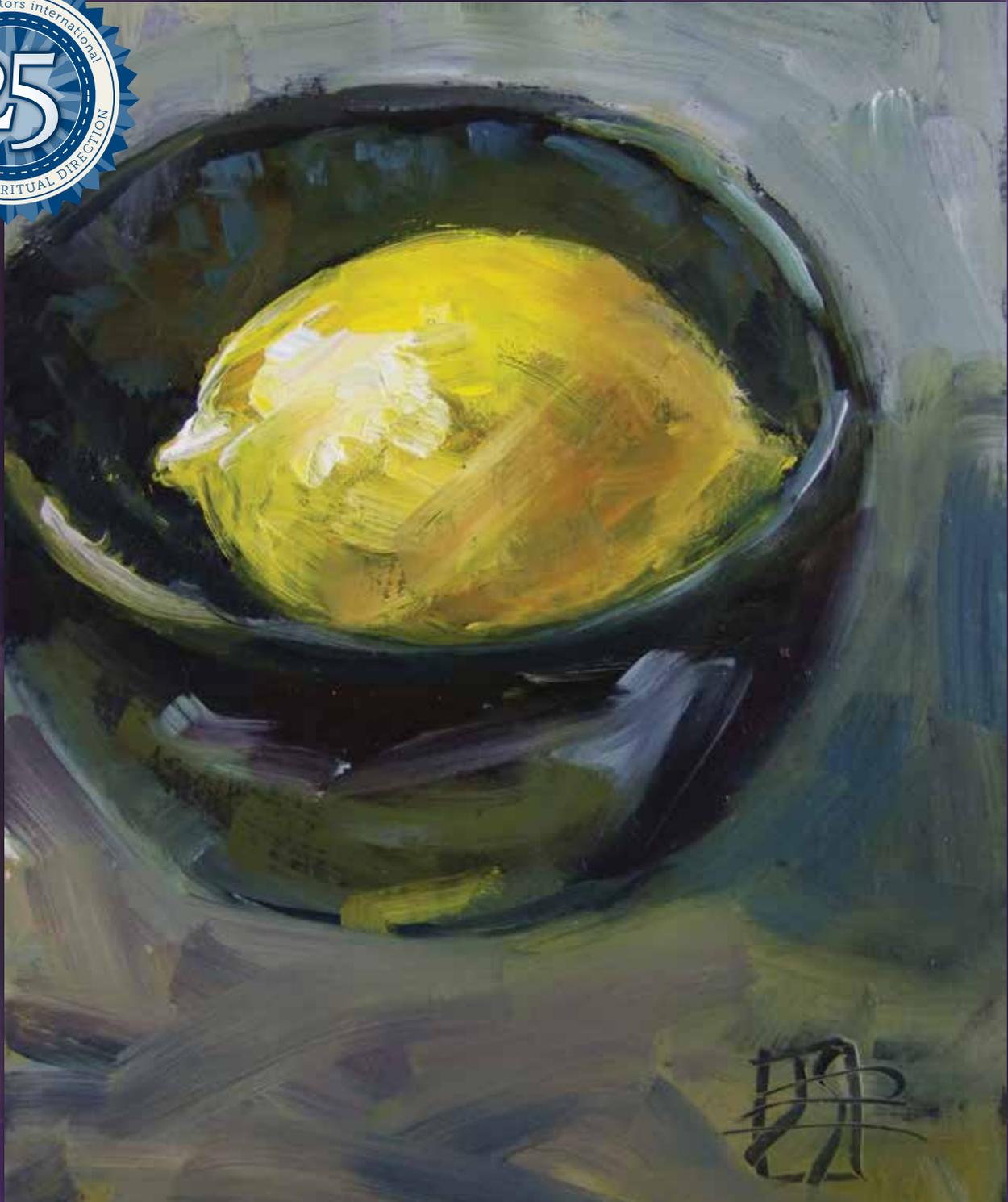


CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL

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AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION • VOL. 21, NO. 4 • DECEMBER 2015



Contemplativeness and Spiritual Direction • Finding the Voice Within
Embracing Wisdom: The Path of the Sage • Thomas Merton and Leonard Cohen

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AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

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of the book, almost like a little manual for spiritual formation, with attention to engaging relational layers to the self, to one another, and to communities. The prose content within each entry is invitational, personal yet communal, inspirational, and authentic.

Millis draws from a broad and diverse range of texts, settings, and circumstances in order to illustrate the depth of each precept. Ranging from sacred scriptures, to texts written by chief executive officers and poets, and to anecdotes told by family and friends, her examples reflect a thoughtful integration of sources, which contribute helpfully to her goal of writing for an audience that may or may not be familiar with classically religious or spiritual frameworks. Such integration of diverse sources reflects her conviction that “the voice of the genuine” (cited in the text from theologian and author Howard Thurman’s 1980 Baccalaureate Address at Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia, USA) resounds and can be found anywhere and everywhere in daily life.

Through this work, Millis invites the reader to deeply engage the voice of the genuine, and she offers her take on such engagement through the twenty-four precepts. A few of my personal favorites include “Make Use of Everything,” “Heed the Whispers,” “Turn to Wonder,” and “Act on What Matters.” Of particular interest to spiritual directors is Millis’s gentle yet insistent emphasis on turning toward the interior as a source for discernment and acting externally. Consonant with her previous work, *Conversation, the Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction*, Millis urges readers to attend to the depths found in one’s interior as a guide for shaping personal actions and interpersonal interactions. This is the type of book that a person will carry along and return to frequently: on the nightstand, in the workbag, on the resource table. I suspect that, much as spiritual directors return to sacred memories with their spiritual directees in order to further mine the depths of God’s presence in a particular moment, seekers will similarly return to this practical little manual to further mine its wisdom and directives for deepening engaging leader-

ship, be it formal or informal. ■

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Seeking Surrender: How My Friendship with a Trappist Monk Taught Me to Trust and Embrace Life

by **Colette Lafia**

Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2015

135 pages, CAD\$19.39, GBP£9.49,

USD\$14.95

Reviewed by Greg Richardson

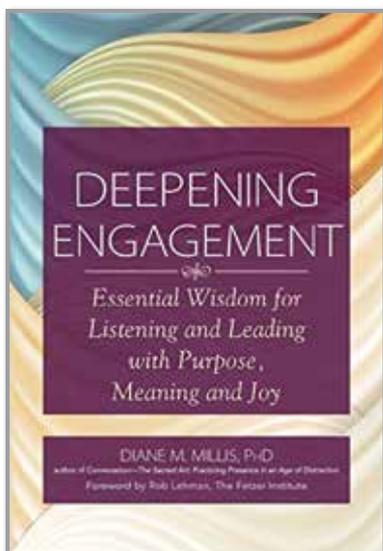
Seeking Surrender is an honest, intimate description of how a spiritual director is formed. We are shaped by how we reflect on and come to terms with our experiences. Our spirituality is sparked and stretched by challenges we face, disappointments and discouragements we feel,

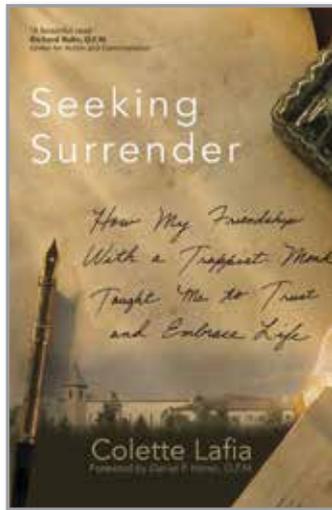
and people we know, along with our own thinking and many other things. In *Seeking Surrender*, Colette Lafia tells her own story.

Lafia’s story grows out of who she is. She begins by describing the experiences that brought her and her husband to the Abbey of Gethsemani, a Trappist monastery in rural Nelson County, Kentucky, USA, in the summer of 2002. Neither of them knew much about monastic life, monks, or the writings of Gethsemani’s most well-known monk, Thomas Merton, OCSO. Based on the recommendation of a friend, they made plans to

visit the monastery for a week. “I held on to the belief that life had more to offer me than disappointment, sadness, and fatigue” (3).

On their first day, Lafia met Brother René who would become a significant guide and friend. *Seeking Surrender* recalls their initial meeting and Lafia’s friendship with Brother René, which developed into a correspondence. Over time, she reflects on the various struggles that brought her and her husband to Gethsemani. She describes lessons she has learned, spiritual practices she





has found and developed, and gifts she has received. She includes her letters to Brother René and his to her, along with practical suggestions about how her readers might put lessons into practice for themselves: “Find a place to sit quietly: in your car, on a chair at home, or on a park bench. Now, breathe in and out. Pay attention to your breath, and begin to scan your body” (38).

I enjoyed reading *Seeking Surrender*. It is a calm and refreshing book. Lafia tells her story in a way that invites her reader to participate in her process of insightful growth. She is clear and direct without being harsh or directive.

Seeking Surrender is a potentially powerful tool for a spiritual director. I have shared passages in groups I facilitate. It is a story told with authenticity and vulnerability, the story of a friendship that evokes deep truth. Additionally it is a collection of helpful, meaningful suggestions for people seeking their spiritual path. Lafia’s story helped me remember the story of my own spiritual journey and the valuable lessons of surrender. ■

Greg Richardson is a spiritual director and leadership coach in Pasadena, California, USA. He is also a lay oblate with New Camaldoli Monastery near Big Sur, California. His e-mail address is StrategicMonk@gmail.com.

**Practicing Silence:
New and Selected Verses
by Bonnie Bowman Thurston**

Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2014
103 pages, CAD\$18.95, GBP£12.99,
USD\$19.99

Reviewed by Kathryn Madden, RC

As a Montessori teacher, I discovered how young children delight in becoming silent enough to listen for a teacher to call their name in a whisper, so that they might respond to her beckoning. In *Practicing Silence: New*

and Selected Verses, I discovered that practicing silence in order to respond to the beckoning of God’s word at every moment is the delightful essence of Benedictine obedience. It is surely also the deep and delightful essence of Bonnie Bowman Thurston’s poetic stance.

Enkindled by her experience of encountering Christian monasticism nearly forty years ago while writing a doctoral dissertation on Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton and visiting a monastery of Episcopal nuns, Thurston’s hope is to communicate “something of the mystery and spiritual depth of monasticism and of the sweetness and sustenance of Christianity” (103). Drawing upon her personal experience of living, not as a monastic, but as a solitary in the world for more than twenty years of widowhood, Thurston seeks to speak to both the spiritual seeker and the curious bystander.

The poems are arranged according to a monastic logic, with each section prefaced by a quotation from *The Rule of St. Benedict*, which sets the tone and announces the theme. For example, in keeping with how the monastic life is structured by the daily schedule of liturgical prayers, there is a section entitled “Hoarium,” which gently leads the reader through a monastic day, from Vigils, offered before the sun rises, to Compline, the last office of the day, which precedes Great Silence and the darkness of the night.

In this one hundredth anniversary year of Merton’s birth, Thurston’s poems quietly resound with the hush of decades spent studying and pondering Merton’s writings. In “Za Zen in Gethsemani Abbey,” we find ourselves right there with Merton:

... I sit in the balcony
beneath the azure windows
contracting my self
into the deep recesses

