

# Book Reviews

By Patti Normile, SFO

## ***"song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations"* by Murray Bodo, OFM**

A treasure was recently given to me. Just a couple of days after seeking Murray Bodo's *Song of the Sparrow* on my bookshelf to reread, I was given a renewed version of his 30-year old gathering of wisdom and poems. *song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations* flows from the marrow of Father Murray's Franciscan spirituality. *song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations* is quartered into the four seasons of the year beginning with "Autumn" and the shedding of self to enable transformation into Christ-likeness. The book concludes with "Summer," a time of growth in desire for God. Murray tells us that "Summer" was written in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of his life as a Franciscan friar, his 70<sup>th</sup> year on his journey to heaven. Secular Franciscans recall Murray's, *The Journey and the Dream*.

As always, Murray's meditations remind us of the power of words, the growth-producing delving, the results from journaling. He writes: *I write and you leap onto the page, O Lord. When I cannot write will you leap back into my heart?* The meditations invite the reader into the depths of our own being through the explorations of a mystic and the pragmatism of a 12-year old school boy wondering about God. Every page or so Murray bursts forth with a brief poem. I have an image of Murray being like an underwater swimmer in a sea of prose, who after a certain time is compelled to rise to the surface for poetic breath. The poems gather the profound paragraphs into memorable clutches of thought.

It is a book that tempts the reader to read cover to cover at a single sitting. Yet after reading a few pages, one knows that would be a sad treatment of this gift of faith and wisdom. A paragraph or page at a time is all this poor sparrow can absorb.

Murray concludes with a call to all Franciscans: What are the images of our world that have been skewed and turned to purposes other than what God intended them to be? What has become deformed and ugly and needs the Franciscan vision to see it aright again?

Saint Bonaventure says that justice makes beautiful that which has been deformed. What is it in our world that is deformed and needs justice to make it beautiful again? Saint Francis made beautiful the fact of thirteenth century leprosy by embracing lepers and seeing Christ in them. What do we need to embrace in Christ in order that its face may be made beautiful by our love, our vision of Christ within what we thought was repulsive? Perhaps we need to begin, as Saint Francis did, with

ourselves and embrace ourselves and see the beauty there first of all. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008.

## ***Care for Creation* by Ilia Delio, OSF, Douglass Warner, OFM & Pamela Wood By Patti Normile, SFO**

As I finished reading Care for Creation, a Franciscan spirituality of the earth, I found myself cradling the book in the palm of my hand in a way that mirrors the lovely cover of the book on which a miniature earth globe is held by caring hands. It is that kind of book - a treasure of Franciscan wisdom created by Ilia Delio, OSF, professor and chair of Spirituality Studies at Washington Theological Union and author of several books; Keith Douglass Warner, OFM, lecturer and researcher at Santa Clara University, California; and Pamela Wood, art therapist, spiritual director and retreat facilitator in Portland, Oregon. Their combined writings provide sound science and thought-stimulating theology combined with individual and group prayer and meditation focused on a Franciscan format for repairing our damaged Earth.

As I read, I began to think of Care for Creation as an "owner's manual" for our beleaguered planet. Care for Creation gives the reader an image of the effect of America's rampant consumerism in terms of acreage needed by Americans compared to others: "Due to our high-consumption lifestyle, the average American has an annual footprint of twenty-four acres, the greatest per-person impact in the world. It would take five "Earths" full of resources to supply the entire human family with an American lifestyle. For reference, the global average is about seven acres per person, but even that level of consumption cannot be maintained indefinitely." [p. 159]

However, Care for Creation is not about hopelessness and despair, but about realization and contemplative action based on the call Francis heard, "Francis, go rebuild my oikos [house] - my creation; as you see, it is all being destroyed." [p. 145] Linking the Incarnation to Mother Earth as well as to human life, the authors allow the reader to view the caring for all life in the way that Jesus or Francis would. Not only would the Earth be repaired, so would humans as they would rediscover the spiritual rather than the material facets of life.

Care for Creation takes me back to my childhood when Mom and Dad would remind me as we picnicked or hiked, "Always leave a place better than the way you found it."

With suggestions for group as well as individual prayer and extensive bibliography and resources, Care for Creation makes an excellent resource for fraternities, families or individuals. It might well be the source of focus for a Quinquennial Congress! St. Anthony Messenger Press