

## Christian Mindfulness

Several classic disciplines in traditional Christian spirituality cultivate attentiveness and awareness of God and divine things. They are recollection, the practice of the presence of God, and the sacrament of the present moment, all venerable exercises in the Christian life. Recollection, a concept and practice dear to St. Teresa of Avila, means in her words that "the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God."<sup>1</sup> She goes on to say that the soul is "centered there within itself." Recollection allows one to meet God in the depths of one's being. The practice of the presence of God is cultivating alertness to one of the many ways God is present and relating to that presence by brief acts of recognition and prayer. The sacrament of the present moment sees each activity in life as an opportunity to meet God. Mindfulness is similar to these three practices, but with its own emphasis. As a Christian practice it is a newcomer on the block. Its name and its particular approach come from the East, particularly from Buddhism. Christian mindfulness adds to God's presence special attention to the concrete and finite aspects of each action.

The present article examines Christian mindfulness for the light it throws both on Christian Meditation itself and on conduct between the times of formal meditation. Mindfulness is precisely what we endeavor to do in the practice of Christian Meditation, in which saying the mantra is the prayer. In the rest of the day, we cultivate mindfulness to make it a prominent feature of our ongoing consciousness.

The older practices highlight awareness of God's presence and will be a direct line of communication between the person and God. Here lies a possible limitation, which might be called abstractness. It is too easy for the remembrance of God's presence, especially on the run, to be a mere nod of the mind to a

theological truth with minimal resonance in one's being. Mindfulness offers the missing piece, namely, a real presence to what one is doing at a given moment.

Mindfulness emphasizes the presence of our total selves in the moment. Actually true recollection demands this too, but the full presence is too easily forgotten. Mindfulness will not let us forget this aspect. So the two disciplines, recollection and mindfulness, together and separately, emphasize full commitment of one's whole being to the moment at hand. They demand the awareness of one's self, the action, and the God who is there. The shorthand for true recollection and Christian mindfulness is presence to the moment, a phrase we hope to elucidate in this paper.

Presence to the moment is concentrated or focused attention; it means being "all there." Often we are only half there, present in body but miles away in thought. John of the Cross alludes to a well-known scholastic adage when he writes that "the soul lives where she loves more than in the body she animates."<sup>2</sup> The schoolboy is already out on the playing field as he impatiently looks at the clock and waits for it to strike the end of the school day. In mindfulness we are present in love to what we are actually doing. We are present contemplatively, that is, with our whole person—body, soul, and spirit—and not just with our mind or half-hearted will. We do not act absentmindedly or on automatic pilot. True presence is steady, nondiscursive attention, which at the same time is relaxed and self-possessed.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux is a perfect example of mindfulness. According to Ida Friederike Gorres, she "accomplished the apparently impossible feat of being, every moment, in a state of sharply focused, intensely controlled alertness, and at the

same time completely spontaneous in all that she did."<sup>3</sup>

Monica Furlong says that Thérèse gave up fantasies and impossible dreams in favor of living in the present and making her little acts of love and acceptance. "Her 'Little Way,'" she writes, "was, in some curious way, the reversal of everything she had been taught, the inflated form of Christianity with its dreams of sanctity and martyrdom. Now she saw that all you were asked to do was follow the will of God, whatever it might be, and to give yourself unreservedly to *that* life and to no other."<sup>4</sup>

Thérèse, according to her novice mistress, was "mystic, comic, everything.... She could make you weep with devotion and just as easily split your sides with laughter during recreation."<sup>5</sup> That is full presence to each changing moment of the day.

Hans Urs von Balthasar concurs with these words about Thérèse:

At each moment, her sole concern is to carry out the will of God as it was revealed to her second to second. . . . Thérèse never tries to dominate the course of events. In a very womanly fashion, she simply tries to receive everything, and to receive it lovingly. For her, every moment comes so fresh and immediately from the hand of God. . . . [Thérèse writes:] "I just keep concentrating on the present moment. I forget the past and preserve myself from worries about the future."<sup>6</sup>

There are also plenty of examples of the opposite of mindfulness. Here is one example from Tilden Edwards from the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*.<sup>7</sup> Calvin does not like to relate to real experiences, because they are not clear; they are

unpredictable and hard to figure out. He prefers to stay on the outside of things, and that is why he likes life filtered through television. That way he doesn't have to think. He can follow the action with dazed eyes and partial attention. Everything is neat and tidy, but very superficial. Reducing reality in this way is to take the mystery out of life. It is to fail to be fully present to the moment.

Mindlessness is lazy thinking or failure to think at all. It allows one to gloss over things. But if we want to live intentionally with commitment to what we are about, we have to gather up ourselves in recollection and be involved in what we are doing. It is a short step to being in touch with the God hidden in the moment. That is what the Christian practice of recollection and mindfulness attempt to do.

Two entries in Thomas Merton's journals illustrate the contrast between mindfulness and mindlessness. They occur at the end of the time he was working through an experience of falling in love with a young woman, the nurse who cared for him in the hospital. He registers in detail the emotional roller coaster he was on over a period of several months. Toward the end of the struggle he made this entry, which is an experience of mindfulness:

June 15, 1966 . . . This morning for the first time, really since going to the hospital, I have real inner freedom and solitude-I love M. but in a different way, peacefully and without disturbances or inner tension. I feel that once again I am *all here*. I have finally returned to my place and to my work, and am beginning once again to be what I am.<sup>8</sup>

Contrast this presence to himself with the fragmentation a month later, indicating that the struggle to deal with his emotions was not over:

July 14, 1966 . . . Noted general dispersion and distractedness all yesterday, obviously [because of being busy on errands in town], and all night. Only recovered a real awake mindfulness after about 3 hours of reading etc. this morning. The other state was of an anxious, disoriented consciousness, not properly centered, and making erratic and desperate acts calling on God, trying to recover orientation, thinking of M., questioning self, fearing consequences of imprudence etc.<sup>9</sup>

Note how Merton tried to regain mindfulness from his distracted mind by reading, reflection, and no doubt prayer. The need is to enter into one's self; just being busy is a challenge, but often an excuse for many-mindedness or mindlessness.

Mindfulness is one form of pondering events in the way Mary does in the Gospels. It is not enough to be amazed as the shepherds were at Bethlehem. We have to ponder them as Mary did and enter into them, seeking understanding, tuning in to the divine presence manifested there. We need to listen with a third ear and sit with mystery. Each moment is a revelation, a unique gift from God. We enter it with wonder and gratefulness and with a receptive heart. This is contemplative living; it is living in God's presence and cultivating the moment.

### **Buddhist Mindfulness**

Mindfulness has an Eastern flavor and is practiced there in various styles of yoga and meditation and martial arts. In its Eastern practice it has a different philosophical foundation and a different goal from the Christian form. But the Buddhist practice is transferable to a Christian setting by the simple but

immensely important addition of the presence of God. In Buddhist mindfulness the only object is to be totally present to what one is doing. It does not make any reference to God, because Buddhism is non-theistic and has no personal God. The Absolute, the God of the Buddhists, is outside their purview of reality; God is unavailable and totally unknowable, beyond the grasp of the human mind. So Buddhist mindfulness settles for seeking total presence to the moment without distraction or divided attention. We believe that we can learn to be present from this practice, but also to include God in the presence. In this way we are baptizing it for Christian usage. We call it Christian usage. We call it Christian mindfulness.

Our standing Christian tradition teaches us to go to God through creation, through the finite and the concrete. All experience of God is mediated. The East can tell us something we always knew. It can help us see our tradition in a new light and realize how important the finite and the concrete are in the spiritual life. We find God by going through the human. It is only a manner of speaking for us to say that we get beyond creatures to find God. Our goal is ultimately awareness of the Trinity and participation in life with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We attain this goal best by paying attention to the vehicle that brings us there, that is, our created activity. We are helped by being rooted in the existential moment.

We are a sacramental people. The more down-to-earth we are, planting our feet squarely on the ground, the less we fly off in flights of fancy and the closer we are to reality and therefore to God. We are an incarnational people, and we believe we find Christ in every crevice of the human condition. Since the incarnation, and espe-

cially since the resurrection, Christ is at the center of the universe and part of every human action. Listen to these words of Karl Rahner, who puts them in the mouth of Christ: "I am the blind alleys of all your paths, for when you no longer know how to go any further, then you have reached me, foolish child, though you are not aware to it."<sup>10</sup> We find Christ by going through, not around, creation. This is to follow what is called the "analogical imagination" by writers like David Tracy, or the "Catholic imagination" by William F. Lynch SJ or Andrew Greeley. Mindfulness helps us reclaim our birthright. The Buddhist teaching on mindfulness can help us see these truths more clearly.

A signature example of the Buddhist mode is washing the dishes when you are washing the dishes. It is the quaint trademark of the Vietnamese Buddhist, Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. He writes:

While washing the dishes, you might be thinking about the tea afterwards, and so try to get them out of the way as quickly as possible in order to sit and drink tea. But that means you are incapable of living during the time you are washing the dishes. When you are washing the dishes, washing the dishes must be the most important thing in your life. Just as when you are drinking tea, drinking tea must be the most important thing in your life."

The inner meaning of the Buddha's teaching on mindfulness is found in the *Sattipatthanda Sutta*, and it is summarized in the following words of a Buddhist commentator:

Mindfulness deepens mental concentration (*samatha*) in the direction of meditation insight (*vipassana*). In mindfulness the disciple dwells in

contemplation of the body, feelings, and thoughts. Through being concentrated and mindful of these factors of our life, and by clearly comprehending through insight their true nature, the hate and greed, of sorrow and grief, is overcome and *Nibbana* [nirvana] is attained.<sup>12</sup>

*Samatha* and *vipassana* describe two different kinds of Buddhist meditation, the former seeking tranquility and the latter insight.<sup>13</sup> Both goals are the fruit of total presence. Listen to Nhat Hanh's description of washing the dishes: "While washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes, which means that while washing the dishes one should be completely aware of the fact that one is washing the dishes."<sup>14</sup> The total presence is the heart of meditation in the East.

A similar presence, but with the addition of a Trinitarian component, is the goal of Christian Meditation as taught by John Main. When I engage in the practice of Christian Meditation, I do not imagine God or anything else. I simply try to be totally present to my deepest self and to the God who dwells there. To the extent that I am successful, I am giving my full focused attention to my interior being and to the Trinity. I am not thinking about God or about any thing. I am practicing contemplation, that is, I am in communion with the real and the Real. It is important to know that John Main does not equate contemplation with special psychological experience of God. Contemplation for him is an existential act; it is participation or communion with God. In true mindfulness I am acting at the level of my being's spirit, and I am truly free and loving. I touch both the reality of God and my own deepest reality.

Free and loving presence to the present moment is the essence of mindfulness and meditation. You wash the dishes to wash the

dishes, intentionally and with as little distraction as possible, not to impress your neighbor or even to provide clean dishes. These motives are extraneous and pertain to the future. You want to stay in the now. To accomplish that you need to be present to yourself. Here is a wise story from Mobi Ho, the translator of *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. She recalls in the preface an incident when she was cooking furiously and had to stop and search for a missing spoon. She was obviously agitated. Thay came into the room and smiled and said, "What is Mobi looking for?" "The spoon," she answered, perhaps a bit petulantly. Thay answered with another smile: "No, Mobi is looking for Mobi."<sup>15</sup>

### Why Mindfulness Is Important

Our distractions come from our divided and disordered selves. Our desires are the product of our many-mindedness, and this in turn comes from our lack of integration. Our desires need to be integrated with our whole person and with what we are about at the moment. Our thought needs to be one-pointed and simple, an accomplishment that takes practice, discipline, and grace.

Practice in meditation and in mindfulness will develop the virtues needed and give me a handle on my desires. Perfect mindfulness will neutralize the warring factions within me and let me be absorbed by what I am doing. In this latter case I will have achieved what the psychologists call the deautomatization of my desires. This means that I have neutralized the impulses and desires I do not want. Instead I can concentrate on my true wishes. The unwanted desires dry up and atrophy for lack of nurture.<sup>16</sup> From a moral or spiritual point of view I have let my faith inform and animate all my behavior. I have attained true freedom and perfect love. I have achieved what John Cassian called purity of heart.

Nhat Hahn celebrates the personal freedom in mindful activity in these words:

The fact that I am standing there and washing these bowls is wondrous reality. I am being completely myself, following my breath, my presence, and conscious of my thoughts and actions. There is no way I can be tossed around mindlessly like a bottle slapped here and there on the waves.<sup>17</sup>

The Christian adds the further element of the good intention and remembering God's presence. I am present to God and receiving the impact of his presence, which is a fact before and after I am aware of it. I do not constitute that presence. I am alive with the presence of God. This aspect is not something extraneous and accidental. It belongs to the nature of things, to the immanence of God in all of creation. God's delight is to be with the children of this world, in our sorrow and in our own delights. This presence is for our sakes and our salvation.

Christians emphasize the presence of God in all things, but they may tend to forget the envelope that contains it. Persons, actions, events are the medium through which God comes. The given moment is the only place one can meet God. In God there is no time, only the eternal now. God lives in that now moment on the other side of the veil that separates time from eternity. We enter the vestibule of that "now" when we concentrate on the present moment. Our beloved God is there, and it behooves us to be there as well. To enter the now moment is to let anxiety fall off our shoulders and to be renewed in hope by touching the God who loves us.

The more that a person possesses herself, the more present she can be. She must be "all there," alert, aware, attentive, in a word, fully present. Intellectualizing or head knowledge is of little value. An abstract recall or thinking *about* God's presence in the here and now is not enough. The knowledge must be holistic and experiential, beyond mere thinking, beyond mind alone. What we need is heart knowledge. I am more than my thoughts or my mind, and therefore I must not identify with my mind or my ego.

In mindfulness we stand before the Lord, "watching and waiting." We do not control the relationship, and we are there to receive a gift. Every moment is a gift from God, and we are aware of that fact. Every moment can be an occasion of contemplation, that is, an opportunity to realize God's love. The contemplative walks in the presence of God in a moment-to-moment experience of God's love. The condition for the gift is to be present there, body, soul, and spirit.

Mindfulness fights the enemies of wholeness and cultivates full presence to God. The enemies of wholeness are what divide us, such as our addictions and compulsions, our unfreedoms and attachments, our sins and imperfections. They undermine our love of God. Mindfulness faces these temptations head on by maintaining attention to the call of faith. We are thoroughly present to the moment because it is God's call for us at that time. Mindfulness recognizes distractions, calls them by name, then lets them pass, all the while gently focusing on the moment.

As focused or nondiscursive attention, mindfulness helps us rise above what John Main calls the "monkey chatter" of the distracted mind. Mindless persons are uprooted and uncentered, so they tend to flit about from one distraction to another, dissipated in their energies, prisoners of

unrecognized consumerism and self-glorification. Mindless persons live outside themselves and engage only the part of themselves that is needed to satisfy the passing whim.

They tend to be dilettantes and escapist. They have no depth or solid ground within themselves on which to rest commitments. They are more vulnerable to the winds of change around them and readily given to worry and anxiety simply because they do not realize that "God is near" (Ph 4:5).

Excessive "busyness" is lack of mindfulness. Busyness is a cultural demon of our time, an escape or excuse from the hard work of concentration and the duty one is trying to avoid. Busyness is a wolf in sheep's clothing, because it looks like virtue but actually is a whole array of self-interest clustered around pride or self-indulgence. It is an ego trip and the enemy of charity. Look more closely at its manifestations and you will find a driven and compulsive spirit that hurts one's health, peace of mind, and awareness of others. Over-busy persons are trying to prove themselves by the sheer quantity of their output. The more they do, the more they feed their self-satisfaction, basking in the imagined plaudits of the multitude. There is little charity in this addiction, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. The motivation in busyness is ego-enhancement, the desire to impress, even to show up the neighbor. Busyness is ersatz zeal.

The reason why mindfulness is good and its opposite bad is that one is the expression of the true self and the other the offspring of the false self. The true self comes from the deeper strata of our being, from our spirit, and it carries body and psyche with it. Thus it incarnates more of ourselves in its choices than does the splintered false self. The true self acts from the heart and not from self-

deception or free-floating emotions. It acts virtuously because it is rooted in God.

Sensibility, our superficial self, is the home of our false self, because ego is at home there and ego goes its own way. The false self is self-serving by nature. It comes out of primitive experiences of life that set in place ways of coping with threats to one's security or self-importance. Our sensibility has to be redeemed and put at the service of charity by being ordered and integrated into our lives. Then the ego serves rather than seeks to be served. In these cases the true self has taken over. Wholeness has been restored and the Holy Spirit has become the fountain of living water springing up to eternal life (Jn 4:14 and Jn 7:36-37). Mindfulness is a sign that the good spirit is in possession.

### How Do I Get It?

One important final question is the practice: how do I become more mindful? The answer is: cultivate a vibrant spiritual life. Mindfulness is a by-product of mature holiness. But are there special means for growing in the practice and skill? How can I become more mindful? I want to suggest two special means. One is meditation itself; the other is the basic condition of all prayer, purity of heart. These are the two arms for embracing God, the pincer movements of the spiritual life. They will bring us to mindfulness.

First, mindfulness is the outcome of faithfulness to the two periods of Christian Meditation each day, since meditation itself is explicit and prolonged mindfulness. Practice makes perfect; obviously meditation will foster the habit of mindfulness. Conventional wisdom says: find God in daily prayer and you will find God everywhere. The Sufi came out of his prayer room and said: I went to the marketplace and found God everywhere. The contrary is also true: without

prayer life you will not find God. General mindfulness throughout the day is a diffuse presence to God. How could this be maintained, if it is not nourished by a focused or concentrated presence? How be mindful of God in the comings and goings of the day if one never takes time to meet God face-to-face? We need to focus on the Lord, to come aside and find rest for our souls. Otherwise we will not recognize God when he appears in the disguise of other people or works of charity.

The two periods of Christian Meditation come from a long tradition. One of the outstanding teachers of recollection, the contemporary and early teacher of Teresa of Avila, Francisco de Osuna, recommended two periods of formal meditation a day, each of them an hour's length. Osuna writes: "You are to retire into your heart and leave all created things for the length of two hours, one hour before and the other after noon, at the most quiet time possible."<sup>18</sup> During the rest of the day the mind is to be occupied with *lectio divina*, the author agreeing with St. Bonaventure that "no one can call himself devoted to the sacred passion unless he spends most of [the day] contemplating it in one manner or another."<sup>19</sup> The two hours a day suggested by Osuna may be beyond the possibilities for many people, and periods of twenty to thirty minutes have proved workable for most people today.

The second way to cultivate mindfulness is purity of heart. It is as important as formal prayer, because the measure of one's purity of heart is the measure of one's prayer. Again this is the constant teaching of the Christian tradition from John Cassian to Teilhard de Chardin. What is purity of heart? It is detachment, and specifically affective detachment. This is the freedom of the will before choices. This freedom is cultivated especially by effective detachment, which is the actual renunciation of what-ever stands

in the way to one's service of God. Affective detachment comes from effective detachment.

In the Western tradition, renunciation is the way to recollection. Writers like Francisco de Osuna, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross underline the gospel teaching that we must leave all things to follow the Lord. A recent exponent of this age-old tradition is Pope Benedict XVI, who put the teaching in fresh language to his interviewer, Peter Seewald, shortly before the death of John Paul II: When it comes down to it," Cardinal Ratzinger said, "everyone has to undergo his own Exodus. He not only has to leave the place that nurtured him and become independent, but has to come out of his own reserved self. He must leave himself behind, transcend his own limits; only then will he reach the Promised Land, so to speak."<sup>20</sup>

Christian teachers generally emphasize the physical renunciation of legitimate goods and pleasures, such as marriage or possessions or worldly honors; they call for the renunciation of all desires. These are refrains in their writing, and modern readers are easily put off by such total demands. But contemporary readers need to be reminded that these classic directives are always in the context of God's will. God's particular will for each person is the controlling factor for renouncing goods. The wholesale rejection of desires applies to disordered desires. Discernment identifies the immediate will of God, and this is the criterion for choices.

The language in this tradition can betray us. Osuna, for example, presents recollection as the way to divine union, and it involves transcending, that is, going beyond all creatures. The person must be "blind, deaf, and dumb to everything that is not God." We need to "guard the heart with all vigilance, unburdening and clearing it of all created

things, so that the one who created it may emerge with the life of grace."<sup>21</sup> The cost of divine union is "not less than everything." The sweeping language might make one think that the whole of creation must be rejected. Not so, these authors tell us. The everything to be bypassed is the all that is in competition or opposed to God.

The teaching on recollection attributes the same high efficacy as mindfulness, but also makes the same demands for its functioning. Karl Rahner in an essay on the Holy Eucharist says that recollection demands letting go of all false and harmful things.<sup>22</sup> The teaching is founded on the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of the Lord, which is "the innermost law of our lives." Baptism initiates us into this mystery and the Holy Eucharist renews the commitment. Eucharistic life, he writes, embraces the total profane life of the Christian, the "everyday" of the followers of Jesus. We die and rise with Jesus Christ, not only at Mass and in Holy Communion, but in our everyday behavior. How can we manage so sublime a calling? Rahner's answer is recollection, which he defines as "withdrawing into ourselves" and from there making the right choices at each moment. Withdrawing into ourselves is not copping out or fleeing the scene. It is being our true selves and living intentionally. Get beyond the distractions, turn off the constant radio, stop the "empty talk and gossip," avoid wasting time with worthless reading, and pull back from the "over-busy and all devouring fulfillment of one's duty, [from the busyness which is] an excuse for avoiding our real duty."<sup>23</sup> Enter into yourselves, so that you are your true selves.

Recollection is no flight from life, but "facing up to ourselves as we really are, confronting ourselves instead of seeking solace in chatter, conversations, mere external dissipations." Holy Communion

commits me to "accept my everyday just as it is. I do not need to have any lofty feelings in my heart to recount.... I can lay my everyday before [God] just as it is . . . in all its pettiness and triviality."<sup>24</sup> Christian

recollection is another word for Christian mindfulness, and these two are at the heart of our search for God that comprises the two daily periods of contemplative prayer that are Christian Meditation.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *The Way of Perfection* 28.4.
- <sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Canticle* B, 5.3.
- <sup>3</sup> Cited from Ida Friederike Gorres's *Hidden Face* in John Donohue SJ's article "Thérèse of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church," *America* 177 (13 December 1997): 16.
- <sup>4</sup> Monica Furlong, *Thérèse of Lisieux* New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 96.
- <sup>5</sup> Cited in Donohue, "Thérèse," p. 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols and Ann Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) pp. 66-67.
- <sup>7</sup> "Valuing the Living Moment," *Shalem News*, cited in *Kinospirit* (November 1995): 2.
- <sup>8</sup> *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton* 6, ed. Christine M. Bochen (HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), p. 84.
- <sup>9</sup> Merton, *Learning*, p. 95.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Great Church Year: The Best of Karl Rahner's Homilies, Sermons, and Meditations*, ed. Albert Raffelt New York: Crossroad, 1993), p. 51.
- <sup>11</sup> "Thich Nhat Hahn, *Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 24.
- <sup>12</sup> Ven. Dr. Dhammarakkhita, "Mindfulness and Loving-Kindness Meditation," *The Gethsemani Encounter*, ed. Donald W. Mitchell and James A. Wiseman OSB New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 35-41, at 35.
- <sup>13</sup> William Rehg SJ, "Christian Mindfulness," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 34, no. 3 (May 2002): 1-9.
- <sup>14</sup> Rehg, "Christian."
- <sup>15</sup> Rehg, "Christian."
- <sup>16</sup> Philip Novak, "The Practice of Attention," *Parabola* 15 (May 1990): 10-12; Arthur J. Deikman, "Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience," *Psychiatry* 29 (1966): 324-338.
- <sup>17</sup> Thich Nhat Hahn, *Miracle*, p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Francisco de Osuna, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, trans. Mary E. Giles New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 388.
- <sup>19</sup> Osuna, *Third*, p. 177.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Elie, "The Year of Two Popes," *Atlantic Monthly* 297 (January-February 2006): 71.
- <sup>21</sup> Osuna, *Third*, p. 132.
- <sup>22</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Eucharist and Our Daily Lives," *Theological Investigations* 7, trans. David Bourke New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 211-226.
- <sup>23</sup> Rahner, "Eucharist," p. 221.
- <sup>24</sup> 24 Rahner, "Eucharist," p. 222.

### **A Tribute to Ernest E. Larkin, O.Carm.**

Prayer is a subject that merits consistent attention by writers in every age. In our own time it probably would take quite a long bibliography to list the titles of books written on prayer in any one year.

In this issue of our journal, we feature the last article on prayer written by Father Ernest Larkin OCarm shortly before he died (1922-2006). The article itself has been published as the eighth and final chapter of his book published posthumously, *Contemplative Prayer for Today: Christian Meditation*, Medio Media, 2007. Father Larkin's interest in prayer and his sharing of insights and personal experience mark his apostolic ministry of teaching, writing, and conducting retreats.

Larkin served on our advisory board from 2001 to 2005 when because of health reasons he excused himself a year early from finishing his term. As editor I was especially delighted that he had agreed to serve on the advisory board. Surely, he brought the gifts of his Carmelite heritage, his teaching acumen, and his rich pastoral experience. But for me Father Ernest Larkin brought much more. He had been my mentor, along with Father Kieran Kavanaugh OCD, and my dissertation director during my doctorate studies at Catholic University of America. Both of these men initiated this Jesuit into the world of spirituality and mysticism, especially viewed from a Carmelite perspective. I am forever grateful.

Because of the intensity of dissertation supervision, Ernie Larkin and I spent a good deal of time together. He was always gracious, he was evidently holy, and he could be gently demanding—a most wonderful set of qualities to get a doctorate student to finish his dissertation on time. One example. After reading and research for one semester, I met with Ernie Larkin, who announced that he wanted a first chapter written now in two weeks' time. Weakly I protested that I still had more reading to do. He smiled and said I could read and I could also write. Ever thereafter I was kept to a regular schedule, and I finished within the semester. We always remained friends, though seldom interacting until he accepted my invitation to be a board member.

Why would Ernie want to be remembered especially for his interest in and contribution to our lives of prayer? He would simply say that our most important relationship is with God. If a relationship is to develop and deepen, it demands time spent together. Conversation is most important as a way of sharing, but sharing takes many forms, often just being together in rest and in activity. We are talking about prayer, sometimes with words, at other times with still presence. Prayer, our relationship with God, was the center of Ernest Larkin's life. As he often said, "pray and God will come." That is what he shared with us, even in his final book.

May he be enjoying his eternal presence with God, the God of his life.

David L. Fleming SJ