovanni della Croce, ne dovrà egli rendere gran conto a Dio." (*Pratica*, n. 104; cf. *Praxis*, n. 126.) (He here warns of the harm a director can cause who does not understand what to do and of the "great reckoning" he must make.)

<sup>31</sup> *Pratica*, n. 99; cf. *Praxis*, n. 121.

profound as well as important to the director and directee. It is the manner in which Providence operates with regard to the need and effect of spiritual direction. Leo XIII's letter to Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore summarizes the basic doctrine:

A most provident God has decreed that men for the most part should be saved by men. Thus He has appointed that those whom He calls to a nobler degree of holiness should be led to it by men, "so that," as Chrysostom says, "we may be taught by God through men." We have an outstanding example of this fact in the beginning of the Church: Saul, who was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter," heard the voice of Christ Himself and asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He was ... sent to Ananias in Damascus: "Go into the city; and there it shall be told thee what thou must do." ... This procedure has ever remained established in the Church. Unanimously all who down the centuries have been noteworthy for wisdom and holiness have upheld this doctrine. Certainly those who reject it, do so rashly and at their peril.<sup>32</sup>

St. Bernard likewise bore witness to this order of Providence. When declaring the folly of directing oneself, he adds: "As far as I am concerned, I declare that it is easier and safer for me to command many others than myself alone."<sup>33</sup>

Contributing some detail to what has been said, St. Vincent Ferrer taught:

Our Lord, without whom we can do nothing, will never grant His grace to one who, having at his disposition a man capable of instructing and directing him, neglects this powerful means of sanctification, believing that he is sufficient to himself and that he can by his own powers seek and find the things useful to salvation. ... A person having a director whom he obeys completely and unreservedly will reach his goal much more easily and rapidly than he could alone, even with the aid of a very keen intellect and learned books on spiritual matters. ... In general, all who have reached perfection, have followed this road of obedience, unless, by a privilege and singular grace, God Himself instructed some souls that had no one to direct them.<sup>34</sup>

St. Francis de Sales sees a special Providence whereby "humble souls who sincerely desire to make spiritual progress" and pray properly to find a good director, as indeed they ought, may be expected to find one. "Have no misgivings in this regard," he says, "for He Who sent down an angel from heaven as He did to young Tobias, will give you a good and faithful guide." Then he tells of the confidence one should put in the director, the conscientiousness one should take in selecting him and dealing with him, and the success one should then expect. The confidence one should put in him is

<sup>32</sup> "... Atque haec agendi ratio iugiter in Ecclesia obtinuit; hanc ad unum omnes doctrinam professi sunt, quotquot, decursu saeculorum, sapientia ac sanctitate floruerunt; quam qui respuant, temere profecto ac periculose respuent." (Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter *Testem benevolentiae*, Jan. 22, 1899, in ASS 31:474-475.)

<sup>33</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epist.* 87, n. 7, quoted in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages of the Interior Life*, tr. Sister M. Timothea Doyle, 2 vols. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948-1949), 1:257. (Garrigou-Lagrange's work is hereafter cited as *Three Ages*.)

<sup>34</sup> St. Vincent Ferrer, *De Vita Spirituali*, Part ii, cap. 1, quoted in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages*, 1:257-258.

not to be merely "in him or in human learning, but in God," Who "will put into his heart and mouth" what our good demands. "Open your heart to him," he says, "with all sincerity and fidelity ... about what is good in you and what is bad," so that, as need be, "the good will be examined and approved and what is bad will be corrected and repaired." This calls for "unlimited confidence mingled with holy reverence." He would have us "choose one out of a thousand, as Avila says. For my part," he continues, "I say one out of ten thousand; for there are fewer men than we realize who are capable of this task. ... Having once found him," he concludes, one should "bless His divine majesty, stand firm, and ... not look for another, but go forward with simplicity, humility, and confidence; for you will make a most prosperous journey."<sup>35</sup>

St. Teresa of Avila, writing in a similar vein in her *Camino de perfeccion*, tells her Sisters in assuring terms that holy counsellors will "not be lacking who will be willing to treat with them and encourage their souls," provided the Sisters "are what they should be;" for the One Who "maintains our bodies will awaken and move the will" of a counsellor "to enlighten their souls" and remedy or avert problems of blundersome confessors.<sup>36</sup> She also tells them that though "there are not many" well qualified men whom they can consult, "they will be able to consult some other than ordinary confessors" who will give them "light upon everything."<sup>37</sup> As long as superiors allow subjects the freedom to consult at times, which Teresa wants her nuns to have, subject to good order and discipline, it should be possible to find learning and advanced spirituality "combined in some persons."<sup>38</sup> She

<sup>35</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. and ed. John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1972), pp. 46-47 (hereafter cited as *Devout Life JKR*). The fuller French text reads: "... c'est-à-dire l'humble qui désire ardemment son avancement spirituel. Puisqu'il est donc si important, Philothée, d'avoir un bon guide dans les voies de la dévotion, priez Dieu avec ferveur qu'il vous en donne un qui soit selon son coeur; et ne doutez pas que, quand il devroit vous envoyer un ange, comme au jeune Tobie, il ne vous donne un sage et fidele conducteur.

"... ne mettez votre confiance en lui que par rapport à Dieu, qui vous conduira et vous instruira par son ministère, en lui mettant dans le coeur et dans la bouche les sentiments et les paroles nécessaires à votre conduite; ... Ajoutez à la confiance une fidele sincérité, traitant avec lui à coeur ouvert, et lui découvrant fidelement le bien et le mal qui est en vous; le bien en sera plus sûr, et le mal plus court; ... Joignez un religieux respect à la confiance, et dans un si juste tempérament, que la vénération ne diminue point la confiance, et que la confiance ne fasse rien perdre du respect; ... Choisissez-en un entre mille, dit Avila, et moi je dis entre dix mille. ... Je vous le dis encore, demandez un directeur à Dieu, et quand vous l'aurez trouvé, bénissez-en sa divine majesté; tenez-vous à votre choix, sans en chercher un autre: allez à Dieu en toute simplicité, avec humilité et confiance; car indubitablement vous ferez un très-heureux voyage." (*Introduction à la Vie Dévote de S. François de Sales*, ed. P. Brignon [Paris: Chez Potey, Libraire, 1824] pp. 16-18 [P. 1, chap. 4]. This work is cited hereafter as *Vie Dévote*.)

<sup>36</sup> St. Teresa, *Camino-V*, cap. 5, n. 5 (*Obras*, p. 214).

<sup>37</sup> "... aunque no ha de ser para con muchos, podréis tratar con algunos, aunque no sean los ordinarios confesores, que os den luz para todo." (St. Teresa, *Camino-E*, cap. 8, n. 2 [*Obras*, p. 213].)

<sup>38</sup> "Será posible hallar lo uno y lo otro junto en algunas personas." (St. Teresa, *Camino-V*, cap. 5, n. 2 [*Obras*, p. 213].) See this whole chapter and *Camino-E*, cap. 8, for her arguments to superiors that her nuns should be able normally to obtain permission when they request it to consult, besides the ordinary confessor, other confessors "at

believed that if a person who practices prayer consults good, learned men, "the devil will not deceive him if he does not wish to be deceived."<sup>39</sup>

Favoring recourse to a doctrinally sound, learned director, St. Teresa judges that if one finds one, and he is not advanced enough in the spiritual life to understand certain things needful in the guidance of advanced souls, but is virtuous, it is not presumptuous to hope that God will enlighten him about what he should teach and even make him advance in the spiritual life himself in order that he may provide better help. "I do not say this without experience," she remarks. "It has happened to me at least in two cases."<sup>40</sup>

One might, perhaps, suspect that the "great harm"<sup>41</sup> St. Teresa reports having suffered from certain directors argues against the teaching presented about the special care of Providence in favor of direction. However, she seems to have blamed herself rather than suggested a different understanding of Providence. She reports that the confessor-directors who did the harm did not

mislead me from a will to deceive, but they did not know better. As what they told me was something lax and gave greater liberty, I reasoned in their favor and thought I was obliged to do no more than believe them. If their teaching had been in line, I in my ruinous ways would have sought other confessors. ... I think that because of my sins God allowed them to deceive themselves and me.<sup>42</sup>

Hence she came to judge that it is not according to the order of Providence that we submit ourselves to an obviously unqualified director, where it calls for "voluntarily submitting one's mind" to one who does not have a "good one. I, at least, could not achieve this with myself, nor does it seem right to me."<sup>43</sup> A lay person who "can choose whom he is to submit to, should praise God and not lose" this liberty, but rather "let him be without" a director until he finds a qualified one whom, "if he is fully grounded in humility and has the desire to succeed, the Lord will give him."<sup>44</sup>

This doctrine that "the Lord will give him" a competent director if one

times" ("algunas veces" [*Camino-V*, cap. 5, n. 2]) when these priests are "learned and upright" ("que tengan letras y bondad" [*ibid.*, n. 5]), but taking care that not anything be opposed to obedience ("procurando siempre no sea cosa contra la obediencia" [*ibid.*, n. 4]).

<sup>39</sup> "Tengo para mí que persona de oración que trate con letrados, si ella no se quiere engañar, no la engañará el demonio con ilusiones." (St. Teresa, *Libro de la Vida*, cap. 13, n. 18. This autobiography of St. Teresa is hereafter cited as *Vida*. [*Obras*, p. 68].)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. 13, n. 19 (*Obras*, p. 69).

<sup>41</sup> "... aunque gran daño hicieron a mi alma confesores medio letrados. ... Lo que era pecado venial decíanme que no era ninguno; lo que era gravísimo mortal, que era venial; que para delante de Dios bien veo no me es disculpa, que bastavan ser las cosas de su natural no buenas para que yo me guardara de ellas." (*Ibid.*, cap. 5, n. 3 [*Obras*, pp. 37-38].) Cf. *Camino-E*, cap. 8, n. 3; *Camino-V*, cap. 5, n. 3 (*Obras*, p. 213).

<sup>42</sup> St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap. 5, n. 3 (*Obras*, p. 38).

<sup>43</sup> *Vida*, cap. 13, nn. 16, 19 (*Obras*, pp. 68-69).

<sup>44</sup> "Pues si es seglar, alabe a Dios, que puede escoger a quien ha de estar sujeto, y no pierda esta tan virtuosa libertad, antes esté sin ninguno hasta hallarle, que el Señor se le dará, como vaya fundado todo en humildad y con deseo de acertar." (*Ibid.*, cap. 13, n. 19 [*Obras*, p. 69].)

does his part, might seem to conflict with other teachings cited above,<sup>45</sup> that God gives immediate guidance to some souls so that they do not seem to need direction, and indeed can find no director even though presumably they are advanced souls who have duly cooperated with grace. We offer the following as the more likely solution: It holds true *per se* that God will provide a competent director for the soul that earnestly seeks perfection and duly cooperates with grace; but the authorities for this do not mean to exclude God's inscrutable way of leaving room for exceptions to this and other general rules. This seems implied by St. Francis de Sales' teaching that God has certain ordinary ways of guiding most of us, but that sometimes He chooses very "extraordinary" ways to inspire and guide certain chosen souls, whose conduct will be more for "admiration than imitation." This especially applies to saints whom God called to a life removed from "Mass, Communion, confession, and any spiritual assistance."<sup>46</sup> St. Gregory the Great, admitting that certain saints were guided immediately by God, declares that their example is for us "weaker people to venerate, not to imitate," and he fears having "everyone presume himself likewise filled with the Holy Spirit" so as to "disdain to be the disciple of a man and become a master of error."<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Aspects of a Director's Qualifications

In the decree *Optatam totius*, the Second Vatican Council provided that priests be "accurately trained in the art of directing souls," so that they can form the faithful in "a fully enlightened and Apostolic Christian life" as well as for the Christian discharge of "the duties of their state." Priestly education should also train men "to help religious so that they may persevere in the grace of their vocation and may advance according to the spirituality of their respective institutes."<sup>48</sup> The decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* of the same Council also calls for zeal and initiative on the part of priests in the

<sup>45</sup> Section B of this chapter.

<sup>46</sup> "Mais il y a d'autres inspirations que l'on appelle extraordinaires, non-seulement parce qu'elles font avancer l'âme au delà du train ordinaire, mais aussi parce qu'elles la portent à des actions contraires aux lois, règles et coutumes communes de la très-sainte Eglise, et qui partant sont plus admirables que imitables. ... Saint Paul premier ermite, saint Antoine, sainte Marie Egyptiaque, ne se sont pas abimés en ces vastes solitudes, privés d'ouïr la messe, de se communier et confesser, et privés, jeunes gens qu'ils étaient encore, de conduite et de toute assistance, sans une forte inspiration." (St. Francis de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, L. 8, c. 12, found in *Oeuvres Complètes de S. François de Sales*, 7 vols. [Paris: 1861], 3:745-746.)

<sup>47</sup> "Sunt nonnulli qui ita per magisterium Spiritus intrinsecus docentur, ut etsi eis exterius humani magisterii disciplina desit, magistri intimi censura non desit. Quorum tamen libertas vitae ab infirmis in exemplum non est trahenda, ne dum se quisque similiter sancto Spiritu impletum praesumit, discipulus hominis esse despiciat, et magister erroris fiat. ... Ioannes Baptista magistrum habuisse non legitur. ... Moyses in eremo edoctus mandatum ab angelo didicit, quod per hominem non cognovit. Sed haec, ut praediximus, infirmis veneranda sunt, non imitanda." (St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum lib. 1*, cap. 1 [ML 77:156, 157].)

<sup>48</sup> "Accurate instituuntur in animarum moderandarum arte ..." (Vatican II, *Optatam totius*, Oct. 28, 1965, n. 19; found in *Enchiridion Clericorum*, 1975 ed., n. 2640.)

direction of souls. While testing spirits of the laity to see "if they be of God," priests must "discern with the perceptions of faith, recognize with joy, and foster with care, their manifold charismatic gifts," whether they be "humble gifts or exalted ones." Gifts "deserving special care" are those whereby "not a few are drawn to the higher spiritual life."<sup>49</sup>

Well qualified directors "are fewer . . . than we realize," St. Francis de Sales declares. He requires that they "be full of charity, knowledge and prudence, and if any one of these three qualities is lacking there is danger."<sup>50</sup>

St. Teresa begs superiors "for the love of God to manage always to consult persons of learning and see that the nuns do so." She prayed God to "deliver them from being directed in everything by one person if he be not a learned man," regardless of the advanced spirituality he "seems to have and may in fact have;" for she thought that the "more favors the Lord would grant them in prayer, the more necessary it is that their devotion, their prayer, and all their works proceed from a good foundation."<sup>51</sup>

Teresa disfavored submission to a director who lacked all the three qualities of "sound understanding, experience," and sufficient "learning."<sup>52</sup> Yet she believed it can be profitable for souls to take direction from men who are learned and virtuous, even though they are not advanced in the spiritual life.<sup>53</sup> She adds that it is a great mistake for a religious to put her soul in the hands of a single director without making sure that he is at least such a man.<sup>54</sup> However, presupposing an occasional consultation with a virtuous, learned man when needful, she does not seem to insist on learning in one's ordinary confessor, but wants him not to be a half-learned bluffer<sup>55</sup> nor an unwise person who, e.g., fancies he will make her understand it is better to obey him than her superior; for "she must be subject to her superior."<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, speaking of the half-learned confessors:

<sup>49</sup> "Probantes spiritus si ex Deo sint, charismata laicorum multiformia, tam humilia quam altiora, cum sensu fidei detegant, cum gaudio agnoscant, cum diligentia foveant. Inter alia vero dona Dei quae in fidelibus abundanter inveniuntur, peculiari cura digna sunt, quibus non pauci ad altiore vitam spiritualem attrahuntur." (Vatican II, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, Dec. 7, 1965, n.9; found in *Enchiridion Clericorum*, n.2701.)

<sup>50</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life JKR*, p.47. More fully: "... car il s'en trouve bien moins qu'on ne pense qui soient capables de ce ministère: il y faut de la charité, de la science, de la prudence; et si l'une de ces trois qualités manque, le choix que l'on fera ne sera pas sans danger." (*Vie Devoté*, p.18.)

<sup>51</sup> St. Teresa, *Camino-E*, cap.8, n.2 (*Obras*, p.213).

<sup>52</sup> St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap.13, nn.16, 19 (*Obras*, pp.68-69).

<sup>53</sup> "... letrados ... virtuosos, aunque no tengan espíritu." (*Ibid.*, cap.13, n.19 [*Obras*, pp.68-69].)

<sup>54</sup> "... yerra mucho en no procurar que sea tal." (*Ibid.*, cap.13, n.19 [*Obras*, p.69].)

<sup>55</sup> "... gran daño hicieron a mi alma confesores medio letrados." (*Ibid.*, cap.5, n.3 [*Obras*, p.38].) Cf. Benigar, *Theol. Spiritualis*, n.1208.

<sup>56</sup> "... si un simple la gobierna y se le antoja, hará entender que es mejor que le obedezca a él que a su superior. ... Ha de estar sujeto a su perlado." (St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap.13, nn.17, 19 [*Obras*, pp.68-69].) Canon 524.3, CIC, now provides: "Confessarii religiosarum tum ordinarii tum extraordinarii interno vel externo communitatis regimini nullo modo sese immisceant" (i.e., neither ordinary nor extraordinary confessors may in any way involve themselves in the internal or external government of a community of religious women). Cf. Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n.696, v. fin., and Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*,

It is better they have no learning as long as they are virtuous . . . ; for such men do not trust themselves (and I am not apt to trust them either) unless they refer to someone who is well learned.<sup>57</sup>

Elsewhere, speaking on the same topic, she would have the nuns sometimes consult other learned men than the ordinary confessor on spiritual matters that call for it, even though the confessor has all the qualifications of goodness, learning, and an advanced spiritual life; for at times "he can be deceived." She says she is discussing what belongs to the superior, whom she begs to see that the sisters obtain the strengthening comforts of wise and sure direction, considering that God leads His handmaids "by different ways" and it is scarcely possible that "one confessor will know them all."<sup>58</sup>

Also, if we are "guided by the discretion and opinion of our director . . . we must see to it that he is not the kind to teach us to be toads, content if our soul only catches lizards."<sup>59</sup> For it is needful to foster high and holy ambition in the pursuit of perfection.<sup>60</sup>

Teresa summarizes her position:

It is quite important that the director be prudent — I mean of sound understanding — and that he have experience. If, besides this, he has learning, that is quite a contribution. But if these three qualities cannot be found together, the first two are the most important; for learned men may be found with whom one can communicate when needful. I say that for beginners who have no [developed] prayer life, the priest's learnedness is of little profit.<sup>61</sup>

In harmony with this and in parts clearer is St. John of the Cross' teaching, where he says that one wishing "to advance in recollection and perfection take care into whose hands he commits himself." He adds that "as the master is, so will be the disciple, and as the father, so the son." It will be hard to find a guide "accomplished for all the roles" needed for this journey, "at least for its most sublime part, and even for its intermediate stage." This Carmelite doctor would have the director be not only "learned and discreet," but "experienced;" for without experience of what the high level of the spiritual life is — i.e., the level he calls "pure and true spirit" ("puro y verdadero espíritu") — the director will "not succeed in leading the soul onward in it when God bestows such a life on the soul, nor will he even understand it."<sup>62</sup>

n.1217. Also, Bl. Innocent XI's condemnation of Prop. 65-68 in 1687 (Denz.-Schön., nn.2265-2268) makes clear the error of those who thought the area of spiritual direction could escape due inquiry, discipline and supervision on the part of ecclesiastical authority, especially regarding wayward teachings and policies.

<sup>57</sup> "He visto por experiencia que es mejor — siendo virtuosos y de santas costumbres — no tener ningunas; porque ni ellos se fian de sí, sin preguntar a quien las tenga buenas, ni yo me fiara; y buen letrado nunca me engañó." (St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap.5, n.3 [*Obras*, p.38].)

<sup>58</sup> St. Teresa, *Camino-V*, cap.5, nn.4, 5 (*Obras*, pp.213-214).

<sup>59</sup> St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap.13, n.3 (*Obras*, p.65).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, cap.13, n.4 (*Obras*, p.65). See St. Alphonsus, *Vera Sposa*, cap.4, n.7 (*Opere*, 4:40,41), seconding this last sentence.

<sup>61</sup> St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap.13, n.16 (*Obras*, p.68).

<sup>62</sup> "... demás de ser sabio y discreto, ha menester ser experimentado; porque, para

There are directors who can help a soul at one stage but not at another. "Not everyone who can hew wood knows how to carve the statue," St. John of the Cross says; nor does everyone who can carve "know how to perfect and polish" it; nor will everyone who can do all these things, know how to "paint it," while some who even know how to paint it, do not know how to give the work "the final touches and complete it." A director can do no more with the statue "than he knows how, and if he should try to do more, he would ruin it." Now "hewing" is "bringing the soul to contempt for the world and to mortification of the appetites." "Carving" means introducing it "to holy meditations." If a director knows how to hew and carve "and no more, how can he lead the soul" through the further stages that "no longer require hewing or carving or even relief work, but call for a work of "final perfecting," a task of "delicate painting ... that God must do in it" and which the director must not hinder?<sup>63</sup> But even before these advanced stages, some directors show a yet "more ruinous" procedure, St. John of the Cross says. For "it will happen that God treats some souls with ointments of holy desires and motives to renounce the world, to change their life ... to serve Him, to despise the world. God values this stage to which He has succeeded in bringing them, since worldly things are not to God's liking." At this stage harmful directors offer the souls "human ways of thinking," ways incompatible with the "doctrine of Christ." They show a dependence "on their own interests and taste," or "fear where there is no reason to fear," and thus either make matters difficult for these souls, or cause them to postpone "unduly the undertakings of generosity which God had inspired, or, "what is worse, try to get them to banish such things from their hearts." For there are directors who "have little devotion" and are "clothed with worldliness and have little of Christ's meekness."<sup>64</sup>

"Spiritual directors," says the Carmelite doctor, "are obliged to show themselves pleased when souls want to become better. ... They [the directors] do not [at least commonly] know the way by which God may want to better every soul." They will see a sign that their instruction and guidance are "not helpful," when a soul "dislikes" these attempts. They are not now helpful because God is advancing the soul "by a different road" from the one such directors are conducting them on, or because "the director has changed his style." Such directors "should themselves counsel" the penitent to accept a release from their direction. "All else springs from foolish pride

guiar al espíritu, aunque el fundamento es el saber y la discreción, si no hay experiencia de lo que es puro y verdadero espíritu, no atinará a encaminar al alma en él cuando Dios se lo da, ni aun lo entenderá." (St. John of the Cross, *Llama de amor viva*, canc. 3, n. 30 [*Vida y Obras*, pp. 942-943].)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, nn. 57, 58 (*Vida y Obras*, p. 956).

<sup>64</sup> "... digamos otra más pestífera ... Acaecerá que anda Dios ungiendo algunas almas con unguentos de sanctos deseos y motivos de dejar el mundo y mudar la vida o estilo y servir a Dios, despreciando el siglo — lo cual tiene Dios en mucho haber acabado y ellos, allá con unas razones humanas o respectos harto contrarios a la doctrina de Cristo y su humildad y desprecio de todas las cosas, estribando en su propio interés o gusto, o por temer donde no hay que temer, o se lo dilatan, o se lo dilatan, o lo que peor es, por quitárselo del corazón trabajan; que, teniendo ellos el espíritu poco devoto, muy vestido de mundo y poco ablandado en Cristo." (*Ibid.*, n. 62 [*Vida y Obras*, pp. 957, 958].)

and presumption or some other pretense."<sup>65</sup> The affairs of God "must be handled with much tactful care and with eyes well opened," especially in a "matter so sublime" where "almost infinite gain is at stake from being right, and almost infinite loss from going astray."<sup>66</sup>

### 3. Two Related Duties and Their Nature

"He who wills not the means, will not the end." Is St. Alphonsus well supported by others regarding the obligation to pursue perfection? If this is binding, how binding is it that we submit to a director?

St. Alphonsus' doctrine of every Christian's duty to tend to perfection is scarcely debatable in orthodox Catholic circles. Tradition supports it, as surveyed by Adolphe Tanqueray,<sup>67</sup> as does Pius XI's Encyclical of January 26, 1923,<sup>68</sup> and the Second Vatican Council, which declares that all the faithful "of every condition and state, each in his own way, are called by the Lord to the perfection of holiness whereby the Father is perfect."<sup>69</sup> Citing St. Thomas, from whom certain implications may be drawn, Royo-Aumann declare

If one were to exclude positively and by contempt the obligation to strive for perfection, it is certain that even a lay person would sin mortally against the precept of Christian perfection (cf. St. Thomas, *Summa*, II-II, q. 186, a. 2, ad 2).<sup>70</sup>

Now we have seen the position of St. Alphonsus and other authorities that spiritual direction fills a needed role in the pursuit of perfection. As for its place in seminary formation, the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* provides that each seminarian "should have his own spiritual director, to whom he humbly and confidently opens his conscience," so that he may be "more safely guided."<sup>71</sup> The needed role of spiritual direction

<sup>65</sup> "Deben, pues, los maestros espirituales dar libertad a las almas, y están obligados a mostrarles buen rostro cuando ellas quisieren buscar mejoría; porque no saben ellos por dónde querrá Dios aprovechar cualquier alma, mayormente cuando ya no gusta de su doctrina, que es señal que no le aprovecha, porque o la lleva Dios adelante por otro camino que el maestro la lleva, o el maestro espiritual ha mudado estilo; y los dichos maestros se lo han de aconsejar, y lo demás nace de necia soberbia y presunción o de alguna otra pretensión." (*Ibid.*, n. 61 [*Vida y Obras*, p. 957].)

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 56 (*Vida y Obras*, p. 955).

<sup>67</sup> Adolphe Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1930), n. 358 (hereafter cited as *Spiritual Life*).

<sup>68</sup> "Nec vero quisquam putet ad paucos quosdam lectissimos id pertinere, ceterisque in inferiore quodam virtutis gradu licere consistere. Tenentur enim hac lege omnes, nullo excepto." (AAS, 15:50.)

<sup>69</sup> "... christifideles omnes, cuiusvis conditionis ac status, ad perfectionem sancti tatis qua Pater ipse perfectus est, sua quisque via, a Domino vocantur." (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11, found in Joseph Alberigo et al., ed., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* [Bologna: Istitutio per le Scienze Religiose, 1972], p. 858 [hereafter cited as COD].)

<sup>70</sup> A. Royo Marín and J. Aumann, *Theology of Christian Perfection*, p. 141.

<sup>71</sup> The text goes on to say that the spiritual director and the confessor are to be chosen "with complete freedom by the students" from among those priests assigned by

particularly in the pursuit of priestly perfection, but also of Christian perfection in general, is something commonly agreed upon, at least when formulated in general terms. We are not including any concept of direction operating purely on the basis of "two heads being better than one," as when two partners in business lean on each other's counsel about financial ventures; nor a concept of direction whereby a king consults his counsellors, to whom he opens up his mind in a very limited way, consulting one one time, one another, and to whom he is not answerable for failures to comply with their proposals, however regularly he consults one or other of them. For that is not the direction to which St. Alphonsus and authorities we have cited, give the special role in Providence which we have been treating. As for the obligatory nature of taking this direction compliantly in a way answerable to the director (as long as we can honestly presume that God would guide us through him — putting all on a supernatural plane), we are aware that among Catholic authors there is some difference to be found. Thus Frederick William Faber writes simply: "It would require very peculiar and unusual circumstances to make disobedience to our director any sin at all."<sup>73</sup> While Faber upholds the excellence and need of spiritual direction as an important means of pursuing Christian perfection, and he admits that Christians have a call to pursue perfection, his position just quoted seems to differ from the view of certain other writers.

A contrasting position seems to us to be that of St. Anthony Claret, who regards the neglect to follow direction to be sinful in circumstances which, as we interpret him, would scarcely be "peculiar and unusual." His thought is better appreciated if our quotation includes some of his context: Addressing persons making the spiritual exercises, he tells them that to fulfill their purpose of spiritual progress they must guard against "all venial sins, especially those that open the way to grave sins. It is not enough . . . to have a firm resolve to suffer death rather than consent to any grave sin." Then he lists nine "venial sins" as especially important for them to resolve to avoid, if they hope to gain even "the least fruit from these spiritual exercises" and "set foot on [even] the lowest rung mounting to perfection." Significantly he includes among the nine: "advertently hiding evil tendencies, weaknesses and mortifications from those who ought to know them, choosing to pursue

the bishop as qualified for this role. A fuller excerpt of the Latin reads: "Studium vitae crucifixae et cordis purificationem ex amore Christi constanter assequi contendant. Ad hoc igitur auxilium gratiae necessariae ferventer requirant, et imprimis ad Poenitentiae sacramentum, in quo cuiusque labor quodammodo consecratur, frequenter accedere assuescant; atque ideo unusquisque suum habeat directorem spiritualem, cui humiliter et confidenter conscientiam suam aperiat, ut in via Domini tutius dirigatur. Moderator spiritus et Confessarius ab alumnis plena libertate sibi eligantur inter eos, qui ad hoc munus idonei ab Episcopo deputati sunt. . . . Fundamentalem hanc Rationem Institutionis sacerdotalis Summus Pontifex PAULUS div. Prov. Pp. VI ratam habuit, confirmavit atque evulgari iussit." (S. C. for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, Jan. 6, 1970, VIII, n. 55 and conclusion [AAS 62:359-360, 384].)

<sup>73</sup> Frederick William Faber, *Growth in Holiness* (London: Burns, Oates and Washburne, 1936), p. 312. Quoted on p. 269 of Tanqueray's *Spiritual Life*. The quote does not show coercively to our satisfaction whether Tanqueray himself concurred with Faber; for it is only a footnote (to n. 555) for the English translation and does not appear in the French and Italian editions.

the path of virtue not under the direction of obedience, but guided by one's own caprice."<sup>73</sup>

Now there are those who think somewhat as Faber does, but would formulate a position more fully as follows (to conjecture a wording): It would require very peculiar and unusual circumstances to make disobedience to our director any sin at all of disobedience as such, though an arbitrary non-compliance with reasonable guidance could easily happen which would involve a sin against some other virtue than obedience. We do not know whether this is Faber's thinking, though we have read fully his context. It is indeed a position one will find, that humble compliance with the director's orders is better classified as an exercise of the virtue of prudence and humility than of obedience. Royo Marín believes that the director "enjoys a true position of superior, as an instructor or schoolmaster does, and on the part of the disciple or directee a true docility and submission should match this" — a docility and submission "which one should assign more to prudence and humility than to the virtue of obedience."<sup>74</sup> Thus an unreasonable, blameworthy non-compliance would more readily be classed as a fault against prudence or humility than against obedience. However, we see also a case for classifying these failures in many instances as being opposed to obedience, arguing from St. Alphonsus' authority.<sup>75</sup>

We submit that the more practical questions involved are these: (1) Is it blameworthy at all for one recognizing the values of direction, to forego it for no good reason when good direction can be had? (2) When one has a satisfactory director, is it blameworthy to fail, for no good reason, to lay one's soul bare before him and duly obey his directions? These are questions which souls that read certain literature wonder about, and sometimes they put them in one way or another to their priests. In response, we have three observations:

(1) In deference to St. Claret, we judge that neither the forgoing of direction nor the uncooperativeness in it, as described, is morally indifferent,<sup>76</sup> especially for one whose vocation calls for the pursuit of perfection.

<sup>73</sup> "... Ocultar con advertencia las malas inclinaciones, debilidades y mortificaciones á aquellos que deben saberlas, queriendo hacerse de este modo un camino para la virtud, non con la direccíon de la obediencia sino guiado de su propio capricho. — Alma mía, si no te resuelves á dejar estos pecados veniales, no sacarás el mas mínimo fruto de estos ejercicios espirituales; jamás pondrás el pié ni aun sobre el mas ínfimo escalon de la perfeccion del espíritu; jamás lograrás tener, ni la comunicacion con Dios, ni la paz y quietud interior del corazon, ni un estado en el cual puedas esperar la muerte sin ningún temor." (St. Antonio Maria Claret, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio Explicados* [Barcelona: Libreria Religiosa, 1859], Medit. 9, pp. 140-142.)

<sup>74</sup> Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 696.

<sup>75</sup> One might argue the holy Doctor's mind from his use of *ubbidienza* to explain direction and its need, in *Selva*, P. 2, Ist. 9, nn. 17-18; also from his instruction to priests that they admonish scrupulous souls to honor one *valid* scruple about their duty to *obey* (*Pratica*, n. 81; *Praxis*, n. 95), and even put the fear of hell in them about this as need be (*Pratica*, App. 1, I, n. 19; *Praxis*, n. 191). One could argue back that *ubbidienza* can have a broad sense where St. Alphonsus is explaining the nature and need of direction, and that a director's role with a scrupulous penitent where scruples have become serious, seems to overlap his role as strictly a confessor.

<sup>76</sup> St. Alphonsus teaches that, while some actions are indifferent, neither good nor bad, when considered *in specie*, i.e., prescinding from ends and individual circumstances

We prefer to classify these failures as at least imperfections.

(2) Suppose a soul earnestly pursuing perfection asks his confessor about the morality of these two failures. We submit that an answer errs which so emphasizes personal freedom and freedom from accountability, as to indicate that even God scarcely cares. If there are cases where God leaves a person a certain freedom from answerability to any *man* for resisting grace, it does not follow that that person is free from answerability to One to Whom we can never render as much love and service as He deserves, so that we all remain "unprofitable servants," even after "we have done that which we ought."<sup>77</sup>

(3) In one place where St. John of the Cross treats the effects of desires involving respectively matter of "mortal sin," "venial sin," and "imperfection" ("materia de pecado mortal . . . materia de pecado venial y . . . materia de imperfección"), he argues that penalties attached to our yielding to deliberate venial sin and those attached to our yielding to fully voluntary imperfections are similar and are very tragic, especially to the soul that hopes to advance.<sup>78</sup>

(as walking, gazing at pastures), yet "more probably" no deliberate acts can be performed which would be indifferent in *individuo*, considered with all ends and circumstances (HA, Tr. 3, n. 21 [Opere, 7:49]); for the Fathers of the Church understood I Cor. 10:31 — "[D]o all to the glory of God" — to be a "command, not a counsel" (TM, L. 5, Tr. Preambulus, n. 44). Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 18, a. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Luke 17:10. Cf. *Selva*, II, ist. 6, n. 7 (Opere, 3:136; CAW, 12:314).

<sup>78</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, L. 1, c. 12 (*Vida y Obras*, pp. 478-479). (The work cited is hereafter designated *Subida*.) For many here is a point which is important in the whole field of directing generosity. We are not prepared to discuss the question of whether counsels hold their non-obligatory preferability always in *specie* only, as indifferent acts hold their non-moral status only in *specie* in the teaching seen in footnote 76. (A bibliography on this is in J. Aertnys, C. Damen, J. Visser, *Theologia Moralis*, 4 vols. [Torino: Marietti, 1967-1969], vol. 1, n. 189.) From Wouters we gather that St. Alphonsus nowhere treats this question explicitly and expressly (Louis Wouters, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 2 vols. [Bruges, Belgium: C. Beyaert, 1932-33], vol. 2, n. 213). Those who would seek some solution implied by St. Alphonsus which may be of practical help, should find it useful, in the light of texts cited in our footnote 76, to consult TM, L. 4, n. 78; *Selva*, II, ist. 6, n. 7 (Opere, 3:136; CAW, 12:314); *Via della Salute*, II, cc. 45 (CAW, 2:183-186). (Cf. St. Thomas, *In Evang. Matt.* 19:12; St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, L. 8, c. 6, v. med.; Royo-Aumann, *Theol. of Christian Perfection*, p. 142; Royo Marin, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 158.) In this matter as in others, one should remember St. Alphonsus' delicate care in withholding "strong meat" from those who can take only milk (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). See his treatment in our Appendix on the Direction of Mortification, viz., *Practica*, n. 123; also *Vera Sposa*, c. 7, IV, n. 7 (CAW, 10-11:178).

## CHAPTER III THE DIRECTION OF BEGINNERS

### A. BEGINNING DIRECTION

St. Alphonsus proposes to confessors various approaches to move a prospective directee: impress the soul with "how deserving God is" of our love, as One who is "infinitely lovable;" show "the gratitude we owe Jesus for having loved us so much as to die for us;" indicate "the danger souls are in who are called by God to the more perfect life and play deaf to Him."<sup>1</sup> These points are well developed in Alphonsus' meditation books, as the *Apprecchio alla Morte* and the *Via della Salute*; and by their daily mental prayer and spiritual reading and their sermon preparations, we suppose the confessors are conversant with these topics. The confessors' task, using these or other ways that circumstances and prudence suggest, is to persuade this penitent to begin to follow a way of life whereby he tends to perfection, with bits of guidance being proposed at each encounter as needed.<sup>2</sup>

Just who is the penitent whom we call the prospective directee? We saw in Chapter II that it is especially the penitent who has been shunning mortal sin and whom one induces to aspire to greater holiness, but that it may sometimes be one less advanced.<sup>3</sup> We have found no development of the question in the Holy Doctor's writings.

The initial direction mentioned by Alphonsus is to introduce the penitent to mental prayer. "The good confessor," he writes, "when he perceives that a soul shuns mortal sin and wants to advance in divine love," should "first introduce it to the practice of mental prayer, that is, meditation on the eternal truths and the goodness of God."<sup>4</sup> What does the Holy Doctor mean by "eternal truths"? His discussion of mental prayer in his *Regolamento di Vita di un Cristiano*, ch. 1, uses "le verità eterne," or "eternal truths," to designate what he described in a previous sentence as "the Last Things, i.e., death, Judgment, the eternity of hell and of paradise."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Practica*, n. 99; cf. *Praxis*, n. 121.

<sup>2</sup> St. Alphonsus presents a program of tending to perfection (*Practica*, nn. 134-137) which the confessor can give religious women "who request" such guidance, thus captioning it: "Regolamento per una religiosa che domanda d'esser guidata per la via della perfezione."

<sup>3</sup> *Practica*, nn. 100 and 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Practica*, n. 100; cf. *Praxis*, n. 122.

<sup>5</sup> *Opere*, 1:854.

### B. THE NEED OF MENTAL PRAYER

To aid in convincing such penitents of the value and need of mental prayer, the confessor may draw on some of these considerations which St. Alphonsus presents for such use:

(1) While meditation is not necessary for salvation "in the same way that prayer of petition is," yet it is needful in order for souls to "persevere in grace." Alphonsus quotes St. Teresa's teaching that "if a soul perseveres" in mental prayer, then, "notwithstanding the sins ... which the devil charges against it, the Lord, I am sure, will bring it to the haven of salvation."<sup>6</sup>

(2) In support of this reasoning, Alphonsus would have us ponder Jeremiah's text (12:11), "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart;" and observe that "it is from lack of the consideration of eternal truths, that the world is full of sin and hell full of souls." He then argues that one who duly reflects "on death, Judgment, and eternity," will "keep free from sin"; for Ecclesiasticus (7:40) states that one who, in "all his works," is duly mindful of his "last end, ... shall never sin."<sup>7</sup> Thus the Holy Doctor would have confessors opportunely convey to certain penitents and directees: first, their need to seriously ponder things of eternity, not in a hand-wringing, fruitless way, but in a hopeful, wise way, realizing that one should not play the ostrich; second, their practical need to reflect on the Last Things in order to alert themselves to avoid sin and its consequences more effectively — something directors must see to it that penitents want to achieve.

(3) "All saints became saints," Alphonsus says, "with mental prayer; and it is seen from experience" with souls, that it becomes "difficult" for those who are faithful to mental prayer "to lapse into mortal sin." If "unfortunately they might at some time fall," as long as they keep up mental prayer "they soon amend their ways and return to God." For "mental prayer and sin cannot stand together." Many people "say the Rosary, recite the Office of the Madonna, practice fasting, and continue to live in sin;" whereas it is "impossible for one to remain estranged from God" who keeps up mental prayer. "Either he quits prayer or he quits sin. But if he does not neglect his prayer, not only will he quit sin, but he will break from his love of creatures and will give his love to God."<sup>8</sup>

(4) If the soul takes the tragic step of abandoning meditation, it becomes "morally impossible — i.e., very difficult — for him to avoid falling into grave sin." For, turning "his attention to other things, he will scarcely notice his needs, ... will not appreciate the dangers he faces, will care little about undertaking and carrying out the means to safeguard himself, and will scarcely perceive the necessity he is in" of petitioning God for help. If he is neglectful and gives up praying for help, "he will indeed perish."<sup>9</sup> Alphonsus quotes St. Teresa: "The soul that omits prayer, thrusts itself into

<sup>6</sup> *Practica*, n. 100; cf. *Praxis*, n. 122. St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Practica*, App. I, sec. III; cf. *Praxis*, n. 217.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* St. Teresa also presents this thinking in *Vida*, cap. 8, n. 4 (*Obras*, p. 50).

<sup>9</sup> HA, App. IV, sec. III (*Opere*, 7:749).

hell, as it were, without the devil's help."<sup>10</sup> In a different text Alphonsus confirms and enlarges upon his argument:

These [eternal] truths are not seen with the eyes, but only with the mind. If they are not reflected upon they vanish from the mind, and then, as the pleasures of sense present themselves, those who do not keep before themselves the eternal truths are easily captured by those pleasures. ... All Christians know and believe that they must die and be judged, but because they do not reflect on it they live far from God. ... Therefore Cardinal [St. Robert] Bellarmine declared that when a Christian does not meditate on the eternal maxims, it is morally impossible for him to persevere in God's grace. Whereas if one makes his meditation every day, it will be difficult for him to fall into [mortal] sin.<sup>11</sup>

We mention in passing that, describing the work of a zealous pastor, Alphonsus would like him to "strongly urge the practice of mental prayer" among his parishioners and "take care to practice it in church with his people every day, or at least every feast day, teaching them the way they can do it at home."<sup>12</sup> A pastor wishing to use these ideas of St. Alphonsus may find an opportunity to incorporate a public practice of meditation into the liturgy, as is done in some seminaries and religious houses, extending Mass time on weekdays to as long as an hour, but fulfilling community rules for daily meditation in a way that seems approved in the newest rubrics.<sup>13</sup>

### C. THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER

Regarding the place for mental prayer, St. Alphonsus thinks a church is more appropriate. However, persons who cannot go to a church for such periods "can make their prayer anywhere — at home, on a walk, at work, if they raise their mind to God. How many country people make their prayer as they work or travel, since they cannot do it otherwise!" Whoever "seeks God finds Him everywhere and at any time."<sup>14</sup> As for the time, Alphonsus favors the morning. "One's activities during

<sup>10</sup> HA, App. 1, I, n. 4 (*Opere*, 7:660), St. Teresa, *Vida*, cap. 19, n. 5.

<sup>11</sup> "... Perciò diceva il cardinal Bellarmino che un cristiano il quale non medita le massime eterne è moralmente impossibile che perseveri in grazia di Dio. All'incontro chi ogni giorno fa la sua meditazione difficilmente cadrà in peccato ..." (*Regolamento di vita di un cristiano*, cap. 1, n. II [*Opere*, 1:854; CAW, 1:409-410]).

<sup>12</sup> "Insinui anche molto l'uso dell'orazione mentale e procuri di farla in chiesa col popolo ogni giorno, o almeno in tutte le feste, insegnando anche il modo di farla in casa; e perciò qui si aggiunge la seguente istruzione, dove si parla della necessità e del modo pratico di far l'orazione mentale." *Practica*, App. 1, II, n. 8, v.f., pp. 239-240; cf. *Praxis*, n. 216.)

<sup>13</sup> "Sacrum quoque silentium, tamquam pars celebrationis, suo tempore est servandum. Eius autem natura a tempore, pendet, quo in singulis celebrationibus occurrit. In actu enim paenitentiali et post invitationem ad orandum singuli ad seipsos convertuntur; lectione autem vel homilia peracta, ea quae audierunt breviter meditantur; post communionem vero in corde suo Deum laudant et orant." (*Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, n. 23, promulgated April 3, 1969.)

<sup>14</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v. med. (*Opere*, 7:750).



the day," he says, "will not go well if he has not made his prayer in the morning." But he prefers that it be twice a day, in the morning and in the evening; but "when there is no time for it in the evening, let it be done at least in the morning."<sup>15</sup>

As for the duration, the director should "guide himself by prudence;" but Alphonsus thinks a half hour "will be enough time for beginners," though it is not enough for one "to reach any high degree of perfection."<sup>16</sup>

The holy Doctor proposes some details about the procedure of mental prayer. There are to be three parts: "The preparation, the meditation proper (*meditatione*), and the conclusion." The preparation should contain acts of faith in God's presence, of humility, and of petition for light. To this he would have one "briefly and attentively" add a Hail Mary for enlightenment, one *Gloria Patri* in honor of St. Joseph, one to one's guardian angel, and another to one's patron saints, and then "immediately proceed to the meditation proper."<sup>17</sup>

As for the topic of the meditation proper, Alphonsus offers some recommendations: "One who does not know how to read should meditate on the Last Things, the benefits received from God, and especially the life and Passion of Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup> Concerning the Last Things, viz., death, Judgment, heaven, and hell, Alphonsus remarks that "especially death is a useful reflection for beginners," though he also recommends Christ's Passion for them. "If the penitent is not uneducated, it is good for him to use a spiritual book which provides a gateway into prayer life."<sup>19</sup> The Holy Doctor himself wrote a number of books suitable for meditation, especially *Apparecchio alla Morte, Via della Salute, Novene e Meditazioni, Riflessioni sulla Passione*, which are contained in volumes 1 and 2 of his *Opere*, and in CAW, volumes 1, 2, 4 and 5 respectively.

When one uses a book,

he should be advised to select that material in which his soul experiences greater devotion; and he should be told to pause awhile at those places where he finds his soul is more strongly influenced and moved. He should then interrupt his meditating and give himself completely to making acts of the will, or to making petitions, or to reaching resolutions. I said that he should give himself to making acts of the will, that is, acts of humility, thanksgiving, faith, and hope. Especially let him repeat acts of contrition and love for God, offering himself entirely to Him and entrusting his soul completely to God's most holy will. More than other acts, let him repeat that act to which his soul finds itself more inclined."<sup>20</sup>

All should realize that "progress in mental prayer does not consist in mere meditating, nor is it as much in the meditation as in making affections, making petitions, and reaching resolutions." These affections, petitions, and resolutions constitute the "three fruits of meditation."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (*Opere*, 7:751).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> HA, App. 1, I, n. 3 (*Opere*, 7:660). Cf. *Pratica*, n. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v. med. (*Opere*, 7:751). Cf. *Pratica*, App. 1, III, p. 243.

The first fruit, affections, are "acts of the will,"<sup>22</sup> which Alphonsus describes:

... after one has meditated on some eternal maxim and after God has spoken to his heart, he needs to speak to God by affections, i.e., by acts of faith, thanksgiving, and adoration, humility, and especially love and contrition — indeed contrition is an act of love.<sup>23</sup>

Emphasizing the value of acts of love, he cites various scriptural texts<sup>24</sup> and declares that "St. Thomas teaches that every act of love causes us to gain a degree of eternal glory."<sup>25</sup> He proposes some examples to present to penitents:

My God, I prefer Thee above everything. I love Thee with my whole heart. ... Lord, grant me to know what You would like of me, for I am ready for whatever you wish. ... I stand before Thee. Do with me and all that is mine as Thou wilt.<sup>26</sup>

Such "acts of offering oneself are acts of love," he says, "which are very much according to the Heart of God." Hence St. Teresa "offered herself to God fifty times a day. It is a very perfect act of love," he adds, "to rejoice in and take satisfaction in God's infinite happiness."<sup>27</sup>

Alphonsus cites St. Francis de Sales' teaching that "if some good affection is ever inspired by the Holy Spirit before one has reached the meditation proper, then the meditation proper should be omitted and one should surrender its place to the affections." The reason is that the discursive reflections and readings that belong to the meditation proper, "only serve to move one to the affections. Consequently, when the end has been achieved, one should omit the means."<sup>28</sup>

Speaking of the second fruit, petitions, which should be interspersed in the meditation proper and elsewhere, St. Alphonsus writes:

During prayer it is very helpful to humbly and trustfully repeat petitions, begging from God His light, the forgiveness of sin, perseverance, a happy death, paradise, and above all the gift of holy love for Him. ... For, ... once we obtain love, we obtain all other graces. This is of supreme importance; for if a soul cannot do anything else on account of a spiritual desolation which it might perhaps be experiencing, it will be enough for it to repeat David's petition, "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, help me. Rescue me and be Thou at my side."<sup>29</sup>

Many penitents will have clouded minds about some aspects of prayers of petition and need instruction. St. Alphonsus provides much material for

<sup>22</sup> "... se exercent in actibus voluntatis." (HA, App. 1, I, n. 3 [*Opere*, 7:660].)

<sup>23</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v. med. (*Opere*, 7:751).

<sup>24</sup> Col. 3:14; Wisdom 7:14; Prov. 8:17; John 14:21; I Peter 4:8.

<sup>25</sup> HA, *ibid.*; S. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 24, a. 6, ad 1; I-II, q. 114, a. 7, ad 3.

<sup>26</sup> HA, *ibid.* (*Opere*, 7:752).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; St. Teresa, *Avisos para sus monjas*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> HA, *ibid.*; St. Francis de Sales, *Vie Dévote*, P. 2, c. 8. Another time when one should omit the meditation proper, and even the preparatory prayers and reflective reading, and proceed to give God at once "a fond attention," is when God has bestowed certain special graces raising one's prayer above the natural level. (*Pratica*, nn. 104 ff.)

<sup>29</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v. f. (*Opere*, 4:752).

answering their questions and giving them needful insight into a very useful doctrine, which confessors should be familiar with.<sup>30</sup> As circumstances and prudence indicate, they may recommend such material to them and make it available for their spiritual reading. To list his salient points:

(1) "Prayer of petition (*la preghiera*) ought to be humble, ... confident, ... persevering."<sup>31</sup>

(2) Alphonsus would have us "understand that the divine promise to hear our petitions is not a promise for temporal favors, but only for spiritual ones necessary or useful for salvation."<sup>32</sup>

(3) "We are to obtain the graces we seek in the name and by the merits of Jesus Christ. ... But 'Whatever is asked contrary to the plan of salvation is not petitioned in the name of the Savior,' St. Augustine declares." Such petitions are not granted, and this is "because God loves us. The physician who loves the sick man surely does not give him food which he knows will harm him."<sup>33</sup>

(4) "All favors that are not necessary for salvation should be requested conditionally. ... But as for spiritual favors, we ought to count it certain that God gives them to us when we ask Him for them."<sup>34</sup> After telling of the supreme desirability of God's will — which is for our good — being accomplished in the favors which require our prayer, Alphonsus adds: "The holy abbot Nilus used to say that we ought not to ask the Lord to make our wishes succeed, but to fulfill His will in us."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> This is chiefly in Alphonsus' *Del Gran Mezzo della Preghiera* and *Breve Trattato della Necessità della Preghiera* (*Opere*, 2:515-610 and 610-618; *CAW*, 3:19-240; 2:428-447).

<sup>31</sup> *Breve Trattato della Necessità della Preghiera*, n. 3 (*Opere*, 2:613-614). The reasonable confidence (such confidence alone is meritorious) is exercised not only by treating God as a provident Master, ready to grant, for the asking, what we need in order to fulfill His designs, but this confidence is exercised in relation to past falls. Thus we should look back with regret on all our sins, saying: How easy it would have been to pray and obtain help; and then, by cooperating, I would not have sinned! (*Institutio Catechetica*, II, cap. 5, n. 27 [*Opere*, 7:876, *CAW*, 15:540]). On the other hand, spiritual souls sometimes practice an unmeritorious, unreasonable confidence that tempts God, as when they needlessly expose themselves to proximate occasions of sin or neglect some duty, praying that God will somehow make it all right (*HA*, Tr. 4, n. 38 [*Opere*, 7:85]; *Sull'Utilità degli esercizi spirituali*, n. 13 [*Opere*, 3:616; *CAW*, 3:299]).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* (*Opere*, 2:616; *CAW*, 2:442).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; St. Augustine, Tr. 102, *In Joannis Evangelium*, n. 1 (*ML*, 35:1896).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* (*Opere*, 2:617).

<sup>35</sup> "Dicea il santo abate Nilo che non dobbiamo già noi pregare il Signore che faccia succedere quello che noi vogliamo, ma che si adempisca in noi la sua volontà." (*Unità formità alla Volontà di Dio*, v. med., found in St. Alphonsus, *Opere Ascetiche*, vol. 1 [Rome: Redentoristi, 1933], p. 295. This edition, now extending through vol. 15 [1933-1968], is described in a prefatory letter of vol. 1 as "edizione critica," and is hereafter designated OA. — St. Nilus, Abbot, *De Oratione*, cap. 31 [*MG*, 79:1174].)

Note that this fourth point is that "favors not necessary for salvation should be requested conditionally," and that such favors are contrasted with "spiritual favors." But in this dichotomy, spiritual favors do not extend to all favors that one might easily call spiritual, as is evident in God's unwillingness to grant final perseverance to us all at once — in which case we would not need to keep praying the rest of our lives (*Del Gran Mezzo della Preghiera*, I, cap. 3, IV [*CAW*, 3:99f]). Citing a commentary of Ven. Palafox (*Obras de Juan de Palafox y Mendoza*, Madrid, 1762, 7:86-94) on a letter of St.

(5) Many are the favors that God wants us to obtain through Our Lady, the saints and the angels, through whom and with whom we should make many petitions, because it is God's wish that we do so.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Alphonsus would have us "always ask and interpose Mary's intercession."<sup>37</sup>

The *third* fruit of meditation, the *resolution*, should be reached during the course of the meditation, at least toward the end. Alphonsus would not be content with one's reaching "only a general resolution, such as to avoid every deliberate sin, even venial, and give oneself entirely to God." Such a resolution is desirable, but one should implement it with a "particular resolution," e.g., to "more attentively guard against some defect into which one has often lapsed," or to "practice a virtue in a better way than one has done before."<sup>38</sup> Thus one might resolve "to shun some occasion of sin, to bear up with an annoyance from some person, to correct a certain failing," and the like.<sup>39</sup>

St. Alphonsus proposes three acts for the conclusion: a thanksgiving "for the inspirations we have had during the meditation," a pledge to "observe fully the decisions and resolutions, which one has reached," and a petition "to the Eternal Father for the sake of Jesus and Mary, for help to remain faithful." As an addition he would have us commend "to God the souls in purgatory, the Bishops of the Church, poor sinners, and all of one's

Teresa (Carta 54 in her *Obras*, pp. 481-484), St. Alphonsus discusses the desirability of praying for Teresa's gifts as described. He adopts Palafox's view that these gifts "are not needed for attaining sanctity. Indeed many souls have attained it without them. On the other hand, many have received them and later were damned." Therefore it is "a superfluous and even presumptuous venture to desire and seek such supernatural gifts; whereas the true and only way for a soul to become holy is to practice virtue and love for God," which is "achieved by means of prayer and by corresponding to the lights and assistance of God, Who wishes nothing so much as to see us saints." Speaking of the stages of supernatural prayer which Teresa reports in this account of her conscience, he declares that "as for the *prayer of quietude*, what we ought to want and ask of God is that He deliver us from the attachment and desire for worldly goods, which give no peace but bring unrest and affliction to the spirit. ... Man's heart will never find true peace unless it empty itself of all that is not God so as to leave itself all free for His love, that He alone may possess the whole of it. Now the soul cannot do this by itself. It must obtain it from the Lord by repeated prayers. As for the *sleep and suspension of the faculties*, we must seek from God the grace to keep them asleep to all that is temporal and awake only to consider God's goodness and to aspire to His love and eternal benefits. As regards *union of the faculties*, let us pray that He give us grace not to think nor seek nor will anything but what God wills; for all sanctity and the perfection of love lies in uniting our will with the Lord's will. As for *ecstasy and rapture*, let us beg God to draw us away from disordered love of self and of creatures in order to draw us wholly to Himself." (*Del Gran Mezzo della Preghiera*, I, cap. 3, sec. 1 [OA, 2:53-55; *CAW*, 3:76-78].)

<sup>36</sup> "Sicché, giusta il s. dottore [nempe, s. Thomas] l'ordine della divina legge richiede che noi mortali, per mezzo de' santi, ci riduciamo in Dio e ci salviamo, con ricever per loro mezzo gli aiuti necessari alla salute. ... il Signore ciò dispone non già per difetto di potenza, ma per conservare l'ordine retto ed universalmente stabilito di operare per mezzo delle cause seconde." (*Opera Dogmatica contra gli Eretici Pretesi Riformati*, sess. 15, De invocatione, n. 16 [*Opere*, 8:997]. St. Thomas, *In 4 sent.*, dist. 45, q. 3, a. 2.)

<sup>37</sup> "Preghiamo dunque ed interponiamoci sempre l'intercessione di Maria." (*Breve Trattato della Necessità della Preghiera*, n. 3, v. fine [*Opere*, 2:618].)

<sup>38</sup> *HA*, App. 4, III, v.f. (*Opere*, 7:752).

<sup>39</sup> *Regolamento di Vita d'un Cristiano*, cap. 2, II (*Opere*, 1:857; *CAW*, 1:417-418).

kindred, friends, and benefactors, reciting the Our Father and Hail Mary," which he describes as "the most useful of all prayers."<sup>40</sup>

#### D. MAKING MENTAL PRAYER FRUITFUL

Following the meditation, Alphonsus proposes a few supplementary practices to make it fruitful. One is that we "choose one or two points" from our meditation, points that have moved us, so that we may recall them from time to time during the day.<sup>41</sup> Also, he would have us count it of great importance to put into practice at once the decisions and resolutions reached in the prayer, "on both the little and the big occasions that we meet, such as a decision to bear up sweetly with a person who is angry with us, or to mortify ourselves with regard to sight, hearing, speech, etc."<sup>42</sup>

He would have us also start observing that habitual silence compatible with duties, but which forestalls mental dissipation and befits a perfect Christian. His expression "silence insofar as possible" seems to mean rather a reticence, an avoidance of the idle word. This is to be cultivated to "preserve an awareness of the sentiments we have had" in meditation. "Otherwise, if we quickly turn away our attention and give ourselves to useless activity and discourse, the fervor conceived in prayer quickly evaporates."<sup>43</sup>

We should never go to prayer for selfish and vain reasons, but should purify our intentions so that we go "just to give pleasure to God and learn what He wants." Thus we should always pray that He make us "know His will" and give us "strength to do it." He adds that "all we ought to go to prayer for, is to have light to know and strength to fulfill what the Lord wants of us."<sup>44</sup>

The director contributes much by a good follow-up. As these souls return to his confessional, he should ask "for an account of their prayer, inquiring how they proceeded or at least whether they made it; and he should have them in their confessions before everything else tell of the fact when their prayer has been omitted." This is because once proper prayer "is abandoned, the soul cannot be saved." If confessors would do these things, "how many souls they could guide to the way of perfection and how many back-sliders they could deliver from mortal sin!" For "once a soul is well rooted in the way of prayer, it will hardly lose God any more."<sup>45</sup>

We remark in passing that St. Alphonsus nowhere denies that some soul or other which decides to give up prayer, might in the future cooperate with grace, return to prayer, and be saved. But persevering, proper prayer of

<sup>40</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v.f. (*Opere*, 7:752).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. (*Opere*, 7:753). Elsewhere in this paragraph, Alphonsus cites St. Francis de Sales as proposing this practice, describing it as gathering "a bouquet of flowers" so that during the day we may "enjoy its fragrance." (Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Vie Dévote*, P. 2, cc. 7 and 8.)

<sup>42</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v.f. (*Opere*, 7:752).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 15, II, n. 13 (OA, 15:115; CAW, 10-11:465).

<sup>45</sup> HA, App. 1, n. 4 (*Opere*, 7:660-661).

petition is, according to the authors he cites with approval, "necessary by necessity of means (*necessaria di necessità di mezzo*)" for those who have the use of reason, to reach salvation. "Hence without prayer it is impossible to be saved. . . . Let us conclude this point: He who prays is assuredly saved; he who does not, is assuredly damned." This may appear less harsh if one accepts Alphonsus' conviction that *all* have a ready grace to win by prayer, abundant effective help leading them (by way of a chain of graces) to gain (or keep) God's friendship, so that the "greatest despondency" for souls in hell will be that they "could have easily been saved with prayer."<sup>46</sup>

Hence Alphonsus appeals to confessors to undertake insofar as possible this direction in prayer life "not only with penitents who have delicate consciences, but also with sinners, who, for lack of consideration, often return to their vomit."<sup>47</sup>

The Holy Doctor would have confessors apply a follow-up concerning meditation "above all . . . when penitents are undergoing spiritual desolation." He offers this explanation:

When a soul first gives itself to the spiritual life, God customarily attracts it with certain special lights, tears, and other feelings of consolation; but after the passage of time He ordinarily stops these favors in order to prove the faithfulness of such souls and in order to raise them to greater perfection while He withdraws from them all sweet feelings to which a soul easily clings, not without some defilement and guilt due to selfishness. The feelings of consolation (and even supernatural attractions) are certainly God's gift, but they are not God. Therefore to detach the souls He loves from His gifts so that they may be constrained to love the Giver with purer love, He causes them to no longer find in prayer the accustomed treats of consolation, but boredom, dryness, distress, and sometimes even temptations. Hence the confessor should be very careful to fortify these souls so that they will not omit prayer nor the prescribed Communions.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> "Da ciò concludono i teologi con s. Basilio, s. Agostino, s. Gio. Crisostomo, Clemente Alessandrino, ed altri, che la preghiera agli adulti è necessaria di necessità di mezzo. Sicché senza pregare è impossibile il salvarsi. . . . Concludiamo questo punto. Chi prega certamente si salva; chi non prega certamente si dannà. Tutti coloro che si son salvati si son salvati col pregare. Tutti coloro che si son dannati, si son dannati per non pregare; e questa è e sarà per sempre la loro maggior disperazione nell'inferno, l'aver potuto così facilmente salvarsi col pregare." (*Apparecchio alla Morte*, consid. 30, punto 2 [*Opere*, 2:138-139]. Cf. St. Basil, *Hom. in Iulittam* [MG, 31:243]; St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae* [ML, 45:1017]; St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. III in Genesim*, nn. 4-6 [MG, 53:279-282]; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromat.*, 1, VII, c. 7 [MG, 9:454 ff].)

Alphonsus develops his arguments for this in his *Del Gran Mezzo della Preghiera* (*Opere*, 2:515-610; CAW, 3:23-240) and his *Opera Dogmatica*, sess. 6, nn. 141-159 (*Opere*, 8:884-890), relating prayer to the roles of free will, grace, and the divine concursus. As truths is morally necessary for us in order for us to have persevering recourse to proper prayer of petition with the right attitudes this requires; and if one has no set determination about making the due reflections — no plan or decision as to how, when, etc. — then he is apt to neglect it and so be lost. This appears to be the holy Doctor's logic in various treatments of the subject (notably *Del Gran Mezzo della Preghiera*, P. 1, cap. 2) and argues the need of some approved system of reflecting.

<sup>47</sup> HA, App. 1, n. 4 (*Opere*, 7:661); cf. *Pratica*, n. 102.

<sup>48</sup> HA, App. 1, n. 5.

Thus the director should "above all ceaselessly urge his penitents not to omit their prayer nor shorten it in time of dryness, and not to ever become dependent even if they seem weighed down by desolation a long time."<sup>49</sup> Some thoughts we may present to these distressed penitents, according to the need, are offered:

Let him [the confessor] bring to their minds these words of St. Francis de Sales: "Before God one ounce of prayer in the midst of desolation is worth more than a hundred pounds in the midst of consolations." One who loves God on account of the consolations, loves the consolations of God more than he loves God; but one who loves God and clings to Him without these consolations, is the one who shows true love.<sup>50</sup>

How many courtiers (says St. Francis de Sales) go to pay honor to their king and are content simply to be seen by him? Let us go to prayer in order to honor God. If He chooses to speak to us and favor us with His consolations, let us thank Him for this great grace. But if He does not, let us be content to be in His divine presence, peacefully adoring Him and presenting our needs. If the Lord does not address us then, surely our care and faithfulness will be pleasing to Him, and in view of our trust He will certainly hear our prayers.<sup>51</sup>

St. Alphonsus does not stress mental prayer at the expense of vocal prayer. He wanted priests and religious to be faithful to their divine office and to pray it well,<sup>52</sup> and he composed many vocal prayers for all classes. He would have the spiritual director of religious sisters propose, at least to the receptive ones, that they pray "at least five decades of the Rosary with the other vocal prayers" each day. But those vocal prayers "should not be many."<sup>53</sup> When they are, "they are said with little fruit, burden the mind, and later on hinder mental prayer." He recommends the "frequent use of ejaculatory prayer."<sup>54</sup>

#### E. RETREATS

There is another helpful means that a confessor can propose to a receptive penitent for purposes of his making spiritual progress, rectifying what is amiss in his life, and reaching decisions about such important matters as the choice of a state of life, as well as gaining an understanding of and

<sup>49</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v.f. (*Opere*, 7:753). St. Teresa confirms this thinking in her *Vida*, cap. 11, and *Moradas*, III, cap. 2.

<sup>50</sup> HA, App. 1, n. 5 (*Opere*, 7:661). Cf. P. G. Gallizia, *La Vita di S. Francesco di Sales* (Venice: 1743), "Massime," n. 31, p. 432.

<sup>51</sup> HA, App. 4, III, v.f. (*Opere*, 7:753). Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Vie Dévote*, P. 2, chap. 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 24, III (*Opere*, 4:363-366); *Selva*, P. 2, Istruz. 5, nn. 10-11 (*Opere*, 3:132).

<sup>53</sup> The corresponding text in *Praxis*, n. 157, reads "non sint plures justo" ("should not be too many").

<sup>54</sup> "Il rosario almeno di cinque poste, con altre orazioni vocali; ma queste non sieno molte, perché quando son molte, si dicono con poco frutto, aggravano la testa, ed impediscono poi l'orazione mentale.

"Usare spesso le orazioni giaculatorie ..." (*Pratica*, n. 135.)

familiarity with mental prayer. In various places in his writings St. Alphonsus recommends that clergy, religious and even, where feasible, laymen, make an eight- or ten-day retreat every year.<sup>55</sup> He makes clear what he means by retreat, or spiritual exercises.<sup>56</sup> In general, it is made when one withdraws himself from normal occupations to read (or hear a reading of, or conferences on) fundamental matters of the soul and meditate on them, such as "the importance of our Last End, the vanity of the world, the journey to eternity, sin, death, the death of the just, the Judgment, the remorse of a damned Christian, the love we owe Jesus Crucified" — to use the subjects of meditation which he adopted for the eight-day retreat which he composed.<sup>57</sup> He tells us that he wrote *Apparecchio alla Morte* and the *Selva* to serve various purposes, including that of furnishing matter for the conferences or reflections of a retreat.<sup>58</sup>

In a long letter published in his *Opere* (3:609-617), the Saint gives detailed reasons for making retreats in solitude and silence, to the extent possible, if one hopes to gain fruit. The following excerpt brings out more fully his evaluation of this practice and what he means by retreat, or spiritual exercises. This is in answer to an opinion quoted by his correspondent to the effect that the solitude and silence were not important.

The truths of eternal life — as the great affair of our salvation, the precious value of the time God gives us to gain merit for a blessed eternity, the duty we have to love God for His infinite goodness and for the immense love He bears us — these and such matters are not seen with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the mind. On the other hand, it is certain that if the mind does not represent to the will the value of such goods or the hideousness of evil, the will will never embrace what is good nor shun what is evil. Now this is the ruin of men attached to the world. They live in darkness, so that, not realizing the greatness of eternal goods and eternal evils, as they are captivated by things of sense, they surrender to forbidden pleasures and thus miserably perish. Therefore, in order that we may flee from sin, the Holy Spirit admonishes us to keep before our eyes the final things that are to befall us, i.e., the death with which all the goods of the world come to an end for us and the divine Judgment where we must make an accounting to God of our whole life: "Remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. 7:40); and elsewhere He says: "O would that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!" (Deut. 32:29). With these words He would make us understand that if men would be mindful of the things of the next life, they would certainly all give

<sup>55</sup> *Pratica*, n. 138 (XI) (cf. *Praxis*, n. 170); *Regolamento di Vita d'un Cristiano in Compendio*, reg. IX (*Opere*, 1:893); *Novene e Meditazioni*, P. 2 (*Opere*, 2:465).

<sup>56</sup> We have found no strict definition by the Saint. Benigar defines the spiritual exercises as "methodica et quantum est possibile exclusiva exercitatio proprii spiritus per aliquod tempus plus minusve breve ad intentius progrediendum in via perfectionis" (Benigar, *Theologia Spir.*, n. 1168). Judging from the retreat matter St. Alphonsus presents, we submit that his concept agrees substantially with Benigar, but has in view the design to convert sinners, to give fervor to the tepid, and to strengthen the fervent.

<sup>57</sup> *Meditazioni per Otto Giorni d'Esercizi Spirituali in Privato* (*Opere*, 2:481-505; CAW 3:303-353).

<sup>58</sup> See St. Alphonsus' prefatory remarks in these two works (*Opere*, 2:5; 3:5; CAW vols. 1 and 12).

their attention to becoming saints and would not run the risk of having an unhappy life for all eternity. They close their eyes to the light, and thus, being left blind, they plunge into so many evils. Therefore the saints always prayed the Lord to give them light. ... Now to obtain this divine light one must turn to God: "Come ye to Him and be enlightened" (Ps. 33:6). ... This light is gained in the spiritual exercises. ... The spiritual exercises have their value only if we separate ourselves for that period from the business of the world and withdraw ourselves to converse alone with God. There God speaks to us by His inspirations and we speak with God, as we meditate, make acts of love, grieve at the displeasure we have caused Him, offer ourselves to serve Him in the future with all our love, and beg Him to enable us to know His will and grant us strength to fulfill it. ... The Benedictine Father Louis Blosius said that special thanks should be given to God for having manifested to His Church in these latter times this treasure of the exercises.<sup>59</sup>

St. Alphonsus tells his correspondent to take with him to the place of seclusion "a book of meditations of the kind usual for making the exercises. The meditations that you read will serve in place of hearing conferences." He should make his meditation "in the morning and in the evening, with a half hour of reflection each time." He should also take with him some "lives of saints or another spiritual book for reading. These will be your only companions in the solitude of the eight days."<sup>60</sup>

In order for the retreatant to receive "light and hear what the Lord says," he must "stay far away from distractions." To perceive "the divine calls one must break off dealing with the world. No remedies help the sick man if he does not take due care of himself, as by avoiding harmful exposure and harmful food." Likewise, "so that the exercises may assist you in the salvation of your soul you need to avoid harmful distractions, such as receiving visits from friends, or messages ... or letters." Alphonsus advises him to "lay aside letters" and not read them "until the exercises are finished." He instructs him to avoid "reading curious books or doing any studies." He should rather "study only the crucifix." In his room he should have no book "except what is spiritual" and when he reads them he should not do so "out of curiosity, but only for reaching" the goal of his retreat — in this case, the determination of his state of life.<sup>61</sup>

The avoidance of external distractions is "not enough," St. Alphonsus says. "One needs to remove internal ones" too. If one "deliberately turns his thoughts to things of the world or to his studies or the like, the exercises and the solitude will be of little value." While one makes the exercises he "needs to use the time only for the interests of the soul, without wasting a moment."<sup>62</sup>

In order to make a fruitful retreat, receiving the lights and graces needed for wise resolutions and decisions about one's problems, what disposition must one take with him? It should be holy indifference — that disinterested,

<sup>59</sup> Sull'Utilità degli Esercizi Spirituali Fatti in Solitudine, nn. 2, 3, 11 (*Opere*, 3:609, 610, 616; CAW, 3:285 ff).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 14 (*Opere*, 3:616).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* (*Opere*, 3:616-617).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 15 (*Opere*, 3:617).

unbiased attitude which merely wants to decide everything according to God and to please Him alone. While Alphonsus prescribes this disposition for his correspondent to start his retreat, we presume, judging from the retreat matter he composed, that he considers retreatants must at least go on retreat with the desire to use this true, disinterested wisdom, and the retreat reflections should help one cultivate it. In any case, the decisions and resolves reached in the course of the retreat should be made with this indifference. Otherwise, "instead of conforming to God's will," it would be a matter of wanting "God to conform" to our will. One would be "like a pilot who pretends to want his vessel to move, but does not truly want this, who casts anchor and then hoists the sails. The Lord does not enlighten or speak to such a person."<sup>63</sup>

We submit that St. Alphonsus does not intend to teach that the director should prescribe all the foregoing details for all directees whom he would guide to make a retreat, especially when retreatants cannot get to a place of much seclusion; but that he would presumably approve the scope of adaptation allowed by St. Ignatius,<sup>64</sup> whose Exercises he seems to highly praise.<sup>65</sup> His guidelines here are for a model case.

St. Alphonsus would also have the director counsel receptive spiritual souls to make a "similar retreat of one day once a month throughout the year."<sup>66</sup> He considers this practice suited for clergy, religious and lay people "for renewing the spiritual life."<sup>67</sup>

#### F. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Often early in spiritual direction young penitents will want assistance in deciding upon their vocation. "The confessor must not undertake to determine" the matter for them. Rather his counsels must be "regulated by the vocational signs," and, consulting these, he is to "counsel that state to which he can prudently judge God calls" them.<sup>68</sup>

If one wants to enter the religious life,<sup>69</sup> "the confessor should first of

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 13 (*Opere*, 3:616). Alphonsus immediately adds: "Ma se voi lo supplicarete con indifferenza e risoluzione di eseguire la sua volontà, egli vi farà conoscere chiaramente lo stato migliore per voi." That is, if your prayer accompanies holy indifference and a resolve to do God's will, He will let you know clearly the better state for you to choose.

<sup>64</sup> See *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, tr. Anthony Mottola (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1964), pp. 41-42 and passim (hereafter cited as *Exercises-Mottola*).

<sup>65</sup> See the final sentence of the excerpt ending on the preceding page.

<sup>66</sup> *Pratica*, n. 138, XI; *Praxis*, n. 170.

<sup>67</sup> *Breve Pratica per la Perfezione Raccolta dalle Dottrine di S. Teresa*, v. fin. (*Opere*, 2:456). Cf. *Regolamento di Vita per un Sacerdote Secolare*, v. fin. (*Opere*, 3:859); *Vera Sposa*, cap. 24, VII, n. 4 (*Opere*, 4:371); *Avvertimenti Necessari ad Ogni Persona di Qualunque Stato per Salvarsi*, Reg. 9 (*Opere*, 1:893).

<sup>68</sup> "Circa poi lo stato che debba eleggersi alcun giovane, non dee porsi il confessore egli a determinarglielo, ma solamente dee regolarsi da' segni della sua vocazione a consigliargli quello stato a cui prudentemente può stimare che Dio lo chiami." (*Pratica*, n. 79; cf. *Praxis*, n. 92.)

<sup>69</sup> See more detailed counselling on the religious vocation in HA, Tr. 13, nn. 23-26, and

all see into what institute one wants to enter; for if the institute has become relaxed, it will be better, generally speaking, for one to remain in the world." Alphonsus judged that if one were to enter, "he will do as the others do and forsake the bit of good he has been doing, as has happened to many." Therefore the confessor should have a guilty conscience if, "at the prodding of relatives, he were to counsel entrance into that sort of community." But "if the institute is observant, the confessor should duly investigate the penitent's vocation to see if there is any obstacle pertaining to health, to lack of talent, to need of parents." He should inquire the motive for the vocation, "whether it is an upright one — such as to draw closer to God, to make amends for one's past life, to avoid dangers of the world." If the "primary motive is something mundane — to live more comfortably, or escape harsh conditions at home, or to please persistent parents," then one should prohibit the directee from going ahead; for in that case there is not true vocation," and without this, "one will turn out badly." But if the "goal is worthy and there is no obstacle," the confessor "ought not and cannot (nor can anyone else, says St. Thomas<sup>70</sup>) block the vocation without incurring grave guilt." However, at times it may be prudent to delay a penitent from going ahead with his vocation, "in order to test whether it is stable, especially when one knows the young person to be fickle, or if his decision was made at the time of a mission or retreat." For some resolutions made at these times "come to nothing after the first fervor passes."<sup>71</sup>

If a young man wants to become a diocesan priest,<sup>72</sup> "the confessor

Alphonsus' opuscula on the religious state in *Opere*, 4:396 ff., especially *Opuscoli I* and *V* (CAW, 3:381 ff. and 461 ff.). Also noteworthy are these instructions of Vatican II: *Lumen gentium*, nn. 43-44 (AAS, 57:49-51); and *Perfectae caritatis*, nn. 1-2, 5, 7, 12-13 (AAS, 58:702-705, 707-708). In addition, from the S.C. of Religious and Secular Institutes there is *Renovationis causam*, Jan. 6, 1969, n. 4 (AAS, 61:107-108), and *Venite seorsum*, Aug. 15, 1969, nn. I and II (AAS, 61:674-680). See footnote 127 below.

<sup>70</sup> "Si ... aliquis vellet religionem intrare et immineret opportunitas temporis, et omnes circumstantiae convenirent, graviter peccaret qui eum ab ingressu religionis prohiberet." (St. Thomas, *Quodl.*, 3.14.)

<sup>71</sup> "Per coloro che vogliono farsi religiosi, procuri il confessore prima di tutto vedere in quale religione vuole il giovane entrare: perché, se mai la religione è rilasciata, generalmente, parlando, meglio sarà che resti nel secolo; poiché, andando colà, egli farà come fanno gli altri e lascerà quel poco di bene che prima faceva, com'è avvenuto a molti. Onde si faccia molto scrupolo il confessore, specialmente se lo fa ad insinuazione de' parenti, di consigliare ch'entrino in tali sorte di comunità. Se poi la religione è osservante, provi bene il confessore la vocazione del suo penitente con vedere se per quella ha qualmini il fine, s'è retto, come di stringersi più con Dio o di correggere i trascorsi della vita passata e sfuggire i pericoli del secolo. Che se il fine primario fosse mondano, di star più comodo o di liberarsi da' congiunti di mala condizione o di compiacere a' genitori che l'importunano, non glielo permetta; perché in tal caso quella non è vera vocazione, e senza vocazione farà mala riuscita. Se poi il fine è buono e non v'è impedimento, non dee né può il confessore (né altri, come dice s. Tommaso), senza colpa grave impedirgli la vocazione: benché sarà prudente alle volte differirgli l'esecuzione, per meglio esperire risoluzione fosse stata fatta in tempo di missione o di esercizi spirituali, mentre in tali occasioni si fanno certe risoluzioni che, passando poi quel primo fervore, vengono meno." (*Pratica*, n. 79.)

<sup>72</sup> For detailed direction on the priestly vocation, see *Selva*, especially Part I, ch. I, 2

should not easily agree without a long and convincing test of his knowledge or at least his adequate capabilities and right intention." For "secular priests certainly have the same obligation as religious and even a greater one, and yet live in the hazards of the world." In order to succeed, the man must first have led "a well-disciplined life, far from fun-seeking, idleness and bad company, and must have been given to mental prayer and frequenting the Sacraments." Otherwise "he will thrust himself into a state of almost certain damnation, especially if he is acting to serve the goals of relatives, to assist his family."<sup>73</sup>

For young people who want to or ought to marry, the confessor must not take sides with parents who, "without just cause, would hinder them from a worthy marriage."<sup>74</sup>

When unmarried women want to "consecrate their virginity to Christ," the confessor should "not permit them to make a perpetual vow of chastity" unless he sees that a soul is "well rooted in virtue and the spiritual life, especially in prayer." At the start he can let them take the vow "just for a time, as from one solemn feast to another."<sup>75</sup>

Alphonsus brings out his belief in several places that God is not indifferent to our choice of a state in life. He presents general principles of Providence on this in Sec. 1 of the first of his *Opuscoli Relativi allo Stato Religioso*.<sup>76</sup> The link he makes between salvation and the right choice of a vocation presents a many-sided doctrine, for which he appeals to tradition. It presupposes that God, as a reasonable Master, always makes His will reasonably discoverable to souls duly interested and cooperative — discoverable according to the requirements of the holy Doctor for due promulgation of a duty.<sup>77</sup>

and 10, and articles on evaluation and training of seminarians in *Opere*, 3:865-868, 878 ff. (CAW, 12:23-47, 185-207; 17:434-445, 474 ff.). Norms and signs for judging a priestly vocation in general are treated in TM, L. 6, nn. 802-803. Also *Pratica*, n. 70 and Appendix 1, sec. I, n. 10, are relevant (cf. *Praxis*, nn. 78-79 and 182). Noteworthy also are these instructions of Vatican II: *Optatam totius*, nn. 6 and 8-12 (AAS, 58:717-721); *Presbyterorum ordinis*, nn. 12-13, 15-17, 19 (AAS, 58:1009-1020).

<sup>73</sup> Se alcun giovane volesse farsi prete secolare, non sia facile il confessore ad accordarglielo senza un lungo e provato esperimento di scienza o almeno capacità sufficiente e di retto fine. I sacerdoti secolari han certamente lo stesso, anzi maggior obbligo de' religiosi, ed all'incontro restano negli stessi pericoli del secolo; onde, per riuscire alcuno buon sacerdote nel secolo (in cui rari se ne trovano, per non dire rarissimi), bisogna che prima abbia fatta precedere una vita molto regolata, lontana da' giuochi, dall'ozio, da' mali compagni e data all'orazione ed alla frequenza de' sacramenti (ma *quis est hic, et laudabimus eum?*); altrimenti si metterà in uno stato quasi certo di dannazione, specialmente se lo fa per secondare il fine de' parenti, ch'è d'aiutar la casa." (*Pratica*, n. 80; cf. *Praxis*, n. 93.) The importance of checking the kind of diocese and seminary a directee would apply to, is taught in *Opere*, 3:878 (CAW, 17:474-475).

<sup>74</sup> *Pratica*, n. 80. Cf. *Praxis*, n. 94; TM, L. 6, nn. 75 and 489.

<sup>75</sup> *Pratica*, n. 80. Cf. n. 85, "Non sia facile a dar ..."

<sup>76</sup> *Opere*, 4:396-397. This is found in English in CAW, 3:381-383. Regarding those who realize they have a religious vocation and neglect it (or prudently suspect they have one, but will not duly probe the matter), the director who would follow St. Alphonsus should study his TM, L. 4, n. 78, which argues for a very firm position about Providence and the distribution of grace. This is treated further in *Selva*, I, c. 10, nn. 13-14 (*Opere*, 3:86; CAW, 12:201-204).

<sup>77</sup> HA, Tr. 1, nn. 14-15, 31, 42, etc.

## G. POINTS DEVELOPED

1. *The Practice of Mental Prayer*

We offer our judgment that it is well for a spiritual director sometimes to emphasize with directees that all prayer should be in some way mental, whether it be the breviary, the Rosary, the Stations, meal prayers, or anything else. So that a director may not be content that his penitents be "toads,"<sup>73</sup> sluggish in their progress, this point should not be overlooked as a matter of checkup at retreat time and perhaps during examination of conscience. St. Teresa declared that if we are to have prayer at all, it must in some way be in company "with meditation." If one does not consider the Person addressed, or what it is he is asking for, or his own status, "I do not call that prayer, even though he continuously moves his lips." She admits that there might be prayer without "this attention," but that is only because points of prayer have been "considered on other occasions." However, if a man has the practice of addressing the "Divine Majesty as he would speak to his slave and does not look to whether he expresses himself improperly," but just "utters what comes to his lips" because he has learned it by repetition, "I do not count that as prayer at all. God grant no Christian may be in such a plight."<sup>74</sup>

Mental prayer, which Lanz defines as "a form of prayer which is mental, in which the soul, by the attentive consideration of truths of faith, influences the will to the good and to the fervor of the spiritual life,"<sup>75</sup> holds an important place in the Catholic religion. The Code of Canon Law directs that it be the daily practice of clergy (can. 125.2) and religious (can. 592). Pius XII declared that the use of mental prayer has an irreplaceable role ("insostituibile") for cultivating priestly perfection.<sup>76</sup>

Writers have much to say about ways of performing it.<sup>77</sup> It was a practice from early Christian times among some people, according to Benigar, to use a book and read from it with intermittent reflection, asking oneself such questions as: Of what advantage is this teaching for me? Have I observed it up to now? What should I do in the future? They would in this way enable their thoughts to yield holy affections and resolutions and they would unite themselves to God by acts of the will suggested by the material.<sup>78</sup> Another procedure reported by Cassian lay in repeating reflectively many times, with due acts of the will, "Deus in adiutorium meum intende; Domine ad adiuvandam me festina" (Ps. 69:1).<sup>79</sup> However, not only such generally defined ways of meditating but elaborations in the way of meditating have always been in use, according to Benigar.<sup>80</sup> In the writings

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Chapter II, footnote 59, above.

<sup>74</sup> *Moradas*, I, cap. 1, n. 7 (*Obras*, p. 366).

<sup>75</sup> *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, s.v. "Meditazione," by Arnaldo Lanz.

<sup>76</sup> AAS, 35:105-116; 42:671-672.

<sup>77</sup> Tanqueray, *Spiritual Life*, nn. 688-703. Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, nn. 500-502. Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, nn. 1115-1134.

<sup>78</sup> Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, n. 1115.

<sup>79</sup> Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 500.

<sup>80</sup> St. Alphonsus, *Vera Sposa*, cap. 20, n. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, n. 1117.

of the Fathers, he says, methodical meditation was given various labels, as "scala exercitatoria, gradus orationis, series materiae meditandae." St. Bonaventure's *De Triplici Via* and *Soliloquium* contain a well-defined method.

St. Ignatius Loyola caused well-structured meditation to become widespread, chiefly by means of his *Spiritual Exercises* promoted by the Jesuits.<sup>82</sup> Because of variations in the subject matter and the conditions of souls, he proposed a number of methods, the best known of which points up an engagement of the faculties (memory, intellect, will) and is outlined below:<sup>83</sup>

## I. Preparation and Preludes

- A. General preparatory prayers, expressing faith in God's presence, and homage, and petitioning grace
- B. A brief recalling of the truth to be considered
- C. First prelude (also called Composition of Place), which applies the imagination in some fitting way to the subject matter
- D. Second prelude, which involves a petition for some special grace pertaining to the subject matter and which one hopes to draw from the meditation

## II. Body of the Meditation

- A. Employment of the memory to recall the subject matter of this meditation as a whole and the chief circumstances it may involve
- B. Employment of intellect to inquire
  1. What should I consider within this subject matter?
  2. What practical conclusions should I draw?
  3. What should be my motives for drawing them?
  4. How have I behaved in this point hitherto?
  5. What should be my future behaviour?
  6. What difficulties must I overcome?
  7. What means should I engage for succeeding?
- C. Employment of the will
  1. to prayer, moving the other faculties to fill their roles in it
  2. to affections at various times during the meditation, especially at the end
  3. to decisions and resolutions (at the end of each point) which are practical, earnest, humble, confident

## III. Conclusion

- A. Colloquies with God the Father, Our Lord, Our Lady, and the Saints
- B. Examen, inquiring
  1. How did I make this meditation? How and why did I fail or succeed?
  2. What practical conclusions have I reached? What have I petitioned for? What have I resolved upon? What lights have I received?
- C. Choice of some thought to recall during the day to preserve better the fruits of the meditation

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> The diagram is adapted from Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 500, and Tanqueray, *Spiritual Life*, n. 695, consulting St. Ignatius, *Exercises-Mottola*, pp. 105-109 and passim.

St. Francis de Sales<sup>88</sup> borrowed ideas from St. Ignatius and Louis of Granada and proposed a structure fairly enough matching the way given by St. Alphonsus,<sup>89</sup> who followed the same traditions in essentials. The Society of St. Sulpice, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and certain other groups have had their more or less distinctive structures and methods, but borrowed from the same traditions.<sup>90</sup>

The question is sometimes asked if the details of method in use for mental prayer in religious communities and seminaries in many places are not superfluous and should yield to some simpler and, as it were, methodless form of silent, personal prayer. This challenge often appeals to a declaration that meditation must "proceed from the grace of God and that its master is the Holy Spirit, Who breathes where He will and as He will." However, a purpose that the setting of detail serves is to help one keep to true mental prayer, which must be essentially ordered toward our perfection and not stray into reverie or studious speculation.<sup>91</sup> It also serves to facilitate learning and teaching mental prayer. Thus Benigar replies that experienced masters recommend the use of certain methodical procedures because "man ought to cooperate with God's grace, and this cooperation is to be in a human way that follows, for the most part, certain psychological laws;" for God is "wont to match the influence of His grace to our human way of acting." Then he argues, first, that the masters of the spiritual life who recommend that certain well-planned procedures be applied in prayer life, "have learned them by divine inspiration and they have found them to be quite advantageous." Furthermore, the methods that they recommend are "merely ... aids," though "well constructed." They are not presented as any "supreme norm to be followed absolutely in all cases." If sometimes they fail to be of use because, let us say, a soul already finds what it needs in prayer, then one is not to slavishly cleave to them "lest this slavishness become rather a hindrance to the movements of grace." No method proposes its composite of details as the one pattern needed by all souls, nor even as the one best arrangement for all. Yet a predetermined composite of some detail, as found in approved methods, is of value, "especially for beginners and for souls that find it hard to become recollected or are suffering aridity."<sup>92</sup> When one uses an approved method which he has chosen to follow in order to cooperate with his spiritual director or with the traditions, ecclesiastically approved, of the community to which he belongs, we submit that especially the beginner is practicing a wise trust. He has good authority for believing that his way is satisfactorily structured toward achieving the goals of prayer life and is not a venture doomed to become fruitless.<sup>93</sup>

If one reviews the method proposed by St. Alphonsus, described above, surely one should not call it overdetailed. True, many of the details — the specific prayers, the time appointed for affections of one sort or another,

<sup>88</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Vie Dévote*, P. 2, chaps. 2-7; Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 500.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. part C of this chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Tanqueray, *Spiritual Life*, nn. 689-691; Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, nn. 1124-1128.

<sup>91</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. 6, ch. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Benigar, *op. cit.*, n. 1116.

<sup>93</sup> Ventures in prayer life which have been censured by the Church are mentioned by St. Teresa (*Vida*, cap. 22; *Moradas*, IV, cap. 3, and VI, cap. 7), and by Benigar, *op. cit.*, nn. 1117 and 1151. Some are in Denzinger-Schönmetzner, nn. 2181-2192 and 2201 ff.

the precise sequence, etc. — could be substituted by other details that could also serve the purpose and likewise produce the true mental prayer that is so important. "It is especially needful," the Holy Doctor wrote, "that our exercises of piety be done only to please God" and not in pursuit of "selfish ends or in the interest of self-esteem or for self-satisfaction." Otherwise "all will be lost, and instead of a reward we shall receive punishment. This is why, in order to make sure that we do for God all that we do, we need to do everything with a dependence on our director."<sup>94</sup> Alphonsus is here addressing priests who want a rule for "tending to perfection." We submit that if this applies to them, even more so it applies to other Christians in pursuit of perfection.

A reason Alphonsus presents for favoring the morning for the time of meditating (above Sec. C), is drawn from the saying of Ven. Charles Carafa, Founder of the Pious Workers, that an "act of love made with fervor in the morning suffices to keep the soul in its fervor throughout the day."<sup>95</sup> St. Teresa's maxim, "Keep in mind all day what you meditated in the morning; take care to do this, for it is very profitable," supposes her acceptance of advantages in this practice.<sup>96</sup> St. Francis de Sales counsels Philothea to "set aside an hour every day before dinner, if possible early in the morning when your mind is less distracted and fresher after the night's rest."<sup>97</sup> Benigar, while citing no other authors, speaking in general, favors the morning hour,<sup>98</sup> as does Royo Marín,<sup>99</sup> citing only Ribet, who, favoring the morning in general when there is but one daily meditation, adds (in the quote): "According to the masters of the spiritual life, the hours most suitable are the early morning, in the evening before supper, and at midnight."<sup>100</sup>

We note that St. Alphonsus favored a half-hour daily meditation for beginners. He would have the director increase it according to his judgment of the soul's advancement.<sup>101</sup> Some thoughts enlarging on this matter are contributed by St. Thomas:

The quantity of anything should match its end; thus, the amount of medicine should be measured according to health. Accordingly ... prayer should last as long as it serves to awaken an earnestness of inner desire. When it surpasses this measure so that it cannot be prolonged without ... irksomeness, it should be continued no further. ... We should judge thus about individual prayer by considering the person's attentiveness; likewise about group prayer ... by considering the people's devotion.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>94</sup> "Perciò affine di far sicuramente per Dio quanto facciamo, è necessario il far tutto colla dipendenza dal nostro direttore." (*La Messa e l'Officio Strapazzati*, App. 2, v. med. [*Opere*, 3:861; CAW, 12:439].)

<sup>95</sup> Pietro Gisolfi, *Vita del Ven. Carlo Caraffa* (Naples: 1858), cap. 32, v. med.

<sup>96</sup> "Lo que medita por la mañana, traiga presente todo el día, y en esto ponga mucha diligencia, porque hay grande provecho." (*Avisos*, n. 31 [*Obras*, p. 664].)

<sup>97</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life* JKR, Part 2, chap. 1, p. 82.

<sup>98</sup> Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, n. 1132.

<sup>99</sup> Royo Marín, *Teol. Perf.*, n. 502.

<sup>100</sup> Jeronimo Ribet, *L'ascétique chretienne* (Paris: 1887), c. 32, n. 3.

<sup>101</sup> "A principio l'asegni il tempo di mezz'ora il giorno, e lo vada poi accrescendo secondo cresce lo spirito." (*Pratica*, n. 101.)

<sup>102</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 83, a. 14.



## 2. Spiritual Exercises

Understanding an experience of the spiritual exercises, or a retreat, to be a "methodical exercise, undertaken as far as possible in solitude, for a period more or less short, for the purpose of more intense progress in the way of perfection," Benigar<sup>103</sup> traces a history of the practice. He sees a kind of retreat when Our Lord called His Apostles to "come apart into a desert place and rest a little" (Mark 6:31), and again after the Ascension when the disciples withdrew "into an upper room" and "were persevering with one mind in prayer" until the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13,14). In the writings of the Fathers spiritual exercises are clearly evidenced somewhat "as we practice them today," he says, and he presents texts from St. Jerome, St. Peter Chrysologus, and St. Leo the Great.<sup>104</sup> In the course of the centuries a "decadence of monastic life brought with it the progressive disappearance of spiritual retreats," reports Iparraguirre.<sup>105</sup> As a reaction, devout religious like Gerard Groot in the fifteenth century had programs to devote several weeks at a time to renew the spiritual life. The Brothers of the Common Life, founded by Groot and Florence Radewyns, achieved much in this spiritual revival by publishing many ascetic treatises, of which some bore the title "Spiritual Exercises." Their work spread, and such retreats were being given in Spain by the Benedictines at Monserrat at the time of Ignatius Loyola, who perhaps made one of them.<sup>106</sup>

At any rate, in the plan St. Ignatius drew up, he assigned the retreat, or spiritual exercises, "a well-fixed function, devising a graduated and methodical procedure," placing the program "under the guidance of a director."<sup>107</sup> His well-known book, *Ejercicios Espirituales — Spiritual Exercises* — was approved in 1548 by Pope Paul III. In 1922 Pius XI ranked St. Ignatius as heavenly Patron of retreats and retreat-promoters. He called the Ignatian Exercises "a most wise and universal code of laws for the direction of souls in the way of salvation and perfection . . . showing the way to secure amendment of morals and . . . the summit of the spiritual life."<sup>108</sup> Pius XII declared that these Exercises "will always be one of the most effective means for the spiritual regeneration of the world and for its right ordering" as long as they "continue to be authentically Ignatian."<sup>109</sup>

One modern yet authentically Ignatian way of giving a retreat in ten days comes from the pen of a recent Saint, Anthony Mary Claret, nineteenth century religious founder and archbishop. He tells us that he learned from the Society of Jesus how to give the Exercises, and frequently engaged in this work.<sup>111</sup> During their early fervor following the Society's restoration, he was, in fact, a priest-novice until an ailment, as evaluated by the Jesuit

<sup>103</sup> *Theol. Spir.*, nn. 1168-1174.

<sup>104</sup> *Op. cit.*, n. 1172.

<sup>105</sup> *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, s.v. "Esercizi Spirituali," by Ignacio Iparraguirre.

<sup>106</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913 ed., s.v. "Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius," by Paul Debuchy.

<sup>107</sup> Ignacio Iparraguirre in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, loc. cit.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Introduction, by Robert W. Gleason, to *Exercises-Mottola*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>109</sup> Ignacio Iparraguirre in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, loc. cit.

<sup>111</sup> *Autobiografía de S. Antonio María Claret* (Madrid: Editorial Cocusa, 1951), Parte 2a, c. 5, v. fin., and c. 20 (pp. 84 and 156-158).

General, indicated that God had other plans for him.<sup>112</sup> Claret's *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio*<sup>113</sup> tells in a preface of the repeated requests he had received to prepare a book containing these meditations, with due explanation, so that "for their greater profit people may be able, with book in hand, to make the meditations in unhurried fashion, or repeat what they have once heard from the retreat master;" and not only for this reason, but "that people may be able to make the Exercises alone during a year when they cannot have a retreat master."

"Spiritual masters," he declares, "divide the meditations into three parts" according to the three conditions of retreatants. "Some are sinners who want to emerge from sin," walking on the road "they call the purgative way," of which the goal is "to purify the soul from all vice, sin, and guilt." Other souls are more advanced and are growing in virtue "who walk on the road which the masters call the illuminative way," the goal of which "is to enlighten the soul with the splendor of many truths and virtues" and make it "gain great increase in them." Others "are the perfect, who walk in what is called the unitive way, the goal of which is to unite" the spirit with God "in a union of perfect love." St. Ignatius distributes the same material "of the three ways into four weeks." In the first week "he presents the material corresponding to the purgative way;" in the second and third weeks, "the material of the illuminative way;" and in the fourth week "the material of the unitive way."

St. Claret then explains the salient features of his program of the Exercises. He divides the material of Ignatius' first week (the purgative way) into two sections. "The first section embraces meditations conducive to deploring and confessing our sins and getting rid of them." The second section of meditations seeks to prevent a relapse into sin and to contribute toward persevering in the purity acquired in the first section. Claret's third section embraces meditations on the virtues we need to have and learn from Our Lord, "which St. Ignatius calls the meditations of the second week." The fourth section continues with Our Lord's virtues, considering them "in a more lofty and perfect way, and is directed toward the spirit in which He performed His holy works, suffered great pains, and practiced all virtues. St. Ignatius places these meditations in the third week." St. Claret's fifth and final section "contains meditations belonging to the unitive way, which St. Ignatius calls those of the fourth week," normally the final week of the full-length retreat as originally devised by St. Ignatius, who did, however, make allowance for conditions calling for shorter periods.<sup>114</sup>

The thirty-five meditations in St. Claret's work are distributed into four a day, except for a single one on the first day and two on the final, tenth day. He would have them all "to be made on the days assigned. If this is not possible in public functions when they are held in church, let them be made privately at home," he says.

We remark in passing that St. Claret, in his opening meditation, insists on silence and freedom from other cares during the Exercises.<sup>115</sup> "Perfect

<sup>112</sup> *Op. cit.*, Parte 2a, c. 7 (p. 91).

<sup>113</sup> St. Antonio María Claret, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio Explicados* (Madrid: Editorial Cocusa, 1955), pp. 5-6.

<sup>114</sup> St. Claret, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-9. *Exercises-Mottola*, pp. 38 and 42.

<sup>115</sup> St. Claret, *Ejercicios . . . Explicados*, pp. 38 and 40. Cf. *Exercises-Mottola*, p. 43.

silence must be maintained," says Gleason, "or the retreat cannot be called Ignatian, no matter how closely the book of the *Exercises* is otherwise followed."<sup>118</sup>

Claret adds other information which should be of use to spiritual directors who would gain a greater appreciation of the *Exercises*, so that those that are able and so inspired may perhaps apply themselves to learning how to give them fruitfully, at least to individual directees; but at least this information enables them to more knowledgeably induce directees to make the Exercises at opportune times, either when publicly given, or, as St. Alphonsus advised his correspondent for his circumstances, to make them privately in seclusion with retreat books.<sup>117</sup>

St. Claret tells us that "according to St. Ignatius the Spiritual Exercises are nothing else than a method of examining your conscience, of meditating and turning the mind on things divine, of praying mentally and vocally, and of other spiritual operations." He adds that "just as to walk, to pace, to run, are bodily exercises, likewise we call spiritual exercises every method of conditioning, rousing, preparing, enabling the soul to rid itself of feelings and attractions that are out of place," and once rid of them, "to seek and find the divine will in all the circumstances of life, for the soul's salvation."<sup>118</sup>

He judges that the Exercises are needed by "the upright, the sinner, and the lukewarm." The upright need them "to grow more so" and "continue good to the end." The sinner needs them "in order to become converted." The lukewarm have "even more need" of them in view of their plight. For an opportunity to take the Exercises indicates that the "Gardener" of their barren soul, "Who is Jesus Christ, has made a request and obtained the favor of another year's delay in the hope that you will soon bear fruit," for now a "new and special gardening treatment" is to be applied.<sup>119</sup>

Having seen the fruits of the Exercises, Pope Paul III urged "in the Lord that all the faithful of both sexes, regardless of their station in the world, make use" of them; and Claret also reports that Clement XII excused parish priests from the law of residence and granted clergy other privileges who would make the Exercises for ten days.<sup>120</sup>

"So excellent," he says, "so useful and so profitable are the Exercises of St. Ignatius, that one can say that for three centuries all the Saints and men of outstanding goodness have been formed in" them to "fill the roles they have played." He lists St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, Ven. Louis Granada, Ven. Louis Blossius, St. John of Avila, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Teresa of Jesus, and St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, among others.<sup>121</sup>

### 3. The Choice of a Vocation

The Apostolic Constitution *Sedes Sapientiae* of May 31, 1956, declares that "if a vocation to any state is a true one, to that extent it should be called

<sup>118</sup> Robert W. Gleason in Introduction to *Exercises-Mottola*, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. St. Alphonsus' letter as quoted in sec. E. above.

<sup>118</sup> St. Claret, op. cit., p. 23. Cf. *Exercises-Mottola*, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> St. Claret, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-33.

in some sense divine, inasmuch as God is the principal author of all states and of all natural and supernatural aptitudes and gifts."<sup>122</sup>

As we remarked above at the end of section F., Alphonsus sees a strict link between salvation and one's choice of a vocation. He adds, however, that the confessor must "not take it upon himself to determine" a penitent's vocation.<sup>123</sup>

This rule of restraint is emphasized in the Code and in two recent *acta* of the Holy See. Canon 971 forbids "anyone from in any way, for any reason, forcing a person into the clerical state, or turning away from the same one who is canonically qualified."<sup>124</sup> The Apostolic Constitution *Sedes Sapientiae* admonishes "those charged with obtaining and examining vocations" to "in no way ever constrain anyone into the priestly or religious state."<sup>125</sup> An Instruction of February 2, 1961, of the Sacred Congregation of Religious tells superiors who confront hesitant candidates for profession or holy orders, to

turn away at the start those whom they perceive to be unsuited, but as for the ones they deem worthy, to exhort them to take the vows or consent to the ordination, but to refrain from urging the profession or ordination, and to let the decision be taken of their own will, avoiding undue influence, as by luring them ... with empty praise, or threatening them with spiritual evils and the pains of hell which they may incur if they withdraw from the profession or ordination.<sup>126</sup>

These three documents are used by Albino, along with other arguments, to refute certain hard-sounding positions about the link between salvation and vocation.<sup>127</sup> We submit, however, that we see no opposition in them to St. Alphonsus' teaching, and if we were to argue against him, we would seek to use other grounds. Albino seems to differ with St. Alphonsus<sup>128</sup> as to the

<sup>122</sup> "Ceteroquin, si vera ad quemlibet statum vocatio eatenus divina quodammodo dicenda est, quatenus omnium statuum omniumque sive naturalium sive supernaturalium dispositionum donorumque principalis auctor ipse est Deus." (AAS, 48:337.)

<sup>123</sup> "... non dee porsi il confessore egli a determinarglielo, ma solamente dee regolarsi da' segni della sua vocazione a consigliargli quello stato a cui prudentemente puo stimare che Dio lo chiami." (*Pratica*, n. 79.)

<sup>124</sup> "Nefas est quemquam, quovis modo, ob quamlibet rationem, ad statum clericalem cogere, vel canonice idoneum ab eodem avertere." (CIC, can. 971.)

<sup>125</sup> "Neminem proinde umquam quovis modo ad statum sacerdotalem vel religiosum cogant, ..." (AAS, 48:337.)

<sup>126</sup> "Cum agitur de alumnis animo ancipitibus et anxiiis, qui ad vitam religiosam amplectendam vel relinquendam aut etiam ad Ordines recipiendos vel reiciendos decidere non valent, Moderatores, quos indignos agnoverint, ab incepto avertant; quos vero dignos censuerint, adhortentur ut vota emittant vel ordinari consentiant; attamen se absteineant ab urgenda professione vel ordinatione, et sententiam amplectendam relinquunt eorum arbitrio, influxum indebitum omittentes veluti eos alliciendo ad professionem vel ordinationem vanis blanditiis, aut minitendo spiritualia mala et poenas inferni, in quae incurrant si a professione vel ab ordinatione recesserint." (*Instruction* to heads of religious institutes by the Sacred Cong. of Religious, n. 26, approved by Pontiff Jan. 23, 1961, and issued Feb. 2, 1961, (*Leges Ecclesiae post Codicem Juris Canonici Editae*, ed. Xaverius Ochoa [Rome: 1966-1974, 3:4150].) This useful document is found in English in Bouscaren-O'Connor's *Canon Law Digest* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1934-1963), 5:452-486.

<sup>127</sup> P. Albino del Bambino Gesù, *Compendio di Teologia Spirituale* (Torino: Marietti, 1966), pp. 598-599.

<sup>128</sup> See references described above in footnote 76.

degree of influence our vocational decisions have on the facility with which we may save our souls. Both agree that there is some influence and that one should not despair if he has made a bad decision and carried it out.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, St. Alphonsus cites, with seeming agreement, a Father Lancicius as telling a penitent that *in itself* it is no grievous sin not to correspond to a religious vocation, because this is a thing of counsel and not of precept, but that one would expose his salvation to great danger thereby "as has happened to many, who for this reason were finally damned."<sup>130</sup>

The Instruction of 1961 speaks of avoiding use of the threat of hell or other spiritual evils, at least on the part of superiors. Does this allow us to assure a youth that he need fear no sin in resisting the grace of a true vocation? This is a question that Albino raises. We submit that where it is not difficult to harmonize these documents with the teaching of holy Doctors, one should do so. The same document speaks of the "dangerous infidelity" of one who resists a "divine vocation solidly established," and declares that refusal to a divine vocation is "justly condemned."<sup>131</sup> Hence we see no difficulty in a confessor who is sure of his lights about a particular case, tactfully and charitably warning one of this danger to his salvation who is being tempted to abandon, against his better judgment, a religious vocation. The reason is that it could happen that in selfishly spurning a "divine vocation solidly established,"<sup>132</sup> one would deprive himself of the helps and graces ordained for him by divine Providence on the path to salvation. Moreover, one should surely be able to give such warnings impersonally to groups by merely quoting in a general way St. Alphonsus and his citations of St. Gregory the Great, etc., on the great hazard of damnation from selfish unfaithfulness to a divine vocation.<sup>133</sup>

A sermon published and circulated by St. Anthony Claret<sup>134</sup> contributes

<sup>129</sup> St. Alphonsus, *Selva*, P.1, c.10 (CAW, 12:206-207). One may cite the example of St. Dominic Loricatus, who, before his conversion, had been simoniacally ordained a priest. His spiritual father and biographer was St. Peter Damian, who tells how the problem was handled (ML, 144:1008-1024).

<sup>130</sup> "... un giovane di gran talenti ... dimandò al suo confessore se era peccato non corrispondere alla vocazione di farsi religioso. Rispose il confessore, che per sé non era peccato grave, perché ciò era consiglio, non precetto; ma ch'era mettere a gran pericolo la salute eterna, come era avvenuto a tanti che perciò poi s'erano dannati." (*Opuscoli Relativi allo Stato Religioso*, I [Opere, 4:397; CAW, 3:384-385].)

<sup>131</sup> "Periculosa quidem est infidelitas, qua vocatio divina certo probata deseritur, sed gravius esset si non vocati vel indigni, clausis oculis, obligationes religiosas et clericales amplecterentur. ... Laudabiliter vitae religiosae sanctitas et sacerdotii dignitas et excellentia tironibus ab initio et toto tempore formationis saepe commendatur, atque a vera divina vocatione defectio iuste damnatur." (Instruction of February 2, 1961, nn.20 and 28 [*Leges Ecclesiae post Codicem* ... ed. Ochoa, 3:4149, 4151]. See footnote 126 above.)

<sup>132</sup> Cf. last paragraph of Sec. F. above.

<sup>133</sup> St. Alphonsus, TM, L.4, n.78; *Opere*, 4:396 ff. St. Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, lib.3, indict.17, epist.65 (ML, 77:663). Cf. St. Bernard, *De conversione ad clericos*, c.21, n.37 (ML, 182:855).

<sup>134</sup> This sermon is on pp.285-300 of the third and last volume of *Sermones de Misión* (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1858), the title page of which declares that the archbishop, Anthony Mary Claret, composed some of the sermons and selected others from various authors, publishing the whole work in his own name. We have found nothing to tell us with certainty which ones he composed and which ones he picked from other sources.

to the teaching we have presented, a development which we have not seen so sharply and categorically stated elsewhere, which seems to accord well with texts we have cited of St. Alphonsus. Among other things, the author rebukes those who suppose that conscientious deliberation and an upright intention are only called for when one is to choose the religious state: "If one is to remain in the world surrounded by dangers," does he need "no more for deciding his future than the fact that a prospective husband presents himself who is handsome, or that a rich bride is available, and that a prosperous marriage seems to be offered?" Is it possible that for choosing the religious state, "thorough deliberations" are not too much, whereas for choosing a "trade or profession in the business world, or for gaining some post that promises great dignity," or for obtaining a "permanent position that carries a comfortable salary in public service or the secular priesthood," all one needs is "to meet the opportunity of acquiring such a position and have a good recommendation and a shrewd way at hand to seize it?"<sup>135</sup> The author answers himself: "Your salvation is endangered if, when you would decide in favor of a marriage, or in favor of the priesthood, or upon a career in the world," you do not apply "at least the same care that you would for deciding in favor of the religious state."<sup>136</sup>

We suggest that the director could gain some further insight for counseling on vocational decisions from St. Francis de Sales' treatment of the virtues to practice and the follies to avoid in deciding about a state in life, in his valuable work called *Theotimus*, or *Treatise on the Love of God*.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> "Y para quedarse en el mundo rodeados de peligros, envueltos en mil escándalos, ¿no se necesitará mas que presentarse un novio de arrogante presencia, una novia rica, y que parezca ser una boda ventajosa? ¿Es posible que para el estado religioso no han de ser excesivas las diligencias mas exquisitas, y para un empleo, una dignidad, un beneficio, sea en el siglo, ó sea en el sacerdocio, ha de ser suficiente el que la ocasión de adquirirle se presente, el que haya un empeño superior, el que no falte un manejo activo para abalanzarse á él?" (St. Claret, *Sermones de Misión*, 3:293.)

<sup>136</sup> "... quiero decir, que vuestra salvacion se arriesga, si para el matrimonio, para el sacerdocio y para los empleos del mundo no praticais á lo menos aquellas mismas diligencias que hariais para el estado religioso." (Ibid., pp.293-294.) The sermon proposes three steps for reaching a decision: First, making the divine will the goal in the matter and seeking the help of heaven as one puts his heart right with God; second, consulting God's ministers, "and not just any of them," but "those whose virtue and talents make them qualified and worthy for you to reverently receive their counsels" and who would "tell you the plain truth as they understand it before God, even though by telling it they might happen to displease you;" and, third, taking account of one's talents, aptitudes, limitations, and fondnesses, to judge whether "the burdens of the state you are considering, or the character of the person you might marry" will be something "that your strength will find bearable," or whether, instead, there would be trials and temptations which "would overtax your patience" or other virtues and "shipwreck your conscience and your soul." (Ibid., p.299.)

<sup>137</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, L.8, chap.10-14.

CHAPTER IV  
THE DIRECTION OF READING

A. SOME COUNSELS

As a penitent cannot always have access to his director "for counsel in every action," the reading of holy books is, according to St. Alphonsus, immensely useful, perhaps "no less useful than mental prayer." Such reading instructs us both "in prayer and in the practice of virtue."<sup>1</sup>

But St. Alphonsus would not have the penitent read indiscriminately even from holy books. We may gather from several texts that he considered spiritual direction to extend to the control (at least to the extent that the director judges it useful) of a penitent's reading.<sup>2</sup> Alphonsus thought that works on moral theology are not well suited to certain directees, for whom they may be "sometimes even injurious." Thereby their consciences "may become confused" or they may learn "things not profitable for them." He would guide some penitents away from reading books on mystical theology, who may become dazzled over supernatural prayer "so as to quit the ordinary method of prayer" made by "considerations and affections." By leaving the lower grade of prayer to seek the mystical grade before they are called to it, "they may be left without the one or the other." He would not have the directee "meddling in" the supernatural prayer of contemplation "unless God clearly calls him to this," at least in his present stage.<sup>3</sup>

After searching the *Opere*, we have found nowhere that Alphonsus lists books for the director to have lay persons read, except that he himself published certain works for general use as spiritual reading.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, writing in his *Pratica*, he proposes for religious women the reading of Rodríguez,<sup>5</sup> Saint-Jure,<sup>6</sup> and J. P. Du Sault,<sup>7</sup> for a spiritual reading period of

<sup>1</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 1 (*Opere*, 4:265-266).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., *Pratica*, n. 135 (*Praxis*, n. 157); *Regole di spirito per un sacerdote che attende alla perfezione*, v. med. (*Opere*, 3:861).

<sup>3</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 4 (*Opere*, 4:267).

The contemplation of which St. Alphonsus here speaks is something which no one can reach by his own efforts, but to which God gratuitously raises the souls whom he chooses for it (*Pratica*, n. 111 ff).

<sup>4</sup> See the Saint's prefatory remarks in *Glorie di Maria*, *Apparecchio alla Morte*, *Del gran mezzo della preghiera*, and *Vittorie dei martiri*, given respectively in *Opere*, 1:5-10; 2:5-6, 515-517; 4:453-561. In English these works are, respectively, CAW vols. 7-8, 1, 3, and 9.

<sup>5</sup> Alphonsus Rodríguez (1538-1616), Spanish Jesuit. His great work is *Practice of Christian Perfection*, tr. Joseph Rickaby, 3 vols. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1929).

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure (1588-1657), French Jesuit. His works include *De la connaissance et de l'amour du Fils de Dieu Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1634), *L'homme spirituel* (1646), *De l'homme religieux* (1657-1658).

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Du Sault (1650-1724), French Benedictine. An important work of his was *Avis et réflexions sur le devoirs de l'état religieux*.

1) &  
2)  
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a half-hour a day.<sup>8</sup> In *Vera Sposa* he tells nuns (and others in the wider readership intended) to read those books "in which you find the most devotion and by which you are the more moved toward union with God." Then, besides the authors we have just mentioned, he lists some more. Among them these have appeared in English: works of St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, Louis Granada,<sup>9</sup> G. P. Pinamonti,<sup>10</sup> and G. B. Scaramelli.<sup>11</sup> He thereupon offers nuns this counsel:

Generally speaking, lay aside difficult books and read those that are devout and easy to read, and manage to read the material that you know to be most profitable for your perfection. Among other things, often read lives of saints, especially those who were religious, as St. Teresa, St. Mary Magdelene de Pazzi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Ven. Frances Farnese, Ven. Seraphina da Capri, St. Peter of Alcántara, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis Borgia, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and the like. Also read the lives of the holy martyrs.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise Alphonsus would have priests devote a half hour daily to devout reading, and recommends works by the above-mentioned Saint-Jure and Rodríguez, and "above all ... the lives of the saints, as the life of St. Philip Neri, of St. Francis Borgia, of St. Peter of Alcántara, and the like."<sup>13</sup>

Alphonsus instructs spiritual souls how to "draw great fruit from spiritual reading." First, he would have them begin it with prayer that God may enlighten them as they read. Second, one should "not read for the sake of learnedness, nor out of curiosity, but for the sole purpose of advancing in divine love." He cites St. Gregory<sup>14</sup> as declaring that "many read only through curiosity," and "read a great deal, but ... finish reading as un-nourished as if they had read nothing." This was why this Pope "corrected the physician Theodore for reading spiritual books hurriedly and without profit." Thirdly, one needs to do his spiritual reading "unhurriedly and reflectively." He cites St. Ephrem's counsel that "when what you read makes a moving impression," you do well to "read it again."<sup>15</sup> Fourthly, when from his

<sup>8</sup> *Pratica*, n. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Louis of Granada (1504-1588), Spanish Dominican. Published in English are his *Sinner's Guide*, tr. Dominican Father (Boston: Thomas B. Noonan & Co., 1883), and a compilation from his works, *Summa of the Christian Life*, tr. J. Aumann, 3 vol. (St. Louis: 1954-1958).

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti (1632-1703), Italian Jesuit. His principal works include *La vera sapienza, Lo specchio che non inganna, La croce allegerita*. W.T. Noon, in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "James A. Joyce," reports that a "translation of *Hell Opened to Christians*" by Pinamonti was the principal literary source of one of Joyce's works.

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687-1752), Italian Jesuit. His works include *Direttorio Ascetico*, treating Christian perfection and the virtues, which has had eight editions in English, according to E.A. Ryan (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Giovanni B. Scaramelli"). He also wrote *Direttorio Mistico and Discernimento degli Spiriti*.

<sup>12</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 9 (*Opere*, 4:269-270).

<sup>13</sup> *Regolamento di Vita*, v. med. (*Opere*, 3:857-858).

<sup>14</sup> St. Gregory's first text is in his *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, lib. 1, hom. 10, n. 7 (ML, 76:888). He corrects and admonishes Theodore in *Epistle 31* (ML, 77:706).

<sup>15</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Opera graece et latine*, tom. 3 (Rome: 1746), p. 101.

reading one "receives some special light" or any instruction that "penetrates the heart," it is wise for him to "stop and raise his mind to God by making a resolution or a good act" — i.e., making his own some worthy sentiment — "or turning to fervent prayer." Then one should "let prayer interrupt the reading," he says, citing St. Bernard,<sup>16</sup> and at that time one should continue to pray as long as the insight in its "lively" impressiveness lasts, even though all the time "prescribed for the reading" might be spent this way; for thus "the time would be used with greater spiritual profit." Sometimes it may happen that one draws "more fruit from reading a single passage than from reading an entire page." Lastly, at the end of the reading Alphonsus would have the reader "select some sentiment of devotion" excited by what he has read and carry it with him as one "would carry a flower from a garden."<sup>17</sup>

#### B. CAUTIONS

St. Alphonsus declares that the reading of good spiritual books is "as profitable as the reading of bad books is harmful." While God inspires wholesome and edifying books, the "author of harmful writings is the devil, who often artfully conceals from some people the poison which these works contain" and persuades them to believe that they need to read these books in order to "be good conversationalists" and gain a "knowledge of things of the world so as to conduct themselves well in it," or at least the devil may argue that such reading is needful in order to "pass our time without boredom." The Saint says that he here speaks not merely of heretical and erotic books, but of all books characterized by vanity and worldliness. Addressing nuns he says, "What fervor can a religious have if she reads romances, comedies, or profane poetry? What recollection can she have in meditation or at Communion?" Even good laypersons, especially those that might seriously take spiritual direction, would not have the practice of reading such books.<sup>18</sup>

Alphonsus speaks also of books that, while not containing "sinful matter, will contribute nothing to your profit." He adds:

These will be bad for you because they will make you waste time which you could employ in things profitable for your soul.

To a woman directee ... St. Jerome wrote for her instruction that he had been fond of works of Cicero during his solitude at Bethlehem and often read them, ... and had a strong distaste for pious books because he found their style unpolished. It so happened that he became very ill, when he saw himself at the tribunal of Jesus Christ. "Tell me, what are you?" the Lord asked. "I am a Christian," replied the Saint.

<sup>16</sup> Alphonsus is taking this from the epistle *Ad Fratres de Monte Dei de Vita Solitaria*, cap. 10, n. 31 (ML, 184:328). The authorship is disputed, and is the subject of a lengthy study by the editors in OA, 14:483-488, who conclude that the work should more probably be ascribed to St. Bernard.

<sup>17</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, nn. 11, 12 (*Opere*, 4:271).

<sup>18</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 2 (*Opere*, 4:266).

"You lie," the Judge said. "You, a Christian? You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian."

He then ordered him to be promptly scourged. The Saint promised to correct his fault, and having returned [from the ecstasy] ... he found his shoulders all livid and covered with wounds. ... Thenceforward he gave up the works of Cicero and devoted himself to reading books of piety. It is true that in works like those [of Cicero] we sometimes find profitable sentiments; but the same St. Jerome wisely wrote to another disciple, "You need not hunt gold amid mire." Why must you go in search of a little gold in the midst of so much mire, when you can read pious books in which you may find all gold without any mire?<sup>19</sup>

Many books are calculated to draw one toward a lax conscience, or libertinism, and so may be expected to cause one to compromise with sound faith and morals. "What desolation this poison will produce should it ever be introduced into any religious community!" Alphonsus remarks, adding, "A single bad book of this sort will be enough to bring it to ruin."<sup>20</sup> He tells the nun reading his *Vera Sposa*,

Should a work of this kind ever come into your hands, cast it promptly into the fire. ... And if you are ever superior, do all you can to eradicate such books from the convent, if you do not want to have a great account to make with God.<sup>21</sup>

Directors after the mind of St. Alphonsus will be uncompromising about reading matter that yields in matters of faith and morals, whether their penitents are in the cloister or in the world. He entered the arena against astute arguments that favored a considerable freedom in regard to unwholesome reading, devoting to this chapters 1 and 4 of Appendix III of Book I in his *Theologia Moralis*. In chapter 2 of the same appendix, he says, "It is demonstrated that from the beginning, at the command of the Apostles, the Church of God has been solicitous for the prohibition of evil books."<sup>22</sup> In the thesis captioning chapter 3 of the same appendix, Alphonsus declares that the Church has in some way always "exercised her jurisdiction" in this matter of prohibiting bad books.<sup>23</sup>

St. Alphonsus puts readers on their guard against Catholic writings that display an a priori bias disfavoring well accredited miracles and revelations, and he also warns of authors who do a disservice by using excessive credulity in evaluating extraordinary phenomena of a pious nature.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 4 (*Opere*, 4:267); St. Jerome, *Epistola 22, ad Eustochium*, and *Epistola 54, ad Furiam, De viduitate servanda*, no. 11 (ML, 22:416-417 and 555). Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (*Three Ages*, 1:147-148) also reports this experience of St. Jerome.

<sup>20</sup> *Vera Sposa*, cap. 17, n. 3 (*Opere*, 4:266-267).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Chapter 2 is captioned, "Demonstratur, quod sancta Dei Ecclesia usque ab initio, ex Apostolorum praecepto, pro abolitione pravorum Librorum sollicita fuit." (TM, vol. 1, p. 261.)

<sup>23</sup> Chapter 3 is captioned, "Fusius ostenditur, Ecclesiae praecipuum et proprium semper fuisse libros malos proscribere; et hujusmodi iurisdic. semper Ecclesiam exercuisse." (TM, vol. 1, p. 266.)

<sup>24</sup> *Vittorie dei Martiri*, Breve Prefazione, v. fin. (*Opere*, 4:465). Similar remarks are here and there in this work.

Note that St. Alphonsus reports that St. Teresa wanted superiors in her communities to "prohibit nuns from reading her books of visions and revelations." She said this in a vision after her death, he says, when she declared that "she became a saint not by visions and revelations, but by the practice of virtue." He used this to argue for his position that we should guide some penitents away from reading books on mystical theology, as mentioned above.<sup>25</sup>

### C. POINTS DEVELOPED

#### 1. Restrictions

As for books dealing with extraordinary prayer, i.e., contemplation and phenomena connected with it, "some authors recommend without distinction the reading of these books, whereas others think they are not to be counseled or allowed for all," writes Benigar, who proposes this rule: "They are not for all, even if they are in themselves good or even very excellent." He would have the director take into account chiefly the nature of the *material*. Books of one kind "merely go through a chain of mystical phenomena." Or they may also "evaluate them *ex professo*" and even "in a descriptive, scientifically theological way." A second kind "are the journals and autobiographies of mystical souls." Also, one must consider the *readers*, "who can be directors of souls, or persons who have not the dispositions for contemplation and show no signs of it, or persons who already have the grace of infused contemplation."<sup>26</sup> Benigar then judges that mystical books of the first kind

should rather be reserved for the study of directors of souls. ... People who never had the grace of contemplation will scarcely find any spiritual profit in reading these books, for they will not even understand what they are about. Souls that have tasted the grace of contemplation and have been proved by the night of sense and spirit, rather need the moral nourishment of an enlightened spiritual director than the reading of such books. Furthermore, by reading such books they very easily lose the simplicity that is of great value for the spiritual life. For they start thinking of the nature of the divine operations, analyzing them, investigating what stage of the interior life they are in. They reflect too much on themselves; and from this a vain complacency easily springs up and an unhealthy auto-suggestion that injures humble docility to divine grace.<sup>27</sup>

But books simply containing many scattered reports of mystical phenomena are obviously judged by St. Alphonsus to be commonly well suited for a general pious readership; e.g., his own *Apparecchio alla morte*, *Le Glorie di Maria*, etc. Benigar would have the journals and autobiographies

<sup>25</sup> *Vera Sposa*, c. 17, n. 4, as found in OA 15:177. In appendix 6 of the same volume (pp. 443-444), editors present a study and evaluation of the apparition, declare it to be corroborated by various events, and evidently put credit in it.

<sup>26</sup> Infused contemplation is distinguished above in footnote 3.

<sup>27</sup> Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, n. 1159.

of mystics evaluated "according to the general criteria for spiritual reading." He would have one "take into account the qualities of the method by which the journals are written." He thinks that "in general, the reading of these books is profitable" if the reader finds things to "spur him to practice solid virtue, self-denial, and mortification."<sup>28</sup> A director evaluating it would be able to judge whether a work is well calculated to have such an effect.

On the other hand, some excellent spiritual literature, even by saints, presents total generosity and mortification from an aspect which makes it harmful to certain beginners; so that they need to wait until daily meditation and well-directed spiritual reading have, with the aid of grace, enlightened them and readied them to put their "feet into her (wisdom's) fetters and ... neck into her chains" and keep "her ways with all" their powers.<sup>29</sup> Thus St. Louis de Montfort would restrict the readership of some of his works.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, St. Alphonsus would guard against letting scrupulous souls read certain good literature which would overfrighten them in their condition.<sup>31</sup>

A development of Alphonsus' teachings on the need of good reading and the harm of bad reading is contained in a passage of St. Pius X's *Haerent Animo*, addressed to priests:

Good books ... impressively admonish us of the duties before us and the demands of lawful discipline; they awaken the heavenly voices that have been silenced in our soul; they scold our laziness; they rouse us from deceitful tranquility; they point out our unworthy attachments that were camouflaged; they disclose the dangers that so often lie in the path of uncautious people. And they do all this with such silent benevolence that they show themselves to be not only our friends but the best of friends. ... On the other hand, sad to say, it often happens in our days that men of priestly rank become gradually blinded by clouds of doubt and follow the wayward paths of the world, especially in view of the fact that they prefer every sort of book far different from sacred books, and a mass of periodicals full of attractive error and corruption. Beware, dear sons! Do not rely on your mature and advanced years. Do not let yourselves be tricked by a false hope that by this reading you can more aptly provide for the common good. Let certain bounds be observed — those which the laws of the Church assign, those which prudence and self-interest dictate. For once someone has drunk this poison into his mind, rarely indeed will he escape damage from the ruin he has prepared.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ecclesiasticus 6:25, 27.

<sup>30</sup> St. Louis M. de Montfort, *The Secret of Mary* (Bay Shore, N.Y.: Montfort Publications, 1972), n. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Practica*, n. 82 (*Praxis*, n. 96); TM, L. 1, n. 12.

<sup>32</sup> "... Sed contra heu! saepius accidit nostra aetate, ut homines e clero tenebris dubitationis sensim offundantur et saeculi obliqua sectentur, eo praesertim quod piis quidem sciantia errore blando ac lue. Vobis, dilecti filii, cavete: adultae provectaeque aetati ne fidite, neve sinite spe fraudulenta illudi, ita vos posse aptius communi bono prospicere. Certi custodiantur fines, tum quos Ecclesiae leges praestituant, tum quos prudentia cernat et caritas sui: nam venena istaec semel quis animo imbiberit, concepti exitii perraro quidem effugiet damna." (St. Pius X, *Haerent animo*, Aug. 4, 1908, [ASS 41:570-571].)

Confessors and directors who want some verification of St. Alphonsus' remarks about sensate literature, will find this developed by Pius XII in an address to newlyweds:

... Today we would like to remind you of the dangers of bad reading. The Church has never ceased to raise its voice against this hazard. But in spite of these wholesome warnings, not a few Christians disregard the seriousness of the matter or even challenge it. ...

"I am no longer a little girl," one young woman says, "and I know life; therefore I have the desire and the right to know it better." But the poor thing does not perceive that her language is that of Eve confronting the forbidden fruit. And does she perhaps believe that to know and love life and make good use of it, she must examine all its abuses and deformities?

Likewise a young man says, "I am not a little boy any more, and at my age sensual descriptions and offcolor scenes do not influence me any more." Is he so sure?

Young people, do not believe that if you sometimes let yourselves be drawn to read, perhaps in secret, some books that are suspect, that their poison does not influence you. Rather fear that this influence does more mischief because it is not immediate. Like an animal drugged by sleeping sickness, the soul will slowly slide into mortal sin and become God's enemy.<sup>33</sup>

Some directees will raise the question of whether the guidance one would draw from St. Alphonsus as well as various Popes on the hazards of bad reading has been superseded by later provisions of the Holy See. The decrees and *acta* of the Holy See that now cover this matter, insofar as they discuss the natural law, reaffirm the traditional truths, as follows, at the same time increasing the responsibilities of prelates and priests who are to protect, enlighten and direct consciences: The decree *Venite seorsum* of August 15, 1969, put religious superiors on guard against "indiscriminate" admittance into communities of "newspapers, magazines and other publications," warning that "by such means indeed even the best religious communities can be permeated with and disturbed by the spirit of worldliness."<sup>34</sup> As for the reading matter of Christians of all classes, on June 14, 1966, the Sacred Congregation of Doctrine declared that the Church "places its firm hope in the watchful solicitude both of every Ordinary and every episcopal conference, whose right and duty it is to inspect harmful books and prevent

<sup>33</sup> "... Ma non crediate, giovani uomini e giovani donne, che vi lasciate talvolta trascinare a leggere, forse in segreto, libri sospetti, non crediate che il loro veleno sia senza effetto su di voi; temete piuttosto che questo effetto, per non essere immediato, sia più malefico. ... L'anima ... come un organismo intorpidito dalla 'malattia del sonno,' scivolerà languidamente nel peccato mortale e nell'inimicizia di Dio." (Address of August 7, 1940, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, vol. 2 [Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana: Rome, 1955], pp. 203-205.)

<sup>34</sup> "Oportet ut diaria, commentarii periodici et cetera subsidia communicationis neque numero nimia sint, neque indistincte admittantur... Etenim per illa subsidia spiritus huius mundi etiam optimas communitates pervadere et perturbare potest." (Sacred Cong. of Religious and Secular Institutes, *Venite seorsum*, Aug. 15, 1969, VII, n. 11 [AAS 61:689].) The expression "even the best religious communities — etiam optimas communitates" is general, even though the document is an "Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns."

them and, if need be, declaim and condemn them;" that the Holy See "uses its right and duty to condemn publicly" hazardous writings in order to "provide with due firmness for the good of souls." While the *Index of Prohibited Books* no longer "has the force of ecclesiastical law with the censures that had been attached," yet it "retains its moral force to teach the consciences of the faithful so that, since the natural law itself requires it, they may beware of those writings which can endanger faith and morality."<sup>35</sup>

## 2. Positive Counsels

As for good spiritual reading, the Holy Scriptures will hold pride of place and the director should want his penitent to make good use of them, as St. Francis de Sales desires.<sup>36</sup> St. Anthony Claret wanted his seminarians to read from the Bible every day.<sup>37</sup> The Fathers of Vatican II asked the same of all religious.<sup>38</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange declares that if, "with humility, hope and love, we read the divine words of Scripture, which are spirit and life," they offer us a grace that "daily inclines us more to imitate the virtues of Christ;" i.e., a facility is gained. He adds that if we are then "docile, the gifts of understanding and wisdom will make us penetrate and taste" more and more "the living thought of God."<sup>39</sup>

As for others authors, St. Philip Neri "preferred those books whose authors had 'S' before their name" — i.e., were saints.<sup>40</sup> "Other authors," writes Benigar, "need to be distinguished." He adds:

Books are not to be read which contain only pretty remarks without solid doctrine. Nor should books be read which appeal to curiosity and promote a desire for visions or revelations; nor those which describe the spiritual life as a most easy one, full of delight and sweetness. Such books foster an unmanly and soft spirit which is broken and crushed as the first troubles arise. But one should read chiefly

<sup>35</sup> "... haec S. Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, facto verbo cum Beatissimo Patre, nuntiat Indicem suum vigorem moralem servare, quatenus Christifidelium conscientiam docet, ut ab illis scriptis, ipso iure naturali exigente, caveant, quae fidem ac bonos mores in discrimen adducere possint; eundem tamen non amplius vim legis ecclesiasticae habere cum adiectis censuris. ... Firmissimam autem spem collocat in vigili sollicitudine et singulorum Ordinariarum et Conferentiarum Episcopaliarum, quorum ius et officium est libros tum inspiciendi tum praeveniendi atque, si res tulerit, reprehendendi et improbandi. ... S. Sedes iure et officio suo utetur ad talia scripta etiam publice reprobanda, ut animarum bono ea qua par est firmitate consulat." (AAS 58:445.)

A decree of November 15, 1966, expanded further on the fact of the reduction of disciplinary controls in the matter of evil publications; but it added: "... iterum tamen inculcato valore legis moralis, quae omnino prohibet fidem ac bonos mores in discrimen adducere." (AAS 58:1186.)

A decree of March 19, 1975, calls for submission to Church authority of certain writings for approval before publication (AAS 67:281-284).

<sup>36</sup> *Vie Dévote*, P. 2, c. 17.

<sup>37</sup> St. Antonio Maria Claret, *El Colegial O Seminarista Instruido*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Libreria Religiosa, 1865), P. 1, Sec. 2, c. 23 (1:246).

<sup>38</sup> "... Sacram Scripturam quotidie prae manibus habeant ..." Vatican II, *Perfectae caritatis*, Oct. 28, 1965, n. 6 (COD 941).

<sup>39</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages*, 1:248.

<sup>40</sup> Our source is Benigar, *Theol. Spir.*, n. 1158.

books by the great spiritual masters who serve out solid doctrine of the spiritual life, who show the resourcefulness to be applied in the practice of virtue, who take sufficient account of the difficulties arising in the spiritual life, who bring out the necessity of serious effort, of generosity, and of a spirit of sacrifice.<sup>41</sup>

The thirteenth century Franciscan, David of Augusta, supplies this criterion for the interested director: One should select spiritual reading from the kind of material

which would not later be profitless in mental prayer, which sheds light toward the knowledge of God, which enkindles one to love Him, which instructs one in good behavior, which encourages one to bear hardship, which instills a contempt of the world and a desire for the heavenly fatherland, which teaches one to distinguish between vice and virtue and overcome temptations, and proposes other things profitable for salvation.<sup>42</sup>

St. Claret wanted each seminarian, in addition to the spiritual reading "in common in the refectory," to have his time for daily "private spiritual reading from a book that his spiritual director would assign." This is because "we know God our Lord leads each one along particular roads." In this way these souls can "provide for their particular needs and advance in perfection," which all aspirants for the priesthood must "hunger and thirst after; and certainly they will never satisfy this hunger if they are not lovers of spiritual reading."<sup>43</sup>

"And since moods of the individual vary greatly," Royo-Aumann adds, "the book used at a given time is not always the one that is most beneficial at that time," especially when one has failed to make his selection with attention to his goals and needs. Books that offered great help at one stage of a person's spiritual development can "cease to be of use later on." These authors, corroborating the view we have mentioned, remark that sometimes only beginners in the spiritual life, because of their lack of understanding of spiritual doctrine, or because of some particular defect at a given time. As an example, they judge it "generally imprudent" to have beginners "attempt to read the works of St. John of the Cross, Henry Suso, or other authors who treat of the heights of the mystical life."<sup>44</sup> Likewise books about "miracles, diabolical influence and occult phenomena could be a source of error for persons who are uneducated in theology." These authors favor assigning, in general, "books which are less spectacular and more solid and doctrinal."<sup>45</sup>

Royo-Aumann offer some thoughts to pass on to directees about *how* to do spiritual reading: It is to be done "not purely for ... study," but as "an exercise of piety." One should set his aim at its final purpose, which is

<sup>41</sup> Benigar, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> David ab Augusta, *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*, 1. 3, c. 52 (apud Benigar, *op. cit.*, n. 1158).

<sup>43</sup> St. Claret, *El Colegial ... Instruido*, P. 1, sec. 2, c. 23 (1:245-246).

<sup>44</sup> However, selected portions of St. John of the Cross's works seem to us suited to a general readership; e.g., Book I of *Dark Night*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>45</sup> A. Royo Marín and J. Aumann, *Theology of Christian Perfection*, p. 590.



"to arouse one's love of God and to intensify one's desire for perfection." Hence they would have us sometimes "reread certain sections of a book," and "use a book as long as we . . . can derive benefit from it." One may need to "resist the temptation to change books frequently, without ever finishing any one book" — not, of course, that one should "waste time on something that is not beneficial." When engaged in spiritual reading of material "properly selected and properly read," one "will easily pass from reading to prayer," and at times will scarcely perceive "when he ceased to read and began to pray."<sup>46</sup>

As for specific names of authors to recommend or assign to directees, Garrigou-Lagrange's advice<sup>47</sup> is especially apropos now that great Christian classics are becoming more available in English, at least in libraries of Catholic institutions: "Next to the Scriptures, the reading of the spiritual works of the saints greatly enlightens and warms the soul," for, while not infallibly inspired, they "were written with the lights and the unction of the Holy Ghost." He proposes some works of St. Augustine, as the *Confessions*, *City of God*, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*; of St. Benedict, notably his *Rule*; of St. John Chrysostom, as the *Priesthood*; of St. Thomas Aquinas, *De perfectione spirituali* (which has an English version by Proctor); of St. Catherine of Siena, her *Dialogues*; and Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* — to give a sampling from his long list.

Of the more recent writers he proposes the sixteenth century Benedictine Louis Blossius, whose *Book of Spiritual Instruction* has been translated into English. He names the Spanish Carmelites St. Teresa of Avila<sup>48</sup> and St. John of the Cross,<sup>49</sup> all of whose works are now in English, as are many of those of St. Francis de Sales<sup>50</sup> and the seventeenth-century French Founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, St. John Eudes.<sup>51</sup> He also proposes the sixteenth century Spanish Dominican Louis of Granada's *Sinner's Guide* and *Memorial of the Christian Life*, and the eighteenth-century Jesuit Peter De Caussades's *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, as well as the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* and *Secret of Mary* by the eighteenth-century Founder of the Company of Mary, St. Louis de Montfort — all of which are now in English. He includes St. Alphonsus' ascetical works, which are in English.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit., pp. 590-591.

<sup>47</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages*, 1:249-251.

<sup>48</sup> "All interior souls can and should read the *Way of Perfection* by St. Teresa." (Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., 1:251.)

<sup>49</sup> St. John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* shows especially the active purification of the soul which prepares for contemplation and which must continue with it. His *Dark Night* tells the "defects of beginners" and "the passive purification of the senses and that of the spirit." His *Living Flame of Love* details "what is lofty in the life of union," and the *Spiritual Canticle* "sums up in a lyrical form the doctrine of his other works." (Garrigou-Lagrange, *ibid.*)

<sup>50</sup> St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to a Devout Life*, or *Philothea*, "describes the purgative life and shows how devotion and sanctity may be practiced in all states of life." His *Love of God*, or *Theotimus*, "lifts souls even to the unitive way." (Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., p. 251.)

<sup>51</sup> V.g., *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls*, tr. Trappist Father (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1946).

## CONCLUSION

Considering that the intelligent priest can generally distinguish changeable from unchangeable elements in theological works, we submit that enough of Alphonsus' material holds good today to more than warrant consulting him. Pius XII saw fit to declare that the holy Doctor imparted a moral and pastoral doctrine, which is "very excellent even for this age," and which has been "repeatedly and seriously commended by the Popes as a safe norm for ministers of the sacrament of penance and spiritual directors."<sup>1</sup>

Garrigou-Lagrange points out that reading the writings of saints, "next to the Scriptures, greatly enlightens and warms the soul."<sup>2</sup> We would include St. Alphonsus' writings, even the academic ones cited throughout this dissertation. They carry their unction, while they represent fatiguing hours of labor in assembling materials, writing, and often re-writing to improve a work as the author advanced spiritually and as he studied more of other good authors and felt himself enlightened to retract and correct.

One evident aim of Alphonsus was to form good confessors and good spiritual directors — something for which there seems to be as much need today as ever. If this dissertation helps serve this need even in one case according to the mind of the holy Doctor, we will consider our labor on it well rewarded. In 1973 Pope Paul VI recommended this need to students and sons of St. Alphonsus: "Like St. Alphonsus, be good confessors. We have such great need of them." And, speaking of the scarcity of vocations, the Pontiff added:

Well, the cause is this: there is no longer guidance given in the confessional, there is no longer spiritual direction. A candle . . . does not light itself. It is necessary that one lighted candle should pass on its light to another candle next to it. The priest must communicate his own vocation, his own abundant joyfulness of being called to the service of the Lord, to another whose life is youthful and lacking in experience but capable of feeling and accepting this call. . . . You are continuators of the school of morals, of religious ethics, of moral theology, which your Founder Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori left you in his magnificent volumes and with his command to pass on this heirloom, saying: "Continue!" . . .

You know the crisis through which moral theology is now passing in the Church. There is the moral theology of relativism. This holds that it is possible for moral theology to change, that, just as men's customs change and society changes and theories in world government change, so also the law of God which We must interpret. . . . Be good moralists. . . . The law of God does not change. . . . We must say: "This

<sup>1</sup> AAS, 42:596. See our Foreword.

<sup>2</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages*, 1:249.

is what the Lord says, this is what the Lord wills." Have great trust in this teaching authority which guides all of us, since all of us are pupils, all of us are students, all of us are disciples of the Chair of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> English translation of the address of Pope Paul VI to General Chapter Members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, Oct. 6, 1973, published by Redemptorist Provincial Residence, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1973, pp. 26-27.

## APPENDIX

THE DIRECTION OF MORTIFICATION  
(Nn. 123-124 of St. Alphonsus' *Practica*. Cf. *Praxis*, nn. 145-147.)

123. With regard to mortification, one needs to realize that when souls begin the spiritual life, and God is charming them with the more sensory consolations, as is His usual procedure at that time, . . . they would like to kill themselves in that first fervor with disciplines, cilices, fasts, and similar afflictive practices.

The director, therefore, needs to be very sparing in allotting them such mortifications; for when the time of aridity comes later on, as ordinarily happens, then, with her early sensual fervor gone, it is easy for the soul to abandon all her mortifications, and then later, becoming mistrustful, to forsake prayer and the spiritual life as things not suited for her. In this way she loses everything. At times it also happens that these beginners, on account of that fervor, surrender to indiscretions and contract physical ailments, and then, to take care of themselves, they let all the spiritual exercises go, with great danger of their not returning to them any more. Therefore the director ought to see to it that first they have a solid spiritual life, and then, weighing the circumstances of health, occupation, and fervor, let him allot them those exterior mortifications which he believes are suited for them according to Christian prudence.

I say, "according to Christian prudence," for among imprudent directors, some seem to place a soul's whole profit in her being charged with performing fasts, wearing cilices, using the discipline to the point of blood, taking penitential burns, and the like. Then others seem to reject absolutely all exterior mortifications as useless for spiritual profit, saying that all perfection lies in interior mortification. But this, too, is erroneous. In fact, bodily mortifications are an aid to interior mortification, and (when they may be used) are in some way necessary for checking the sense-appetites. Thus we see that all the saints (some to a greater or lesser extent than others, yet all the saints) have practiced them.

No doubt interior mortification of the passions is the principal mortification that one must require — i.e., that of making no comeback when wronged, of not seeking or disclosing what fosters self-esteem, of yielding in contentions, of condescending to the will of others (when it would be without spiritual harm). Sometimes it is wise to forbid a soul to practice any exterior mortification until she is seen to have become detached from some passion which has been domineering her, such as a passion for vanity, or for rancor, for worldly concerns, for self-esteem, or for having her own way. But it is a very great error to say that exterior mortifications serve little or no purpose. St. John of the Cross said that one should not put stock in the

man that disapproves penitential works, even if he were to work miracles.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning the director should first charge the penitent not to do anything against or without obedience to him. Those who do penances against obedience, says St. John of the Cross, "grow more in vice than in virtue."<sup>2</sup>

One should, then — as I said — be reserved about allotting such mortifications, even though a request for them is made importunately by penitents. In the beginning it will be enough if one allots them some small and infrequent mortification, as the wearing of the catenella, a use of the discipline, or a practice of abstemiousness. This is more in order for them to gain the desire for mortification than for them to accomplish a mortification that is due. Then in time one will progressively loosen this restraint, according to how he sees the soul advance in virtue. When the soul reaches firmness in the spiritual life, the director could not, without fault, forbid those mortifications which are suitable for her.

Furthermore, let him have a general rule (ordinarily speaking) of not allotting exterior mortifications unless they are requested; for they are not of much help unless they are hungrily accepted. Moreover, in allotting them, one should always make it less than what is requested. And one should sooner (as Cassian says<sup>3</sup>) lean too far in denying than in granting these things.

Let special importance be attached to mortification of the palate. This is something certain spiritual souls give little attention to; but truly it is the hardest and most profitable for the spiritual life and often for the body as well. St. Philip Neri used to say, "One who does not mortify the palate will never arrive at perfection."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, one should be sparing in granting mortifications that restrict needed sleep, because this easily does harm to physical and spiritual health. For when there is not adequate rest, the head suffers, and with a suffering head a person is unfit for meditation and all the other devout exercises.

But whatever be the mortification one grants for a penitent to do, in order for him not to be too pleased with himself over it one should tell him it is nothing compared with what the saints have done and the pains that Jesus Christ suffered for love of us. St. Teresa said, "All we can do is rubbish compared to a single drop of Blood that the Lord shed for us."<sup>5</sup>

But the best mortifications, the most profitable and least hazardous, are the negative ones — ones which, ordinarily speaking, raise no issue of obedience to the director. Such are to forgo seeing or hearing something curious, to speak sparingly, to be content with food not to our liking or poorly seasoned, to deprive oneself of fire in winter, to choose whatever is

<sup>1</sup> "If at any time, my brother, someone — whether he be superior or not — would persuade you in favor of a lax and pampering doctrine [*doctrina de anchura y más alivio*], do not believe it or embrace it, even if he confirms it with miracles; but believe in and embrace penance and more penance and detachment from all things; and if you want to arrive at the possession of Christ, never seek Him without the cross." (St. John of the Cross, *Cartas*, n. 24, to Padre Juan de Santa Ana [*Vida y Obras*, p. 381].)

<sup>2</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Noche oscura*, L. 1, cap. 6, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> John Cassian, *Collationes sanctorum Patrum*, col. 2, especially cc. 16-17 (ML, 49:549-550).

<sup>4</sup> H. Bernabeus, *Vita*, in *Acta Sanctorum maii*, 6 (Antwerp, 1688), p. 574.

<sup>5</sup> St. Teresa, *Vida*, c. 39.

poorest, to rejoice when we lack what we need — for herein consists the virtue of poverty, according to St. Bernard's saying, "The virtue of poverty is not poverty, but the love of poverty."<sup>6</sup> Other examples are to avoid complaints about the discomforts of seasons, or about the contempt and persecution we may receive from our neighbor, or about the pains of an illness we are suffering. By the chisel of suffering the stones of the heavenly Jerusalem are fashioned. St. Teresa said, "It is an error to think that God admits into His friendship people given to comforts. Souls that truly love God can seek no repose."<sup>7</sup>

124. Here a problem arises. In one place the Gospel says, "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). In another place it states, "When thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth" (Mt. 6:3). The question now is whether acts of virtue should be manifested to others or be hidden.

Our answer makes a distinction: *common* works, which are needful to Christian virtue, ought to be performed openly, such as frequenting the sacraments, making mental prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, assisting at Mass recollectedly on one's knees, modesty of the eyes, the observance of silence in church, the admission that one wants to become a saint, the avoidance of talkativeness, of hazardous associations, and of curiosity, and the like. Deeds which are of *extraordinary supererogation* and have something singular about them, as the above-mentioned exterior penances — the cilice, the discipline, prayer with the arms extended, the eating of bitter herbs, etc., also sighs and weeping during prayer — these ought to be hidden from view as much as possible. As for other deeds of virtue — as serving the sick, giving alms to the poor, practicing humility with one who is wronging us, and the like — it is best to hide these from view as much as possible. But if these cannot be performed at all without being done publicly one should not omit them, provided one does them for the sole purpose of pleasing God.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. St. Bernard "Epistola C" in *Opera* (ML, 182:235).

<sup>7</sup> St. Teresa, *Camino-V*, c. 18, v.i. (*Obras*, p. 248).

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