

THE BEST
OF THE
REVIEW — 3

*THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
OF
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION*

Edited by
David L. Fleming, S.J.

Foreword

When the first issues of *Review for Religious* were published in 1942, the topic initially chosen for reader involvement and discussion was *spiritual direction*. The founding editors—Jesuit Fathers Adam Ellis, Gerald Kelly, and Augustine Ellard—opened up the topic with a five-page editorial entitled “Spiritual Direction by the Ordinary Confessor.” The editors suggested that a forum for exchange of ideas might be established through letters and positive suggestions. To aid the discussion, they subsequently published articles on “The Need of Direction,” “Cooperation with Direction,” “Manifestation of Conscience,” and “The Prudent Use of Confession Privileges.” Almost a year later, in volume 2, number 3 (1943). The editors put together a concluding survey from the various letters and reflections which had been submitted from the REVIEW readers.

Almost a half-century later, we find that the interest in the topic of spiritual direction has grown stronger and far more widespread than just in reference to religious and priestly life and direction’s relationship to the confessional forum. The articles which have appeared in REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS over the recent years provide at kind of gold mine for coming to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Christian ministry of spiritual direction.

For clarity and a progression of thought, I have given a certain structure to this book in the way in which I have grouped the articles. I have written an original introductory article on direction from the perspective of what I see is neglected in most contemporary treatments—the perspective of its being based in the gifting of the Spirit and so truly meriting its being a *Christian ministry*. Then in the first section, I group those articles which give some aspects of a Christian spirituality foundation. The second section contains those articles which spell out some of the identifying factors of spiritual direction itself. I have selected a few articles in the third section which give an indication of the interaction between direction today and contemporary psychology, with some selections especially focusing on the currently, predominant Jungian contribution to the understanding of our human and spiritual makeup.

In the fourth section, we start looking at the actual working of the ministry of direction by first touching on its beginning stages. The fifth section attempts to take in various aspects of the process itself, with its subdivisions of a) God and our experience, b) prayer and examen, c) will of God and discernment, and d) dialogue. In the sixth and final section, I have grouped some articles representative of issues, related to direction, such as supervision, the sacrament of

reconciliation, and a model of direction in a group form.

All the articles in this collection have value beyond the period of time in which they were written. But immediately it will become apparent that even a period of some ten years does make a difference in the style of writing and in the ways ideas are expressed or certain emphases are taken. For example, a number of articles will not be written in the inclusive language style which has become prevalent in the last few years. So, too, the power of imagination and the role of the unconscious are not as clearly reflected as they tend to be in some current thinking. Yet for all the weaknesses that any collection of articles written over a number of years and written by various authors has, I believe that the book provides a rich resource to stimulate personal reflection, study, and discussion.

The Christian ministry of spiritual direction is a many-splendored gift of the Spirit's outpouring upon the Church. I hope that the varied emphases and the wisdom of these articles will serve to deepen our understanding, appreciation, and use of this most precious gift for our own growth in Christ.

David L. Fleming, S.J.

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Introduction

Spiritual Direction: Charism and Ministry

David L. Fleming, S.J.

The Setting: Four Life Situations

Sister Matilda is tired of teaching high school girls and decides that her new ministry should be “more spiritual.” She determines that retreat and spiritual direction work would suit her just fine at this time of her life.

Father Abe feels that he needs a break from the administrative office duties which he has had these past twenty years. In his sixties, he would like a lighter schedule, and he thinks that he will let it be known in the parish and diocese that he is available to be a spiritual director.

Susan is married, and her three children are all in school. She wants now to give more time to her parish activities. Susan has a master’s degree in counseling, and so she is considering using her skills in the “At Home Retreat” movement and also offering some group spiritual direction.

Rudy has just finished some years of volunteer service in Latin America. He is more convinced than ever of the importance of lay ministry in the Church. He knows that he is friendly and easily approachable and likes dealing with people and their problems. He plans to go to the Jesuit School of Theology for training in pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

Need for Theological Clarity

These four examples of Christian interest in spiritual direction ministry could be multiplied many times over and with many variations in age, experience, motivation, and desires. Although we know only the initial interest shown in spiritual direction in each of these stories, we find ourselves immediately alerted to the absence of some basic theological thinking about the place of spiritual direction in the Christian tradition.

4 / *Ministry of Spiritual Direction*

From the personal circumstances described in each situation, we have no evidence that any of these four people are apt candidates for being spiritual directors. We would question whether any of them knows why direction is rooted in the Christian tradition and why it comes to be an identifiably *Christian* ministry. We could also question whether they have had the experience of personal spiritual direction in their own lives over a certain period of time. Are they even now receiving direction? Is there just a simple transfer of counseling skills to spiritual direction work? Does being a “service personnel” person in the Church—a priest, brother, sister—automatically qualify for being a spiritual director for others? Is spiritual direction work one more job qualification for which they can receive training at some theology school?

The questions which these simple life situations raise are significant for the larger question of ministry training in the Church today. It is true that breaking out from the clerical domination of ministries prevalent since at least the time of the Council of Trent has led to a new vibrancy of Church life. At the same time serious questions are being raised not only about the adequacy of traditional seminary training for priest candidates in terms of the contemporary demands on priestly ministry, but also about the means of identifying, forming, and authorizing those who exercise any of the ministry roles in the Church or more generally in the Christian name today.

Spiritual direction is just one of the specialized ministries which demand a greater understanding about their place in Christian theology and about the elements necessary for their practice. For we are beginning to realize the dangers of good-willed but inept and unqualified people putting themselves forward as directors in a milieu which does in fact have a dearth of good directors in proportion to those seeking direction. Without entering into the complexity of the training of spiritual directors for our Church today, I intend to highlight a few theological issues which are absolutely necessary for any consideration of Christian spiritual direction. If we clarify our theological foundations of direction, I believe that we provide a better base for identifying and forming people who perhaps are being called by God to take their place in exercising a spiritual-direction ministry.

Gift/Charism: Root of All Christian Ministry

As in every other Christian ministry, spiritual direction is rooted in God’s call first and then our human response to that call. When we are baptized in Christ, we do not take out a brochure of Christian ministries and busily pick out which ones we think that we would like to exercise. Yet in the midst of a wonderful proliferation of ministries available to be exercised by us as members of Christ’s Body in our time, we seem to be coming upon a very secular-style approach which lets everything depend on “what *I* want” or “what *I* need” and “what *I* judge my talents or interest to be” as central to ministry work.

Spiritual direction as a Christian ministry cannot be chosen from this kind of focus on self. Direction is first of all a charism, a gifting of Christ’s Spirit in

a special way to a particular person. St. Paul in three different places in his letters (Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians) explicitly alludes to some of the various charisms which the Spirit has poured out upon the community members of the Body of Christ. Some of the functions he names sound so ordinary in the life of any community grouping, such as *administering, teaching, exhorting*, and yet for Paul there was a wholly new depth to the kind of service a Christian could bring to the community because of what he or she had been given by the Spirit. Grace—gifts of the Spirit root the exercise of the Christian's new ministry or service role in the Christian community—not just natural talents or gifts, previous secular job or training, or even the simple charitable desire "to be useful."

In combination with the personal awakening to their charism and their acceptance of it in service, baptized persons also receive confirmation of this gift in a normal human way by means of other people with whom they live or work identifying it and calling for its use. Commonly, people who have some intimations of a God-given discerning ability find that others seek them out and want to share their life situations, joys, and difficulties with them and value their counsel, advice, and support in their own attempt to grow as Christians.

Through our Christian experience, we have become aware of a process that normally takes place in the recognition of ministerial gifts. In that process the following four elements are identified: 1) a person's growing sense of being gifted in a certain way, 2) one's being confirmed in this gift/charism by the experience of a special quality of interaction with others, 3) a person's deciding freely to exercise this gift for others, and 4) one's seeking out ways of training and refining the gift given. When the Church began to institutionalize the selection and formation process of priesthood candidates at the time of the reforms of the Council of Trent, there developed an organized process of a testing along the lines which we have described so that the ordained minister was one who is community—approved and community-qualified. Although today this selection and formation process needs continuing adaptation to our Vatican II situation for priest and deacon candidates, the lack of a similar kind of screening and qualifying process for nonordained ministers has become evident. Currently spiritual direction is one example of a ministry which calls for our identifying and acknowledging of its charism root—a gift of the Spirit—as the indispensable foundation for anyone who seeks to exercise this ministry. In addition, then, we need to define better ways for the Christian community to give its own confirmation of the call and to provide appropriate resources for training and development.

Direction: Christian Theology Base

A. A Personal and Trinitarian God

Spiritual direction is not just one more helping relationship in human society. Its very base in a Christian theological tradition provides a necessary content to its practice.

Direction is one of the charisms made evident in the Pentecostal gifting of the Spirit to some individuals in the Christian community; it has been and always will be present in some form in all Christian communities. While direction through the ages and even to our own times takes on many forms, for example, individual and group, written and oral, incidental and ongoing, we hold a centrality for direction more traditionally understood as an ongoing relationship between two individuals, in which one is recognized as the helper for the other in the progress of living ever more fully one's Christian life.

Direction is called *spiritual*, not just in some "other than material" or earthy sense, but direction is *spiritual* because its source is the Spirit of God. For direction is rooted in our faith in a Trinitarian God, a God identified as Father, Son, and Spirit. This God is personal, not seen or related to in terms of forces or powers, or abstractions or neuter cases. Jesus used a love-word, *Abba*, as his apparently favorite imagery of his relationship to this personal God. In the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus saying to Philip that "anyone who sees me sees the Father." And so from the early Christian community down to our own day, Jesus has given us an entrance-image into a Trinitarian God who is personal. It is also in the Johannine writings that we hear Jesus identify himself as our "paraclete" when he announces that his leaving us is important for his sending "another paraclete" who will stay with us always and have no other message or mission than to help make Jesus as our Lord known to us in fuller and more intimate ways.

Direction, then, is taken up with the relationship of the Christian to the Christian God. As we well know, not all images of God are Christian, and some imaging of God is not only a distortion of the Scripture images but also totally incompatible with the Gospel. A person needs to be well-grounded in an adequate theology of God and Jesus in order to be a Christian spiritual director. Christian spiritual direction necessarily faces us not with a God of our prejudices or of our own making but a God of revelation and yet a God of our own experience.

B. *Christian Prayer*

An essential part of this relationship between a Christian and the Christian God gets expressed in that special conversation-communication mode we call prayer. In the Christian tradition, prayer, like direction itself, is not viewed as just one more human activity, common to anthropological studies and usually found as a part of all religions. Rather, prayer is seen as a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ, and so Christian prayer takes on a new depth of meaning and content from its very source in the Spirit.

Christian prayer is always a relational expression, and in the very act of praying, we come to a deeper sense of the limit- boundaries of the self and the God we adore as the "God of *our* life." In other words, in our Christian praying, we speak out the conviction that we are not God and that everything we have and are has God as its source. In Christian prayer, there is not a getting lost or absorbed into some kind of an all-devouring fog or some sidereal black

hole. An interpersonal love marks the various expressions of Christian prayer, whether it be petition for needs, sorrow for sins, or thanksgiving for life.

The way of praying taught by Jesus focuses on a personal God of love, one who acts and is concerned for us individually and for our world, and who has plans for us all in which our free cooperation is invited. If we take Jesus' way of praying as summed up in the Gospel story of his teaching the "Our Father" or if we more generally observe his own praying throughout the Gospels and his various teachings or stories about praying, we find a consistency in approach to God and to the content of prayer.

Direction encourages our growth as Christians by keeping us in contact with the ways of praying as Jesus prayed. Not every method or way of praying is automatically adaptable to the kind of relationship which Christian prayer is meant to engender. A spiritual director must be able to be discriminating about the ways of praying which call forth the growth proper to a Christian praying in the Spirit.

C. A Bringing About of the Kingdom

Spiritual direction does not concern itself only about growing in relationship with God. The Christian God is a God whose activity through creation, incarnation, and the Paschal Mystery is bringing forth a fulfillment (the Pauline *pleroma*) which is beyond human imagining. We believe and we hope in a God who makes all things new, and we know that in Jesus the in-breaking of this divine reality has reached a new and definitive form for ourselves and for our world. We as Christians take on a special responsibility for allowing it to happen in our own lives. This in-breaking of the Kingdom always catches us by surprise, even with all our efforts to lead better Christian lives and despite all our falling back and remissness in embodying Christian values in our lives and works in this world.

The focus of spiritual direction is as wide as a person's whole life. No activity, no suffering, no relationship, no good action or bad action is exempt from being looked at in spiritual direction. In fact, just as ordinariness is the typical context of God's dealings with the Israelites in the Old Testament accounts, so we find that the God who speaks and the God who calls and acts in our lives works ordinarily through human agents and through commonplace circumstances and events. It is in the listening to these experiences and growing in a discerning heart that we begin to realize that any of our human experiences is potentially a *religious experience*. For it is through our experience that we begin to learn a language of God, forming and focusing our lives. The ministry of spiritual direction is that attempt to help translate our religious experience into a language that we can more readily understand and so more fully respond to. A spiritual director knows that God's call is constant and all of us are necessarily involved in the bringing about of that part of the Kingdom where God is working in and through us. Christian spiritual direction looks for no nirvana of escapism in which people are left sitting around, feeling good about their prayer experience. Christian spiritual direction necessarily makes all Christians—those

busy in the activities of secular life and those identified as cloistered contemplatives and those who follow the vocation of hermit—prophets who are responsible for a Kingdom still to come.

D. *The Passion and the Resurrection*

Because the Paschal Mystery remains the central theology dogma of the Christian faith, the passion and resurrection must take a consciously central place in the ministry of spiritual direction.

Jesus relates to every Christian as the one who is their savior. Every person must face how Jesus is savior for him or her—whatever form the question may take from being a savior *from*, to a savior *of*, or to a savior *for*. Sin, suffering, and death in all its forms, culminating at last in the apparent termination of one's human life, clamor for integration in each person's relationship with God. Christian theology has given a certain shape to our thinking about the integration and wholeness of human life in the light of the mystery of redemption. Spiritual direction is the attempt to facilitate the incorporation of this basic doctrine into the life-story of an individual Christian. The mature growth in Christian spiritual life takes place in proportion to a person's ability to enter into a passion and death with Jesus.

The full richness of Christian growth becomes evident when in spiritual direction a person learns to discover that the personal God who is more readily recognized in the treasured experiences of life and of love is the same one who remains intimately close in the dark moments and the secularly nonvalued or "throwaway" experiences of life. Through direction God more literally becomes acknowledged as the "God of my *whole life*"—a God found in passion, dying, and death and the same God who is our joy, hope, and source of all life. Christian spiritual direction retains the cross as the central image which challenges us humans to a mature and integrated spiritual life.

Direction: A Life Lived

Granted a more correct understanding of the essential notes of Christian theology in spiritual direction, is there a way of training or refining this gift of the Spirit found in certain members of the Christian community? Because of the modern day development of psychology and counseling, we are inclined to be far more conscious today of skills and technique training in spiritual direction than in previous ages. Valuable as the contribution of psychology and counseling has been, it sadly has at times obscured the theological foundations and content of contemporary spiritual direction. But besides our consistent lack of focus on the theological foundations of direction, we also seem to pass over too lightly that the most important element in the refining of this ministerial gift of direction lies in one's own continuing development of one's spiritual life. Workshops and training programs in spiritual direction will fail to produce a spiritual director if a spiritual life is not seriously pursued. For it is in the lived spiritual life that the most basic formation is done by God in the potential spiritual director.

There is a tradition that St. Teresa of Avila identified that a director should

possess a certain theological foundation as the most essential quality for giving good spiritual direction. At the same time, Teresa had an expectation that a director would be pursuing his or her own spiritual growth. From her experience, Teresa knew that pious sanctity or the good-willed attempt to help another was not enough for proper spiritual direction. And so her careful distinction about the more essential quality in a spiritual director was not to deny the good of a certain holiness of life lived by the director, but to stress that the director must possess a certain theological acumen. Teresa's sense of criteria I would hold to be even more essential for today's spiritual director than in previous ages.

Spiritual Direction: Concluding Reflections

Today, then, what is commonly missing in considerations about spiritual direction is its distinctive Christian theological base. We must begin with the fact that direction is a charism of the Spirit, and the Spirit gives these gifts where the Spirit wills. No one can claim a gift that is not given by God. Today as people put themselves forward for various ministries, this Christian fact of gifts which differ from person to person as well as the lack of certain gifts in any one individual is often being obscured or even ignored.

We need to pay greater attention to the fact that direction is a *Christian* ministry. The Christian context of spiritual direction gives a specific content to who God is, to how we pray, to our relationship to our world, and to the human reality of sin and death. These most basic elements of our Christian faith seem to attract little attention in the whole spiritual-direction project as it is considered in our day.

There is no doubt that we have a richness of resources, previously unknown or undeveloped in Church history, that we can bring to the study and practice of spiritual direction. Yet we need to make sure that these very resources clearly provide support for the most distinctive elements which identify spiritual direction as a Christian ministry. For ultimately only if we build upon spiritual direction's Christian theological foundations will we find that this ministry will be productive for the growth in holiness of Christians today.

I. Spiritual Direction: Needed— A Spiritual Context

Spirituality and Ordinary Human Experience

Toward a Method for the Study of Spirituality

*Am I Growing Spiritually? Elements for a Theology
of Growth*

Three Questions for the Spiritual Journey

Spirituality and Ordinary Human Experience

Angelo M. Caligiuri

Volume 37, 1978, pp. 454-460.

The conciliar call to renewal has generated and/or facilitated the development of a rich variety of “spiritual” movements within the contemporary Church. Spirituality is no longer the explicit concern and interest of the few—spiritual directors, formation personnel, spiritual writers, and others—and the implicit but seldom articulated interest and concern of the majority of Christians. Today, the growing number of priests, religious and laity who have participated in programs of spiritual renewal and who have, in varying degrees, undergone a “conversion experience” have contributed to the increased and very conscious interest and concern for spirituality appearing in all segments of the Church’s life.

The appearance of houses of prayer, diocesan renewal centers, centers for directed retreats, as well as the increasing number of priests and religious who are discerning a call to specifically “spiritual ministries,” are all indications of this growing interest in spirituality.

Spirituality is becoming less the acknowledged and rather exclusive concern of a relatively small number of Jesus’ followers, and more the acknowledged concern of every person who has come to know the Father’s love in Jesus, and who strives to respond to that love in his particular walk of life.

Because, for many, this expression of interest in spirituality is grounded in a unique, grace-filled experience, be it of a directed retreat, an encounter weekend, through a charismatic prayer group or community, and so forth, there is a tendency to equate “spirituality” with the kinds of prayer, activity and feelings experienced during these “extraordinary” occasions of one’s life.

And no matter how much time and energy are exerted during these periods to help persons “reenter” the mainstream of their ordinary living situations, reentry for many, more often than not, seems to be somewhat difficult, if not problematic.

I would like to suggest that, at least to some extent, this situation obtains because, in the flow of ordinary human experience, we recall and remember the extraordinary experience of God’s Spirit, not as a stimulus and challenge to discover and ground our spirituality in the ordinary, but as a norm against which to judge the spirituality of our daily living. When this happens, we feel that ordinary human experience is a hindrance to spiritual growth, with the result that we long for and try to recapture experiences of God which are unique and extraordinary gifts. And then, instead of being present to the spiritual that is in the flow of ordinary human experience, we are tempted to merely tolerate the ordinary until we can once again experience the extraordinary.

When, and to the extent that this happens, we can begin to experience a certain amount of frustration in our ordinary apostolates. And instead of being willing to live with the healthy tension that accompanies trying to be a contemplative in action, activity can come to be seen as an obstacle to our spiritual growth, and the ordinary flow of experience as devoid of any perceptible and personally nourishing presence of God.

It is within this context that I would like to reflect upon the spiritual dimension of our ordinary human experience.

In speaking about the spiritual dimension of our human experience, we are necessarily employing the word *spiritual* from within the context of a more fundamental understanding of what we mean by the term. It certainly should not be surprising to realize that there can be significant differences in the meaning which persons perceive and intend to communicate when they hear and use the word. *Spiritual* frequently attempts to describe a dimension of human experience which is acknowledged as going beyond the purely human, a dimension that results from the interaction between the human and some other worldly force, be it personal or not.

At this level, our understanding of the word *spiritual* will necessarily reflect our understanding of the nature of this transcendent force. And so we can legitimately speak, for example, of a Buddhist or of a Hindu spirituality. In speaking of the spiritual dimension of our human experience, however, I am concerned primarily with a Christian understanding of spirituality, that is, with the way in which the personal God who reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ is at work in our human experience.

Having clarified my understanding of the word spiritual, I would like now to attempt to explicate the specific meaning contained in the phrase spiritual dimension of our experience.”

It is a basic truth of our Christian faith that God our Father, has created each of us in his own image and likeness, and that he wills all of us to share the fullness of life with him in eternity. However, given the history of our human race and of the abuse of freedom which characterizes our way of life after the fall, we humans could not achieve this purpose without the intervention of God. And so the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us, and enable us to return once again to the Father. Jesus did this by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, that is, by his paschal mystery. Now in his life among us, Christ revealed to us some of the ways in which God is at work in our midst trying to lead us back to himself.

One of the basic truths which Jesus reveals to us is that the Father is drawing us to himself. As Christians, we believe that God the Father is actively at work in our lives, drawing us ever more closely into unity with him. Christ not only reveals this truth to us, but he also teaches us something about how the Father will draw us to himself. In explaining to his disciples why he must return to his Father, Jesus says that unless he goes, the Holy Spirit will not come upon us. And it is the Holy Spirit who will teach us all things and draw us to the Father. It is the Holy Spirit, then, who is our new life, who is the sanctifier. For every Christian living after the ascension, then, our new life in the Lord is the result of the Holy Spirit's enlivening and energizing activity in us. In effect, this means that to speak of a Christian spiritual life means to speak of the Holy Spirit. Unless we possess God's Spirit, we cannot speak of a spiritual life or of any kind of spirituality in a Christian sense.

In speaking of the spiritual dimension of human experience then, I am first and foremost speaking of the presence and activity of God's Spirit in human reality. Spirituality is primarily the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Now if these faith facts are true, that is, if it is true that God the Father is acting to draw us to himself by sending the Holy Spirit to work among us, then it would seem to follow that the heart of Christian spirituality is the effort to discern and respond to the life-giving promptings of God's Spirit.

At this point in these reflections, a further question legitimately arises. Just how does God's Spirit work in our lives?

In trying to arrive at some understanding of this question, we are given help by noting the life and teaching of our Lord, and by reflecting on the experiences of the early faith community which are recorded for us in an inspired way in the Scriptures.

The fact that Jesus became fully human, and that he lived in a very human setting, indicates that it is in our human lives, in the reality of human experience, that we are primarily going to encounter God's Spirit at work, for nothing truly human is foreign to God. This is not to say that God's

Spirit cannot, has not, or is not, working among us in extraordinary ways, for God's ways are not our ways, and his Spirit breathes where he will.

It does say however, that because of the Incarnation, the usual way in which God works among us is in our ordinary human experience. Since the supernatural presupposes and builds upon the natural, God's Spirit usually and ordinarily works among us in and through our ordinary experience, in and through the real situations of our daily living.

If we take this a step further and consider just what we mean by human experience, I think we can get some further insight into how God's Spirit is at work in our lives, and hence of the spiritual dimension of our experience. In a rather simplistic way, we can describe human experience as a human being's awareness of himself and of his presence to all that is not totally identifiable with himself.

In other words, there is a two-fold dimension to human experience, the subjective, the human subject, the person; and the objective, that which is not totally identical with the person. When we are present to and aware of how we relate to what is other than ourselves, be it an idea, an emotion, a brick wall, a refreshing drink, a cool breeze, or another person, we are experiencing. "We," then are an essential component of our human experience. When each of us speaks of our experience, we are necessarily speaking of a phenomenon of which we are an essential component. Without our person, without us, it simply would make no sense to speak of our experience.

Now, if I, the unique person that each of us is, is an essential element of my human experience, and if God's Spirit is primarily at work in my ordinary human experience, then it would seem to follow that God's Spirit is very much at work in each of us, as individuals. If we want to be aware of the spiritual dimension of our human experience then, we must first of all be in touch with ourselves, we must get to know ourselves the best we can, become aware of all the various levels at which we operate, so that through a growing sensitivity to ourselves, we can gradually begin to discern which of our inclinations and feelings are caused by purely human dynamics, and which are the result of God's Spirit calling us to greater life in the Lord.

When we speak of the spiritual dimension of any human experience, we are first of all speaking of our personal relatedness to God, of our own faith-filled presence to God's Spirit at work in us. To be sure, our spirituality is ultimately the work of God's Spirit in us; however, we must cooperate. We must develop a posture of active receptivity, whereby we dispose ourselves to see the gift of God; whereby we are able to discern the movements of God and listen to his promptings. And this involves a true personal asceticism, a true discipline, whereby through prayer we gradually are able to let go of all our false idols, of all that is really our own god and spirit and, in full freedom, be able to perceive and respond to God's Spirit in us.

Some writers have described the spiritual life as the gradual tearing down of all of our defense mechanisms, so that we eventually let go of all our

own ideas of what and who we should become, and allow ourselves to become what God wants us to become. And it is toward this goal, this dying to our old self, that God's Spirit is trying to lead us in our personal lives.

It is precisely at this level of our spirituality, at the level of the development of our personal relatedness to God's Spirit, that we can benefit from what the human sciences of psychiatry and psychology can offer us. As we try to get in touch with ourselves so that we can discern God's Spirit, we realize that while part of our interior activity is conscious and deliberate, another part is situated below the level of our conscious awareness.

In our efforts to develop an authentic personal spirituality, which means to perceive and respond to the Holy Spirit as he is working in our personal life, we have to get to understand ourselves. And the behavioral sciences can help us do this. They tell us a great deal about our human nature on which the grace of God is acting. They can identify unhealthy attitudes and practices as well as unsuspected styles of self-deception.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of our human experience in which God's Spirit is at work drawing us back to the Father, includes a two-fold dimension: the subjective, that is the person who experiences; and the objective, that which is not totally identifiable with ourselves, that which is experienced.

Thus far I have tried to reflect a bit on the work of God in the subjective element of our human experience, ourselves. I would now like to reflect briefly on God's Spirit at work in the objective dimension of our human experience.

Our ability to be sensitive to God at work in the objective dimension will necessarily be related to our ability to sense God's Spirit in our personal lives. This is because we are the only ones who can experience, who can be aware of and present to all that is not I.

Granted that each of us has a personal spirituality which we are deepening through faith and prayer, then we will also be able to discern how God is at work in the objective dimension of our experience, that is, in all of creation, and especially in other persons. Our own growth in our personal spirituality, our own sense of how God is at work in each of us in a unique way, will make us more sensitive to his presence in all the other unique individuals that form the relational context in which we live our daily lives.

It is our own personal spirituality that will open up to us the spiritual dimension of our human experience. It is our faith-filled presence to God's Spirit in our lives that will make us more present to that same spirit at work in the lives of those we meet and in the world around us.

Simply put, it seems to me that there is no spiritual dimension to any human experience apart from the presence of a person who is alive, sensitive, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in his real life-situations. For it is the Holy Spirit whom the Son has sent to draw us back to the Father.

But where there is such a person present, then all human experience has a spiritual dimension. Because Jesus became man, there is no human experience that is foreign to, or incompatible with, the presence of God.

It is the presence of a faith-filled person to the ebb and flow of human experience which uncovers and reveals the spiritual dimension of that experience. It is the presence of a faith-filled person who discovers the spiritual meaning of a human event, an event which, considered impersonally in its physical dimensions, is the same event which a nonbeliever experiences as devoid of any transcendent meaning, if not as totally meaningless. This is not to fall into a kind of modern day fideism, for the reality of meaning necessarily includes the presence of a human subject who alone is the discoverer and revealer of meaning. To speak of the meaningfulness of human experience, is to speak necessarily of the presence of a human person, for whom alone meaning has any reality.

All of which means that if we are going to be able to perceive and respond to the presence of God's Spirit in the flow of ordinary human experience, a presence which is most significant in terms of our own growth in our love relationship with God, in terms of our spirituality, we must be aware of how we experience God. We must be growing in our familiarity with how he is at work in our personal lives. For it is one and the same Spirit who is present in each person and in all of creation.

And it is towards this end, the end of helping us recognize and own how we experience the presence of God's Spirit in our personal lives, that we are gifted with an extraordinarily intense and clear experience of God during the especially graced times of retreats and other conversion experiences.

We must be careful then, not to let these extraordinary experiences of God's presence with which we have been gifted during times of special grace to become the criteria according to which we evaluate or try to get a sense of the quality of our spirituality.

We must not try to experience God in our ordinary daily human experience in the same way we did during these times of extraordinary grace. We must not try to recreate such freely given experiences, nor be present to our ordinary daily life with a sense of loss because we "long" to return or to live in the memory of what was in the past.

God's enlivening Spirit is just as powerfully present in the flow of ordinary human events as he is during extraordinary periods of retreats and other special times devoted totally to one's life in the Lord. The lasting reality of these otherwise "unreal," extraordinary situations is precisely the personal growth in our sensitivity to how God's Spirit is at work in our life. It is this heightened awareness that enables us to discover and be present to that same Spirit of God at work in our life in and through our ordinary life situations.

While it is certainly possible and in fact a reality, that, as a result of an intense period of prayer and grace, an individual may come to discern a call to enter into a new type of spiritual ministry, it is just as possible that this

desire is a veiled attempt to recreate and recapture on a more lasting basis the experience of a past time of spiritual grace. This should lead all persons who feel drawn to leave a ministry in which they have been most effective and fulfilled for a more “spiritual” ministry to be truly present to all the dynamics at work in their desire. For while a sense of personal restlessness and dissatisfaction with one’s former ministry may be a legitimate sign of God’s call to a new ministry, they can also be symptoms of a subtle attempt on our part to recapture what was, an effort to try and find a lifestyle which one thinks will make of the extraordinary, the ordinary. In such situations it is imperative that the individual be truly open to the community’s needs, input and reflections, in discerning whether or not this call is from the Lord.

For most of us, it is in and through our presence to our ordinary daily experiences that we are going to mature in our life in the Lord. And it is to help us become more present to God’s Spirit at work in our daily life situations that we are graced with the profound experience of his presence during extraordinary times such as retreats.

If holiness is the work of God’s Spirit in our lives, and if spirituality is our attempt to respond to his Spirit, then it follows that for most of us, our spirituality must be primarily rooted in our ordinary human experience, in our ability to be present to and respond to God’s Spirit at work in the ordinary.

Toward a Method for the Study of Spirituality

Edward Kinker, S.J.

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A former professor of historical theology once described spirituality as a “glob” area. He explained this rather inelegant label by pointing out that spirituality enjoys an unlimited wealth of resources but possesses no tools for getting those resources organized. “I understand what it means to do history or to do theology,” he objected, “but what does it mean to do spirituality?” Students contemplating work in spirituality will take small comfort in his remarks but they will know exactly what he meant, for, unlike most other academic disciplines, spirituality lacks both formal definition of its content and methodology proper to itself. Studies in the *history* of spirituality, prayer, religious life, Scripture, psychology, theology, and any number of authors and movements can be most beneficial in themselves, but where does one find the unifying principles to bring all this knowledge together?

The occasional reader, who finds this or that work personally rewarding, will not be troubled by such abstract concerns, but this vagueness of content and style can be a formidable handicap for those who undertake a more thorough study, either for their own enlightenment or with the thought of being of service to others. In the latter case one must analyze spiritualities, interpret them in their historical-cultural context, compare and contrast them to other spiritualities, and finally develop criteria for criticism and evaluation. The tools for such reflection are not commonly available in the way that they are for other disciplines, including theology.¹

Part of the difficulty lies in the very nature of spirituality. Except for the

Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries it has been rare for theological speculation to elicit passionate responses on the part of Christians. Spirituality, on the other hand, always makes at least an implicit appeal to the heart; it is much closer to people's lives and emotions than is theology. This is to be expected, but it places the "academic" study of spirituality in an awkward corner precisely because the material lends itself so immediately to practical application, the pastoral. Consequently, spirituality as a discipline finds itself more often called upon to train spiritual directors and retreat givers than to engage in reflection. This oneness is risky. Spirituality cannot afford to neglect the mistakes or the riches which are a part of its heritage; nor can it forego with impunity the arduous task of using the theoretical process to correct the subtle mistakes of common sense.²

In a recent article for *REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS*, Father Alan Jones chronicled the split between devotion and theology—head and heart—and called for the redevelopment of mystical theology in order to "combat the tendency to anti-intellectualism today, particularly in areas where religious experience is concerned."³ Using William Johnston's definition of mysticism as "wisdom or knowledge that is found through love,"⁴ Father Jones suggested contemplation—which includes all levels of knowing—as the means of bringing reflection into religious experience and religious experience into theological reflection.

Father Jones's concern to bring head and heart together must be a constant preoccupation for spirituality; the great classics were developed more in the chapel than in the library, though they depended on both. However, I believe that we have an auxiliary task which is less "creative" and more "organizational" in character. In order to bring the vast and often unwieldy material from the history of spirituality into the arena of our prayerful reflection it must first be arranged into digestible form. The purpose of this article will be to suggest some questions or distinctions by which such arrangement can proceed: in other words, a method for the study of spiritualities. Of course, this is an ambitious undertaking, and I will protest in advance that these are remarks "toward a method." But since the need is great, I hope that any venture in this direction might prove useful.

Spirituality needs (1) a definition of itself, (2) some tools for analyzing a particular spirituality, (3) some guidelines for relating a spirituality to other spiritualities, and (4) some criteria for evaluation. In the pages that follow I will make attempts in the first three areas and then conclude with some limited thoughts about the fourth.

What Is Spirituality?

Everyone has a notion of spirituality, but efforts to pin it down in definition can be frustrating. It is everywhere yet nowhere; its scope is so vast—potentially as vast as the sum and depth of all human experience—that workable content virtually disappears.

Spirituality has been described as "lifestyle." If we realize that this means

more than length of hair and particular preferences for food and clothing, this *definition* is actually quite good. A person's spirituality is the way in which he or she lives in accordance with basic values. The famous Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar has given this a more philosophical formulation: "The way in which [an individual] acts and reacts habitually throughout his life according to his objective and ultimate insights and decisions."⁵ The strength of such a definition lies in its completeness; its weakness is that it is too complete. We are left afloat on a sea of private human experience with no markers to make this or that dimension of experience stand out. These definitions are good because they include everything, but they are not workable because they distinguish nothing. And without distinctions analysis is impossible.

What should we look for in a workable definition? First of all, a definition of spirituality for the purpose of study should limit the material to what is *expressed*. Nothing can be studied unless it is communicated in some way. It is true that spirituality must deal with the mysterious depths of the human person in relationship to God and that this mystery often defies conceptualization. However, it is usually open to communication through symbolization; and this, too, is a form of expression. Spirituality studies expressions, and these expressions can be conceptual or symbolic: they can be words, or they can be art, music, architecture, or indeed any form of human activity. Of course, an individual's full experience of his or her relationship with God can never be *adequately* expressed, not even symbolically. This is simply a difficulty which the study of spirituality must accept; we can only examine what is expressed and yet we know that the expression is never exhaustive of the reality.

Secondly, a definition of spirituality should contain the idea of *personal growth*. There is no spirituality for an animal, nor do we ever speak of God's spirituality.⁶ What distinguishes the human condition is growth beyond self, self-transcendence. There is a restlessness which is a constant striving to move from the less authentic to the more authentic. This is why spirituality gravitates so readily to psychology, and it is precisely the point at which the greatest care must be exercised not to confuse the two.⁷

Finally, as indicated earlier, a workable definition must contain markers: terms in the definition which orient the material by distinguishing what is important from what is unimportant. Without some means of making distinctions the material of spirituality presents an undivided sameness inimical to study. Markers differentiate that material; and this, in turn, facilitates questions for analysis. The particular selection of markers will necessarily be somewhat arbitrary. Here I have chosen to view any spirituality primarily from the standpoint of expressions of the *authentic* and expressions of the *inauthentic*.

A spirituality, then, is the expression of a dialectical personal growth from the inauthentic to the authentic. There are three ingredients in the definition: expression, dialectical personal growth, and authentic-inauthentic. *Expression* need not be clarified further. *Growth* has been called *dialectical* to underscore the fact that all spiritual growth is a simultaneous "yes" to one thing and a "no" to

something else. Each step toward the *authentic* demands a corresponding rejection of the inauthentic.⁸ The Gospel of Luke manifests this dialectical character in its expression of the beatitudes: every benediction has its corresponding curse (Lk 6:20-26).

Inauthentic and *authentic* are the markers referred to above. The total authenticity of a human person would be his or her complete self-transcendence in love. Conversely, total inauthenticity would be complete self-alienation, self-centeredness in hate. For our purposes, however, expressions of the authentic and inauthentic will normally be but partial representations of these absolute states. In a famous line from the *Imitation of Christ*, for example, compunction is an expression of the authentic while vain knowledge is an expression of the inauthentic; they are signposts along the way. Furthermore, specific expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic are not always univocal, even within the same spirituality. In the *Cloud of Unknowing*, meditation on Christ's passion can be either an expression of the authentic or the inauthentic, depending on the stage of one's contemplative development.¹⁰

Questions for Analysis

In an age as hermeneutically conscious as our own, it need not be stressed that a prerequisite for the analysis of any spirituality is some understanding of its historical-cultural context. To be unaware, for instance, that the end of the Roman persecutions coincided with the great movement to the desert in the fourth century would be to miss the opportunity for many insights into the roots of desert spirituality. The historical-cultural context is available for anyone who wishes to take the time to do some research. Our project assumes that this research can and will be done, but we are concerned here with something more general.

Questions for analysis must serve two purposes. They must provide a means of organizing the material of a spirituality in such a way that the material can be more easily assimilated. In other words, they must teach us how to read and how to retain what we read more effectively. The other purpose is that of comparison and contrast. The questions for analysis must be such that they can be asked more or less equally of any spirituality. It is only by putting the same questions to many different bodies of material that we can begin the process of comparing similarities and contrasting differences which will lead us to deeper understanding.

The first question flows immediately from the terms of the definition: what are the expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic? An effective way to begin answering this question is to make a list. Reading through the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, for instance, we would observe that shame and confusion, sorrow, tears, anguish, intimate knowledge, poverty, humility and gratitude¹¹ are but some of the expressions of the authentic; and we could do the same for expressions of the inauthentic. Making a list is a good way to begin because it directs us to the text with a simple and specific objective: how does

the spirituality express what it values and what it rejects? An exhaustive list is rarely possible or even desirable, but we do want to be certain that we initiate our analysis by carefully gathering all of the pertinent expressions.

A list gives us the concrete expressions from which to work, but it is too one-dimensional to be of more than limited value. By itself a list cannot single out those expressions which are of special importance, nor can it fit them into a pattern of meaning. What we lack is an organizing form¹² which could give the expressions depth and a relationship to one another. In the *Spiritual Exercises* an excellent illustration of such a form is the image of the Two Standards: the Kingdom of Christ versus the Kingdom of Satan.¹³ The Kingdom of Christ gives depth and relationship to the expressions of the authentic while the Kingdom of Satan does the same for the inauthentic. Intimate knowledge, poverty, humility, gratitude and the like contribute definite nuances to the understanding of the nature of these two kingdoms; and the expressions, in turn, receive their full meaning only in relationship to the complete image. The Two Standards are the unifying image for expressions in Ignatian spirituality.

While Ignatius himself gives the organizing form of the Two Standards, it is often necessary to uncover a form which is not itself one of the particular images used in a given text. Such would be the case in the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius.¹⁴ Clearly the text does not lack for images, but the best organizing form is rather the structure which Athanasius employs to develop his story: a series of four withdrawals by Antony, each one into greater solitude. The author uses these withdrawals to highlight periods of development in Antony's life, and each period unifies a corresponding set of expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic. In the first withdrawal Antony left his home to live on the outskirts of the village with an older ascetic. The expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic are characteristic of a "novitiate" period: zeal, faith, desire for purity of heart, imitation of the older ascetic were set in opposition to anxiety over family, money, fame, difficulties of asceticism and sexuality. In the second withdrawal, closing himself into a tomb, the chief expressions of the inauthentic are wild imaginings, terror and the temptation to flight, while defiance of the demons, perseverance and faith are expressions of the authentic. From the tomb Antony went to live in an abandoned fort in the desert where he was besieged by the demons. A hint of weariness from the clamor of the demons is the only expression of the inauthentic while expressions of the authentic reflect Antony's growing strength: confidence, utter equilibrium, purity of soul, and so forth. Antony's final withdrawal was to the "inner mountain" which is described in paradisaical terms. The expression of the inauthentic most characteristic of this period is pride in the power God has given him; while the expressions of the authentic are the manifestations of the power of the Spirit working through Antony: overpowering the demons, curing the sick, instructing the monks and confounding the heretics.¹⁵

It is not always possible to find a single form or image which will tie a body

of material together. One rather difficult text is the *Imitation of Christ*. In his fine analysis of this spiritual classic, Bernard Spaapen has noted that “the truths which they [the four books of the *Imitation*] enfold have not been arranged according to a precise play, a rational structure, or a psychological dialectic.”¹⁶ Much of the difficulty is due to the style of the work: a collection of thoughts useful to the spiritual life, possibly by more than one author. There is a variety of equal themes, and so no single form can be found which could give unity to all the expressions. The most one can do in such a situation is to discover, or invent, several forms which together best gather the material into useful patterns.

As a corollary to the organizing forms we can also examine the expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic for stages of spiritual growth. All spiritual life is a type of growth but in many well-developed spiritualities there are specified stages,¹⁷ and the key for detecting these stages lies with the expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic. When a particular expression of the authentic becomes an expression of the inauthentic, then a stage of spiritual growth has been crossed. An example of this has already been furnished from the *Cloud of Unknowing*: meditation on Christ’s passion is an expression of the authentic for the beginner but just the opposite for someone more advanced in the spirit of contemplation. Sometimes the stages of growth will be the structure giving unity to the material, but this will not always be the case.

The second question for analysis comes from the idea of personal growth. A spirituality which reaches the state of expression does not appear out of the vacuum, but it is the maturation of much personal experience. One or many have traveled a similar dialectical journey from the inauthentic to the authentic and from this experience comes a wealth of valuable insight. This insight, which embodies both the techniques and the lived experience of the journey, can be called wisdom, and it is the object of the second question: what is the wisdom of a particular spirituality?

To discover the wisdom of a particular spirituality we must look at its teaching. In what special manner does a spirituality propose to find God, and what experience flows from its techniques of encounter? In the *Life of Antony*, for example, wisdom comes especially from the experience of solitude, which for the desert fathers meant struggle with demons representing every imaginable thought or feeling. The wisdom of the *Life of Antony* is expressed in a long speech by the hermit to a group of other hermits assembled for the occasion.¹⁸ This speech, often called a speech on discernment, is a description of what to expect in solitude and how to deal with whatever (or whomever) occurred. The wisdom of the desert employs some of the most colorful and varied imagery in the history of spirituality, but it is always characterized by the detection and diminishment of interior turmoil in order to find and preserve *apatheia*.¹⁹

A very different example, though with striking parallels, is found in the wisdom of St. Ignatius. The *Spiritual Exercises* express wisdom not in speeches but in appendices: rules for thinking with the Church, rules for eating, rules for discernment, and so on. Ignatian wisdom, however, is not contained equally in all

these rules but in one special and famous set: the rules for the discernment of spirits.²⁰ As mentioned above, the primary image of Ignatian spirituality is the Two Standards, and the goal is to serve with Christ who wishes to spread his Kingdom and defeat the Kingdom of Satan. Now these kingdoms will enjoy victory or suffer defeat as a result of our particular choices. However, the kingdoms are distinguished from each other less by the object of a particular choice than by attitudes. Consequently, the disciple of Christ must differentiate between objects of possible choice according to authenticating feelings (attitudes) or their opposites. The rules for the discernment of spirits are Ignatius' wisdom for making this all important differentiation and decision.

There is no need to multiply examples. Wisdom gets at the heart of a particular spirituality because it taps the special experience of the person or persons who have lived it. Often referred to "thoughts" in describing the struggle of solitude and to *apatheia* as the goal of that struggle. For Ignatius, the key word would be discernment. On the other hand, there need not be but one wisdom for every spirituality. Moving beyond the *Spiritual Exercises* one could speak also of a wisdom of obedience in Ignatius. The objective is to identify the central insights of a spirituality; insights, however, that flow from matured experience.

Finally, we should underline the fact that questions for analysis—expressions and wisdom—are effective for focusing and organizing the material, but they certainly do not exhaust its riches. In addition to the fact that no set of questions can ever draw everything from the material, a spirituality will always retain a certain opacity regardless of how carefully it is scrutinized; and we will always find ourselves returning to the source for clarification, new insight, and personal edification. However, at some point in time we must determine that an analysis is finished, both in the number of questions asked and in the depth of the answers. It is the suggestion of this article that the two questions given above will focus and organize the material sufficiently to enable us to turn to the wider arena of comparison and contrast of different spiritualities.

Questions for Comparison and Contrast

Bernard Lonergan has described *method* as "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results."²¹ What we have thus far is not a complete method but its foundation. Questions for analysis provide a normative pattern of operations which can be applied to any number of particular spiritualities, but only continued application followed by comparison and contrast will yield cumulative and progressive results.

Now the general matter for any comparison and contrast would normally be the *expressions* of the authentic and the inauthentic, the *images* and *forms* which give them unity, and the expressions of wisdom. From this one could proceed in any number of ways depending only on time, interest, and availability of sources. Let us suppose, for example, that someone was interested in the general topic of prayer and that he or she had some familiarity with both the

Cloud of Unknowing and the works of John of the Cross. Even an examination of the titles would reveal that "cloud" and "night" are expressions of the authentic for both. A study of the similarities and differences between the *Cloud's* understanding of "cloud" and John of the Cross's understanding of "night" might prove to be a straightforward and interesting investigation into the meaning of apophatic prayer.²²

Ordinarily the work of comparison and contrast will draw heavily on our ability to understand the relative historical-cultural contexts. This can be given some direction, however, if we keep in mind two principles for comparison. The first is that a spirituality cannot help but reflect certain cosmological perspectives. As a result we should always ask: what understandings of space and time shape the relationship between self, world, and God for a particular spirituality? For example, the *Life of Antony* used a simple cosmological framework which placed a person on top of the world but under two concentric hemispheres: the air, which was the abode of the demons, and the sky, which was heaven and the abode of God. Thus, to go to God one had to leave the world and ascend through the air, and this meant battles with the demons. Today we experience ourselves through a cosmology which is couched in evolutionary and psychological terms. Instead of place, time is the important parameter: it is no longer "up" and "down" which correspond to the authentic and the inauthentic but "transformation" and "regression." The discovery and investigations of the unconscious have forged a new vocabulary for our descriptions of evil, human growth, and the nature of freedom. The unconscious has also given us a new locus for expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic. The cosmology of the day—be it Antony's, our own, or any other—will not only shape the expressions of spirituality but it will also locate those expressions in accordance with its perception of the relationship in time and space of self, world, and God.

The cosmological questions can be made specific. The question, "Where is Christ?" yields interesting results when asked of St. Basil the Great (fourth century) and St. Ignatius (sixteenth century). Each has a passage about Christ the King and his call to men and women to follow him, but note the different images for describing where Christ is and the practical consequences for discipleship. For Basil: "Where is Christ the King? In heaven, to be sure. Thither it behooves you, soldier of Christ, to direct your course. Forget all earthly delights."²³ Ignatius, however, perceived the world as friendlier potential for the self's encounter with God: "Consider Christ our Lord, standing in a lowly place in a great plain about the region of Jerusalem. . . ." ²⁴ And instead of forgetting the world in order to go to Christ in heaven, Ignatius encourages people to follow a Christ who "sends them throughout the whole world to spread his sacred doctrine among all men, no matter what their state or condition."²⁵

We can do similar comparisons for time. "When will Christ come?" For St. Paul and the early Christians the answer was, "Soon!" But for most of the Church's history until recently, the question of time hasn't been that important.

Most Christians tended to regard the world as having a certain timeless stability. The important time was not Christ's coming in glory but the individual's meeting with Christ at death. Today, however, an evolutionary consciousness has made time very important. When will Christ come for someone imbued with the vision of Teilhard de Chardin? He will come when the human race, now responsible for cooperating in its own evolution, will have (with God's grace) brought about the kingdom.

Statements about time and place are not theological statements; they are descriptions of world views. The location of a spirituality within its particular cosmological framework makes possible the comparison and contrast of similar expressions which come from widely different historical-cultural contexts. It would be far beyond the scope of this article to attempt to outline the world views which have shaped and been shaped by western thought, but it is worth mentioning here two books which are particularly insightful: Romano Guardini's *The End of the Modern World* and John Dunne's *A Search for God in Time and Memory*.²⁶ Guardini has mapped out four cosmologies fundamental to the history of western thought: classical, medieval, modern, and post-modern. If we take into account that much has occurred which might further clarify his analysis of the present (post-modern) period, this work is very useful. Dunne has given the study of world views an interesting refinement by pointing to the different ways in which autobiographies have been written: a story of deeds (classical), a gamut of experience (Augustine), a ladder of experience (medieval), and a story of appropriation (modern and contemporary). This does not do justice to the nuances given by Dunne, but the distinctions he introduces are invaluable for appreciating the genres under which spiritual growth has been described.

A second principle for comparison and contrast is that there exist specifically different, yet equally valid, spiritualities within the Church. In other words, spiritualities differ not only because of various historical-cultural backgrounds, but they also differ according to type. Of course, a rigid and exclusive classification would be impossible and undesirable, but the varied emphases of many spiritualities suggest that we might discover several models which would help us to better understand similarities and differences.

To develop models it is necessary to select criteria for differentiation. This selection, always arbitrary, establishes the parameters by which the models are distinguished. Here the criteria will be "attitudes" toward two potential loci for expressions of the authentic: the *world*—including human society and institution—and *history*—especially change and conversion. We can determine the models by asking this question: does a spirituality view the world and/or history as a positive locus for expressions of the authentic?²⁷ If a spirituality is not positive toward either we will call it *apophatic*, if it is positive toward both we will call it *apostolic*, if it is positive toward the world but not toward history we will call it *city-of-God*, and if it is positive toward history but not toward the world we will call it *prophetic*.

At one extreme, answering “no” to both the world and to history, are the *apophatic*²⁸ spiritualities. These are the mystical spiritualities known to us today primarily through the *Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross, and Thomas Merton. For an apophatic spirituality, the chief expression of the authentic is negation of the specific image: one goes to God through unknowing or through darkness. It should be stressed, however, that the apophatic spiritualities do not necessarily hold that the world is evil or that history is meaningless; one need only think of the concern and involvement of Thomas Merton. The apophatic spiritualities emphasize a wisdom of contemplation through negation, and the goal of that contemplation is the love and knowledge of God. A curiosity of apophatic prayer is that its central insight—negation—should never be practiced by a beginner. Both the *Cloud* and John of the Cross counsel that apophatic prayer is not for everyone, that beginners should definitely rely on the mediating image, and that there are signs by which one can know if he or she is called to this form of prayer.²⁹

At the other extreme, answering “yes” to both world and history, are the *apostolic* spiritualities. An apostolic spirituality views the world and history as a locus for self-transformation. Its expressions can vary greatly. Ignatius was concerned with “the defense and propagation of the faith and the progress of souls.”³⁰ For Ignatius holiness was found through an involvement with the world in an attempt to spread the kingdom. Ignatius’ successor, Father Pedro Arrupe, wants “the conversion of the individual” but he also wants to “transform the world into a fit habitation for justice and humanity.”³¹ It is important to distinguish apostolic *work* from apostolic *spirituality* as that model is being described here. Everyone is called in some way to the apostolate, but not everyone seeks God *primarily* through involvement with the world and the transformation of its history. When a particular spirituality adopts the vocabulary of involvement and transformation in its expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic and in its statement of wisdom, then it exemplifies the essential marks of the apostolic model.

A *city-of-God* spirituality, saying “yes” to the world and “no” to history, is characterized by the location of expressions of the authentic in one special place in the world to the exclusion of others. This place, which then becomes a reflection of the kingdom of God, could be a monastery, the home, or even the individual human heart. St. Benedict summarized his wisdom in the form of a Rule: how to live the kingdom together in the monastery. The *Imitation of Christ* counsels flight to the safety of our own hearts where “you will see the kingdom of God come into your soul.”³² A city-of-God spirituality has probably been the norm for most Christians throughout history, and it is also a characteristic of every other type of spirituality, even if not the primary one. Whenever we focus on a particular community or on our own heart we are highlighting the city-of-God dimension of our spiritual lives.

The *prophetic* spirituality finds expressions of the authentic in history but not in the world. The Old Testament prophet offered interpretations of histo-

ry as well as judgments. The radical poverty of St. Francis of Assisi was a judgment of the abuse of material wealth and it was a sign of hope in a God who would fulfill all promises. Prophetic spirituality is often characterized by living one or more of the gospel values to an extreme: Francis and poverty, the virgins and ascetics living a life of celibacy while awaiting martyrdom in the early Church, or the gospel-motivated civil disobedience in our own times. While prophetic spirituality often contains the dimension of a “challenge” it certainly need not be a gloomy spirituality—as witnessed by the joy of St. Francis.

Once again, we must not adhere to these models too rigorously. The examples given above illustrated the tendencies of their respective models to a marked degree; but most spiritualities, including those mentioned, are mixtures of all four, with perhaps one or more predominating. With this caution in mind we could make use of the models to organize and clarify the differences and similarities we observe among the various spiritualities. For example, both Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross were sixteenth-century Spanish saints who shared the same geography and culture. The spiritualities of both these men are familiar enough to us that we would not be surprised to find a number of significant differences in spite of similar backgrounds. We know that consolation is an important part of the spirituality of Ignatius: it is an expression of the authentic, something to be sought in prayer. For John of the Cross, on the other hand, consolation in prayer was often a sign of the inauthentic: the contemplative advancing in prayer should neither seek consolation nor trust it when it came.³³ This apparent contradiction is resolved when we remember that we are dealing with two very different models of spirituality. John, the apophatic mystic who shuns specific images so as to approach God in the “night,” is consistent within his model when he rejects consolations. Ignatius, the apostolic man who finds God in the world through specific choices, is consistent in asking to have these choices confirmed through consolation. Apophatic and apostolic are different paths of spiritual growth.

Towards Evaluation

Ultimately evaluation is the responsibility of the Church, and over the centuries she has generally given a wide latitude to the expressions claiming to be of the Spirit. As long as a spirituality refrained from making its charism normative for all Christians, maintained a balanced view of theology and human nature, and did not habitually defy the directions of the hierarchy, the Church has been at least tolerant if not actively supportive. Ronald Knox has catalogued a number of exotic spiritual movements beginning with the Corinthian community, and his very thorough work is an encyclopedia of spiritual aberrations together with the appropriate judgment of the Church.³⁴

Negative criteria are much easier to establish than positive, and the records of the Holy Office detail specific distortions to be avoided rather than positive principles on which to build. But, then, most great spiritual leaders did not consult the Vatican archives in order to construct a charism; they responded to the

work of the Spirit and left the editing to others. Nonetheless, it is possible to point out three indicators of a good spirituality: good theology, good sense, and good results. Good spirituality must flow out of the Christian community's understanding of the gospel and hence must exhibit good theology. Spirituality is a human movement, and so good spirituality should reflect a keen sensitivity to the human condition—good sense. Finally, a good spirituality will produce good results because it will be the work of the Holy Spirit—"Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty" (Jn 15:5).

Good theology and good sense are not abstract principles which can be applied unerringly to any new situation. In most cases they are the culmination of a long process of give and take between the Church and the proponents of a new spirituality. On the one side there must be an increasingly sympathetic understanding of the expressions of the new spirituality; on the other, there must be a growing clarification of the meanings of those expressions.

Let us take St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans as an example. The cry for the *vita apostolica*—a return to the life of the gospels in penance, poverty, and preaching—did not appear suddenly in 1206 when Francis overcame his fear of leprosy. The twelfth century had already witnessed a large number of spiritual movements toward the *vita apostolica*, and many of these movements were in tension with the Church. A change in the socio-economic climate, the abuses of wealth especially among the clergy, and the Church's own reforms of the eleventh century had brought about a hunger for new ways of expressing the spiritual aspirations of those who did not feel called to the cloistered life of the monastery. The Cathars,³⁵ the Humiliati,³⁶ and the Waldensians³⁷ were some of the better known movements which answered to this hunger. Almost inevitably there was resistance from the official Church. If we leave aside misunderstandings and personal animosities, this resistance was usually on theological and pastoral grounds. Theologically, the new movements presented opinions ranging from the outright dualism of the Cathars to the denial of the validity of a sacrament administered by a corrupt priest. Such theological opinions, which touched the sacramental nature of the Church, could not be tolerated. Pastorally, the issue was normally over the right to preach. Did a person who took the gospel seriously and lived poorly have the right to preach without the permission of the local clergy or bishops? Both the Waldensians and the Humiliati approached Rome for approval but were rebuffed on the question of preaching.

No one denied the need for greater poverty, and the pope himself called the bishops and clergy to task for their failure to preach the gospel;³⁸ it was a question of finding the right form. What took place in the twelfth century was a twofold development whereby the new expressions of spirituality were being clarified against the theological-pastoral demands of the Church; and the Church was learning to listen with more sympathy to the different spiritual needs of her people. By the end of the century the time was ripe for Francis and Dominic.

Of course, the phenomenon of St. Francis was not just the inevitable outcome of an historical development. It was also the special work of God's grace in a man who was both generous enough to respond to the call for a life of radical poverty and humble enough to listen to the voice of the Church. Nonetheless, that long century of development points to the kind of preparation and hard work out of which true spiritual insight is born. Nor did Innocent III's approval of Francis in 1209 complete the process. As numbers increased problems did also. Good sense and a sound understanding of human nature called for certain modifications. More structure and organization were needed which could channel the charism without destroying it. Provinces were established, local houses and superiors appointed and a year's novitiate was required.³⁹

If we shift back into our own century we realize that the Church is constantly faced with new expressions of spirituality arising from the legitimate aspirations of a people hungering for God. These new movements need to be examined in the light of good theology and good sense, and they need to receive the sympathetic understanding of the Church. A serious study of spirituality can make a genuine contribution to this endeavor.

First of all, a new spirituality needs to identify, and then clarify its expressions. This is the work of analysis described earlier. What are the expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic and the forms which organize them? What is its wisdom? Only after these questions are carefully answered does theological evaluation become possible. When we know the expressions of the spirituality and their relationship to one another, then we know its theological stance and we can judge it. The analysis will also reveal the spirituality's perspective on human nature, its understanding of the human condition. While great care must be exercised here, it would violate good sense to have a spirituality which proved to be psychologically destructive. It has unfortunately happened in the history of spirituality that "leaving the world" has become an occasion for hatred and destruction of the self or the body rather than a love for God.⁴⁰ Finally, analysis of a new spirituality will reveal its internal coherence or lack thereof. This is important because personal growth demands a certain degree of unity of purpose and technique, and a spirituality which seems to move in many different directions at the same time will only provoke confusion and frustration. While this may appear to be obvious, it is not always so easy to recognize. For example, a spirituality expressed entirely in a nineteenth-century idiom might exhibit good theology and good psychology, but unless it is able to translate itself coherently into the language and forms of the twentieth century there will always be an unnecessary tension from trying to operate in a world view, a cosmology, which is no longer our own. This was one of the reasons for Vatican II's call for adaptation in religious life.

In addition, a new spirituality needs to be understood externally, and this is the work of comparison and contrast. From the Church's standpoint, evaluation will be enhanced when a spirituality is known in relation to other spiritualities

both past and present. This much goes without saying. But such an external understanding can also be quite useful for the spirituality itself. One of the habitual dangers for a new movement is to see itself as being unique in responding to the call of the gospels. Time and time again this has resulted in sectarianism and heresy. When a spirituality understands itself in the context of history it will be better able to appreciate its uniqueness without overestimating its importance.

Notes

¹ Theologians may protest that method is a problem for them, too, but at least work is being done. Recently David Tracy has suggested five basic models which have influenced theological inquiry: orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical, and his own “revisionist” model. See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (Seabury, 1975), pages 22-34. Tracy has been influenced in part through his long association with the thought of Bernard Lonergan. In a very important work, *Method in Theology* (Seabury, 1979; first published: Herder & Herder, 1972), Lonergan applied his transcendental method to the task of developing a method in theology. I will cite Lonergan only briefly in the course of this article, but I need to acknowledge that the influence of *Method* has been considerable.

² For an explanation of the relationship of the realm of common sense and the realm of theory, see Lonergan, *Method*, pp. 257-258.

³ Alan Jones, "Spirituality and Theology," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS 39 (1980), p. 171.

⁴ William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* (Harper & Row, 1978), p. 20. Jones cites this on p. 170 of his article.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Gospel as Norm and Test of All Spirituality in the Church," from *Spirituality in the Church*, Christian Duquoc, editor. Concilium, vol. 9 (Paulist, 1965), p. 7.

⁶ Process theologians may take exception to this. In a dipolar notion of God one might be able to speak of God's spirituality: "God in his consequent aspect receives into himself that which occurs in the world, so that it becomes the occasion for newer and richer, as well as better, concretions in the ongoing movement of divine activity," W. Norman Pittenger, "Process Thought: A Contemporary Trend in Theology," *Process Theology*, Ewert H. Cousins, editor (Newman, 1971), p. 27. Even if one were to accept this position, it would be quite difficult to move from the idea of a spirituality of God to its description.

⁷ It is very easy for spiritual direction to become psychological counseling. Of course, sometimes this is desirable because it is counseling which is needed, but often we slide into a counseling framework simply because it seems to have more substance than spiritual direction. This again reveals the necessity of definition and methodology proper to spirituality.

⁸ Lonergan views this as a fundamental characteristic of religious development. See *Method*, p. 110.

⁹ "I would rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than merely know the definition of compunction," Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, edited with an introduction by Harold C. Gardiner (Image, 1955), Book I, chapter 1.

¹⁰ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, by an anonymous fourteenth-century Englishman, edited and introduced by William Johnston (Image, 1973), chapter vii.

¹¹ Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, translation by Louis J. Puhl (Newman, 1954). Shame and confusion, sorrow, tears and anguish are from the First Exercise of the First Week, #48; intimate knowledge of Christ is from the First Contemplation of the Second Week, #104; poverty and humility are from the Two Standards, #147; and gratitude is from the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God, #233.

¹² The identification of basic units (expressions of the authentic and the inauthentic) and the discovery of the forms by which these expressions are related have a slight resemblance to structuralism. However, a double caution is in order. In its extreme sense structuralism can become an ideology in which all we can know about a system are its basic units and their associations; further meaning would be denied. In a less ideological sense structuralism is a method of inquiry which can be more friendly to theology and spirituality, but even here—as the term can be very ambiguous—I wish to make clear that my own use is limited to exactly what has been described in the text.

¹³ *Spiritual Exercises*, #136-148.

¹⁴ St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, was probably the author of the *Life of Antony* shortly after the hermit's death in 356. Antony represented a prototype for the desert fathers, and, whatever the historical accuracy of the *Life*, it certainly had a profound influence on desert spirituality. This important work is once again available in English: *Athanasius: The Life of St. Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, translation and introduction by Robert C. Gregg, preface by William A. Clebsch (Paulist, 1980).

¹⁵ The four journeys: leaving his home to live on the outskirts of a village (*Life of Antony*, c. 4); living in the tomb (Ibid., c. 8); from the tomb to the abandoned fort (Ibid., cc. 11-12); and the withdrawal to the inner mountain (Ibid., cc. 49-51).

¹⁶ Bernard Spaepen, "A New Look at an Old Classic," from *Imitating Christ*, E. Malatesta, editor, *Religious Experience Series*, vol. 5 (Abbey Press, 1974). This work is a translation from the *French Dictionary of Spirituality*.

¹⁷ Frequently a spirituality will describe the break between an unreflective Christian life and the desire to lead a more spiritual life. Another break occurs later when the Christian leaves the period characterized by struggle and “spiritual achievement” and moves more into a climate of surrender and “spiritual giftedness.” The classical distinctions have been the three ways: purgative, illuminative, and unitive.

¹⁸ *Life of Antony*, cc. 16-43.

¹⁹ Apathia was the ascetical goal of the desert fathers. It was not apathy but rather a state of interior calm and recollection. Athanasius described this state in the *Life of Antony*: “The state of his soul was one of purity, for it was not constricted by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor affected by either laughter or dejection. Moreover, when he saw the crowd, he was not annoyed any more than he was elated at being embraced by so many people. He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature” (c. 14). Perhaps the best summary of desert wisdom is contained in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399), especially in his *Praktikos*. This has been translated together with Chapters on Prayer and published as *Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, translated and edited by John Eudes Bamberger, O.C.S.O. (Cistercian Publication, 1970).

²⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, #313-336.

²¹ Loneragan, *Method*, p. 4.

²² See note 28 below.

²³ Basil, “An Introduction to the Ascetical Life,” From *St. Basil, Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church* vol. 9, translated by Sister M. Monica Wagner, C.S.C. (New York, 1950), p. 9.

²⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, #144.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, #145.

²⁶ John Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (Macmillan, 1967). Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, edited with an introduction by Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, translated by Joseph Theman and Herbert Burke (Sheed and Ward, 1956).

²⁷ The idea for this came to me from reading John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (Seabury, 1978). In a section called, “A Typology of Interpretations” (pp. 86-88), Macquarrie works out four types of Christian hope: individual vs. social, this-worldly vs. other-worldly expectations, evolutionary vs. revolutionary, and realized vs. future.

²⁸ Apophatic: in speaking of God one can either affirm certain truths (kataphatic theology) or, realizing that God is beyond any conceptualization, one can speak of him by negation (apophatic theology). The apophatic mystics are those whose way the way of unknowing. This can be found to a high degree in many mystical writers, and the chief source for their apophatic vocabulary is the work of a mysterious Syrian monk of the fifth or sixth century who has been known through the ages as Dionysius the Areopagite or pseudo-Dionysius.

²⁹ *Cloud of Unknowing*, c. 75. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, translated, edited, and introduced by E. Allison Peers (Image, 1958) Book II, c. xiii, pp. 219-223.

³⁰ Ignatius Loyola, *The Formula of the Institute*, as contained in the papal bull, *Exposcit debitum* of July 21, 1550. Translation from *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated and edited by George E. Ganss (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), p. 66.

³¹ Pedro Arrupe, “The Challenge of the World and the Mission of the Society,” opening address to the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. Published in *A Planet to Heal*, translated with notes by John Harriott (Center of Ignatian Spirituality, Rome, 1975), p. 312.

³² *Imitation of Christ*, Book II, c. 1.

³³ John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, cc. 4, 7.

³⁴ Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford University Press, 1961).

³⁵ The Cathars, also known as Albigensians, were especially active in southern France from the middle of the twelfth century. They were virtually a distinct religion with their own organization of dioceses. Theologically they were influenced by the Bogomils of Bulgaria, whose theology can be traced back to a Manichean dualism.

³⁶ The Waldensians were an evangelical movement founded by Valdes, a merchant from Lyons. They attempted to remain orthodox but were forbidden to preach at the time of the Third Lateran Council (1179).

³⁷ The Humiliati appeared in northern Italy during the second part of the twelfth century. They were forbidden to preach in 1179 but were eventually reconciled to the Church by Innocent III in 1201. He gave them a threefold rule which regulated the men as canons regular, the women as religious, and a group of married people as a type of third order. For an interesting treatment of the dealings of Innocent III with the Humiliati see Brenda Bolton, "Innocent III's Treatment of the Humiliati," from *Popular Belief and Practice*, edited by G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge University Press, 1972).

³⁸ In his treatment of the twelfth century, M.D. Chenu wrote: "Peter the Chanter had denounced the 'most dreadful silence' (*pessima taciturnitas*) of the clergy, and both Peter and Innocent III had invoked a phrase from Isaiah (56:10) to repudiate "these muted dogs who don't have it in them to bark," M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, selected, edited, and translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester L. Little, preface by Étienne Gilson. (University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 244.

³⁹ For a discussion of these developments, see Cajetan Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, translated by Aedan Daly, O.F.M. and Dr. Irina Lynch (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970); see especially Chapter III: "First Crises and Attempts to Overcome Them."

⁴⁰ An extreme example of this might be found in the Cathars who practiced (though rarely) a form of suicide by starvation called *endura*. This occurred only after the reception of the *consolamentum* which was a combination of baptism and Eucharist. Once the believer received the *consolamentum* he or she was to live without any sin whatsoever. It was in fear of a relapse that some chose to end their lives as soon after *consolamentum* as possible.

Am I Growing Spirituality?

Elements for a Theology of Growth

Matthias Neuman, O.S.B.

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Recently a student at our seminary expressed his judgment about the quality of the theological and spiritual training offered to him: “Because of the many talents and abilities of our faculty I am sometimes overwhelmed by the vastness of what one should know and be. This has contributed to a feeling of insecurity and incompetence on my part in tackling pastoral duties and spiritual responsibilities.” In a later conversation this student indicated that the variety of theological disciplines, the pluralism within each discipline, and the multiplicity of personal spiritualities forced him toward too many choices and subsequently a stalled indecision towards his professional and spiritual development. This young man rather sharply reflects the problem that confronts many people today. The American religious scene corrals a grab bag of interests, from mysticism to social action, from pure rationalism to biblical fundamentalism, from family centered religion to process cosmology. The spiritually minded individual, fortunately or unfortunately, gets exposed to most of these religious trends at some time or other. Besides being intellectually confusing this incredible mixture tends to stall one’s personal integration, growth and competence in the spiritual life.

In this article I wish to explore the possibility and issues of a viable “theology of spiritual growth.” I would like to search out some concrete directives by which a Christian adult might seriously look at his or her life and give a satisfying response to the question: “Am I growing spiritually?”

This tremendous concern of faith-minded adults for their own spiritual growth cannot be separated from the larger thrust of American religion into the realm of interiority and spirituality. At the outset it would be good to take some time to clarify what is meant by the two terms *spirituality* and *spiritual growth*.

At least in Roman Catholic circles, and I suspect beyond, *spirituality* has become a “hot” subject in recent years. Books, workshops, prayer seminars and directed retreats proliferate and vie for the increasing crowd of concerned believers intent on deepening their faith. This movement in spirituality highlights a number of concerns in American religious practice. There is, first, the desire to break through the abstractions and formalisms of religion to gain a personal, immediate contact with God. This desire also wants to go beyond the generality of scriptural phrases such as “life in the Spirit” and “following the Lord.” These are certainly important but they need to be fleshed out with a commonsense language of our time and culture. Second, prayer is viewed as a “being-in-the-presence-of” the Divine rather than an obligatory addressing of the Deity~ it is personal communion with God. Third, by means of spirituality people wish to free their emotions and use their real-life experiences as their primary religious foundation in place of theoretical dogmas. And, lastly, the spirituality thrust calls each man and woman to develop a very personal and intimate religious practice.

These concerns convey some of the flavor of the spirituality movement, but they do not make precise the structured shifts that take place in the religious practice of people. For this we need to know the basic elements of any spirituality, I would like to suggest four constitutive elements which are always operative, either explicitly or implicitly, within a given spirituality:¹

1. *The point at which God touches people in their daily lives.* The real, generating source of any spirituality is found where the person or persons sense the presence of Mystery or of the Transcendent in their everyday lives. Wherever we sense that a power beyond draws us out of ourselves and gives us a feeling of awe or of selfless love (the Holy), then a spirituality begins.² Those everyday moments, places, events or persons which join us to the Transcendent ground the structural origin of any spirituality.

2. *The supports constructed to protect and nourish this experience of Mystery.* The instinctive reaction to an experience of the Holy is to surround it with activities, derived from our best abilities, which are intended to shore up and protect, and thus contribute to the likelihood that the Mystery will appear to us again. Whatever form these follow-up activities take, they constitute the intrinsic “devotions” of the spirituality.

3. *A method of focusing one’s attention for the renewed encounter with Mystery.* Such styles of “attending” are, in fact, methods of prayer. From a phenomenological perspective, every style of prayer—meditation or contemplation, communal or ritual movement—reflects a particular way of organizing and stimulating consciousness to prepare for Mystery.

4. *A method of growth and conversion.* Every spirituality encloses some plan for extending the benefits and riches of one's contact with God into all other areas of one's life. To meet the Transcendent must rearrange values, and that rearrangement must automatically push itself into all other parts of a person's total life-world. A spirituality, then, inherently implies some kind of spiritual growth.

This last item of the structure of spirituality needs development, thus bringing us to the major concern of this paper: a theology of spiritual growth.

Our American culture is obsessed by the need for progress. People feel compelled to constant growth—intellectually, personally and spiritually. Not unlike so many consumer products that we buy, each year (we feel) we should be able to measure ourselves as “new and improved.” This often rabid quest mirrors the ethos of American modernity itself, the cumulative result of industrialization, technology, mass media and the myth of progress.³

This cultural storm has flooded into the religious milieu of America as well, engulfing all the branches of the Christian tradition. The myth of continual growth, the American dream, has ever so forcefully incorporated itself into our religious practice and hopes. People feel an intense need to be able to measure and plot their progress toward God. They ask for special courses and practices in spirituality, faith formation and prayer. They seek out spiritual directors with whom to identify evidences of their spiritual growth.

This state of affairs generates a plethora of problems. First of all, few people seem to have any clear idea or conviction about what “spiritual growth” really consists of, or how to measure it. Like myths about sex, views of spiritual growth get passed around from popularized article to popularized conference. Countless people strive constantly to improve, to grow, but end up terribly frustrated because they aren't sure if they are getting anywhere because adequate criteria and a coherent theory are lacking. Marshall McLuhan once wrote: “The price of eternal vigilance is indifference,”⁴ an ominous warning for so many who cast themselves headlong into plans of spiritual regeneration.

This presents us with a serious problem in Christian spirituality today. In the remainder of this article, I will try to indicate some components of a theology of spiritual growth which might assist Christians to make a better evaluation of their lives in their journey towards the Mystery of God. Three points will be specifically addressed: 1) the necessity of a critique of cultural theories of human growth; 2) a better use of Christian religious resources as a foundation for valid spiritual growth; and 3) the importance of increasing the role of personal responsibility for one's spiritual growth.

The Necessity of a Critique of Growth Theories

In the last quarter century, under the onslaught of the psychological revolution, an ever-increasing array of theories of human growth have established themselves as elements of the American cultural scene. Philip Rieff's prophetic warning has come of age:

Psychological Man lives by the ideal of insight—practical, experimental insight leading to the mastery of his own personality. Psychological Man has turned away from his Occidental preoccupation with transforming the environment and converting others. Rather, he now more nearly imitates the Oriental ideal of salvation through self-contemplative manipulation.⁵

Some perception and schematizing of human growth has traditionally been a part of all folk wisdoms and religious traditions. The transition from child to adult was always acknowledged, and a large portion of folk literature dealt with the shifts in behavior, attitude and community-esteem that attach to the passage from boy to man or girl to woman. Similarly, religious traditions of every kind have always sought to understand the fundamental shifts that occur in the course of human life and how this changes the individual relationship with God; the Hindu schema of Student-Householder-Wanderer-Holy Person serves as a typical example.⁶ However, these traditional understandings of human growth have been sharply accentuated and developed in our hyperpsychologized milieu. Not too long ago psychologists began to delineate more precise stages of growth—down to year-by-year and month-by-month. In addition to more narrowly identifying the temporal sequence, they also expanded the list of means by which such growth should occur. One fairly recent book lists a sample of the ways available to contemporary Americans, offering us growth by means of play, breathing, extended perception, smell, taste, touch, sex, family, encounter groups, peak experiences, gestalt therapies, LSD dreams, meditation, training intuition, psychedelic experiences and finally—relaxation.⁷

In such a supercharged atmosphere, is it any wonder that people start worrying about “having to grow”? They check themselves month by month to keep tabs on the normalcy of their progress. A man in a parish once told me of his anxiety that his mid-life crisis hadn’t started on time! People can get abnormal trying too hard to be normal. A good theology of spiritual growth ought to address this issue head-on.

Available theories are legion in our society. Just consider the complexities of balancing together Piaget’s cognitive development,⁸ Erikson’s psychosocial theory of growth,⁹ Kohlberg’s stages of moral development,¹⁰ Richard Jones’s structuring of imaginal growth,¹¹ Daniel Levinson’s modeling of adult life-transitions,¹² and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s enumeration of the stages of dying.¹³ Apparently the negotiation of one’s way through that maze begins with the first month of life and never ends until the final breath. It would be a grim and determined individual who would seek never to sway from the tough road of such normalcy: “Narrow is the path that leads to life and few there are who follow it” (Mt 7:14)!

What I find distressing is how easily and totally those growth schemas are imported wholesale into spiritual thinking and writing. Piaget and Kohlberg are assumed to present ready-made outlines for faith development.¹⁴ Erikson’s schema is accepted as the basis for identifying the major steps of adult religious conversion.¹⁵ Levinson’s adult life-transitions provide the hidden key to a mid-life “spirituality of crisis.”¹⁶

I would like to suggest that a theology of spiritual growth ought to provide a much deeper and more detailed critique of these theories of human growth and their uses for spirituality. While there is much excellent research in these cultural theories of growth and development, and while they certainly offer a mine of insights to be tapped for a theology of spirituality, there is still a need for religious prudence in the acceptance of them. Too often, for instance, one encounters the feeling that the accurate following of this or that theory becomes binding for human happiness. “Normalcy” equals happiness and fulfillment! A theology of spiritual growth should exercise some critical deflation of such expectations.

Again, readers of psychological theories frequently assume that a particular age-related growth pattern can be made the target of personal decision and attacked forthwith. They forget that the most such schemes can accomplish for any individual is to provide possible awareness-points along the way toward long-range programs and decisions, points which might possibly help people to locate the source of some of their present blockages in one or other unresolved issue of their past lives. There are, in other words, no instant panaceas.

In seeking for balance in the utilization of these chronological growth patterns, a theology of spiritual growth would do well to brush off discarded philosophy books, rehabilitating, for instance, the existentialist notion of “event.”¹⁷ In the making of a human life, the setting of attitudes, actions and hopes is as much the result of the particular and unique *events* which happen to an individual as it is of the unfolding of any chronologically structured growth scheme. Most life events occur without our previous consent, even though others may be deliberately planned and executed. The powerful existentialist insight into event, however, has recently been smothered, philosophically, in the waves of structuralism. Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison* provide a good example of one man whose mind, heart and vision had been irrevocably changed and shaped by his unplanned prison experience.¹⁸

Other areas cannot be developed here. But let me suggest that any adequate theology of spiritual growth must incorporate and develop four basic dynamics of human and spiritual deepening. I have drawn these from a theory that combines social phenomenology and cultural anthropology.

1. *Chronological Growth Stages.* This dynamic encompasses the many theories that seek to explain how the structural human being (mind, emotions, sociality, and so forth) moves through the trajectory of life. Its purview is the time line, and it locates the person as moving successively out of one set of structures into a future set. Most of the growth schemas mentioned above—Erikson, Kohlberg, Levinson, and so forth—are good expositors of this dynamic of human growth. Knowing these chronological stages can give us some positive insight into how we have negotiated the human need to cope with emotional maturity, sociality, intellectual responsibility, and so forth. We need to know this, and it can serve as a fundamental indicator of our spiritual growth toward the mystery of God.¹⁹

2. *Cultural Exposure.* Just as significant for a basic human and spiritual deepening is the dynamic of cultural expression to which a person has been exposed. Here growth opportunities point to a richness or expansiveness of social, personal and religious experiences of life. This may be the most neglected of all the basic areas of human and spiritual growth. Americans especially have been provincial—even to the point of denigrating the cultural riches of other peoples. Yet we have to realize that there are many ways of meeting the fundamental issues of life in family and society, of entering into interpersonal relations, and so on. To limit oneself exclusively to the learned patterns of one's own family or culture is, in effect, to deny the possibility of other ways of growing that God has offered to the human race. Cultural openness is also a means of grasping more profoundly just how God's life merges with our own.

A personal example may illustrate what I mean here. I was raised in a small Midwestern town, in a culture strongly shaped by traditional Germanic values. A cardinal belief of that culture was: *You never get something for nothing.* That limited experience kept me from really understanding and interiorizing the New Testament notion of charisma—a gift of God freely bestowed. It wasn't until I had lived in another culture (Italy) for four years that the cultural expression of pure gift became an experienced part of my reality, enabling me to interiorize this New Testament meaning. I doubt that this could have happened if I had clung rigidly to my inherited convictions.

A broad-based cultural exposure can be a vital dynamic of both human and spiritual growth. Not only should we recognize this, but we should be willing to let ourselves be challenged by it.

3. *The Depth of Transformational Possibilities.* This dynamic considers to what extent the individual recognizes the opportunities that are available for changing one's life. The previous element can present numerous possibilities and values to test one's ability to go beyond and enrich one's inherited and socialized culture. This dimension of human deepening, though, looks far more radically and openly to the future and to the goal of humanization than do the previous two areas. It incorporates the hope and realistic expectation that our lives can actually be reshaped and renewed into a creative new pattern that combines inherited values and newly-learned cultural expressions. The full reality of spiritual growth, then, must internalize the possibility that the true spiritual person will be the result of a creative religious act.²⁰

4. *Integrative and Creative Decision.* This final dynamic specifies that unique moment when the three preceding dimensions are brought into mutual interaction. Chronological growth, cultural possibilities, and projected changes are balanced and ready to be creatively merged by free decisions. This truly integrative dynamic of spiritual deepening is the traditional meaning of Wisdom. Christian theology has also called it "discernment in the Spirit of the Lord." It is an axis of human and spiritual growth which reaches far beyond the simple

importation of cultural growth theories into religious spirituality.

These four elements of spiritual growth ought to provide at least a basic framework that would take us beyond a simple application of the chronological growth stages. Spiritual directors and reflective Christian adults should examine all four areas for material to answer the question: Am I growing spiritually?

Christian Resources and a Theology of Spiritual Growth

Having considered the problem of understanding growth in contemporary spirituality and the human social sciences, we must further inquire: Does the Christian religious experience offer any special contributions to this issue of spiritual growth? Does the Christian tradition add any unique perspectives in ascertaining the precise goals, means or methodological steps of authentic spiritual deepening?

First, let us acknowledge that Scripture surely affirms some kind of religious maturation. The Apostle Paul gently reprimands his congregation at Corinth: "I treated you as still infants in Christ. What I fed you with was milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it" (1 Co 3:1, 2). In another passage he contrasts the ways of children with those of adults as a norm for spiritual deepening (1 Co 13:9-12). Paul further notes the real possibility of regression or backsliding on the spiritual journey: "I am astonished at the promptness with which you have turned away from the one who called you . . ." (Ga 1:6). Along with other biblical writers (see Jn 16:12) the Apostle of the gentiles presents a definite conviction of the need for growth or deepening on the spiritual Journey. But we will look in vain for any systematic description of a life-pattern of holiness in the Scriptures. Alas, no biblical Erikson has appeared to lead us into this Promised Land. At best we can discern religious situations, spiritual responses to the situations, and recognitions that people have not progressed as far as they should have.

Secondly, from a purely linguistic and cognitive viewpoint the Scriptures complicate the matter of trying to formulate a coherent theory of spiritual growth. This complication results from the cultural and religious pluralism that lies behind the early Christian writings; this pluralism results in a variety of central symbols—all concretizing the same Christian way.²¹ The New Testament encompasses a variety of goals in the spiritual process: the paschal pattern of Christ in us (Paul), the kingdom of God (Jesus), the holiness of God (1 Peter), the life and ministry of Jesus (synoptic gospels). Similarly diverse are the means to attain these goals: an active moral love (Paul), the new commandments (Matthew), loving knowledge (John) and personal conversion (Jesus). As if this were not enough, one falls to find the least evidence of any systematizing method which would trace the step-by-step procedures of spiritual growth through the means to the end. While many later Christian writers have attempted to formulate systematizing examples, they all impose a later schema on the earlier texts.²²

The absence in the New Testament of a step-by-step explanation of spiri-

tual deepening should be understandable in a moment's reflection: these canonical writings are occasional pieces, not systematic expositions. Moreover, in the cultural milieu of their composition, subjective spiritual growth was not a high priority: it is our modern viewpoint that has elevated it to a primary concern. And yet the richness of spiritual experience in the Christian heritage does possess an immense wealth in its own right, one that need not be clipped or stretched to fit within our cultural categories of human growth. Methodologically, this suggests that a revisionist method of theology, such as the one outlined by David Tracy, should be introduced more forcefully into the realm of spirituality.²³ The Christian heritage should challenge contemporary culture, as well as vice-versa. I would like to suggest one issue which might be pursued in this dialectical exchange.

The question should be raised: Does the Christian religious vision even allow that spiritual growth have any single necessary ground-plan? Ought we not consider as a real possibility that the reason it is difficult to find a methodological statement of spiritual growth in the Bible is because there isn't supposed to be one? These writings are open-ended! They provide no absolute goal of spiritual growth; they offer no absolute means of holiness, they organize no steps in an absolute methodological pattern. Taken as a collection of accumulated experience these writings simply give us a variety of examples of men and women who are "on the spiritual way." Like the parable of the Good Samaritan which avoids a direct answer to the question: "Who is my neighbor?" the whole import of the scriptural collection deliberately leaves a great deal of latitude for people to choose their own path. The implied message of the Good Samaritan story, "Be loving and you will recognize your neighbor," may be symbolic of the entire scriptural message. Paul's great theme of freedom in the Galatian letter forcefully accents that same open-endedness. "Before faith came, we were allowed no freedom by the Law. . . . The Law was to be our guardian until Christ came. . . . Now that that time has come we are no longer under that guardian" (Ga 3:23-25). That warning may be spoken against any absolute plan (including a growth plan) that would shackle human freedom. When Paul pleads with his hearers to be guided by the Spirit (5:26), he is admonishing people to remain open and attentive to that momentary and integrating creative impulse of God. The Spirit has a rich basket of fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, etc.; they form the field of possibilities within which each believer must fashion his or her personal spiritual map.

I like the way Joseph Goldbrunner outlines the tasks of pastoral theology in his book *Realization: Anthropology of Pastoral Care*; those tasks may also serve as a framework for Christian spiritual deepening. He notes that the process moves through these stages: 1) getting people to accept their personal being; 2) making them aware of their religious potentials; 3) encouraging them toward faith-decision and action; 4) helping them to articulate their unique religious life-history; and 5) assisting them to realize that their faith-personality must always exist within the God-given limits of their world and society.²⁴ These

seem to be excellent parameters for outlining the flexibility of spiritual growth patterns and incorporating those principles of freedom and unpredictability that are embedded in the Christian Scriptures. I personally find a great deal of difficulty in rigidly applying a chronological growth schema as a measure of spiritual growth. Does a young man with Down's syndrome have to move through the normalcy of Erikson's stages before he can perform an act of selfless love? Is a parent who has been embedded for years at Kohlberg's "law-and-order" level incapable of rising to a great act of selfless forgiveness to a wayward teenager? I'm afraid that all too often we simply categorize and then bury people at a certain level of human and spiritual capacity. We should go back and see what our faith has to say about the power of God's Spirit.

Developing Religious Initiative, Responsibility and Practical Judgment

The previous section raised the issue that a good deal of spiritual deepening is left in our hands—not just the making of decisions and the applying of cultural growth patterns to faith development, but even the drawing up of the religious map itself. This means that spirituality and a theology of spiritual growth need to give much more attention to formulating a theory of religious initiative. Indeed this is a necessary component of any theology of spiritual growth. A person can grow only insofar as his or her self-expression gets incarnated into his or her world and society (both secular and sacred).

Modern anthropological studies have consistently affirmed the pivotal significance of creativity and the vital role of the imagination within the human project. Humans are active workers who in large measure shape their worlds. Indeed, the distinctive trait of the human species can be identified as the extraordinary versatility of its culture-creating capacity. For better or worse we shape an environment about us—space, society, ritual, atmosphere—that then becomes part of us. This process also holds true for the religious sphere of life. The distinctiveness of human and Christian faith occurs in the projects and actions that an individual or group chooses, organizes and executes.²⁵ What makes us special as human beings, whether sacred or secular, is our direction toward the future and our decided action to make that future actual. The measuring of spiritual growth includes an examination of our particular religious initiative.

The lineaments of a developed theory of religious initiative would include three major tasks:

1. The first task aims at concretely forming a distinctive religious personality. This demands a concretizing of the vision of our particular religious tradition. We incarnate our faith resources through imagination. The elements of a religious personality will generally take shape along the main lines of forming a human identity: building a sense of uniqueness and dignity; exercising this within the framework of an intimate community; appreciating one's own distinctive gifts and integrating all the foregoing into a personal plan of sharing.²⁶

2. A theory of religious initiative will also sharpen one's awareness of shap-

ing a personal faith. Faith can no longer be construed as a primarily passive process. We do not merely “accept” faith, but rather actively assemble the given pieces of a puzzle. Faith must include the active forming of convictions, attitudes and projects as well as the moment of acquiescence to Mystery.

3. Finally, religious initiative ends in identifiable projects of ministry and mission. Faith and calling should see results in the reorganizing and shaping of the natural activity of life towards the concretizing of religious belief.

Needless to say, this stage lays the foundation for a much better material and formal analysis of spiritual growth in an individual’s life. One of my personal contentions is that the currently assumed “measure” of spiritual growth tends to be far too introspective. True Christian spiritual growth points to the constant sharing of faith through some form of mission and ministry.

Along with a theory of religious initiative, a theology of spiritual growth must give far more attention to developing the moral virtue of personal responsibility. In recent years Bernard Haring and Charles Curran have both suggested the notion of personal responsibility as the key perspective explaining the singularity of Christian moral theology.²⁷ Their advice is well taken and should extend to all systems of a humanly grounded religious ethic. Responsibility, as used here, implies that the individual lives in a network of intertwining relationships in which there can be no minutely codified plan of conduct, but rather in a creative way the individual determines how he or she should respond and live. Curran comments that one of the most grievous sins of modern societies is precisely the failure to nourish a true personal and social responsibility in their citizens.²⁸ Responsibility as a central moral virtue means that no hidden plan is inscribed in heaven. God calls us to measure our gifts, form our religious identities and carry out a responsible spiritual living. This challenges us to make decisions even though we lack absolute knowledge of the future. Thus a prime criterion of spiritual growth will be the depth and expanse to which personal responsibility has penetrated into the believer’s life and action. Only then can the words of Paul really be acted upon: “Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit” (Ga 5:25, 26).

A direct corollary of educating to personal responsibility will be giving emphasis to the corresponding ability to make practical judgments. This latter ability is necessary for any consistent and authentic spiritual growth. The theory of religious initiative grounds our need to act; the moral virtue or responsibility promotes the personal accepting of that need; the art of practical judgment one into the how of spiritual deepening. One grows spiritually to the extent that solid practical decisions can be made which move the person into real faith sharing. Perhaps the heavy shift into psychological categories of analysis has obscured these rich philosophical and moral resources of the Christian tradition.

In conclusion, the spiritual movement has surely sensitized many adult Christians to the need to grow spiritually. But this desire should not be left to reverberate in an empty manner in people’s lives. Concrete guidelines need to

be established and a sound theology of spiritual growth articulated. This article has tried to touch upon some of the elements which ought to be included in such a theology. Hopefully the issues raised will help some of the readers move forward into that gift of immersing oneself more deeply into the Mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES

¹ These elements are derived from the social phenomenology of Alfred Schultz (1899-1959). A summary of his, life and work is given in Helmut Wagner, ed., *Alfred Schütz: On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 1-50.

² This whole movement is captured by John Shea, "Experience and Symbol: An Approach to Theologizing." *Chicago Studies* 19 (1980), pp. 5-20.

³ Don S. Browning. *Generative Man: Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 11.

⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 43.

⁵ Paraphrased in Browning, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

⁶ K.M. Sen. *Hinduism* (Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 22-26.

⁷ Herbert A. Otto and John Mann. *Ways of Growth: Approaches to Expanding Awareness* (New York: Viking Press, 1968).

⁸ Barry Wadsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development* (New York: David McKay Co., 1971).

⁹ Excellently summarized in Browning, *op.cit.*, pp. 145-217.

¹⁰ Ronald Duska and Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

¹¹ Richard M. Jones. *Fantasy and Feeling in Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

¹² Daniel Levinson, *et al.*, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

¹³ Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

¹⁴ See Duska and Whelan, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ William C. McCready, "Religion and the Life-Cycle," in *Toward Vatican III: The Work That Needs to Be Done*, ed. by David Tracy, Hans Kung, and Johann Metz (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 272-281.

¹⁶ James Zullo. *Mid-Life: Crisis of Limits* (NCR Cassettes. nn. 504-507).

¹⁷ William Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963); Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O'Connor, eds., *Readings in Existential Phenomenology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1907).

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), especially p. 15.

¹⁹ McCready, *op.cit.*

²⁰ This element is sketched in Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion: Meaning and Change in Religious Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 10-13.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 15-63.

²² See, e.g., Marc-François Lacan, "Conversion and Kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1978), pp. 97-118.

²³ David Tracy. *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 32-63.

²⁴ Joseph Goldbrunner. *Realization: Anthropology of Pastoral Care* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1906), pp. 20-29.

²⁵ For the significance of "action" in the philosophy of social phenomenology, see Alfred Schultz, *Collected Papers, Vol. I: The Problem of Social Reality*, edited by Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 19-46, 67-96.

²⁶ I have elaborated some of the corresponding theological tasks in "Religious Identity and the Theologian's Work," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 28 (1973), pp. 271-277.

²⁷ Bernard Häring. *Free and Faithful in Christ, Vol. I: General Moral Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 59-103. See also Charles Curran, "Responsibility in Moral Theology: Centrality, Foundations, and Implications for Ecclesiology," *The Jurist* 31 (1971), pp. 113-142.

²⁸ Curran, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

Three Questions for the Spiritual Journey

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

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Asking a question implies searching for an answer; also it implies a desire for the knowledge and value inherent in the answer. As expressions of a commitment to the spiritual journey, questions can be effective channels for discovering ways in which the Lord has been and is operative in each one's life. Most of the great mystics do not use questions as a structural basis for their writings. However, they *do* seem to be addressing a query that could be formulated thus: "What is your experience of God in your own life?" Within this experiential context, mystical writers offer the reader profound glimpses into their relationships with God. Admittedly this is not the only query that shapes the writings of these authors. Other, more specific, questions emerge as they articulate their understanding of the spiritual life.

Questions pertaining to each one's own spiritual journey should be neither accidental nor random. Haphazard questioning can have a significant impact on the direction that one takes: it can result in one's losing sight of the journey's end—union with the Lord. Questions for the journey rather should facilitate choices which have to be made, should be a guide along the road, should offer the support and the challenge necessary to continue faithfully even when the road is dark.

Where can such questions be found? The spiritual journey is a movement

toward union with the Lord. Our questions, then, should come from the Lord himself. He alone gives the grace to discern choices, to find support along the road, and to bring light to the darkness.

This reflection will focus on three questions which come from the Lord and which seem to be of special importance for the spiritual journey.

Identifying the Lord

The first question is itself posed in the context of a journey: specifically, Jesus and his disciples are entering the district of Caesarea Philippi. First Jesus asks his disciples who others believe him to be; then, after a variety of responses, he asks the disciples themselves: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:13-15 and parallels). The question is a crucial one, an identifying one; the response to it immediately identifies each one's faith in, and relationship with, Jesus of Nazareth. This identification is fundamental to the spiritual life. It specifies the end point toward which the spiritual journey tends. Above all, it is a statement of faith.

Faith is a lived reality. Its core is made visible by the whole of one's life, through one's attitudes, decisions, commitments, relationships. Contemporary Christians, just as the disciples, must also confront this question, in faith, for it is ever-present. "Who do you say that I am?" Clearly, it is present as one prays, either individually or in a worshiping community. It is present in everyday decisions and encounters, as well as in those which have an impact on one's life beyond a single day, week, month, or year. In short, it is present throughout the spiritual journey. All of life responds, in some way, to it.

The movement of the text in which this question appears is from general ("who do *others* say. . . ?") to particular ("who do *you* say . . . ?"). The disciples, doubtless, had been influenced by what others were saying about Jesus; hence, their answers to the generalized question. The challenge of the more particular question, however, is to respond personally on the basis of their own experience. So too, for contemporary Christians, the influence of others has some bearing on the development of personal faith; eventually, however, the question must be addressed on the basis of one's own faith and experience. The spiritual life, as a personal relationship with God, must contain a response to Jesus on a personal level.

Finally, the identification of "who Jesus is" in and for one's life is inseparable from the Paschal Mystery. "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16:21 and parallels). To identify Jesus, in the words of Peter, as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" is to accept the cross-and-resurrection. The Lordship of Jesus and his accomplishment of the Father's will by dying and rising are one. And so, the spiritual journey begins. One's vision of its end and of the road to be taken is focused sharply in each one's response to the question of Jesus: "But who do you say that I am?"

Acknowledging the Lord

The first question, the identifying question, is not asked in a vacuum. It leads to, and is supported by, another question: “Do you know what I have done to you?” (Jn 13:12). The immediate scriptural context of this question is the Last Supper, after Jesus had washed the disciples’ feet. In this simple action, he gives them an example of how they are to serve others.

For the spiritual journey, the response to this question is the acknowledgment and recognition of what the Lord has done in one’s life; it is the recognition of specific graces that are given to each one throughout his life. This acknowledgment and recognition flow from, and support, what has gone before. To acknowledge the graces one has been given implies some identification of the Giver; to recognize those graces strengthens one’s faith in Jesus as Lord. The gospel itself affirms this interdependence of the two questions; immediately after asking this second question, Jesus states: “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (Jn 13:13).

Beyond its appearance in the context of the Last Supper, this question can refer to Jesus’ entire life. In a sense, he is asking an all-pervasive question: “Do you know what I have done to you?” since you have been with me and I with you—during all that has happened (will happen) to us since the beginning of my ministry? In this larger context the disciples must reflect on all that has taken place. They must begin to see Jesus’ life and ministry as a single incarnate expression of the Father’s love. Jesus is the Exemplar (Jn 13:15), the one to whom all Christian lives must point.

This question, too, must be particularized. The Lord’s actions surely have affected all people, but each in a unique way. The acknowledgment of that unique way in which the Lord has been operative in one’s life shapes the response to this question. This is to know what the Lord has done.

The second question appears very near the end of Jesus’ life; thus, it, too, points to the cross-and-resurrection. The graces which one receives throughout life are intrinsically bound to the drama of Salvation History. Indeed, the gifts which the Lord bestows upon his people—individually and collectively—draw their power from his passion, death, and glorification. And so, the spiritual journey continues. Complete dependence on the Lord, by acknowledging his gifts, is highlighted in response to the simple, yet pervasive, question: “Do you know what I have done to you?”

Seeking the Lord

Jesus’ first two questions are a type of prelude to his third. To identify Jesus in one’s life, and to acknowledge his gifts, are the means of responding to a final question: “Whom do you seek?” (Jn 18:4). This is asked by Jesus in the garden just prior to his arrest; his boldness stuns those who seek him, and so Jesus repeats himself.

This question must remain a constant traveling companion on the spiritual journey. It must be answered again and again, at every fork in the road, as the

spiritual life progresses. Its purpose, clearly, is to keep one's sight fixed on the Lord alone. Thus, it is the *raison d'être* for the entire spiritual journey. At any point along the way, regardless of what one is doing, the manner in which his life is lived actually proclaims his response to the question: "Whom do you seek?"

That night, those who were seeking Jesus (to arrest him) were caught up in their movement as a crowd. It would have been interesting to go through that crowd and ask each, individually, whom he was seeking. Some may not have really known. Judas did, but he did not search alone. As odd as it may seem, a parallel can be drawn for the spiritual journey. Faith and gifts from the Lord can be taken for granted, and so one can easily be caught up in merely doing what everyone else is doing. Then Jesus' question really has not been heard. Like the previous questions, this one must be particularized. To fix one's sight on the Lord alone clarifies the response; the alternatives are confusion and uncertainty. It is not to be inferred that confusion and uncertainty are never to be experienced in the spiritual life. Rather, the point here is that one's basic response is stable.

From its context in the Gospel of John, it is obvious that this question leads to the cross-and-resurrection. To seek the Lord is to accept all that the Paschal Mystery entails. In a prophetic way, Sirach emphasized this some two centuries before: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials" (2:1). To seek the Lord leads to life, but it is a life that is born through death (Jn 12:24-25). And so the spiritual journey continues. At any moment and every moment, the Christian must know the road being traveled; constancy must be the hallmark of each one's response to the question: "Whom do you seek?"

In Response

Every Christian must respond in some way to these three questions of the spiritual journey. The ways in which each identifies, acknowledges, and seeks the Lord will be unique, based on personality, talents, experience, life-situation. Nevertheless, a common thread does run through all responses.

In the opening lines of his first letter, St. John makes a statement that addresses effectively all three questions.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1:1-3).

Consider each question, and then read this text as a response. Jesus is identified as "the word of life": he is acknowledged as the source of all that has been received: and, he is the end toward which the proclamation points. Jesus is the common thread.

It is beyond the scope of this brief reflection to explore this text in any

depth: but one point in particular is worthy of note. Tactility and sensibility are emphatic elements of this text. The one about whom these things are written is known through experience: “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “touched.” These elements strengthen the testimony that is given. From his own experience, St. John proclaims “the word of life,” and invites others to “fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Responding to these questions throughout one’s own spiritual journey must be the fruit of experience: it cannot be the result of academic gymnastics. These questions warrant a commitment, a fidelity to the spiritual journey. Only then does one’s life—testimony, proclamation—identify Jesus as Lord, acknowledge his gifts, and seek him alone.

Conclusion

Three simple questions. Simple, yet interdependent. Simple, yet for the spiritual life they can be viewed as the most significant questions in the New Testament. To identify Jesus in one’s life, to acknowledge what he has done and is doing, and to seek him above all else these constitute the spiritual journey. And, as always, the roads along which the journey progresses are paved with the cross-and-resurrection.

The spiritual journey requires only fidelity. That fidelity is incarnated through the Christian’s lived response to the Lord’s questions: “But who do you say that I am?” “Do you know what I have done to you?” “Whom do you seek?”

I. Spiritual Direction: Identity— A Christian Ministry

Spiritual Direction in the Church

Spiritual Direction and the Paschal Mystery

Spiritual Direction

The Three Dimensions of Spiritual Direction

Models of Spiritual Direction

Spiritual Direction as Pilgrim and Companion

Spiritual Direction In the Church

John R. Sheets, S.J.

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Before we talk about spiritual direction in the Church, it is important to clarify what is meant by the term, and to see how spiritual direction in the Church differs from the practice found among all peoples where those who are wiser counsel those seeking direction.

It is simply a matter of fact that among all peoples, those who are endowed with greater gifts instruct those who are not. The gifts might come from special gifts of temperament or training, together with wisdom and practical judgment gained from long experience. This type of direction takes many forms, teacher and student, religious leader and disciple, parents and children, elders in a community and those who are less experienced. In the religions of India, special importance is given to the guru (literally, “the venerable one”) in his role of guiding others to a high level of spiritual development.

When we speak of spiritual direction in the Church, however, we are talking about something which is radically different. There are some similarities, but spiritual direction takes on an entirely new meaning when the “old creation” is transformed into what St. Paul calls the “New Creation” (2 Co 5:17). Here again the old dic-

tum is verified: "Grace builds on nature." The natural dynamics at work are taken up into a whole new network of relationships.

The simplest way to approach the topic of spiritual direction is to look at the two words: "spiritual," and "direction." To help us understand what is meant by these words, I want to use a term which C.S. Lewis often employs. It is what he calls "transposition." It means the putting of the higher into the lower. As mysterious as that sounds, it is something that we are doing at practically every moment of our lives. For example, transposition is at work when our ideas (the higher) are put into words, into movements of air, or into little marks on a sheet of paper (the lower). When an artist puts his inspiration into an arrangement of paint on a canvas, he is transposing the higher into the lower. On another level, we speak of the soul transposed into the body. In a most special instance, we speak of the Incarnation, that is, the transposition of the Word who is with the Father into our human flesh.

How does this term, "transposition," help us understand the meaning of "spiritual direction?" The deepest meaning of our Christian lives is the metamorphosis, the complete change of our being, the New Creation, that comes through the transposition of the Holy Spirit into our human selves. "God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us" (Rm 5:5).

In the Christian sense, then, "spiritual" does not mean ghostly. Nor does it primarily mean what is immaterial or what cannot be seen. Rather it means that our human spirit, our whole self, has been overshadowed by the Spirit to bring about a New Creation. It is a change of identity. As Paul puts it, "I live now, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Ga 2:20).

The words that are used for "spirit," and "spiritual" in the New Testament do not have the bleached-out notion that the English words convey. In the original Greek, the words are "pneuma" and "pneumatikos." These words convey something of the mystery and the paradoxical qualities of spirit.

In his treatise on the Holy Spirit, St. Basil describes some of these: "simple in substance, manifold in powers, present entirely in each individual while existing in entirety everywhere, divided without suffering diminution, shared without loss of completeness. . . . The Spirit comes to each of those who receive him as though given to him alone; yet he sends out to all his grace, sufficient and complete, and all who partake in him receive benefit in proportion to the capacity, not of his power, but of their nature."

This theme of the transposition of the "Pneuma" of God, the Holy Spirit, into our own spirits is a theme that runs through the letters of Paul. In particular, Chapter 8 of Romans describes the

contrast between the new personality of the Christian, that is, the “pneumatic person,” and one who still lives on the level of what is simply human, the “unpneumatic person.”

Those who live on the level of our lower nature have their outlook formed by it, and that spells death; but those who live on the level of the *pneuma* have the pneumatic outlook, and that is life and peace. . . . But that is not how you live. You are on the pneumatic level, if only God’s *pneuma* dwells within you; and if a man does not possess the *pneuma* of Christ, he is no Christian (Rm 8:5, 6, 8, 9).

To appreciate, then, the meaning of spiritual direction, we have to recapture the scriptural sense of the “pneumatic” person into whom the “*Pneuma*” of Christ has been transposed. In the second place, we have to situate the notion of “direction” into the direction which is given by the Spirit who has been poured into the Church and into the heart of each Christian.

The transposition of the Spirit into our spirits carries with it the transposition of the direction of the Spirit into the natural direction of our spirits. This is another way of speaking of “teleology,” or the inbuilt orientation to a goal. The Christian then takes on the orientation, direction, teleology of the spirit. Again, in the words of St. Paul: “Everyone who is united to Christ is one spirit with him” (1 Co 6:17). This means that a person united to Christ through the Spirit has the same inner direction as Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has only one orientation, that is, to create in us the image of Christ. Paul sees the action of the Spirit and that of Christ as having the same direction. “We all reflect as in a mirror the splendor of the Lord; thus we are transfigured into his likeness, from splendor to splendor; such is the influence of the Lord who is Spirit” (2 Co 3:18).

As is clear, then, from the above, we have to locate what we ordinarily mean by spiritual direction within what is deeper if we are to understand it properly. In the most profound sense, the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director. It is he who orientates us most radically to our goal. All other forms of spiritual direction the Church are only instrumental and derivative of the primary director and his direction, that is, the Holy Spirit. It also follows that the norm of the genuineness of spiritual direction, as we ordinarily use the term, has its base in the conformity of the human spirit to the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual direction, then, is the way that a person or institution fosters the life and the direction of the Holy Spirit, bringing the various aspects of a person’s life into a convergence, freeing us from whatever gets in the way of the direction of the Spirit in our lives. All spiritual direction, then, in the human sense, lives in a kind of

apprenticeship to the Holy Spirit. "We are God's work of art" (Ep 2:10), as Paul puts it. Human spiritual directors are in some way instruments, or disciples, of the main artist, who is the Holy Spirit. Like some of the famous painters who have a school of disciples, the Holy Spirit has many disciples who are engaged in the one work of art, which is to change us into the image of Christ.

We speak of spiritual direction *in the Church*. It is important to see that the Holy Spirit is not simply given to the individual Christian as an isolated individual. The gift to the person exists in the context of the gift given to the community. The Holy Spirit dwells in the whole Church as in a temple, as well as in the heart of each Christian.

At this point, it will be helpful to recall some of the texts from the Constitution on the Church of Vatican II which highlight the role of the Spirit in the life of the Church. I shall not quote all of the texts, but enough of them to give a sense of the richness of the treatment.

When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church and thus all those who believe would have access through Christ in the Spirit to the Father. He is the Spirit of Life, a fount of water springing up to life eternal. To men, dead in sin, the Father gives life through him; until, in Christ, he brings to life their mortal bodies. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them he prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons.

The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which he unified in communion and in works of ministry, he both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits. . . .

All members ought to be molded in the likeness of him until Christ be formed in them. . . . In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in him, he has shared with us his Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the Head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves through the whole body. This he does in such a way that his work could be compared by the Holy Fathers with the function which the principle of life, that is, the soul, fulfills in the human body (n. 7).

When we speak, then, of spiritual direction in the Church, we mean in the first place that there is a divine, personal, vivifying, unifying, centering power directing both the Church as a whole and each member to the same goal. The Spirit is at work in the whole Church in order to provide the milieu for what he wants to accomplish in each individual, that is, the formation of Christ in each. Paul describes this goal, "that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ" (Ep 1:10). In this sense, communion-creating love is the motivating power at the heart of reality, the love of Father for Son, the Son for the Father,

and the Holy Spirit whose whole meaning as person is to transpose into mankind the communion which exists within the Trinity.

We have been using the term “transposition” to describe how this greater reality, namely, the orientating Spirit, is poured into us, who are so limited. The Gospel of John describes the gift of the Spirit into the Church in language that is very much like that which we have been using.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then he carries out the fulfillment of all that he came to do. He transposes the gift of his own mission into the apostles by giving them his Spirit:

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. He breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive any man’s sins, they stand for given. If you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain” (Jn 20:19-23).

The words which Jesus uses recalls the words of Gn 2:7 which describe the mystery of the initial transposition of God’s Spirit into clay in order to form man: “Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.” In both passages, there is a description of a transposition of the higher into the lower. In the account in John, Christ, first in symbolic gesture (the breathing on them), then in word, transposes into the apostles his orientating Spirit, which is the transposition of his own mission into them.

We have spoken, then, about spiritual direction in the Church, in the first place by clarifying its uniqueness in the Christian sense, compared with the practice of teacher-disciple relationship which exists among all peoples. We described this uniqueness in terms of transposition of Christ’s directing Spirit into the Church. Hence, what we ordinarily call spiritual direction is always in service of the primary spiritual director, the Holy Spirit.

Because of this transposition, spiritual direction takes on another aspect which makes it completely different from the ordinary human process by which people guide others. Another norm of wisdom comes into play. It is called by various names: the Paschal Mystery, the wisdom of the cross, renunciation. Paul speaks of the scandal of the cross as being the wisdom of God but foolishness to the world (see 1 Co 1). A spiritual director has to be aware of this mystery as it calls forth in the Christian this same foolishness of God. Each Christian is called to live this mystery in some way. Those called to the life of the evangelical counsels are to make an explicit profession of the Paschal Mystery in the life of chastity, poverty, obedience. The Paschal Mystery finds supreme manifestation in martyrdom.

The human spiritual director, then, must be especially sensitive to the movements of the Holy Spirit. This involves a two-sided *sym-path*y, that is, in the original meaning of the word, a “feeling with,” that reaches in two directions: the sym-path that comes from sensitivity to the Spirit, and the sym-path that comes from a sensitivity to the person being directed. It is a sym-path that has its origin in the fact that they are both animated by the same Holy Spirit. This sym-path creates a certain resonance between the spiritual director and the one whom he is directing. They are being moved in the same direction by the Holy Spirit. This movement takes a conscious shape in the sharing of a common faith, the same hopes, and the love that binds all together.

There is, then, an imperative built into the orientation given to us by the Spirit. The human director has to sense the pressure of that imperative, and to bring it to fruition in the one whom he is directing. In the words of St. Paul the imperative is to take on the identity of Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus” (Ph 2:5). It is the imperative to allow the Holy Spirit to coordinate all of our activities to this one purpose. “If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct our course” (Ga 5:25).

There is, however, another important aspect of this spiritual sym-path. It gives the director a kind of spiritual “smell” for *evil*. In this sense, evil is that which opposes the orientation of the Father as given to us in the Spirit of his Son. Evil, therefore, always attempts to block, suppress, or disorientate the orientation of the Spirit. Hence, there is need for discernment of spirits. “But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; test the spirits, to see whether they are from God” (1 Jn 4:1).

The evil spirit can attempt to block the work of the Holy Spirit in many ways: by the simulation of what is good, but is in fact evil; by creating a state of soul that is confused, troubled, disturbed by emotions contrary to the Spirit, such as anger, resentment, pride, unforgiveness. Any disturbance of the fundamental peace, which is the sign of the Spirit’s presence, can make discernment difficult. Perhaps the infallible sign of the presence of the evil spirit is not the antagonism to what good, but to the Paschal Mystery itself, wherever that is incarnated. For this reason, the key temptation in the account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert was aimed at blocking the Paschal Mystery itself.

This discernment, however, goes beyond the sense of the evil present in the heart of individuals. It exists also on the whole stage in which the drama of human life is played out. St. Paul speaks of “cosmic powers, authorities, and potentates of this dark world, superhuman forces of evil in the heavens” (Ep 6:12). These evil

influences are more difficult to detect because the pressure of their presence is not noticed. What is simply part of the furniture of our world is hardly noticed. It is like a person living in a room where the air is stale. He does not notice it. Only one coming in out of the fresh air can pick up how stale the air is.

The nature of the evil powers is not precisely to do anything to the human consciousness. Rather it is to block the orientation of the Spirit, to narrow the consciousness of individuals to the point where there is a fixation on only one narrow aspect. The Prince of this World, as Jesus called him, captured Judas by narrowing his consciousness to what he could get from betraying Christ. As C.S. Lewis has his character Screwtape say: “Humans think we tempt them by putting thoughts in their mind. They don’t realize that we tempt them by keeping thoughts out of their mind.”

In the Apocalypse, John describes how the evil powers, in a kind of diabolical imitation of the Holy Spirit, enlist others in his work—the Roman emperors and the pagan priesthood—to crush the Church. One of the important aspects of spiritual direction, then, is to be able to detect the presence of evil, not only in an individual, but also on a societal level. On such a level it presents an anti-milieu to what Teilhard de Chardin speaks of as “the divine milieu.”

Practice of Spiritual Direction; Its Foundation

We turn, then, from what might be called the level of principle to actual practice. We want to see how the “primary spiritual director,” the Holy Spirit, works through his instruments to bring about the orientation of all things to Christ, and, through him, to the Father. The level of instrumentation varies. On the foundational level, Jesus Christ is the fullest expression of the orientation of the Spirit. In this sense he is fullness of what we speak of as a “spiritual director.” Secondly, there are the apostles and evangelists. Among these St. Paul is preeminent. Thirdly, there is the practice, and it grew up with many variations in the history of the Church. We shall take up these different modes of instrumentation in the following pages.

However, it is important also to realize that spiritual direction is not only that which takes place between individuals. It is also that which takes place between institutions and persons. It is the institution which provides the “milieu” in which the direction is taking place. It sets the basic norms for spiritual direction by providing the “coordinates,” so to speak, on which it all takes place. This is what St. Paul speaks of as “healthy doctrine.” Spiritual direction by its very nature presupposes that one is operating out of revealed truth. There is not much value in setting a ship in order if it is off the

course and headed in the wrong direction.

Let us, then, reflect on Christ as the model spiritual director in the primary sense. Of course, when speaking of Jesus as “spiritual director,” we have to expand our ordinary understanding of the term.

In the first place, Jesus is the one who has made spiritual direction in any sense of the term possible. He is the one who, by reconciling us to the Father through his redemptive act, has redirected us to the Father. It is he who has endowed us with the gift of the Spirit who serves, then, as the “redirection” power of Christ within us. In this primary sense, then, Christ is spiritual director in reorientating the whole of creation to the Father.

In the second place, Christ himself, who is filled with the Spirit, is the one who, through his teaching, guides us to the Father. Everyone who listens to his words is listening to the words which the Father has given him. “The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God” (Jn 3:24). “I myself am not the source of the words I speak to you” (Jn 14:10). His words are to free us and fill us with life: “The words I spoke to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:33). The Spirit who descends upon him at the time of his baptism is the orientating power of the Father. All that Jesus does comes from a sensitivity to the holy pressure of the Spirit.

While Jesus is the spiritual director in all that he does and says, we find in the discourse of Jesus at the Last Supper, as described in the Gospel of John, a beautiful model of spiritual direction in his dialogue with the apostles. I would like to comment on this discourse briefly.

First of all, Jesus has the kind of sympathy that we spoke of above. He is “on the side of” the Spirit, and “on the side of” the apostles. Being on the side of the Spirit, in a most wondrous way he can describe the very characteristics of the Spirit. The way that he describes the Holy Spirit shows that he is in someway identified with the Spirit. He can read his mind, his heart, and his role, because there is a kind of spiritual resonance between Spirit and Son.

He describes the Spirit as another advocate (counselor, consolator). “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will be with you forever, the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:16). The Holy Spirit is a teacher, who continues and expands the teaching of Jesus himself: “The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything, and will call to mind all that I have told you” (Jn 14:26).

He will bear witness to Jesus. This means that he will be the verification of Jesus’ own life and teaching. “When the Advocate

comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness" (Jn 15:26).

He will also disclose the hearts of people, show (to use our current expression) where "people are coming from." "He will confute the world, and show where wrong and right and judgment lie" (Jn 16:8). The Holy Spirit discloses what is in the human heart. In particular, he discloses how all sin is in some way a rejection of Christ himself.

The Holy Spirit will become the guide when Jesus goes to the Father. He will be the "spiritual director." He will direct the apostles and the Church to all truth. During the time before his Second Coming, he will unfold the richness of the truth that is in Christ. "He will guide you into all truth . . . everything that he makes known to you he will draw from me" (Jn 16:15). The Holy Spirit, then, is the primary spiritual director, who draws all the content of the direction from Christ, and in his own proper role orientates all things, especially the Church and its members, to forming the full stature of Christ: "So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God—to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ" (Ep 4:13).

Jesus is not only on the "inside" of the Spirit to the point where he can draw the "profile" of the Spirit. In the discourse he also exhibits those characteristics in his way of directing the apostles.

He is, like the Spirit, the Consoler, the Advocate. "Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always. Trust also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. If it were not so, I should have told you; for I am going there on purpose to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you also may be" (Jn 14:1-3).

He is "on the inside" of the apostles. He knows his sheep by name, and calls them by name. He reads their hearts, senses their fears, repeatedly assures them that he is not going to leave them orphans, that if he goes, it really means that he will come to be with them in a deeper way, through the gift of his Spirit.

He teaches them the truth about himself. That he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He teaches them the truth about the Father. "This is eternal life to know thee, the only true God, and him whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). He exposes the power of evil at work in the world, and assures them that the power of the Prince of this World is about to be broken. He senses the presence of that Prince of Darkness in the presence among them of one who is to betray him. When they need him most, after they had betrayed him, he seeks

them out. In particular, he seeks out Peter, and as spiritual director tells him that he himself will walk the path of the Paschal Mystery.

It would be possible to go through all of the gospels from this particular point of view to see how Jesus is the spiritual director. We find in him in a paradigmatic way the meaning of spiritual direction, and the qualities of a spiritual director. Perhaps in no better way can there be contrast to what is called “counseling” and “spiritual direction” than by observing how Jesus directs his disciples, and others.

Coming in touch with him is coming into a *presence*. One senses that he is in the presence of someone to whom he cannot be indifferent. He both discloses the heart of each, and draws them to a new level in their relationship to the Father. Not content with observance of the commandments, he will attract them to the “more” of his Paschal Mystery. “If you want to go the whole way, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and then you will have riches in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). “While some are incapable of marriage because they were born so, or were made so by men, there are others who have themselves renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let those accept it who can” (Mt 19:12).

We turn, then, to the letters of Paul to comment briefly on how he himself fulfills the role of spiritual director. He is the first of a long line of spiritual directors in the history of the Church who will fulfill this role through letters. In his letters to Philemon, Timothy, Titus we find the person-to-person direction, which is aimed at leading each of his correspondents to a fuller realization of their faith, but also to a more fruitful apostolate.

I spoke above of the “sym-path \bar{y} ” that should characterize the spiritual director. Paul’s letters are filled with this sense of identity with his flock. “I am all things to all men to win all to Christ” (1 Co 9:22). “Who is weak and I am not weak?” (2 Co 11:29). “Little children, whom I am bringing to birth again until Christ is formed in you . . .” (Ga 4:19). “We were gentle as a nurse caring fondly for her children” (1 Th 2:7). “As you well know we dealt with you one by one, as a father deals with his children, appealing to you by encouragement, as well as by solemn injunctions, to live lives worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Th 2:11,12).

In his letter to Timothy he stresses the foundation of all spiritual direction, *truth*. For Paul, truth is not an abstraction. It is the gospel entrusted to him by Jesus Christ. “If anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast” (Ga 1:9). In the letters to Timothy he coins a phrase to show the relationship between the gospel and one’s life: “healthy

doctrine,” “healthy teaching.” “This is what you are to teach and preach. If anyone is teaching otherwise, and will not give his mind to healthy teaching—I mean those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to good religious teaching, I call him a pompous ignoramus” (1 Tm 6:3). “The time will come when they will not stand wholesome teaching, but will be avid for the latest novelty and collect for themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes” (2 Tm 4:3).

This doctrine is not something he or any human being invented, but it is a sacred trust given to the Church by Christ. “Timothy, keep safe that which has been entrusted to you” (1 Tm 6:20). “Keep as your pattern the sound teaching you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Tm 1:13,14). “Put that teaching into the charge of men you can trust, such men as will be competent to teach others” (2 Tm 2:2). “They must be men who combine a clear conscience with a firm hold on the deep mystery of our faith” (1 Tm 2:9).

The preservation of “healthy doctrine” is not left to the vagaries of history. It finds its protection and foundation in the Church, which is “God’s household, the Church of the living God, which upholds the truth and keeps it safe” (1 Tm 3:14, 15).

The letter to Philemon which consists of only twenty-five verses is a kind of mini-course in spiritual direction. Paul teaches Philemon how he should face a painful situation in a truly Christian way. Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, had run away, and came into contact with Paul, who baptized him. Now Paul sends him back with the following advice to his owner: “I am sending him back to you . . . no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave—as a dear brother, very dear indeed to me and how much dearer to you, both as man and as Christian” (Phm 12-16).

It seems to me that the spiritual genius of Paul lies in the instinctive way in which he can rise from a particular situation to the larger mystery, and draw an application from the larger mystery to the particular case. For example, he teaches the Corinthians that fornication is a desecration not only of their own bodies, but of Christ himself, by recalling the mystery of the identity of the Christian, that anyone united to Christ is “one spirit with him” (1 Co 6:17). To teach the lesson of humility he rises to the mystery of the “lowering” of Christ to take on our human nature, and even the death of a criminal (Ph 2:12). This pattern of making a judgment about some particular through a sense of the implications that are involved in Christian mysteries is of the essence of spiritual direc-

tion.

Finally, another characteristic of the spiritual director is always at work in St. Paul. It is the sense of the inbuilt movement of the Spirit toward the “more” of the spiritual life. “Finally, brothers, we urge you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus to make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live” (1 Th 4:1). He compares the “more” of the spiritual life with the abundant harvest we are to cultivate (Ga 5:22). If our lives have a genuine direction, then we are being progressively transformed into the image of Christ. “We all reflect as in a mirror the splendor of the Lord; thus we are transfigured into his likeness, from splendor to splendor. Such is the influence of the Lord who is Spirit” (2 Co 3:18). “May the Lord make your love mount and overflow towards one another and towards all, as our love does towards you” (1 Th 3:11, 12).

The Practice of Spiritual Direction; Its History

We come, then, to the practice of spiritual direction in the history of the Church, after which we will take up some ideas on spiritual direction in the Church today. Usually any discussion of spiritual direction begins with these themes. In our treatment they come at the end. They do not make sense unless we understand, in the first place, that Christ is the one who has redirected us to the Father through his redemptive act, and that he continues this direction through the gift of his Spirit; secondly, that Christ and his apostles also show in practice the meaning of spiritual direction. The practice of spiritual direction in the Church has certain invariable qualities found at every point of history; on the other hand, it will also take different “styles” according to various historical circumstances. I can only comment briefly on the practices found over a period of nearly two thousand years in the Church.

The practice of spiritual direction comes into its own as a teacher-disciple relationship in the fourth century of our era with the emergence of the monastic life. Thomas Merton describes this period very well:

It must not be forgotten that the spiritual director in primitive times was much more than the present name implies. He was a spiritual father who “begot” the perfect life in the soul of his disciple by his instructions first of all, but also by his prayer, his sanctity and his example. He was to the young monk a kind of “sacrament” of the Lord’s presence in the ecclesiastical community (taken from *Writings on Spiritual Direction*, ed. Neufelder and Coelho, Seabury, 1982).

The practice of spiritual direction at this stage strikes us as very different from what goes by that name today. In the direction that was given, there was a sense of a prophetic word, that would res-

onate with the inner spirit of the person, to achieve what the person needed—encouragement, advice, exhortation, correction, or whatever else the person needed. But the constant was there, the *sympathia* of the director with the Holy Spirit, and with the spirit of the disciple.

It seems that subsequently the “prophetic” nature of this relationship was attenuated from what might be described as an apodictic form to one that was more along the lines of pointing out to a person the direction he should take. Perhaps we could say that “hieratic” was succeeded by the “prudential” mode. The sense of spiritual direction arising out of a mystery that was shared took on more and more the nature of guidance of a person less experienced by one who had more experience in the spiritual life. I hope that this is a legitimate way of generalizing the kind of change that took place from the early monastic form to that which became customary and in the general practice of the Church.

To attempt to describe the practice of spiritual direction in the Church over a period of fifteen centuries would entail a commentary on practically all of the saints. It is no exaggeration to say that all of the great saints—men, women, priests, religious, lay—were spiritual directors. (For an exhaustive treatment see “Direction Spirituelle,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*). One of the common ways in which this was carried out was through letters. Augustine, for example, has scores of letters which have as their explicit purpose to give spiritual direction.

However, even among the great spiritual directors, St. Ignatius of Loyola holds a special place in the history of the Church. I would like, then, to say a few words about him.

We recall how St. Ignatius had been wounded in battle, and that during the course of his convalescence, mainly through reading the lives of the saints, he went through an experience of conversion. After he recovered his health, he went to Manresa where he spent a year in prayer and penance. During this time, except for the direction given by his confessor, he had no spiritual director. Later in his autobiography he describes how it was God who was directing him during this period.

At this time God treated him just as a schoolmaster treats a little boy when he teaches him. This was perhaps because of his rough and uncultivated understanding, or because he had no one to teach him, or because of the firm will God himself had given him in his service. But he clearly saw, and always had seen that God dealt with him like this (*Ignatius’ Own Story*, William Young, S.J., Loyola University Press, 1956, p. 22).

During his stay in Manresa, Ignatius began to direct others. As

he says in his autobiography, “Besides his seven hours of prayer, he busied himself with certain souls who came looking for him to discuss their spiritual interests” (p. 21). The special gifts of the Spirit to Ignatius were, then, to see how the Lord was directing him. He discovered the Spirit’s direction mainly through discerning the direction of desires within his own spirit: where they came from, where they were going, and how they affected his own interior disposition. Desires from the Holy Spirit affected his own spirit in a vastly different way than desires prompted by the evil spirit, or from his own natural desires,

Ignatius’ own experience, and the way that he embodied that experience in the *Spiritual Exercises*, gave him a particular orientation to directing others. The same can be said of those who are formed by the *Spiritual Exercises*. The distinctive “components” of spiritual direction began to take on their own identity, together with the sense of how they form a kind of symphonic whole.

He saw that above all spiritual direction aims at freeing oneself from whatever gets in the way of doing God’s will. Of primary importance, then, is the need to free ourselves from self-love. “For every one must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests” (*Sp.Ex.* n. 189). The process of discernment, then, is essential. But all this presupposes that the one being directed open his heart completely to the director.

There is stress on daily examination of conscience, not so much to see how a person has succeeded or failed, but to look at the “confluence” where the movements of the Holy Spirit in our spirit during the day meet in a kind of confluence with the daily circumstances of our lives. Then to reflect whether the direction this “confluence” takes is marked by the direction of the Spirit or not.

Spiritual direction, then, should aim at drawing a person to the *magis* in the service of Christ, the *greater* glory of God. In the *Spiritual Exercises* this *magis* is put before the retreatant at key moments: in the meditation on the call of Christ the King, and in the reflection on the Third Mode of Humility. In each of these the retreatant is invited to offer his life to take on the paschal mode of Christ’s own life, to serve Christ and the Church in a redemptive mode of life.

To preserve a person from a spirituality that is myopic, and thus in danger of distortion, he stresses the need for guidance from the Church. “We must put aside all judgment of our own, and keep the mind ever ready and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, our holy Mother, the hierarchical Church” (*Sp.Ex.* n. 353).

It can safely be said, then, that God's gift to the Church through Ignatius was, in the first place, to provide a spiritual "milieu" in which direction would take place, namely, the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the second place, through him the role of the spiritual director became more "formalized," that is, it began to be differentiated from other aspects of pastoral care. Further, the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* became a way of training others to give spiritual direction.

Spiritual Direction in the Church Today

I think that this process of "formalization" of spiritual direction has entered a new phase within the past twenty years. Perhaps it is only following the laws at work in every area of human experience, the movement toward differentiation and specialization. There has been more written on the specific topic of spiritual direction in the past twenty years than was written over all the previous centuries in the history of the Church. Along the same lines, for the first time in history scores of programs have been set up with the explicit goal to equip people to give spiritual direction.

There has also been a kind of "raising of consciousness" for the need of spiritual direction, not only for priests and religious, but also for the laity. In fact, we are caught in a situation where the demand is vastly out of proportion to the supply of good spiritual directors.

The retreat houses across the country are enjoying an unprecedented volume of retreatants, making everything from weekend to thirty-day retreats, both group retreats and private directed retreats. The practice of "at home" retreats, or in the Ignatian terminology, "Nineteenth Annotation retreats," is growing at a phenomenal rate. Spiritual direction is one of the main activities during these retreats.

Before I try to assess what is happening here, I want to go back to the directives given in Vatican II for training priests in spiritual direction.

Spiritual formation should be closely linked with doctrinal and pastoral training. Especially with the help of the spiritual director, such formation should help seminarians learn to live in familiar and constant companionship with the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, in the Holy Spirit (*Decree on Priestly Formation* n. 8).

Let them receive careful instruction in the art of guiding souls, so that they can lead all sons of the Church, before everything else, to a Christian life which is fully conscious and apostolic, and to fulfillment of the duties of their state. With equal thoroughness they should learn to assist men and women religious to persevere in the grace of their vocation and to make progress according to the spirit of their various communities (n. 19).

It seems to me that the growing awareness of the need for spiritual direction today is one of the signs of the hunger felt by so many for a deeper relationship with God. This movement is not loud and ostentatious. It belongs on the level of the silent springs that water the world through expanding the spirit. These are not the kind of activities that hit the media. But they are definitely signs of the movement of the Holy Spirit.

But who are these people directing and being directed? By that question I am not asking about the kind of groups into which they can be broken down: lay, religious, priest. They are different people from those who have gone ahead of us in previous centuries. Their attitudes have been shaped not only by what took place during those centuries, such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment. They are also heirs of more recent movements that have shaped our thinking. I would like to single out two areas of thought and two points of view that are influential.

Among the most influential are psychology and sociology. There is no doubt that the knowledge of such disciplines can help both a director, and the one whom he is directing. At the same time a subtle "reality shift" can take place. The things of the spirit tend to take on a lesser reality, while the principles of psychology and sociology become more real and more effective. They are in fact easier to get a handle on, while the things of the spirit are not under our control. Unconsciously, then, the weight of attention tends to shift from the spirit to the concreteness offered by psychology and sociology. The sense of the ontological roots of spiritual direction, the presence of the Holy Spirit who is poured into our hearts, can be attenuated and lost in the face of the apparent impact of psychological and sociological realities.

There are also pervasive moods that are in the air. Without our being aware of them, they form the optic through which we see reality. One of these is what is called humanistic psychology. It is really not psychology. It is a thinly disguised philosophy of human nature. Its basic assumption is that we are all naturally good. According to this position, what we call evil is merely some kind of a defect, like that which makes a tree crooked. A tree can be straightened out by "tree therapy." Human nature, if it is warped, can also be straightened out by various techniques. Underlying this humanistic psychology is the assumption that our human nature is not in need of redemption. Whatever is wrong can be cured by the therapy of interpersonal dynamics.

However, in the Christian view, what was (and is) wrong with human nature cannot be set right by any amount of human effort. This is what is meant by the redemption. While the Holy Spirit is

the source of life on any level, even tree-life, he is the source of the spiritual life only by inserting us into the one who died and rose. That is the therapy of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that the prevalence of the view of human existence that comes from a humanistic psychology can dim out the need for this spiritual therapy.

Perhaps no person giving spiritual direction would subscribe to this humanistic philosophy of human nature. On the other hand, the attitude is so pervasive that it can imperceptibly color a person's attitude and affect his approach to spiritual, direction.

Another pervasive mood which is in the air is a secularistic mentality which filters out the sense of the sacred in the world. It is particularly harmful if the sense of the sacred is not present in the context of spiritual direction. It is possible to talk of spiritual things, and even give spiritual direction without a sense of the sacred. But to adapt the words of St. Paul: "If I am without a sense of the Spirit, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Co 13:1). We should attempt to recapture the "hieratic" sense, the sense of the holy, which Merton describes above, as the vital context of spiritual direction in the early Church, where the director became "a sacrament" of the Lord's presence in the ecclesiastical community.

We are back once more to the fundamental meaning of spiritual direction, which is the human effort to channel the movement of the Holy Spirit to bring about a deeper orientation of a person to the Father. Such an awareness disposes us to the fundamental disposition of the director and one being directed. This is docility. Literally this means "teachability." We are alerted to this need for *docility* to the Spirit when we consciously attempt to put ourselves in the milieu of the sacred.

The need experienced by so many today for spiritual direction is a genuine sign of the presence of the Spirit in our time. However, as I mentioned above, the supply is not equal to the demand. To try to satisfy the demand, there are those who undertake spiritual direction with a minimum of training. Perhaps this is simply a provisional measure until we can catch up with the demand. On the other hand, the number of people prepared, and the level of preparation in many cases, goes far beyond the preparation provided at any other time in history.

I think that we are living at a special time in history. As is true of any special manifestation of the Spirit in history, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. At the same time, we are in the presence of the freedom and unpredictability of the Spirit who "lists where he will." No one could have dreamed of this development twenty-five years ago. Where this is going, and what it is preparing the Church for, lies hidden in the designs of the Director of directors, the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude and summarize, then, by giving a description of what is meant by spiritual direction.

In first place, it is the direction transposed into the Church and into individuals by the Holy Spirit. He is the primary director. In Christ we find the paradigm of spiritual direction. He himself through his openness to the direction of the Spirit was obedient to the Father's will which issued in his sacrificial death. He transposed his own mission and orientation into the apostles through the gift of the Spirit.

In the letters of St. Paul we find the characteristics of a spiritual director who is sensitive to the movement of the Spirit. Throughout the history of the Church, the Holy Spirit has worked through thousands of directors to draw others into the direction of the Spirit.

In short, as the term is ordinarily used, however, a spiritual director is one, who through the power and wisdom of the Spirit, acts as a spiritual guide for a person over a significant period of time. Through a kind of spiritual artistry he attempts to bring about a convergence of the whole person to the master-vision of faith, and a master-commitment to Christ. The words of St. Paul can be applied to this process of spiritual artistry: "I am in labor with you over again until Christ is formed in you" (Ga 4:19).

I spoke of "sym-path \bar{y} " as being one of the characteristics of the spiritual director. I shall end this long paper with a story about one of the desert fathers from the fourth century.

Some old men came to see Abba Poemen and said to him: "When we see brothers who are dozing at the common prayer, shall we wake them so that they will be attentive?" He said to them, "When I personally see a brother who is nodding in sleep, I put his head on my knees and let him be at peace." Amen.

Spiritual Direction and the Paschal Mystery

Gregory I. Carlson, S.J.

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Spiritual direction is receiving strong encouragement today among religious communities. In fact there are those, myself included, who see it as an integral part of religious vitality. For this experience to be of genuine help to religious persons, both directors and directees must know what it calls on them to do. Otherwise spiritual direction runs the risk of becoming just another episode in a series of religious fads, perhaps meaningful to those few who have entered into and understood it, but one more disappointing and discarded panacea to those who for whatever reason have not succeeded in assimilating this experience functionally into their lives. What I propose to do in this article therefore is to give a careful description of spiritual direction and what it involves and to suggest by reflecting on the paschal mystery what place it has in the life of an apostolic religious. I speak principally from the viewpoint of someone who has profited from excellent spiritual direction through most of fifteen years of religious life—and has learned something too from the lack of it through several important years during this time.

What Direction Is Not

What I have called spiritual direction is rather specific, and I would therefore like to distinguish it from three other important experiences of religious life:

1. Spiritual direction is not the normal exchange of advice and feedback among friends. Spiritual direction is more regular than these haphazard occurrences and sometimes involves things one would

not want to discuss with his or her friends, as well as things to which one's friends are perhaps equally blind.

2. Spiritual direction is not problem-solving or decision-making. Both of these call for advice from the person consulted. They tend to fix on one area of a person's life and to occur at crisis periods.
3. Spiritual direction is not psychological counseling. Many of us will find it worthwhile to analyze under competent care the history and dynamics of our own feeling patterns. This counseling tends again to fix on problem areas and to seek a solution in terms of understanding one's own history or modifying one's behavior. It can go on and does without any reference to God.

While each or all of these experiences may be involved in spiritual direction at a given time, there is a core of spiritual direction that is different.

What Direction Is

What is spiritual direction then? It is a conversation in which, with the help of another, a person expresses his or her experience of faith and discerns its character and movement. Let us look briefly at the three central elements in this description.

1. This is a conversation, not simply an account read off to someone, and each party has a distinct part to play in it. Though the purpose of this conversation concerns the growth of one of its partners, the faith, commitment, and experience of both are actively at work.
2. The first purpose of this conversation is the expression of one's experience of faith, its clarification and objectivization. If we want to come to grips with and appropriate what is going on within us, we have to try to express it, conceptualize it even, frame it in some kind of words, even as we realize that the words will never fit the experience adequately. Put another way, spiritual direction is an opportunity we give ourselves for the precise purpose of raising more and more of our experience to a level of faith. Our purpose here is by no means to get a firm conceptual hold on or control of God, but simply to recognize in faith the extent and depth of His presence in our lives. This is not an escapist head-trip that tries to intellectualize reality, but a patient effort to recognize God in all the complexity of His presence to us, on all the levels of our being. Words are simply our normal tools for expressing this, tools that have a way of committing us and challenging us to stand up to what we express with them. At its best, spiritual direction is one place where we can put aside rhetoric and admit with full honesty what we are experiencing.
3. The second purpose of this conversation is discernment upon our experience of faith. Granted the honest expression of what we are

experiencing, can we see better what is happening in our lives with God, where He is leading us, what rhythms and patterns our relationship shows? What sort of overall direction has our relationship been developing? Where do the moods and movements that carry me away from God arise? What kind of decision has led me to Him in the past? Here the partners in the dialogue of spiritual direction can bring to bear all the wisdom of Christian tradition concerning the discernment of the spirits that work upon a person. Such are, for example, Ignatius Loyola's rules that for a person seeking God peace is the normal and basic touchstone of His lead, or that a person should learn to see the pattern of the developments in his or her life by looking back over their beginning, middle, and end, or that one's prayer should follow the line of consolation. Again, this sort of scrutiny of our continuing experience of God is not a matter of boxing Him in, of trying to find some categories that will define for good what He is and how He works, but rather a matter of picking up some sense of the rhythm and pattern, of the dynamic of His touch upon us. What this scrutiny teaches us is, among other things, to be ready for the surprises by which the God of Christian tradition has distinguished Himself.

The Director's Role

As it is the role of the person seeking spiritual direction to submit his or her experience to scrutiny, to probe patiently, and to admit courageously both the very good and the evil things that he or she sees, both the very surprising and the routine elements of his or her experiences; so it is the role of the director not to teach, not to advise, not to judge, not to direct, not to decide, not to belittle, but (1) to ask those questions that will help the directee to clarify his or her own experience and discern its meaning and (2) to suggest at times a possible interpretation for what is going on in the directee's life. It is of course one of the commonest facts of human interchange that the overarching pattern of my experience is sometimes closed to me as I live in the midst of it. I may need someone to suggest this meaning; once it is suggested, only I am in a position to judge whether it is right or wrong. It is finally the role of the director (3) to encourage the directee.

I repeat: the director does not direct. I retain the word "direction" in discussing it here simply because it is the traditional terminology for this particular area of religious life. "Counseling" comes closer than "direction" to describing this reality, but it unfortunately suggests that the relationship centers on getting advice from someone who knows my life better than I do. Any suggestion that I give to another person some of my unique responsibility to understand and shape my life misrepresents real spiritual direction. Seen at one level, what we are really seeking is self-direction, but at a deeper level, even "self-direction" does not do justice to what we are describing.

God loves each of us in a unique way and finds surprising ways to lead us to life and service, ways neither we nor others could have dreamed of. The point at issue then is not simply how we direct ourselves but how we facilitate God's direction of us. And this is precisely what spiritual direction tries to do: to facilitate God's own direction of us in our lives.

Qualities of a Good Director

To whom should one go for direction? There are advantages at times to having someone outside one's own community; one particular advantage is that with a priest director, one can relate one's direction to sacramental confession. Still, in general, it seems better to choose someone from one's own religious community and even within one's present living community if it is not too small. The reason is simple: in normal circumstances a person with whom one is in frequent and general contact will know him or her better than an outsider and can therefore listen and understand more perceptively than others.

What should one look for in this director?

1. Most importantly, a director should be someone you can trust as well as someone who trusts you and respects you. It should be someone who can help to support in you a living sense that God loves you, since the whole purpose of direction is to let the love with which God loves you shine through your life and lead you to greater intimacy with Him.
2. A director should be someone with experience, both broadly human experience and specifically religious experience, as a basis for understanding what he or she hears.
3. A director should have balance, prudence, and discretion.
4. Finally, a person should look for a director with compassion.

There are such persons in religious communities right now, and there is no reason why their fellow religious should hesitate in asking them to be of service as directors.

Some Suggestions

Let me add four particular suggestions on how to make spiritual direction as helpful as it can be. First, expect it to be difficult. Honest self-revelation to another human being should be difficult. Yet the experience of knowing this difficulty and still going ahead—and finding the understanding and trust of another—is a worthwhile experience of Christian community, Appropriating our own experience and sharing it with others go together, and the support and challenge we find in sharing our life with someone else is a powerful help in appropriating it for ourselves.

A good way to begin a session is by describing your prayer. Spiritual

direction is, of course, pointless if you do not pray, that is, if among the other forms of your prayer you do not have some time for quiet and personal listening to the Word. A second form of prayer that has special value for spiritual direction is quiet personal prayer toward the end of the day directed to sensing the pattern of the day, to feeling how God and I have interacted during it. Many people find keeping a journal a good way to make this prayer.¹ The best way to become aware is to articulate, and a journal can help us not only to become aware of God's work in us at the moment but also to get some sense of the overall movement at the end of a given month or year. This movement will of course be individual: everyone's interaction with God develops in a rhythm that is his or her own. A good spiritual director has no preconceived idea of what he or she wants or expects to hear: the director is simply there to help the directee get into closer touch with the individual rhythm of his or her own life with God.

After prayer, a good place to start a session is with the cutting edges of my life. Often a good immediate preparation for a session of spiritual direction is a quiet period of prayer in which we simply let ourselves become aware of what we are feeling. The purpose of the prayer and the session is to see and admit where God fits into this. Am I at peace? What is bothering me? What unfinished business is lying around in the corners of my life? What problems am I facing and how do I react to them? What decisions lie before me, and how do I feel about them? There is always ample material for conversation and reflection if we let our lives, especially our emotional and social lives, surface in the presence of God.

Finally, a good director will ask from time to time what the directee thinks of their relationship. This gives the directee a chance to say that the director is too judgmental, too restrictive of appropriate matter for conversation, not challenging enough, not compassionate enough, not willing to share his or her own experience. A good director will open the door to this kind of feedback regularly; but even when it is not sought, a directee should feel encouraged to offer it.

Spiritual Direction and the Paschal Mystery

The paschal mystery is the pattern of our lives, not just of some ideal life we should be living and not just of someone else's life. Being a Christian means living out this mystery revealed dramatically in the fate of Jesus Christ. Spiritual direction is an occasion to find, recognize, and assent to this mystery as we live it. It is a mystery: it is revealed to us by God, and we find it only in assent to Him and His word. It is good for us to put ourselves into

Editor's Note

¹ [For one treatment of journal keeping and the life of prayer, see Edward J. Farrell, "The Journal—A Way into Prayer," *REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS*, v. 30 (1971), pp. 751-756.]

the position of Martha and to be asked "Do you believe this?" This is, as we have seen, the first question put to us by the spiritual direction situation. Here we can attempt to articulate and express the faith we live by. But this mystery is not opaque, not superimposed on our "real" life; we believe it is the real pattern underlying the surface meaning of events, and we can progressively understand and enter into it. With Augustine and Anselm, we believe in order to understand. And all this is only an application of what we said earlier about the second purpose of spiritual direction: discernment upon our faith experience. It is good for us to have an occasion, a time and a place, where we can try out loud with another person to get hold of the mystery we find shaping our lives.

How is Christ's paschal mystery the pattern of our lives? Let me suggest three ways as they pertain to the work of spiritual direction.

Dying and Finding New Life

The culminating event of Jesus' life was a matter of a seed falling into the ground and dying and giving birth to new life. In the face of the onslaught of death He trusted in His Father and found that His Father saved. In dying He found a new and fuller life given Him by His Father.

Now we are dying every day. Growing up means, among other things, giving up, giving up many of the things we have loved and enjoyed, like any number of immediate satisfactions and the security and dependence we knew as children. Every decision we make during our lives involves the same threat that becomes overpowering in death: we lose something. We suffer the loss of immediate contact with our friends, we suffer the loss by death of those we love, we suffer the pruning of one alternative to let the other grow, we move from one kind of work we enjoy to another that has greater responsibility for other people, we give up particular hopes that have proved unrealistic. We go, in the words of one of Bergman's characters, step by step into the darkness, and every decision is a new step into the unknown. And as we move on into later life, the pattern is the same: loss. We lose our quickness and agility; our minds and limbs suffer an inevitable hardening. We give up the effectiveness we once enjoyed and the communication with others that we cherished. At last we must give up all that we have had to face the darkness unarmed.

Responses to Death

In the face of the death that is at work in our lives right now, we can respond by turning away, forgetting it, denying it in the style contemporary American culture has developed into a high art. Or we can let it undermine our love for and commitment to life and turn instead to subtle despair and cynicism at the deepest levels of ourselves. Or we can do what Jesus did: face it squarely with hope in a God that can save us and all that is beautiful and cherished. If we face it squarely, we can see in many of our little deaths that

they are an entrance into new life, Giving up one alternative leads us to growth; a step into the darkness brings light into our lives and those of others. That is what Jesus experienced, and it is a pattern of our experience. It is good for us to have a chance in the spiritual direction situation to confess this honestly to ourselves and to see in the concrete details of our own experience how this mystery is at work. And this is precisely what we commit ourselves to do in spiritual direction: to attempt to confess and to understand.

Let me spell this out for one critical area of our experience as religious. Many religious find after some years of religious life marked perhaps by a youthful enthusiasm and exuberance that they are faced with the increasing revelation of levels of themselves that are not easy to look at: they find layers of anger, fear, and hostility that they had not suspected in themselves. Even more basically, they discover gradually the depths of evil in themselves: their own resistance to God and His love becomes more and more patent. They feel a sense of shame over what they are and wonder if they can continue a life that seems to them to have become a sham.

They can deny these things and turn away from them into a kind of schizophrenic religious life with God and joy and service in one part and a lot of muck in the other. Or they can settle into quiet and bitter despair over the levels of themselves which God seems unable to reach. Without an opportunity for explicit articulation of our experience in the light of our belief, such schizophrenia and despair are indeed possible. The alternative is to face these things squarely and honestly with trust in a God that can save. We can raise even this stratum of our experience to a level of faith, admit its existence, invite God to save even this, and submit ourselves with patience and trust to the mysterious way He has chosen for saving us. In the language of Gestalt psychology, we can try in the context of spiritual direction to appropriate this part of ourselves, claim it as our own, refuse to leave it as an absurd and gnawing force in our lives, bring it to closure or completeness by seeing it as one area where God asks us, as He asked Jesus, to submit to death with trust in Him. The areas and ways in which this surfaces will be different in each of our lives, but for each of us it is here in the concrete experiences of death that the paschal mystery of Christ is at work.

Finding God

Looked at from another side, the paschal mystery for Jesus was His discovery of the full presence of God. The cross says that God was most present to Jesus at a time when a good Jew would have been least aware of Him, in the experience of death. The paschal mystery is the overturning of the traditional Jewish view—a view we all have quite naturally—that Yahweh is simply not involved in death. Here, where we least expect His presence, He makes His power felt with ultimacy. In His weakness Jesus realized experimentally the full power of God.

The same mystery is at work in us. Our lives are a matter of finding God at work in more and more areas of our life. This includes finding Him where we did not suspect that He could be at work, finding Him in our own weakness and emptiness, and finding Him finally in the experience of death. Gerard Manley Hopkins catches this Christian experience in the final lines of the opening stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

. . . and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

In fact we religious have singled this element out to be thematic for our lives. In the midst of a world that has generally given up the search in disappointment, we proclaim boldly that we have found Him and dedicate our lives to a continual rhythm of seeking and finding Him afresh. Over again we feel His finger and find Him. By our vows we choose a kind of life that is gathered around this experience.

We must be clear about this. The kind of experience out of which religious dedication grows and on which it is nourished is not a matter of a simple career choice, based on certain talents and aptitudes and expressed in an easily definable role; a person does not become a religious as he or she would become a teacher or a doctor. Nor is it simply a matter of willingness to work for God, hoping somehow that what we do is done for Him and serves His purposes. It is rather a matter of radical openness to and experience of Him through faith at the deepest levels of ourselves. God is not just our business or our goal. Prior to being men and women from God and working for Him we are men and women of God, and that means people who believe they are touched by Him, in contact with Him. God is the atmosphere in which we live, a part of who we are; our goal is that to encounter us is for the men and women we meet somehow to encounter God. The life we are trying to live means that the peace, the joy, the energy, the hope that surrounds us is a living invitation to others to come like us under the influence of a loving Father and a redeeming Brother.

Apostolic Religious

A religious is a person for whom finding God is thematic, who continues to reflect on his or her ongoing experience of Him. Apostolic religious, one could well argue, possess the special charism both of being an occasion for encounter with God for the men and women they meet, of being quite palpably men and women of God, and of putting their faith at the disposal of others, of articulating in humanly effective terms the presence of God in human life. Now this ability to put our faith at others' disposal obviously demands that we assimilate our experience of God at a very deep level, that we get a real feel for it. A stereotyped articulation of our faith will be as uninviting to others as it will be, eventually, cloying for us. If what we proclaim and what we live are to match each other, then we need an occasion to

reflect on, articulate, and understand our finding of God. And that is precisely what spiritual direction is.

As we all know, people are drawn to our life and our belief far more by what we do than by what we say. Christianity is lived in service to other people. Still, there does come a time, frequently in our kind of life, when someone—impressed, invited, or puzzled by our lives—asks what it is all about. That is a critical moment. The answers we give this person have to square with what he or she has seen in us. To give this kind of witness to the faith we live by demands that we do ongoing reflection and discernment upon our faith experience. Putting that faith at the disposal of others is not easy, but it is the task to which we as apostolic religious are called.

If religious are called to occasion encounter with God and to put their faith at the disposal of others, then it is part of the charism of our kind of vowed life to be spiritual directors, again for want of a better name, for the community of faith. The Christian, declared or anonymous, should find in us what we have talked about finding in a spiritual director: an experienced, patient, trusting listener to and supporter of people's belief. People come to us with their own experiences of faith and insights into it, and they are seeking precisely those things spiritual direction is meant to give: an opportunity to be listened to, to get hold of something too difficult to work out within oneself alone, to be taken seriously as a believer, to be encouraged in the difficult struggle of faith. The best way to school ourselves for this service is to submit ourselves to the process of spiritual direction.

Serving Others

Let us look at the paschal mystery from one other side. In his death and resurrection, Jesus climaxed the life he lived as the suffering servant not only of Yahweh but of his fellow men. Here on the cross he poured out his life literally for others: he became accessible to all men here as the revelation of God's saving work.

This is the pattern of our lives as Christians: learning more and more to give our lives for others and so to be a revelation for them of God's saving work. This is a joyful and fulfilling experience, but it costs constantly. Every day presents a new invitation to mature and healthy generosity, to overcoming our selfishness and putting more and more of ourselves at the disposal of others. The concrete forms of this invitation are different in each of our lives, and they change and develop as life goes on. At one time it is a matter of choosing what concrete form of service allows us to help people most; at another time it is a question of how we can be there most for the others in our community; at still another time we will have to confront traits of ours that are hardest on other people. These are not minutiae separate from the action of God; rather they are precisely where the mystery of Christ's dying and living for others is present now. They have therefore to be faced with all the seriousness, imagination, and generosity we can bring to the task of

pouring ourselves out for others. If prayer is a chance we give ourselves in the midst of busy lives to hear and ponder these challenges to service, spiritual direction is a further chance to admit to another person how serious the challenges are, to give shape through words to our imaginative glimpses into how we can respond, and to express out loud our commitment to respond generously.

This all looks so easy and so clinical as I discuss it here. My point is that the mystery of Christ's dying and rising takes place now precisely in the give and take, the tears, the anger and frustration, the joy too of the real decisions and passions of our lives. Our calling challenges us to submit just these things to the vision of faith that stands before Jesus' Father and says "This is your work" and that learns to see in our own dying and living for others the extension of Jesus' action here and now.

Spiritual Direction

Frank Wallace, S.J.

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Pastoral care is a term that covers the work of many helpers whose roles may at times overlap, yet are specifically different. There is the parent who nurtures, the teacher who instructs, the religious superior who rules a community, the confessor whose specific function is to convey sacramental forgiveness, the counselor who helps the client get in touch with his or her feelings, helps remove blocks, assists in decision making and psychological growth. And there is the spiritual director, whose specific function is to facilitate the encounter between God and the directee; so also do confessors, religious superiors, and perhaps, too, the other helpers. Yet the spiritual director has a distinctive, specific function, which is emerging ever more clearly.

The Role of the Spiritual Director

The experience of most older religious today is that the spiritual director (or spiritual father, as he was often called) was someone you consulted about problems, distractions in prayer, and who helped you in those areas. With the growth in prayerfulness and the awareness of the need for guidance, lest we may “fall off the mountain,” with the increasing popularity of directed retreats and houses of prayer, with the work of depth psychology, the role of the spiritual director is seen to be more than problem solving. It is concerned very much with growth in prayer. The spiritual director has been called God’s usher and so is one who helps the directee to become more aware of God coming, of God present, by being with the directee as he or she is opening up to God’s love. Spiritual directing belongs properly to the opening to the Spirit. As Alan Jones says, spiritual direction is worship, adoration, waiting on God (*Exploring Spiritual Direction*, p. 56).

At times, the spiritual director may have recourse to a psychological counselor or, if skilled, act as counselor, to assist in the psychological growth of the directee, because psychological growth and spiritual growth are related, though not synonymous (see Dr. Gillian Straker, *REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS*, Vol. 38, 1979). There may be distorted images of God, of self, of prayer, that are blocking the encounter with God and which need correcting for that encounter to take place. In this, however, the spiritual director will not lose sight of the relationship with God as the focus of his or her caring. The valuable work of the counselor in helping the directee to be in touch with his or her feelings and to accept the real self, facilitates the journey to a real God, by means of real communication. So often this experience, to borrow the title of one of Morton Kelsey's books, is reaching for the real, and necessary for growth in spiritual freedom.

The spiritual director walks with the directee, who shares his or her prayer experiences, and together they discern what is happening. At the very heart of spiritual direction is discernment, which, in its full meaning adds a deeper dimension to counseling, as we shall see later.

The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits are a valuable contribution by Ignatius Loyola to spiritual directing. The *Directory* of 1591 compares the director to a midwife. Hugo Rahner says of this: "This somewhat remarkable comparison of the director to a 'midwife' is in itself an introduction to that great patristic theme of the 'birth of God in men's hearts,' which the great psychologists and experts on human nature among the Fathers saw as a time of internal conflict, during which considerable importance must be attached to the discernment of spirits" (*Ignatius the Theologian*, p. 140).

Recently a friend, who is a mother and who had been directed by me in a retreat, and who had never heard of the 1591 *Directory*, wrote to me, and with her permission I quote:

"I rather think you are like a midwife—assisting those in the throes of labor—knowing the birth is to eternal life. We don't see the birth—only the struggle. I know once I reached the stage of being able to push, it wasn't nearly so bad and nobody could do the pushing for me. But getting to that pushing stage was greatly helped by understanding midwives who helped me to know what was happening and where I was at. They encouraged, dispelled fears, transferred confidence, lifted sagging spirits, soothed and cossetted and bullied me throughout."

That is as good a description of a spiritual director as I have come across, and it certainly opened up for me the validity of the 1591 image of midwife.

Any serious entry into one's spiritual life may cause a great "agitation of spirits," as Ignatius Loyola and Peter Favre both said. The director needs to be very encouraging and reassuring, be willing to share the helplessness and pain. Convinced that any experience can be creative or destructive, he or she will be ready to encourage at times of fear, discouragement, disappointment. Encouragement is, perhaps, the most significant help that the director gives.

Linked with this is enlightenment, so that the directee sees what is happening, discovers the hidden God or new ways of praying. Enlightenment does not mean telling the directee what to do, playing God in his or her life, imposing the director's experience on the directee. The director should be a mirror for the directee to look into, a sounding board to bounce off ideas, a companion of hope and light.

In the following model interview we note the encouragement and enlightenment offered by the director:

Director: You have been telling me about your prayer with Jesus in the garden, and said you were disappointed. What were you disappointed about, Mary?

Retreatant: I was just fighting distractions all the time. I couldn't stay with the Lord, and I wanted to comfort him.

Director: You really wanted to comfort him? That desire is surely from the Spirit, wouldn't you say?

Retreatant: I suppose so, yet I really feel I let him down.

Director: Do you think the Lord is disappointed in you?

Retreatant: Well, I didn't do much for him.

Director: Have you asked the Lord whether he was disappointed in you?

Retreatant: No, but he must be, surely.

Director: Could you go to him and ask him? Only he can tell you. Your disappointment is real and it is important to find out more about it. So speak to him about this feeling of letting him down.

Retreatant: Do you think this will help?

Director: I believe it will. And I also hope you haven't forgotten about that desire to comfort him. That's the result of his power at work in you. Well, talk it over with him.

Retreatant: That's right, I did want to comfort him. So I mustn't be all wrong.

Director: Well, talk it over with him.

Here the director is trying to encourage and bring the retreatant to the Lord. No doubt he or she will discuss at some time the retreatant's concept of prayer, the handling of distractions, and will direct attention to the Lord's experience of pain in the garden. These are areas arising from the interview about which both must seek further enlightenment. The director will have noted how the retreatant tends to focus on the negative and forget the positive. But haste is made slowly.

The Context of Spiritual Direction

The context of spiritual directing varies, and so do the people seeking. There is the spiritual direction proper to a retreat. If the retreat is fully directed, the dialogue will be very much centering on the prayer experiences shared. Of course, there will be references to out-of-retreat life, but usually

the focus is on the retreat prayer. Sometimes the retreat may be “semi-guided,” characterized by one or two talks to the group, and the opportunity to talk with a director. In that context there seems to be less discussion of the individual, distinctive prayer movement, because the situation is not as intense. So in these two retreat contexts we see some variation.

Outside of retreat there may be ongoing spiritual direction, characterized by regular, frequent interviews, extending over a year or longer. This will mean discussion of daily life experiences as well as the prayer experience. Often this means that the director moves into a counselor’s role, although the dialogue about prayer and God should not be overlooked.

There may be the kind of directing relationship that calls for interviews only occasionally during the year, as a kind of “accountability checkup,” with the opportunity to talk over one’s spiritual life made available at these meetings. Finally, a spiritual director may be sought out in a crisis situation, either because he or she is recommended, or because the alternative of seeking a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist is too alarming.

Although the expectancies and the dialogue in all these cases will vary, the spiritual director, qua director, will focus on relationship with God—though in differing ways, according to the directee’s needs.

Gerald G. May summarizes the role of the spiritual director very succinctly when he describes it as “a pointing of direction, a setting of environment, a sharing of oneself, and a deep attentiveness” (*Pilgrimage Home*, p. 23, Paulist Press, 1979).

Some Qualities in a Good Spiritual Director

Ordination, of itself, does not gift the priest to be a spiritual director. Today we are seeing lay people and nuns exercising this ministry, and doing so successfully. What are the qualities needed?

Love

The director must be able to relate to people, to love people, to be free to feel warm to them and to receive their warmth. Morton T. Kelsey in *Caring*, writes well of this and says: “It is impossible for us to love other people unless we listen to them. . . . The kind of listening I am talking about is listening which does not judge or evaluate” (p. 67). It is the quality of the listening that shows whether you are loving the person, deeply interested in him or her, listening to know and accept, not to change, judge, evaluate. It is a listening that respects the distance and the difference of the other, a listening that patiently waits for the revelation of the other, a listening that can lay aside personal agendas because of the absorption in the other. It is a warmth, however, that is not possessive, that allows the other the freedom to be his or her own person.

In *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Barry and Connolly speak of the need to have a “surplus of warmth” (pp. 126—130). They mean “a love for a

variety of people, warts and moles and all,” which is characterized by commitment, the effort to understand, and spontaneity. The director must be free to be his or her own person, not seeking to satisfy emotional needs through the directee, nor imposing agenda or experiences on the other. Nor must the director lay false expectations on himself or herself by trying to play God in the other’s life as a solver of that person’s problems. He or she listens so fully that he or she “enters into the skin” of the directee. This demands generous love because it leads into compassion which is shared helplessness, shared pain. It means being able to stay with the other no matter how hard that is, losing yourself in the other. Clearly we are not talking here of sentimental attachments, but love as understood by St. Ignatius in the *Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love*. Sensitivity, courtesy, gentleness, reverence, patience are all qualities that fill out the love the director must have for the directee, plus a willingness to accept silence. He/she is responsible *to* the directee, but not *for*.

The quality of our responding reveals how we are listening. If there is no response, the directee may not have the sense of being heard, and, as Gerard Egan says, that is “hollow listening.” Listening with the head only leads to judgment and just as the directee wants to be heard, so also does he or she want to be accepted, not judged. “Don’t worry about that. You have no need to feel that way,” as first responses are passing judgments, and reflections on the directee. What he or she wants is to be *accepted*, and this is experienced through responding with understanding. “I see that is very worrying. You must have been very hurt,” and so forth. As the director listens with full absorption, the understanding will deepen, so that the sources of the feelings will be seen. When judged opportune, the director may communicate that deeper understanding.

The goal of listening is *total listening*, responding from the heart, not merely from the head. Gerard Egan writes well of listening and responding in *You and Me*. Total listening means listening with one’s eyes, ears, head, heart so that one is lost in the other. It is contemplative listening, which hears what is *not* said, which hears the tone of anxiety, sees the expression of joy or worry, enjoys being with the other, and communicates that: “You are the only person in my world just now.”

The genuine love we are speaking of is marked by utter honesty and openness with the directee. So there can be no pretense, no bluffing by the director, but a transparent, open love. Brutal harshness and severity have no part in this honest trust, even though sometimes they are mistaken for it. If there is to be confrontation it is important that this come from love, and be seen to come from love. Setting up “win/ lose” situations comes from a desire to be right, not from love. As the directee experiences being trusted by the director, so he or she is encouraged to trust the director with that precious “hidden self” that Paul writes of in Ephesians 3:14—21. All this will facilitate a genuine encounter between persons and with God, not just a

mask meeting a mask. Sensitivity to the mystery of the other is the soil in which intimate relationships grow. The director needs to be comfortable with mystery, whether it is the mystery of God, of the directee, of self, so that there is this growth in sensitivity. There must, then, be patience to wait on the directee, on God. It is a great temptation to push sometimes, and this must be resisted, for, as Ignatius Loyola teaches, the Lord chooses to deal directly with the soul, and the director must not get in the way of this meeting. Simone Weil spoke of “waiting patiently, but with expectation, for the coming of the Lord.” As the example of the midwife reminds us, it is only the mother who pushes, not the midwife.

Dr. Jack Dominian describes this love as sustaining, healing and promoting growth (*Tablet*, 14 May, 1983). Total listening is sustaining because it conveys to the other that you care. A responding that clarifies, confirms and affirms the goodness of the other, not reinforcing the badness they see, and which can help open the directee to God’s personal love, is healing and promotes growth. There is little growth without pain. Wounded people can be frightened by the love offered and may lash out in their fear, challenging the sincerity of the love offered. The director must be willing to stay in there, sharing the hurt and the helplessness. That is compassion, shared helplessness, and the director shares in the growth of the directee as they walk together in the mystery of pain and healing. We are all wounded healers if we are close to Christ. Mary could stand by the cross, sharing the helplessness of Jesus, without moving away because she could “do nothing” for him. At times the director’s role is just to be a presence, helping transform helplessness into strong hope, not hopelessness (2 Co 12:7-10).

This can be very difficult and painful, because the more love we bring to a situation, the more vulnerable we are. Peter tried to come between Jesus and his cross because he loved Jesus. Later he learned it was a false kind of love, that was directed more at himself than at Jesus. So, the director may feel deeply the pain of the other and wish to come between the directee and Calvary. Dr. Dominian is not exaggerating when he writes: “For anyone of us to succeed in loving, we have to suffer, and die a thousand deaths. Here is the encounter between grace and nature at its most powerful” (*Tablet* 14 May, 1983, p. 446). Directors who have stayed with directees in their Gethsemanes will agree.

Feelings and Affectivity

The director needs to be aware of the importance of feelings. They are messages to ourselves about ourselves and we are diminished when we do not listen to them. The relationships between the director and directee, as between both and God, are deepened as there is a growing awareness of the feeling responses present, and a sharing of them.

Feelings, by Willard Gaylin, M.D. (Ballantine Books, N.Y.), and *Feeling and Healing Your Emotions*, by Conrad Baars, M.D. (Logos), are helpful books. Baars speaks of humane and utilitarian emotions, directing attention

to the psychic energy emotions release.

Barry and Connolly speak of Anger, Deep Fears, Warmth and Tenderness, and Sexual Feelings, as very strong, deep feelings that people experience. There must be no blaming the other for one's feelings, for feelings are deeply personal and must be personally owned.

So the director encourages the directee to reveal such deep feelings to God also. Some may be prepared to reveal their so-called *good* feelings but not those they judge to be negative, e.g. anger. Or they may be willing to share anger (because it is becoming acceptable) but not strong sexual feelings they might be experiencing. Authentic prayer, though, is not a performance. It is an encounter with God, possible only when I am truly myself.

One should be on guard against an exaggerated emphasis on anger which can be a cover up for less acceptable feelings as, for example, sexual feelings. And it seems to have become rather common for persons to blame parents, school, Church, their religious congregations for their present unacceptable state. Without wishing to deny the influence all these have, I wish to stress that our feelings are our own, and blaming others is both false and harmful. It is a sign of growing maturity when we accept responsibility for our *now* lives.

So often we discover that the feelings that surface in prayer reveal the concept the directee has of God. Hannah Hurnard in *The Hearing Heart* tells that for long she could not pray to Jesus, only to the Father. She was afraid of approaching Jesus lest he ask something hard of her. This would indicate that Jesus seemed to her excessively demanding. She was healed of this distortion, and could then pray to him. So a retreatant might pray to Jesus as God, but not as Man; she feels safe that way because she is frightened of men. Yet that fear is hindering an intimate relationship with Jesus, keeping him distant. Somebody else might pray to a God who is infinitely powerful, holy—and also infinitely distant, impersonal. Could such a person experience that God really cares, is deeply fond of him or her? Perhaps what we see here is a fear of intimacy.

The affectivity of the person includes the will, which besides being an executive faculty, is also a loving faculty. The affective act of the will, "I love you," expresses the basic desire for the well-being, the continued existence, of the beloved.

Besides the will, our affective life also includes our feelings. These are what I call the surface responses—sad, mad, glad, scared.

There is also a deeper level of affectivity where dwells our faith, hope, love, peace, which one is aware of even though sensible "feeling signs" are missing. For example, a directee may speak of aridity in prayer, and yet there is the longing to pray, together with the awareness of an underlying deep peace. When John of the Cross speaks of the signs for moving prayer into contemplation, he is alerting us to these deeper levels of our affectivity.

Discernment

The spiritual director is a walking contradiction, in that he or she is to be

a “competent incompetent” as someone has said. The director must be *incompetent*, because it is God’s work at issue, God’s power that gives the increase (2 Co 12:7—10; 1 Co 2:1—5). So, we must trust in God’s power at work in the director and in the directee, “doing infinitely more than he can ask or imagine” (Ep 3:14—21). This attitude must be continually growing and relied upon.

But the director also must be *competent*, skilled in total listening and in discernment. It is the discernment of spirits that is at the heart of spiritual direction and which ultimately differentiates it from counseling. Ignatius Loyola and Peter Favre were good directors because they were both skilled in discernment. As with them, so with the modern director, this skill is learned by being attentive to one’s own responses—thoughts, feelings, behavior. Reflecting upon these experiences, for instance, the director will begin to observe their beginning, their middle and their end. Thus he or she begins to distinguish movements which are from God, movements authored by self, and movements stemming from forces outside, whether good, neutral or bad. The spiritual director learns from the movements in his or her own life the skills of discernment. Rarely are things black and white. Sifting the good and the bad, the wheat and the tares, is a gift from the Spirit.

The matter for discernment is the actual experiences revealed by the directee. Together, the director and directee prayerfully reflect upon these experiences to distinguish what is God-wards from what is not. The directee, for example, may speak of a “peace-filled prayer.” Not all peace, however is from the Good Spirit. Some is the result of achievement, some the accompaniment of a tranquil environment, some is the false peace of complacency, and some truly is God’s gift. What is this “peace” before us now? What are its fruits, and is it enduring? How does it measure with the packet group of Galatians 5:22-24? Humbly, patiently, both director and directee wait upon the Spirit to reveal the truth.

Perhaps disappointment is revealed in a session with the director. “Whom are you disappointed in? What are you disappointed about?” Following through on the answers offered can be richly rewarding, and can point the way in which the Spirit is guiding the directee.

There are many writings about the discernment of spirits to help the director. A good knowledge of the Rules given in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola is most helpful. Jules Toner has published a Commentary on these Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. This is the fullest and deepest treatment I have read. Chapter 10 of Pousset’s *Life in Faith and Freedom*, Michael Buckley in the *Way Supplement* 20, Harvey Egan in “The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon,” the *Memoriale* of Blessed Peter Favre (*Way Supplement* 35), John English’s *Spiritual Freedom*, Hugo Rahner’s *Ignatius the Theologian*, are all other good sources. It is by study and especially by reflection on one’s own experiences that competence in this field is acquired.

Discerning the Prayer

It is above all with the discerning of the directee’s prayer that the direc-

tor must be concerned. Yet there can be a reluctance to do this, to be busy instead with problem solving and counseling. This reluctance may spring from the director's neglect of discerning his or her own prayer, or the fruit of a static spirituality that is resisting growth. It may be that the director is not well-read in the classic writings and, like a doctor who has neglected reading, the director hesitates to enter into this "specialist" field. Yet a true spiritual director must walk with the directee, acting as a sounding board for the prayer experiences, guiding, encouraging, supporting, challenging.

To speak generally about prayer is not so difficult, but it is not easy to reveal to another the intimacy of one's relationship with God. Until the directee knows that the director truly cares and reverently respects that relationship, there cannot be deep sharing. The director must wait patiently for that barrier to be removed. In a retreat, for example, the retreatant may describe a prayer period like this: "I was praying about Jesus calling Peter in Luke 5. The scene was vivid and I saw Jesus enter Peter's boat and speak to the crowd. And then I watched as the miracle happened. It was a good experience."

The account is general, and speaks mostly of what the retreatant did. There is nothing about the relationship between the retreatant and Jesus. It may well be that the retreatant is unable to trust the director with that yet. Or it may be that this really is the way the retreatant prays. In either case the director must remember what he or she has been told, and wait. It is a mistake to rush in to explore *too soon*. If you ask too many questions, you will reflect more on your own behavior. "What" questions which reveal the experience allow the retreatant to stay with the depth of the experience. "Why" questions take the experience into the head and may stop the unfolding of the experience, or prevent the retreatant from staying with the affectivity known in the prayer.

When the director judges it is opportune to journey into the prayer with the retreatant, i.e., when there is evidence of being trusted, then is the time to explore more deeply into the prayer experience. I believe it is helpful to direct from the strengths of the directee and not initially, at any rate, from weaknesses. Compare these two very different approaches.

Director: "Your prayer seems to be very much on the level of what you did. I don't see any evidence of your relationship with the Lord. It all seems very vague and general. Why are you so distant from the Lord?"

Directee: "I didn't think I was distant from the Lord."

Director: "Well, you don't tell me anything about how close you are."

Directee: "I don't know what to say. You seem disappointed in me."

Director: "I'm not disappointed in you. All I want to do is help you."

The directee has picked up the attack and is defensive. The director has assumed that the directee *can* talk about the relationship, about intimacy, and has been drawn into a debate.

The above, of course, is a caricature intended to highlight mistakes. Let

us look at another response to the same prayer account.

Director: "Joan, I'm glad your prayer experience was good. Do you think you could tell me a little more about it? I'd really like to know what you found good, or in what way you felt good."

Directee: "I don't know. It just seemed to make me feel good."

Director: "Was it something in Peter, or something Jesus said or did, that appealed to you?"

Directee: "No, the strange thing is that Peter seemed to disappear."

Director: "Was it just you and Jesus there then?"

Directee: "Yes, that's it. Just me and Jesus."

Director: "And that made you feel good? Was it being alone with Jesus?"

Directee: "Yes, and I was really surprised."

Director: "What surprised you, Joan?"

Directee: "It's never happened before, at least not like this. I never expected him to be so caring of me."

Director: "I can see that experiencing the love of the Lord like that must have been a good experience. You might find it helpful to stay for a while with that. Something like Psalm 139 or Isaiah 43 might be helpful."

Here the director begins from the strength of the directee, and tries to help her expand on it. He or she invites intimacy by sharing feelings and care, and keeps responding to what the directee says, not to what she does not say. Later on in the relationship there may be challenge, but not yet. Just now the director keeps with the Lord. The director shares of self only insofar as it helps the directee, avoiding the twin traps of either being aloof and impersonal or dominating with one's own experience.

It is very helpful for the directee and the director to know where the focus of attention was during prayer. Is the directee contemplating the relationship between self and ideal self? This is not prayer, but harmful introspection. Is the focus on other people in the scene or is it on Jesus? Is it just on Jesus, on me, on Jesus and me? The answers reflect different degrees of intimacy.

It is important to know how the retreatant feels at the end of the prayer. Observe this exchange:

Director: "How did you feel when the prayer ended, Bill?"

Directee: "I felt a bit disappointed."

Director: "Whom were you disappointed in, Bill?"

Directee: "Me, I suppose."

Director: "You just suppose it was you?"

Directee: "Well it couldn't be God, could it?"

Director: "I don't see why not."

Directee: "But God loves me."

Director: "Yes, that's true. So perhaps we should try to see what you were disappointed about."

Directee: "I just felt a bit flat."

Director: "In what sense, flat, Bill? Tired?"

Directee: "No, not tired, almost as though I had been let down."

Director: "That God had let you down?"

Directee: "Yes. I'd really tried at this prayer and he seemed a bit hard to please. It was only a flash, and I quickly put it aside."

Director: "Do you think you could reveal this 'flat feeling' to the Lord?"

Notice that the director is helping the retreatant explore the disappointment. As spiritual director, his aim is to guide the directee to honest sharing with the Lord. There are signs of self-dissatisfaction in this interview, and also a distorted image of God. But the director does not go down these paths too soon, keeping precisely to the implied contract to be "God's usher." Sudden, spontaneous reactions are so important as break-throughs to behind the mask. If the directee is meeting the Lord, the director will allow the Lord first say, and only later may there be further exploration.

The director must not be drawn into the quicksands of guilt feelings or anger. The question always at issue is simply: What is this doing to the person's life, to his relationship with God, with others, with self?

As Karen Horney says, we should look to see if we are moving from, to, or against others. Thus the director will note the movement in the prayer: Is it to, from, or against God?

It is easy to see prayer as just a performance, like a well-written homily or lesson, a well-played piano recital. Once that attitude takes hold, the directee is in the grip of the semi-Pelagianism of the Avis Rent-a-Car school of spirituality: "We try harder." Prayer, however, is not a performance but an encounter with God. Consider this dialogue:

Directee: "I'm afraid I've got nothing good to report today."

Director: "The day was pretty heavy, was it?"

Directee: "Yes. No matter what I did, nothing seemed to jell."

Director: "You really put in plenty of effort, I gather. Must have been frustrating."

Directee: "It sure was. I took the psalm you suggested, Psalm 63. And I think I did all the right things. But my mind was all over the place. And I found it hard to keep still, too."

Director: "I am wondering whether Psalm 63 fitted where you and the Lord were."

Directee: "Well I thought it would be really good, as it's a favorite psalm of mine. So I was really looking forward to the prayer session."

Director: "But it turned out to be a bit of a shambles."

Let us pause to see the attitudes that are being revealed.

"I'm afraid that I've nothing good to report today." Is the implication that the director is only interested in good reports? The *performance* by the retreatant seems to be the focus. There is no mention of the Lord. Pertinent questions to

ponder might be: Does the retreatant see prayer as a performance, not as an encounter? Does the retreatant measure prayer by consolations received? Is the retreatant therefore unwittingly seeking the consolations of God, and not the God of consolations, in prayer? Again, control is being revealed.

It may not be possible, nor even advisable, to check out all these questions in this interview, but they must be remembered. Here is one avenue the director might decide to walk along.

Director: "But it turned out to be a bit of a shambles."

Directee: "You can say that again."

Director: "You told *me* it was frustrating. Can you tell the Lord that?"

Directee: "What do you mean? I don't understand."

Director: "What do you mean? I don't understand."

Directee: "But he knows how I feel. He's God, isn't he?"

Director: "Yes, that's true. But I'm wondering whether *you* can tell him."

Directee: I suppose I could, but what's the good, if he knows already."

Director: "It may help your relationship with him."

Directee: "How can it do that?"

Director: "Well you were able to tell me. That showed a lot of trust, I think, and I appreciated it. You were really open with me."

Directee: "Well you're here, I can see you. But God's not like that."

Director: "He's a long way away, is he?"

Directee: "He certainly was in that prayer time."

Director: "How does it make you feel when he's so distant?"

Directee: "It's like when I really wanted my father and he was never around."

Director: "That must have been lonely. Were you able to tell your father you missed him?"

Directee: "Not really. He was a shy sort of man and he was working so hard to support the family, a big family."

Director: "Must have been a really good man, and I can understand how you wanted him. You've trusted me with all this. How about telling God? Give him the chance to let you know whether he cares or not. Would you like to try?"

Directee: "O.K. What do I do? Just tell him?"

Director: "Yes, that's right. Just tell him how you feel when he is distant."

The director has stayed with the retreatant, despite the resistance shown. It is a good sign when there is resistance because it shows that something rather deep is being touched. The human heart longs for intimacy and at the same time is often afraid of it. By staying with the retreatant, the director learns about the other relationship, with the father, which could be influencing the retreatant's relationship with God. The directing, however, does not pursue that point yet. Rather the director keeps with the retreatant's relationship with God, moving him or her towards him. The information,

however, is stored up, possibly to be discussed later.

Spiritual direction is a very rewarding work. No two people are the same, and their lives in the Spirit are never identical. The director becomes amazed at the varied activities of the Spirit, and at the power of God's love witnessed in people. He or she will learn from everyone. To be invited into the intimacy of another person's life is to be privileged. To be a sharer in that person's relationship with God is awesome. To be trusted with the other's self, and to witness a rebirth of God in another person's heart is like being present at the miracle of birth. I end by quoting again from the *Directory* of 1591:

"It is a sort of birth—a supernatural birth in which pain and travail and involuntary sadness are experienced; these are liable from time to time to torment both parent and offspring and to stifle them, unless a conscientious and experienced midwife is present, and especially light from heaven, and strength and perception from above" (quoted in *Ignatius the Theologian*, p. 140). The consolation of direction is described by Jesus: "A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given birth she forgets the suffering in her joy that a man has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21).

The Three Dimensions of Spiritual Direction

Alice McDowell

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All who are called to spiritual direction, whether as director or seeker, are truly privileged. Few other activities can be more satisfying because spiritual direction involves a wrestling with basic life forces, both human and divine, in close communion with another person.

Spiritual direction seeks primarily to enable the seeker to achieve a deep relationship with or grounding in God and thus to live a life of total freedom, individuality and deep love. This is an awesome and complex process which entails ridding oneself of past psychological injuries and traumas, false ways of thinking and acting, and undue attachment to any person, possession, or spiritual practice. At the same time it encourages and fosters a practice of deep prayer so that one can discover one's deepest self, and thereby find the will of God in one's life.

Some of the effects of spiritual direction coincide with those of psychotherapy but the two processes are different. Simply stated, spiritual direction goes beyond psychotherapy and burrows to the "deepest" level of reality, to the fullness of God. This can bring about wholeness on the "less deep" psychological level provided there are not deep-seated neuroses or psychoses which first need to be healed. Yet more than psychological adjustment is gained because the seeker begins to live the life of God. As a result, all living things who happen to come in contact with such a person are transformed in some way. Put more simply, the goal of psychotherapy is mental adjustment and psy-

chological wholeness whereas the goal of spiritual direction is enlightenment, spiritual communion with God, transcendental liberation or any other term traditionally used to describe this state of being. Consequently, in contrast to psychotherapy, spiritual direction concentrates on the relationship between seeker and God.

While the relationship between the seeker and God is primary in spiritual direction, two other relationships must be strong if the process is to be truly effective. The director must first have a deep relationship with God, and second, there must be a viable and secure spiritual friendship between director and seeker. Only if these three relationships are strong, can spiritual direction proceed effectively.

This article seeks to analyze the intricacies of these three relationships as a way to clarify the dynamics of spiritual direction. From this, several important guidelines will emerge for the director as he or she engages in this privileged work.¹

The Relation Between the Director and God

A close relation between the director and God is an essential ingredient for good spiritual direction. An abundant knowledge of psychotherapeutic or spiritual techniques will remain ineffective if this basic relationship is absent. This closeness with, or grounding in, God has many important ramifications.

To understand the seeker's experiences, the director needs to have this close relationship with God. Obviously, the director must personally and continually be experiencing the dynamics of the spiritual life in order to realize what the seeker is undergoing. This experience includes a profound understanding of the great spiritual writers and the key concepts of his or her religious tradition. But this must go beyond mere intellectual knowledge to one that stems from lived experience. John of the Cross was well aware of the dangers resulting from inexperienced directors and he cites Mt 15:14 in this regard. "If a blind man leads another blind man, both fall into the pit."²

To comment effectively on the seeker's experiences, the director must be so grounded in God that the Holy Spirit is able at crucial moments to speak through him or her. Pat answers to certain questions will not do, nor will following some "usual" routine for specific situations. The director must be open to the Holy Spirit, willing perhaps to give a highly unconventional response to a particular situation. The right words will sometimes spurt out of a good director, without conscious thought. At other times, the seeker will note retrospectively how the director's advice on a particular matter really was insightful only to have the director fail to remember saying such a thing. Surely these are instances where the Holy Spirit has been allowed to work.

Openness to the Holy Spirit will cause the director's actions to vary from session to session. He or she might appear one time to be a stern taskmaster and at another, a loving, supportive person. Often the director is unaware of these seeming changes in personality. A simple but forceful declarative sentence can

at times be so appropriate that it rips through the center of the seeker's being like a sword, even as the director is unaware of his or her words having such an effect.

A close relationship with God is also necessary if the director is to serve as a model for the seeker. Ideally, in looking at the director, the seeker understands what it is like to live the spiritual life more fully. The director's interior joy and peace, effortlessness in movement, powerful presence, dynamism, and effective modes of action can provide the hope and determination the directed one needs to persevere in traveling the spiritual path.

A strong grounding in God also enables the director to become a powerful and positive force-field, which can strongly influence the directed one. Frequently in the spiritual journey, an individual for a variety of reasons "gets off the path," i.e., is no longer centered in God. Spiritual growth thus comes to a halt; there is a feeling of disorientation and dissonance with one's surroundings. Yet merely being in the presence of an individual grounded in the life of God can put a person on track once again. It is as though the peaceful vibration of the seeker has gone awry and all he or she needs to become harmonious again is to come in contact with a force-field of that same peaceful vibration. Nothing really needs to be said; the presence of the other is sufficient. There are other ways that an individual can become re-centered. A day spent in prayer is often quite effective. But in the early stages of the spiritual journey, the quickest and most effective method is often just to be in the presence of the director. Obviously, this will not work if the director is disoriented himself. The director must be a channel of peace and grace for the process to be effective.

One of the director's main functions is to be an "intercessor in the night,"³ i.e., to pray for the seeker in quiet moments. The famous spiritual director, Baron von Hügel, took this task so seriously that he would pray for the persons he directed three times a day.⁴ For others, nighttime is often the only chance a director has to pray for those whom he or she is directing. A director may suddenly awaken and realize the need to pray for a certain person. To the outsider, such intercessory prayer would seem to have little effect, but this is not true. There are times when the seeker will feel this direct intervention of the director. A problem or impasse will suddenly be cleared hours after the director has prayed about it. At other times when one is undergoing a difficult situation, one can "feel" the added God-filled energy of the director. Whatever the particular dynamics, the director, by being closer to the all powerful and loving God, is able through intercession, to help the seeker. Furthermore, the greater this spiritual depth, the more frequent is the effectiveness of such prayer.

Additionally the director needs to have a grounding in God or Christ so as to maintain equilibrium in the face of the psychic and spiritual forces that can and should be released if the direction is to be effective. As will be discussed below, the director must risk his or her self in encounter with the seeker and yet not become involved in the ploys and emotional turmoil of the seeker. The director must thus have partially understood his or her own human failings and

desires so as not to be trapped by them during this exchange. A groundedness in God enables the director to take essential risks with the seeker without getting thrown off his own course.

Additionally, in rising above the ploys and turmoil of the seeker, the director serves effectively as a mirror, enabling the directed one to see these actions for what they truly are. Armed with this increased clarity, the seeker is then better able to understand the dynamics of his relationship with others as well and thus able to improve upon them.

In all aspects of spiritual direction, therefore—in understanding and commenting on the seeker's experiences, in being a model of inspiration, in acting as a force-field that helps center the seeker again, in entering into an authentic and thus transformative relationship with the seeker—the director's relation to God is crucial. Yet, this point is often underplayed. Directors frequently think they are doing the most good by spending the most hours directing or serving the largest numbers. This creates a great deal of human action but little God action, i.e., little effective action. Doing so comes at the expense of needed time that could be better spent in solitude and prayer, revitalizing the director's own relationship to God. If a director has been occupied with many duties even for only a few days' time and has not had sufficient time for deep prayer and centeredness, he would serve the seeker better by canceling the appointment and spending that time alone in prayer.

The Relation Between Director and Seeker

Another essential ingredient in the process of spiritual direction is a special friendship between director and seeker. Ideally the two should unite at the deepest dimensions of each one's being, the place where God dwells. So much of human striving is aimed at achieving this kind of closeness with another, yet so often these efforts fail. Spiritual direction is one area in which true communion can succeed. Success is possible because of the abundant graces given to both individuals and because both guide and seeker focus primarily on God rather than each other.

However, the relationship between the director and seeker is not a friendship in the usual sense of the term. Generally, they share few spheres other than the deepest dimensions of their beings. They do not usually play tennis, go to the movies, have dinner with each other, or chat about topics of ordinary interest. Avoiding such activities, in fact, helps the two when they do meet. Then they can focus on this deepest dimension that unites them more quickly and clearly. The relationship is not confused by other areas of interaction and so it can operate more effectively.

Moreover, the friendship between the director and seeker is unlike a typical friendship because it is primarily concerned with the needs of one, not both, on his journey to God. Even when two individuals serve as directors for each other, separate time must be allotted for each in turn to be the center of concern.

In some aspects, the director-seeker relationship is more like one of parent-child or teacher-student, than friend-friend. Presumably a person will choose a director who has more wisdom, experience and spiritual depth so that the seeker will be aided in his quest for a deeper life with God. At the same time, there can be danger in stressing the superior-inferior, knowing-unknowing relationship between director and seeker.⁵ Both might too easily get the impression that the director is a source of “information” that needs to be given to the seeker, that the one has the “answers” to the other’s problems. The director is thus erroneously seen as the great teacher, healer, magician. Although the director gives help and insight, only God, who resides in the core of the soul, can give true answers. The director’s primary role is to listen with the seeker to what God is saying. As Thomas Merton notes:

[A]s soon as you think of yourself as teaching contemplation to others, you make [a] mistake. No one teaches contemplation except God, who gives it. The best you can do is write something or say something that will serve as an occasion for someone else to realize what God wants of him.⁶

After deepening his spiritual life, William Richards, a minister and psychologist realized this same idea with respect to psychotherapy.

I no longer view my work as me *doing* therapy to another but rather as *being with* the person; recognizing that a healing process is unfolding, with a trust or love acceptance there and a feeling of being more of a channel for the healing process as opposed to being the mighty healer! I observe that growth, healing, conflict, resolution, greater integration, etc. happen, and I help facilitate it, but I don’t do it or take credit for it.⁷

These words capture the attitude that a spiritual director must have. The director is a privileged witness to the work of God in the seeker, and at best a channel through which God can work, but he or she is not the teacher or healer per se.

Another danger in overly stressing the inequality of guide and seeker is the imbalance it creates between the two in sharing their deepest spiritual dimension. This impedes complete healing and transformation. In an imbalanced relationship the seeker bares his or her deep experiences, conflicts and joys to the director while the director remains mute about his or her own experiences or feelings. This inevitably leads to truncated growth and development for both individuals. Even though the focus of direction is on the seeker, the director must be open and willing to share his deepest experiences if the occasion demands it.

Along these lines, Carl Jung insists that the therapist must risk his whole being as a result of the special encounter with the patient. All preconceived ideas must remain open to challenge; the therapist too must be open to change. Only then will healing take place. Jung likens psychotherapy to the contact of two chemical substances. If there is any reaction, both are transformed.⁸ The essential openness and vulnerability of the therapist can only be achieved by sharing his personhood. Here also is where the experience of the director is so

necessary. As noted before, the director must know the pitfalls of his egocentric desires and needs and be truly grounded in God in order to avoid getting caught up in the anxieties and psychological ploys of the seeker or succumbing to the powerful forces that sometimes are released. He or she must be clear, calm, and God-centered, but simultaneously vulnerable and open to change.

There are a number of other advantages when the director appropriately shares his or her experiences, struggles and insights with the one he directs. It gives the seeker greater insight into the spiritual life and an ability to see the road ahead more clearly. It prevents him from having a distorted, often overglorified idea about greater spirituality, because the deeper struggles as well as the deeper joys are revealed. Additionally, such a sharing enables the seeker to see the human failings and limitations of the director. Such a perception prevents the seeker from putting the director on a pedestal where he, rather than God, is looked up to for answers and consolations. The act of revealing personal struggles and pitfalls can in turn be a great relief to the director who is released from the pressure of living up to the glorified expectations of the directed one.

As a result of the unique nature of spiritual direction with its primary concern for the seeker's path to God, it is easy for both director and seeker to see how much the seeker benefits from the direction process. The reverse also needs to be acknowledged. If the process is working, the director gains help and comfort from the seeker as well. To be a privileged witness to the life of God unfolding in another is truly joyous. Additionally, the seeker's excitement over newly discovered ways of being and acting in the world can remind the guide of similarities in his own spiritual past, thus bringing rejoicing and thanksgiving. At times when the guide is experiencing the inevitable periods of dryness and desolation, the enthusiasm and joy of the seeker can be a true oasis. Alternatively, being present with the seeker during his or her dark nights can, during a time of personal desolation, remind the guide that his life does have meaning and purpose.

The route of the spiritual journey can be visualized as a spiral: one undergoes comparable experiences or tests at deeper and deeper levels. For example, one seeks to maintain a peaceful centeredness at all times. On the more shallow level of the spiral, the journeyer will struggle to maintain such peace during quiet moments of meditation. As he travels deeper, one is asked to maintain this peace or centeredness during manual work; still deeper, in the midst of chaotic noise and deeper still, in the face of life crises, such as the death of a loved one. Often by "coincidence," i.e., by the grace of God, seeker and guide are grappling with the same type of problem, only at a different level. Each one's struggle aids the other. In aiding the seeker through the working of the Holy Spirit, the guide is often giving himself the same advice. This is one of the beautiful aspects of the guide-seeker relationship.

The seeker may also contribute to the growth of the director through his or her uniqueness. Often such personal traits involve strengths and different

approaches to life that need to be developed in the director. For example, the seeker might have greater ease with people, better ability to express deep emotions or a more holistic relation to his body. Such traits can help the director to become more tolerant and whole. During each meeting the director should interiorly ask what message God is trying to convey through the seeker.

In these ways, the seeker truly helps the director. The director must not forget this. He must continually appreciate what the seeker is contributing to his own growth and be willing, when appropriate, to tell him that this is so.

Stress on the sharing and mutual benefit between director and seeker is all a prelude to the key element in this relationship: love for one another. This takes seriously the directive given in the Gospel of John: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12) because only in love can one begin to know God (1 Jn 4:7). Needless to say, coming to know God constitutes the whole process of spiritual direction.

In addition to providing the basis for knowing God, this love enables effective healing and growth to take place. In analyzing the phenomenon of spiritual healing, Lawrence LeShan has observed that the most profound healing occurs when "healer" and "healed one" attempt to unite with each other at the deepest level of their being.⁹ The two individuals enter a relaxed state and meditate on reaching this deep union. No physical energy is transferred in the process; in fact, the two need not be in the same room. There is no thought of healing, only of union in love. Yet, from this union wonderful healings can occur.

This union in love is the most essential element in spiritual direction on the director-seeker level. No amount of helping another, whether it be in giving him important insights into his problems or in spending large amounts of time with him, will really be effective if this basic love is absent. Yet, this is not a sentimental love but is necessarily even harsh at times. It can poke into dark corners of the psyche and bring unknown or forgotten failings to light. It reveals the truth at all costs because only then will the seeker grow. Despite this, such a love includes an acceptance of the individual, including his faults and failings. It also includes an appreciation of his uniqueness and special contribution to the creation of all things. In experiencing the director's unconditional love, the seeker begins to accept himself more fully and to realize God's ultimate love. This gives the seeker courage and confidence to begin to change and grow.

Once in a while this unconditional love might appear impossible because of basic personality clashes, but here again grace operates. Often in these cases, the director receives a love for the person that goes beyond normal human inclinations or capacities. He is given the privilege of seeing into the core of the seeker's soul, thus seeing it as God does. In other words, the director is able to see through the personality quirks, false actions, and emotional turmoil to a basic goodness lying dormant in the soul and awaiting activation. Such deep insight reduces annoying personality differences to trivia. It is similar to a mother's immediate love for her newborn child. The night feedings, soiled dia-

pers and crying jags are unimportant compared with the specialness of this child and the dreams for its greatness.

The love of the seeker for the director has a different set of complicating factors to overcome. A basic dislike for the director would have led one to choose another person in the first place. Moreover, love usually comes easily because the benefit of direction can be felt and appreciated. But this love can be problematic, because it often stems from a wanting and desiring (*eros*) rather than an acceptance and appreciation (*agape*). Such a love can be coercive and manipulative rather than freely given. John of the Cross observes how those directed often want to be favorites of their directors and to become overly intimate with them; they become envious and upset about the director's involvement with others.¹⁰ Part of the progress made on the spiritual path includes a change from *eros* to *agape*, first in the seeker's relation with the director and later in all of his or her relationships.

An unconditional and devoted love is therefore the key to good spiritual direction. It is the soil necessary for both to grow. It must be continually in mind. A director need not worry what he or she is doing for the seeker, what should be asked or discussed, or the like. The director must simply love the other out of a personal love for God. Everything else comes from this.

Relation Between the Seeker and God

The primary purpose of spiritual direction is a development in the relationship between the seeker and God. While the other two relationships must be operating effectively for this one to develop, nevertheless, both guide and seeker focus primarily on this relationship in their discussions and interactions.

The images of midwife, catalyst and privileged witness, which are used to describe the role of the spiritual director, stress the point that the relationship between the seeker and God is of primary importance. A midwife assists in the birth of the baby but is not part of the birth process itself—neither in conception, pregnancy nor delivery. Similarly, a catalyst is a substance that helps speed up a chemical process but in no way directly affects that process. The energized presence of the director quickens the seeker's growth in God without directly interfering with that process. In like vein, a witness is present at an event but does not partake in the event directly.

It is important that both director and seeker keep these images in mind. At appropriate times, the director should remind the seeker that God or Christ is the true director and that the purpose of their meetings is primarily to determine his will for the seeker in a given situation.

The uniqueness of the relationship between the seeker and God must always be respected. Neither the director nor the one directed knows what the final outcome of the seeker's relation with God will be, since each person is called to serve God in a unique way. Each person, once united with God, will be his or her true self. Holiness does not require a uniformity of acting or being, but the freedom to be who one is really called to be, regardless of soci-

ety's dictates. Both director and seeker therefore should not labor under preconceived ideas about how the relationship between God and the seeker will unfold. Obviously there are valid positives as to what this relationship is not. Holiness precludes killing another or going against the basic moral precepts. But the demands that holiness makes on each person are totally unique and cannot be foreseen. Consequently, the director must continually be willing to step back and watch a special process unfold. Too much interference from the director will distort the process or make it nonproductive.

In this light, the director must continually ask the seeker: "What is God calling you to do in this particular situation?" This is not necessarily the same as what either one *thinks* should be done. It is a much more personal response to what God is asking the individual to do, even if this seems to go against everything the seeker has previously been taught. For example, for a while the seeker might need to stop spending a great deal of time helping others, and instead use this time for developing his relationship with God through prayer. As long as the seeker is true to his conscience and not committing any flagrant immoralities, he should be free to explore many ways of acting and being.

Consequently, the director must respect God's timetable for the seeker's spiritual growth. At times the seeker will not be ready to forge ahead even though all indications to the director suggest that this is what is needed. Several months of seeming stagnation or even sliding backwards might prove essential. Alternatively, the seeker might need and should be allowed to travel down what the director knows are dead-end streets, perhaps in order to gain a more complete understanding of what not to do! Such false paths might include the pursuit of a relationship or work situation which will only lead to frustration, sorrow, and little growth. Sometimes, a person may go so far in spiritual direction and then seem to renounce the whole spiritual life, its prayer and its purgation, for a number of years before resuming the spiritual journey once again. A director should not become discouraged in these developments for they often belong to God's greater wisdom and understanding for the growth of the individual. Perhaps more importantly, just as the director should not be discouraged about supposed "failures" neither should he take personal credit for the "successes." He or she can only derive satisfaction at having been a timely catalyst in an awesome process.

The whole thrust of spiritual direction is to enable the relationship between the seeker and God to develop to a fullness in which the human director is no longer, or rarely, needed. In the beginning, a director is needed to help the seeker differentiate a path that God is indicating from one which springs from the seeker's own imagination or other, less holistic forces raging within the self. Stated another way, the director helps discern the will of the deeper self from the more superficial levels of the psyche. Classically this is known as the discernment of spirits. With help from the director, the seeker begins to know experientially which force or voice is that of the deeper self, i.e., the will of God. In other words, the director helps the seeker sharpen his or her listening and

discerning faculties. Similarly, the seeker learns in time, without needing to see the director, how to re-center on God after circumstances have thrown him or her astray. The movement, therefore, in spiritual direction is from a budding relation with God that needs assistance and interpretation to a fuller, more direct one that requires little or no mediation.

One is never at a point where one no longer needs guidance. But development implies that guidance comes less frequently through the director. The sources of such subsequent guidance vary with the individual. It could be through a spiritual community, a reading from Scripture, the word of a child or numerous other sources. It is not that guidance might not previously have come in these ways; it is only that the seeker was not sufficiently educated or balanced to be able to interpret properly the signs they provided. There also can be development in this guidance as the seeker progresses. He or she begins to see that God is directly giving a series of “lectures” on a particular topic. These “lessons” will come through a clustering of insights gained in meditation, dreams, a problem that someone else describes, a magazine article that he or she happens to read at this time and so forth. After this topic is exhausted, another one is “chosen” for the seeker’s edification.

Additionally the seeker receives insights into the essence of his or her religious tradition. For example, the Christian becomes more and more aware of the presence of Christ in his or her life. Such a seeker begins to experience deeply the peace of Christ that can best be described in Taoist and Buddhist terms as *wu-wei* (not doing), “no-thingness or thusness”; or the suffering of Christ for those not yet liberated; or the joy of the resurrected Christ as the bonds of death are overcome and the whole cosmos is transformed. Such flashes of insight and deep awareness can never be given through any external guide.

With regard to the director’s attitude towards the seeker’s relationship to God, the metaphor of a parent helping a child to walk is appropriate. At first the child is heavily dependent on the parent to provide steady guidance. But the parent’s whole focus and effort is aimed at teaching the child to walk alone. Only then can running, hiking or dancing become feasible. As Baron von Hügel so aptly states, “The golden rule is to help those we love to escape from us.”¹¹

Conclusion

Given the centrality of these three relationships, the process of spiritual direction might appear to be overly complex. How is one able to keep in mind all the points discussed when actually directing another? Even more, are there not inherent contradictions? The relationship between guide and seeker demands a deep bonding and a transformation of both persons; but at the same time the guide is asked to remain on the side and to let the relationship between the seeker and God develop with little personal interference. Other differences could be noted. But these contrasts need to be held in tension with one another for completeness and fullness. The three relationships must all be operative and complementary for the direction process to be truly effective.

While the process of spiritual direction is complex, its mode of action can nevertheless be reduced to three basic guidelines for the director. The director must: be as grounded in God as possible; love the seeker unconditionally; and respect the seeker's unique freedom by standing aside and letting the relation between God and him unfold in all its fullness. The third guideline is actually a corollary of the second since unconditional love requires a respect for the loved one's individual growth and freedom. Thus, these guidelines come remarkably close to the two basic commandments Jesus taught: "You shall love God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:36-39). Although this sounds very simple, it is nevertheless difficult to practice. But it is precisely in following these two "simple" commandments that spiritual direction can truly accomplish its goals.

NOTES

¹ Most of the material for this article comes from my own experiences as both director and seeker. I am particularly indebted to my director, Father John De Socio for many insights into the process of spiritual direction. I would also like to thank Chalmers MacCormick and Hugo Timer for their helpful comments and criticisms.

² John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1958), p. 255. '.

³ This is a term used by Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., in his lecture, "The Spiritual Father: The Christian Teacher of Prayer," Conference on Contemplation and Modern Society, December 5, 1978.

⁴ Douglas V. Steere, *Spiritual Counsel and Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 12.

⁵ Some forms of spiritual direction do greatly emphasize the unequal relationship between director and seeker. The director is sometimes experienced as the awesome, powerful one who reflects the awe and power of God. The guru in the Hindu tradition come closest to this model of spiritual direction, and it is reflected to a lesser extent in the Freudian analyst. Basically the seeker becomes clear of attachments and ego desires in his or her devotion and obedience to the powerful and totally authoritative director. However, the task of becoming detached from such a director understandably becomes very difficult. Furthermore, to be effective, this model of spiritual direction requires a living saint or avatar and such persons are not readily available!

⁶ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 271.

⁷ Personal interview, February 7, 1977.

⁸ C.G. Jung, "Psychology of the Transference," *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, edited by Violet Staub de Laszlo (New York: Modern Library, 1959), p. 401.

⁹ Lawrence LeShan, *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist* (New York: Viking Press, 1966, 1973, 1974), pp. 106-107.

¹⁰ John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1959), p. 41.

¹¹ Steere, p. 12.

Models of Spiritual Direction

David L. Fleming, S.J.

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Religious men and women today often find themselves in deep disagreement about the role of spiritual direction in their lives. The basic problem lies often enough in the inability to distinguish the various ways of understanding spiritual direction which have been developed in the Christian tradition.

A. Models of Spiritual Direction

Inspired by Father Avery Dulles' book, *Models of the Church*, I would like to propose a similar approach to be used to better our understanding of spiritual direction. Dulles carefully makes the case that *church* has no single comprehensive definition, but as contemporary theology views it, *church* is in need of many models held simultaneously to gain a more adequate understanding. In a similar way, I believe that we will come to a far richer appreciation of spiritual direction if we consider various models which have tried to capture what it is and how it works.

The advantage of models in understanding spiritual direction, just as in working with the notion of *church*, arises out of the necessary obscurities of religious language and the area of religious experience. Spiritual direction deals with an ultimate level of religious mystery of a God and man love-relationship. As a result, our religious language should be looked upon as forming models because it can only approximate the object which it is trying to grasp. Whenever we use a model conception, we break the illusion that we are actually holding the infinite within the finite structures of our language. Moreover, a variety of models opens up the possibility of our not getting fixed

upon any particular one and taking it as an idol. At the same time, through a variety of models we will more easily allow for the greater expression of the subjective element which is at the core of all religious experience.

I will propose, then, five models of spiritual direction that are found in our Christian heritage. Spiritual direction can come in a group setting such as faith-sharing groups, small group discussions, or review-of-life groups. But here I will propose five models that deal only with personal spiritual direction, that is, one director with one being directed. For personal direction holds a privileged place in our tradition, and group activity does not eliminate its value or its need. I do not pretend that five models form an exhaustive list, but I think that it covers a helpful spectrum of ideas about spiritual direction as it has come to be understood and practiced in the Church. The five models I have chosen are: 1) direction as institutionalized; 2) direction as interpersonal relationship; 3) direction as charismatic; 4) direction as sacramental and 5) direction as incarnational. I will describe briefly spiritual direction as understood in each of these models, touching somewhat on both the strengths of the model and the weaknesses. In trying to identify each clearly, I face the risk of caricaturing, but that is not my intention. All models should be valued and respected.

1) *Direction as Institutionalized*

Spiritual direction is institutionalized in the functions of the novice director, the designated spiritual director of a seminary, the tertian director, and sometimes the superior, especially as understood in the original role of the abbot or in the Ignatian idea of a superior. Direction in this model is carried out particularly by instructing in the spiritual and religious life. Spiritual direction is considered in terms of formation; it has a molding role, and so it connotes a certain control over a person's life development. Oftentimes direction in this model exercises a judgmental role because candidates for religious life or for the priesthood must be declared fit or not fit and so accepted or rejected. Spiritual direction in this designated job-form plays an important part in the Church today, just as it has in past centuries.

Among the advantages of this model, the clarity of formation is assured, because the necessary instruction about spiritual development is not left to chance. Definite goals and some set means are a part of the direction exchange. In this model, we find a certain control over the competency of the director since the "job" of direction was assigned usually by superiors who have judged a person's fittingness for such a role. From the letters of St. Paul giving direction to communities and to individuals, through the early models of direction by the desert fathers, we find deep in Christian tradition the bases of this institutional model.

But a number of weaknesses are also apparent in this model. Obviously freedom is minimal in setting up the relationship of direction since the one being directed must subject himself to the person whose function it is to ful-

fill the assigned job as director. Direction seems to be more a matter of imposition of life style and spiritual practices than an evoking of personal growth. Direction also appears to be quite limited in time-value, for it covers primarily the formational period or, beyond that, the possible crisis period which needs information or judgment.

2) *Direction as Interpersonal Relationship*

In this model, spiritual direction is defined primarily in terms of a personal relationship—the closer the friendship the better. Direction, then, usually has the aspect of friendly sharing and loving support. While still maintaining the interpersonal basis, this model of direction sometimes makes studied use of psychological techniques, e.g. the transactional analysis methods. Even with the possibility of a certain psychological approach being consciously employed, direction attempts to focus equally upon the interpersonal relationship of the two friends (the one directing and the one directed) and the growth in a life-response to God. Frequently in this model, the two people involved exchange roles of director with each other so that spiritual direction becomes a mutual involvement.

The strengths of this model are evident in the presence of the love, care, and concern which permeate the relationship in all its aspects. As in any friendship, the free gift of self to each other is assured. Self-disclosure with all its dreams, ideals, fears, and disappointments flows very naturally as the friendship continues to deepen. While contemporary attitudes, especially in reaction to the institutional model of direction, favor this kind of approach, historically it also rests on strong evidence from the example of various saints' friendships with each other and from the written correspondence of direction.

When we consider the weaknesses, we note that such a model may over-stress the humanistic and so not allow for the distance between reason and grace, which never perfectly coincide. Even though in one sense friends can speak up honestly and forthrightly to each other, in another sense their lack of distance may blind each other to the very areas which need attention. Sometimes even the best of friends find that they are frozen in speaking about one or other area because of the delicacy of the love relationship between them. Another difficulty arises when psychological techniques enter into the picture too consciously; we may find a good helping relationship, but one which takes very little notice of the presence of God or the dynamism of grace.

3) *Direction as Charismatic*

Spiritual direction in this model finds a basis in the *diakrisis* or *discretio* of St. Paul's grace-gifts within the Body of Christ. Because of the stress upon the special character of this person who is truly a "spiritual discerner," spiritual direction itself is seen as a rarity. St. Teresa of Avila is often quoted in support of this viewpoint because she said that only one person in a thousand is capa-

ble of direction work. Just to make the point more clearly, St. Francis de Sales is cited for his observation that a director may number only one in ten thousand.

Following the biblical image of forgiveness as seventy times seven, both saints are not using modern statistics, but rather they are indicating the special gift which is demanded of the director in spiritual direction work. For spiritual direction as understood here is defined more in terms of insight or infused intuition from God. Direction has an aura of the marvelous about it. The emphasis seems to focus more on the arcane directions which will be given to the person directed—special divine messages which come from the “reading of a soul” by the inspired director.

The strengths of such a view certainly include the great stress made upon the gift-notion of spiritual direction. Direction in this model catches up two people in the atmosphere of the divine, and the process receives its proper emphasis of being more than human technique and human response. It does point up that a “seeing deeper” with the eyes of faith highlights the relationship of direction. There is a certain basis in both the Old and New Testament, and some examples in Christian hagiography to support such a viewpoint.

The weaknesses become apparent in the over-significance attributed to the power of God’s grace—looking for its presence only in the spectacular or the marvelous. It seems to restrict God’s gifts far too much to the extraordinary in the light of human judgment. As a result, spiritual direction itself becomes an extraordinary means in the life of the Church spiritual tradition. But the history of spirituality does not support this conclusion.

4) *Direction as Sacramental*

Spiritual direction has long been seen in terms of a sacramental model because of the confessor-penitent relationship in the sacrament of penance. Because of the sacramental grace of priestly ordination, the priest himself was seen to be a very special instrument of God and to embody the gifts of ministry which we find in the writings of St. Paul. The words which a priest speaks, then, have greater importance than mere human opinion or advice because they are spoken by God’s human representative. More particularly, within the sacrament of penance the priest-confessor often has words of advice or counsel. This context becomes the only true setting of spiritual direction because of the certain *ex opere operato* effect of words spoken within the sacramental encounter. Such counsel within the context of the sacrament takes in, not just the area of sinful tendencies, but all the attitudes and ways of acting which relate to the God-orientation of a person’s life.

The advantages of this model include the emphasis given to a more balanced sense of the sacrament of penance. Confession itself is not a mechanistic forgiveness; it has a human relationship involved between the priest-representative of the Church and the penitent. There is no doubt that God-inspired words of counsel or advice do take place in the sacramental context.

Yet as every priest knows experientially, such words cannot be presumed automatically—one flagrant handicapping of God’s action being the prepared little “sermon” which each penitent, no matter what he may confess, may receive on a particular Saturday confession period. But two human beings, so consciously aware of the special presence of God in the sacramental relationship, are both more readily open to the word of God being spoken and being received. The merit of this viewpoint rests upon a long tradition stemming from the penitential manuals of the Irish monks of the eighth century to the more contemporary confession manuals dating from the seventeenth century in which direction brings a fullness to and finds its proper setting in the sacrament of penance.

The weaknesses of such a model are found in the restrictions which it puts upon spiritual direction itself. Because of the sacramental setting, a priest is the only qualified spiritual director. Direction, then, flows properly from the ministry of priesthood. If other men and women carry on this work, it is only as “secondary” helpers to the priest who gives over to them this function. This viewpoint seems to take for granted that priesthood ministry includes all the ministries to be found within the Church, but this conception has no sound basis in scripture or tradition. Direction in this model also takes on too magical a sense in that whatever is said within the context of the sacrament becomes true spiritual counsel.

5) *Direction as Incarnational*

This model of direction is one that is probably receiving most attention today in the revival of the practice of spiritual direction. The name *incarnational* given to describe it calls a little too ostentatiously to the Christian connotation of God-becoming-man. Spiritual direction takes its place among the many “fleshly” means which make up God’s ordinary way of salvation as understood in Christianity. From Jesus Christ through the Apostles down to our own contemporary Church, we know that God has a design of salvation mediated by our fellowmen. Direction, then, is seen in its ordinariness of one man helping another to clarify and objectify God’s will in his life. At the same time, direction is known to be a relationship of two persons caught up in the presence and power of God in this very ordinary encounter, and so both are aware by faith of the privileged grace-time which direction makes available. Elements which are present in the incarnation of the God-man have their analogous components in the direction relationship. Human preparation, faith, and an openness to the movement of God are necessary, and then a recognition that any true fruition of the direction relationship comes from the Spirit. This model of direction is also properly identified as incarnational in that no aspect of a person’s life is left apart from the direction context, since man as a whole—physically, psychologically, and spiritually—must grow in his response to God’s unique call to him.

The advantages of this model are especially seen in terms of the develop-

ments of our own day. It presents a conceptual notion of direction that is deeply in tune with the whole process of renewal in the Church. It builds upon the richness of contemporary scriptural and theological studies, particularly in the areas of Christology and Ecclesiology. It maintains a sure emphasis on the humanness of this relationship in direction, while still placing the solidity of growth as a God-empowered gift. Direction in this model is an ordinary means of spiritual growth in the embodied spirituality which is Christianity. This way of understanding direction has good foundation in both scripture and tradition since we find God acting through men in giving advice and warning (e.g. Jeremiah), in making a person aware of how to listen to God (e.g. Samuel and Saul), in clarifying and objectifying a response (e.g. David and Nathan), and in instruction (e.g., Ananias and Paul). The example continues in the many volumes of spiritual writings and letters which we have as a legacy from holy men and women in our Catholic history.

The weaknesses of this model arise somewhat from the novelty of its recent re-emphasis. It may too easily be seen as a good human relationship sprinkled over with pious words about God's will. Direction may look so ordinary that the only conclusion to be drawn is that everyone needs it and is capable of profiting from it and just about everyone has the ability to give direction. Then, too, taking in the whole of one's life as the subject-matter seems to leave this model of direction open to a lack of preciseness—no clear understanding of the concerns of direction or the ways of going about it. In a similar way, direction seems to lack clarity about the quality of this spiritual relationship—mixing friendship and distance or professionalism, and ordinariness and the sense of the holy.

B. A Model of Models?

In review, all the models have played and do play an important part in our full understanding of spiritual direction—what it is, who does it, to whom it has value, how to go about it, and so on. What I hope to have shown is that we can understand spiritual direction in various ways (not just *one* right way), and that as a result there are various expectations on the part of the director and the one being directed, various methods of directing, and even different ways of valuing its importance for mature spiritual life.

To try to reduce the various models of spiritual direction to a single one is to lose sight of the incomprehensible richness of religious experience which forms the content of direction. Neither the strengths nor the weaknesses of the various approaches or models are neatly reducible to a single model. Even after describing each model in its purity, we should be aware that a blending often happens in actual practice. What we tend to do is to make one model our pivotal model for adapting and understanding other ways of functioning in spiritual direction. But to hold one model as pivotal is quite different from maintaining that there is only one way of understanding and practicing spiritual direction.

If I were to opt for a pivotal model for our own day, I would choose direction described as incarnational. I believe that it allows for a greater understanding of the continuing importance of spiritual direction, especially for the men and women who have recognized or who are in the process of recognizing the call to specialized ministry roles within the Church. It also more easily allows for the importance of other understandings of direction and other methodologies according to circumstances, though it maintains an adequacy for its own method as a common pattern. Far more work must still be done to gain an appreciation of the richness which we possess in the Christian practice of spiritual direction. Presently, to be able to hold the different models of direction in tension allows us to draw a little closer to a more adequate truth and a more varied beauty which encompass the mystery of spiritual direction ministry.

Spiritual Direction as Pilgrim and Companion

James G. McCready, S.J.

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The following is an essay toward an integration of a range of literature on spiritual direction. It focuses focusing on the image or model of direction which I shall call *pilgrim/companion*. Among the models proposed by David L. Fleming in "Models of Spiritual Direction" (Review for Religious, May, 1975, p. 351), it can be considered as a blending of the two described respectively: "Direction as Interpersonal Relationship" and "Direction as Incarnational." First, in considering the nature and purpose of spiritual direction, a general perspective will be given, then it will be followed by the particular perspective indicated above.

Emphasis needs to be given to the quality of the relationship in spiritual direction whereby the persons involved become sensitive to God's presence, deepen their personal relationship with Christ, and attend to the quiet action of his Spirit in their lives. Religious experience will be the focus of their attention. In other words the focus will be the Lord, not ideas. The method will be conversation related to prayer and the process of discernment associated with prayer. Integral to this will be some form of conversion. The purpose in Pauline terms is to put on the mind and heart of Christ.

Spiritual Direction, in the context of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, involves a special form of interpersonal relationship entered into with a "director" for the purpose of helping the person engaged in the Exercises to be rid of inordinate attachments, and, *after their removal*, to seek and find the will of God in the disposition of his life for salvation. The Exercises are spiritual activities which include vocal and mental prayer, meditation and especially

contemplation of the Scriptures. “Consciousness Exam” might likewise be included among these exercises (see “Annotation 1,” the *Spiritual Exercises*).

The interpersonal relationship is entered into in order to facilitate the “seeking and finding” of a God-given direction to life, including the spiritual development and commitment to which the person is uniquely called. The ensuing dialogue involves the faith commitment of both the person expressing his experience of faith and related discernment, and the “director” sharing the account. It embraces, among other considerations, the affective movements related to the beginning, middle and end of prayer periods. Significantly, with regard to purpose, this is to help in discernment of the action of the Spirit in prayer. The “director” joins with the other in seeking the kingdom of God. He helps the other to be sustained in this seeking with the firm and peaceful conviction that the long road leads to light. In this is found another dimension of purpose: to be a *supportive companion* in fashioning an openness to God’s teaching in prayer and giving a direction to life.

Rather than using the traditional term of “director,” or the longer Ignatian expression “he who gives the Exercises,” we may better understand some of the elements of spiritual direction and the role of the director by reflecting on life as a pilgrimage and likewise on the spiritual life as being “on the way” (see Ac 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9-23; 22:4; 24:14-22). In using the term “companion” for spiritual director and “pilgrim” for the person in direction we more readily acknowledge that the Lord, the director of life’s pilgrimage, does send companions to guide us, yet leaves the pilgrim free to follow the way or not to follow it. In similar fashion the companion needs to reverence the spiritual freedom of the pilgrim. He must do what he can to foster this freedom and the personal responsibility that goes with it. He does not foster dependence on himself but only dependence and trust in the Lord, Jesus, who is The Way.

In their first meeting on the way, and indeed in subsequent stages of their spiritual journey, the companion would do well to ascertain the present stage of the pilgrim’s life, where he is right now. Since “life begins at forty” can apply to the spiritual life, the question might well be: Is the pilgrim at the beginning or middle of his journey to the Lord? The assumption would be that his meeting with a companion, which implies an active seeking out, is indicative that he has not reached the end of spiritual growth. A significant element would be what meaning or direction does he perceive his life to have at present? An emphasis on the “now” is important. Another significant element of the developing relationship is intensive listening by the companion, so that both together may listen effectively to God directing, finding him in what is going on, in the changing moods of the beginning, middle and end of prayer. Both are likewise involved in responding-personally and interpersonally. The presence of the companion will assure the pilgrim that he is not alone. As a further element, he can assure the pilgrim that even when they are separated on the journey, the Lord always remains with him on the way. This pilgrim-way will be marked by long periods of “waiting upon the Lord,” frequently far removed from any hos-

pitabile inn. In such periods the sustaining presence or availability of the companion is of great importance.

Since the God who comes, who is met on the way, is the God who evokes, rather than compels, the companion is likewise called to be “sacrament” to the other: to embody, to manifest in some manner, the abiding presence of Christ in the relationship with the pilgrim. This can be expressed, for example, in loving forgiveness, whether it be sacramental or otherwise. All spiritual movements along the way are movements toward God or away from God. The sacrament of reconciliation, therefore, has a very significant place in the relationship; however, the companion need not be confessor to the pilgrim. Yet the companion, whether confessor or not, may well be the instrument that leads the pilgrim to this hostel.

A constitutive element of spiritual direction and a principal function of the companion, is to question the pilgrim about the spiritual movements which he experiences in affectivity or thought. The questioning is directed towards the objectification of religious experience with the possibility of a deepening of faith and the establishing of constancy in values which are permeated by God. This questioning will be conducted in an understanding and compassionate way by attending to the pilgrim’s strengths rather than prompting him toward a destructive introspection of his weaknesses. From the above it will be apparent that the companion must be someone with whom the pilgrim can be at ease, so that he may be more at home with the Lord. There should be at least some possibility of that triune friendship which involves a deepening relationship with Christ, their mutual and greatest friend.

As they “walk in the Spirit,” the pilgrim and his companion will find themselves in unknown paths. They should not be surprised to find Abraham’s path to be their own, sharing in the experience of moving into ambiguity. This will provide the companion with the opportunity to point out that God works in everything, and that following the road-sign which reads: “To the City of Less Security,” can bring with it the awareness that the special presence of the Spirit can be expected to be found along that way. There will be continued learning for both pilgrim and companion in the recognition of what it is possible to do together. Hopefully, this will mean helping the pilgrim to grow spiritually even in those “accidents of the unforeseeable” which are an inevitable part of the pilgrimage of life. When these accidents evoke an openness to the breath of the Spirit and a trust in the action of grace, there will be a concomitant advance along that usually long road to freedom. A person in the process of being freed is not always a comfortable person to be with; therefore it would be helpful to focus on the action of the Spirit rather than on anxieties. The exercise of a freedom which lets the Lord be Lord will leave a deeper interior peace unshaken.

The ongoing process of discernment, of objectifying and clarifying experience, is integral to spiritual direction. It is usually necessary for the pilgrim and his companion to travel some distance on the way for effective discernment to take place. Decisions are significant steps forward towards God, our “embrac-

ing horizon.” To remove deception as much as possible, it is necessary to avoid any tendency to tilt at every secondary “windmill” along the way. For this reason it is very important that the pilgrim maintain great openness with his companion in whom he can confide on an ongoing basis. When the “enemy of our human nature” is encountered in the course of our spiritual pilgrimage under the appearance of good (see “Annotation 10,” the *Spiritual Exercises*), the companion can help the pilgrim discern the presence of the enemy, so that he may more readily unmask him on other occasions, hopefully before he has been “had.” The companion will also assist by reading or interpreting other experiences of the pilgrim-way, acknowledging that all experiences on the way can be transformed by grace.

The following extracts from the Lucan account of the experiences of the two companions on the road to Emmaus will be helpful in attending to some of the ways in which spiritual direction can take place: “While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Lk 24: vv. 15-16). The Lord does not overwhelm us with his presence. He simply hints at the presence of his Spirit in the experiences relative to spiritual direction. He thereby leaves us free to respond in love or ignore him in the midst of our preoccupations. “And he said to them, ‘What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?’ And they stood still . . .” (v. 17). At times we need to enter into that intent, listening quiet, to attend to the Center, the still point. Luke continues to present a theological context in dramatic dialogue, including that initial lighthearted question: “One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him. ‘Are you the only resident of Jerusalem who does not know the things that went on there these past few days?’ He said to them, ‘What things?’” This may enable us to appreciate those occasions in spiritual direction, or in life’s pilgrimage in general, when a sense of humor is a saving grace. The Lucan résumé of the Good News is then transformed with significance as the Lord says to the companions, and to us: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (vv. 26-27). Likewise in our contemplation of the Scriptures, we need to let the Lord be Lord, be our teacher, be the director.

“So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, ‘Stay with us, . . .’ So he went in to stay with them. . . . And their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (vv. 28-31). In joining with the Lord on the way, and especially after prayer of importunity, we also will be enabled to say: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (v. 32). One of the fruits of the account of our religious experience in the relationship of spiritual direction, which should also include an account of our participation in the prayer of the Church could well be that we more

readily recognize the Lord “at the breaking of bread.” Talking on the way, we find The Way.

As well as talking on the way, the companion may invite the pilgrim to write a pilgrimage “journal.” It is not necessary for the pilgrim to hand over the journal unless he finds it especially helpful to do so. If he communicates the significant entries which record his experiences on the way, this will suffice. In this manner the gradual progress of each stage of the way may be seen while maintaining perspective with the help of the companion, and divergent pathways can likewise be noted. The closer the pilgrim comes to the Lord on the way, the more aware he will become of the paths which lead him away from the Lord. At each consultation on the way, the companion will try not to walk too far ahead of the pilgrim. Otherwise the pilgrim may be tempted to use a “mount” to catch up. Furthermore, he may be tempted to use the “mount” as a guide, as Ignatius did on that celebrated occasion of early discernment with regard to the Moor who shared that stage of his pilgrimage with greater risk than he probably realized.

The companion can also be imaged as a free person who is chosen to be Christ's. He attends to the needs of the other, the pilgrim, with the quiet strength of a servant of the Lord, with that humble power, dignity, and sense of purpose which are the concomitants of such service. In this way the companion is called to be a sacrament, as we mentioned above, a visible sign of the Lord's presence manifesting that the Lord really loves through his relationship with the pilgrim he accompanies. He is alive to the sometimes anguished concerns of the pilgrim. At times he will make a mistake in the discernment process and yet be able to trust that the Lord will make even his weakness to be strength for the pilgrim. By witnessing to the gospel, by sorrowing with the pilgrim sorrowing, rejoicing with the pilgrim rejoicing, yet keeping just sufficient “distance” to be of genuine help, the companion can facilitate that process whereby the pilgrim is helped to help himself, The enterprise can assuredly be said to be “of God,” as both lives become more Christ-like in the process along with the lives of others they touch. The ideal of spiritual direction imaged above reflects something of the relationship proposed in the *Spiritual Exercises*, where the element of service is of great significance.

Now we can ask: How does direction during the Exercises in retreat compare or differ from the ongoing spiritual direction of everyday life? The image of companion-pilgrim still applies. In ongoing spiritual direction, however, the companion will give special attention to the ways in which the pilgrim's prayer flows into relationships with others, whether it be family, friends, or religious community. Positive or negative dimensions of these relationships will be integral parts of the ongoing discernment process. The companion's questioning will also be designed to elicit indications of how prayer life is integrated into the daily demands of the apostolate. The pilgrim-companion relationship, if it is effective, will be that of contemplatives in action and will bear fruit in their

interaction with other contemplatives in action. Ideally, this will mean that even in seemingly diverse apostolates such as the retreat apostolate and the social apostolate, with *effective spiritual direction*, pilgrims and apostles can come together in mutually sustaining common enterprises such as the promotion of justice, in being for others. This is the kind of “rocking of the boat” which can send out ever widening circles of spiritual freedom to the great benefit of the wider community in which we live. The way, whether purgative, illuminative, or unitive, is an ongoing pilgrimage, on land or on the water, with Jesus who personifies the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who sends us companions in his name. In the climate of mutual trust which is essential to spiritual direction there can be the basis for development of a “covenant community” that facilitates reaching out to the wider community in faith. This can be the expected outgrowth of a lived dialogue with the Lord, the sharing in this love evoking a deepening participation in the healing influence and spiritual energizing that flows from creative living of community life focused on the Lord.

Hunger and thirst for God, although not always recognized as such, are among the signs of our times. Response to the need for God can be made in aberrant ways. As the finding and loving of God is experienced in the loving service of neighbor, spiritual direction, as stated above to be a special form of that service, will have as its fruit a participation by the pilgrim in loving service of neighbor according to his unique vocation and gifts. The needs of our times demand the best that can be given in spiritual direction, not only in pointing the way to which the Lord is calling but in being with them as compassionate companions on the way.

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Five models are presented to allow more readily for the expression of the subjective element at the core of religious experience. Acknowledged as not being an exhaustive listing they are: 1) direction as institutionalized; 2) as interpersonal relationship; 3) as charismatic; 4) as sacramental; and 5) as incarnational. While indicating that spiritual direction can be understood in various ways, the author has preference for the incarnational model.

Hanlon, Morgan P., C.P. "The Spiritual Father and The Spiritual Director." *Province Newsletter Supplement*, June, 1975.

A comparative study with an emphasis on "putting on Christ."

John of the Cross. *The Living Flame of Love*, III, 27ff. *The Collected Works*, trans. by K. Kavanaugh, O. Rodriguez. Washington D.C.: I.C.S. Publications, 1973.

A very high ideal is set for the spiritual director. The person being directed is cautioned that for this journey, he will hardly find a guide accomplished as to all his needs. Besides being learned and discreet, a director should also have experience.

Johnston, William, S.J. *The Still Point*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Of the eleven chapters of this work, the following are of special interest: 2) The Christian Mystical Experience, 4) Christian Mysticism: Psychological Structure, 8) Defining Mysticism, 9) Incarnation. These reflections on Zen and Christian mysticism contain many references to *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*, works which the author has translated. Both works reject conceptualization in words like the following: "God can be grasped by love but never by concepts. So less thinking and more loving." Both works are edited, with an introduction, in one volume. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1973.

Kennedy, Eugene C., M.M. "Counseling and Spiritual Direction." *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 1963, pp. 117-123.

The emphasis here is that spiritual direction is effective when there is a genuine interpersonal relationship between the people involved. The quality of the relationship is of far greater importance than any possible techniques. The statement of St. Irenaeus, "The glory of God is in man fully alive," is applied to the spiritual direction relationship.

Orsy, Ladislav, S.J. "Faith and Justice: Some Reflections," *Studies in the Spirituality*, of *Jesuits*, Vol. V11/4 (September 1975) 151-169.

The objective of this study is to arrive at some understanding of the work for earthly justice, in the context of faith, for the community that celebrates the Resurrection. The values inculcated are of consequence for all who are involved in spiritual direction. The mission of justice is principally a mission to heal the mind and heart of man; the mission extends to the change of structures secondarily.

Teresa of Avila, *The Autobiography: The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, tr. & ed. E. Allison Peers. New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1960.

In an unaffected style, St. Teresa treats of the mysterious ways of the Spirit in the context of prayer. She describes the Lord's favors and the need for understanding them. Although her own experience was that of an exalted form of mysticism, she writes with knowledge of those who struggle at the beginning of the ascent of the Mount, of their temptations, the possibilities of deception, and provides wise guidance for their directors.

Wall, Kevin A. "Direction, Spiritual." *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1960. pp. 887-890.

This historical analysis of the development of spiritual direction sees it as a nearly universal phenomenon. This author acknowledges the importance of discernment of spirits. He refers to the great works of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross as inculcating

the necessity of spiritual direction for the renewal of the Church. His treatment of Ignatian discernment presents the “director” as a witness or mediator of divine action. He recalls that Caussade’s estimation of the need of a director was much tempered by his experience, while acknowledging the importance of the practice of spiritual direction, as well as the great contemporary need.

Wright, John H., S.J. “A Discussion on Spiritual Direction.” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. IV/2 (March 1972) 41-51.

Spiritual direction is described here as an interpersonal situation in which one person assists another to develop and come to greater maturity in the life of the spirit, that is, the life of faith, hope, and love. He sees the essential method as conversation. The relationship is referred to as an adult-adult form. Understanding is seen as the fruit of trying to objectify experience, and the very inadequacy of formulation helps in recognition of the mystery involved.

Wulf, Friedrich. “Spiritual Direction.” *Sacramentum Mundi*. 1970, pp. 165-167.

In this article the main tasks of spiritual direction are outlined as follows:

- a) to help the individual to self-knowledge;
- b) to help him to self-acceptance;
- c) to help him to detachment from his own ego;
- d) to help him find the actual will of God.

Respective elements associated with this outline are

- a) receptive listening and humble frankness;
- b) real conversion, since the searcher is to accept self-knowledge gained with the help of another;
- c) striving for the inner attitude of abandonment, resignation or indifference.

This is considered the real aim of spiritual direction, the will of God “for me.” When a man or woman is in harmony with self, he or she is in harmony with God. This also involves carrying the cross, the incalculable mystery associated with self-fulfillment.