A WAY TO THE DESERT:
101 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON RETREAT,
PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT THE IGNATIAN WAY
By Ramon Maria Lusa Bautista, S.J.
Makati City, Metro Manila: St. Pauls
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Reviewed by Francis X. Clark

The specific purpose of this book is “to help train and form future directed retreat givers, but not excluding to help initiate and familiarize people more with the directed retreat style” (xii). The author chose the focusing question and answer format utilized by Raymond E. Brown in a similar book on Scripture and by other authors in various fields.

The purpose is attained; the book is a success. This reviewer has been a Jesuit for many years, has made two thirty-day retreats and seventy-two eight-day annual retreats, yet he has learned much new matter about retreats, prayer and discernment.

The first outstanding point of the book is the author’s background. He began with a Masters Degree in Theology from Loyola School of
Theology (Manila), continued with a Licentiate in Theology at the Jesuit School of Theology (Berkeley, California), and ended with a Doctorate in Theology and Spirituality at Heythrop College of the University of London. In addition, through the years he has preached and directed retreats and has been spiritual director for religious, seminarians and lay people. At present, he is the Master of Jesuit Novices in the Philippines.

Another commendable feature of the book is the history of retreats in the Church and, in that history, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The author also explains the difference between preached retreats and one-to-one directed retreats, greatly favoring the directed format as the one most used by Saint Ignatius himself, and very helpful for our modern age. All in all, the book is a mine of information and inspiration for all involved in giving and making retreats.

The one difficulty is the faulty references to frequent quotations from books and articles. Two examples suffice: on page 61 there is a reference to The Way Supplement, page 36, but no year or volume number is given; on page 86 one finds a reference to the periodical Review for Religious, but without the year, volume or page. Many similar deficiencies occur. Perhaps the author did not want to frighten ordinary readers with a scholarly array of data, or was simply following the example of other authors in similar volumes. But it is curious why only a fraction of a reference is provided when full information is needed to trace it. To avoid footnotes or references in the text one solution might have been endnotes, which are inconspicuous yet accurate. A bibliography might also have been helpful to readers.

Aside from this criticism, the book is a welcome addition to retreat literature and spirituality in the service of God and people. The author is to be heartily congratulated for conceiving the idea, planning it, and bringing it to final publication.