Tulsa Deacons Seminar / Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House
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Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction

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One: Where Christian spirituality functions *Every person who comes for spiritual direction or counseling has a worldview, which informs all their experiences and frames the meaning they give to their lives. For instance, at a prayer day in St Louis recently, some Catholic-educated teenagers said that they did not believe in life after death. That disbelief surely shaped what they were willing to do and what they think life is about. How can a guide listen for this?*

Christian spirituality is the experience of those who, guided by the Holy Spirit, respond at some depth to revelation. It requires prayer and reflection and an informed mind. The experience begins in the Church and leads to a deeper belonging to it. For spirituality's context is the Church's view of human life and all of creation. This worldview is handed on in the *story* of creation and salvation; in *symbols* such as the creed, liturgy, art and song; in the *praxis* of Sunday worship, works of mercy, and the great spiritual traditions; and this worldview faces all the *great questions*. In this context, each Christian matures a personal mind and heartset, first of all by reflecting on the Christian responses to the great questions.

The Story. God created all things from nothing and placed humankind over all the other creatures on earth. Humans failed, did wrong, and chaos spread on the earth. God then chose a people and gave them a land and a Law. They, too, failed by worshiping other gods. Then God became human, Jesus of Nazareth, and worked redemption through His blood. God added to His people to fill out the work of redemption, even though they remain sinful. God creates them moment by moment and the Holy Spirit guides the evolution of the Reign of God. We look forward to the moment when all suffering will be wiped away and death will be defeated. Then the people will live enfleshed forever in glory.

The Symbols. First is the Mass and the sharing of His Body and Blood. Church buildings are concrete symbols -- as are statues, icons, books, and bibles. Liturgies are symbols, and many kinds of prayer and song. Some symbols endure for centuries (baptismal water) and some are ephemeral (Lourdes water). Many public actions are symbolic (food banks, pilgrimages). Some are counter-cultural (the Cross) and some acculturated (the St Louis Jesuits' songs). All Christian symbols stand on their own, both growing out of beliefs and hopes and embodying them, and spirituality uses use them to grow in faith and hope.

The Praxis. The Catholic's praxis begins with the seven sacraments in all their complex consequences. It requires regular worship of God who is One and Three, and begins prayer with thanksgiving. The praxis has

been, from the very beginning, inclined to spread the Good News. Catholics try to be people for others, positively constructing their lifeworld, freely giving what they have freely received. Catholics do not sacrifice animals or do voodoo and are skeptical about things like horoscopes. They stay away from orgies (Gal 5:16f) as not of the Holy Spirit, and keep a certain holiness code (not blaspheming or maligning). Spirituality adds interior prayer and other things to this praxis.

The Mind and Heartset. Accepting that worldview, each member of the Body of Christ shapes a personal mindset which fixes the heart first on God and then on loving others. Some Christians remain vague and follow what everyone else thinks and wants; others pray and study. All are confirmed in the freedom of the Children of God. Christians commit to *foundational beliefs* such as that each person's dignity is inviolable and every single person is precious in God's eyes. These are like ideals. They also commit to some *consequent beliefs* that are closer to everyday life: God loves me as I am; whatever comes into my life comes from God. Many have in mind that they have a call, a personal vocation from God. It must be added here that much in a Christian's mindset may come from some other worldview than Christ's. Christian spirituality leads us to examine that constantly, for out of this mindset, Christians develop aims, goals in life, and motivations.

Spiritual Situation ☼ Zachary

You have been meeting with Zachary every month for about six months. He approached you after Mass one day to thank you for your homily. The two of you hit it off well and he asked whether he might come see you sometimes. He'd had spiritual direction before.

Clearly an educated and accomplished man, he does not reveal much about himself. He is about 45, you would guess, and has a devout wife and two grade-school children. You have the impression that he was a kind of diplomat before moving to the city, and you suspect that perhaps he's in one of the intelligence services. He tells almost nothing about his daily life and seems to have no special agenda in his interior life.

You have found your discussions more difficult than you had anticipated. At the beginning, he seemed mainly to want to learn how to "pray better," giving you the impression that he was following Carmelite prayer. When he talked about his prayer, however, he seemed to have remained up in his head. He recounted few feelings or convictions. He typically recounted many ideas that he had had, and spent a lot of time telling about what he'd read in bible studies. He was sometimes spending his time (a half-hour each morning) comparing passages in the synoptics. Once he talked at length about what Jesus had meant when he said, "the Kingdom of heaven is *at hand*."

You had urged that he apply to his own life what Jesus said and did, but he has not mentioned anything very significant. You are wondering what is going on in his life -- in his family and in his work, for instance. You have sometimes used open questions such as "What would that mean to you?" or "Does that tell you anything about where your life is going now?" You have given him passages of scripture that seemed to apply to his own life, such as the one about Jesus and the little children. None of this has helped, and he continues to talk to you as though he were just finished studying a lesson. You are begin-ning to wonder how you can help this person.

Now, in the current session, he announces that he has to tell you something that might cause difficulty. You wait, and he says that he does not believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist.

Reflect: What do you want to know just now about this person? How can you find out?

Presuming you wish to continue helping him, how will you guide him forward?

Two: Worldviewand Motivations. *Without doubt, we shape our actions by our history and in unconscious ways. Without doubt, too, we are moved by conscious ideas and feelings and convictions. More than that, we freely believe some things and choose to be moved by many desires and satisfactions. Consequently, the spiritual guide listens for each one's "mind and heartset," since each person uniquely applies to their life and self the worldview we share in common.*

Many worldviews invite adherents today. Marxism and Islam still win disciples with explicit arguments. Agnostic scientism and Freudianism vaguely seduce the less wise. Each world-view tells the story of human life and the universe. Each has its own symbols, objects, and gestures. Each promotes a praxis -- that is, a comprehensive way of living out the world-view. We just took a very brief glimpse of the Christian worldview. Every worldview sustains characteristic responses to life's great questions aobut who we are, what is going on, and where it's all going.

Through the ages, Christians have posed these questions in various ways. René Voillaume (past president of the Little Brothers of Jesus), for instance, thinks that spirituality requires us to face four questions, perhaps repeatedly, as we go through life: Until about 20, Who am I? Until about 35, What am I to do? Until about 60, Whom am I with? And in the later stages of life, What is this all about? Voillaume felt that each person is drawn by the Spirit to answer them – always within the Church.

Here is another way to pose the great questions, adapted from N. T. Wright (perhaps the greatest New Testament scholar living today).

First, Who are we? Note the *we:* for every one of us before anything else belongs to God's chosen people. Once we were no people, now we are a "chosen race, a kingdom of priests," God's personal possession (1 Pet 1:9). We do not identify ourselves at the surface -- as Americans, middleclass, or Republicans. We find who we are in following The Way of Jesus of Nazareth, enacting the gift of baptismal election.

Second, What's really going on in the world? We see beyond terrorism, politics, and progress, even beyond human history to the evolution of the Reign of God. We acknowledge all of the joys, the sufferings, the cares of humankind but do not believe they come about by chance or luck or fate. As Jesus did, we find the Holy Spirit guiding history. We affirm that what is going on is the divine evolution of the Reign of Christ. We trust that when we do what God hopes, we are co-creating that Reign. That's what's going on.

Third, Then what's wrong? Jesus saw that the Romans and the unwise religious leaders were not the real enemy of God. Satan, the Dark, is the real enemy whom He had to defeat. Our response is abrupt: sin is what's wrong. Almighty God has hopes for a world of peace and plenty, but humankind--whom God wants as lovers--keep refusing to be grateful and grasping whatever we want. We keep on sinning, almost against our wills, and are destined now to die because we cannot fix the chaos we are causing.

Fourth, What can set this straight? Jesus Christ has already set it straight. His Kingdom is already now, but not yet. For while His redeeming act is already done, He has shared with us the fulfillment of that act. In Him, if we accept it, we will find guidance from His Spirit to know the next good action that will further His Reign.

Christian spirituality functions in the whole of a person's life, characterizing not only thoughts and beliefs, but also actions and motivations. Of course, spirituality takes expression in prayer. But it is understood first of all by looking to what we do.

Spiritual Situation ☼ Yolanda

You are advisor to a group of young people (late teens, early 20s). They gather every other week to share and talk and, of course, to eat junk food (you join them!). You set a topic for them and give them a (very little) bit of reading. This week, you've asked them to talk about vocation.

They clear away the notion that the only vocation is to serve in the Church and range on to other topics. A vocation can be to any form of life, however God wishes to have you use your gifts. Your vocation grows from your own gifts, which after all are from the same God who gives you the vocation. Probably, God makes a good match between gifts and vocation. You can make a mistake trying a vocation that God hasn't given you the gifts for. One man tells the story of a cousin who tried a medical career but was dyslexic and not all that bright, so failed.

One of them says that she believes God does not care what she does with her life as long as she does good. Others say yes, but God does have some ideas for you. One volunteers that his father says that you have to follow your vocation or else you'll sin. They go at that pretty hard, not all that clear about how you are both called and free.

After the session, Yolanda hangs around to talk with you. You know her pretty well, aware for instance that she is an honor student with a super brain. She is disturbed. She thinks she wants to be a grade-school teacher in the Catholic school system but her parents are dead set against it. She reminds you that the family is regularly at church and both parents are active in various organizations in their parish. They are good Catholics. How could they oppose what she feels is a clear call from the Lord? It's her vocation, isn't it, not theirs?

She asks you what you think.

Reflect: Does God have hopes for each person? How is a person to know?
How does a personal vocation fit into the Church?

THREE: Ongoing Creation in the Concrete *Children have to believe that God made them. Adults, if they are to be spiritually mature, have to learn that God is making them still. God creates us, not in the abstract, but in our real, concrete selves. No one can have a serious spirituality without this intimate relationship filling their hearts. Apart from this understanding of God the Creator, prayer is likely to remain on the surface or be about something other than God.*

God our Lord, we profess in the Creed as "Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible." The Creed does not make so clear that God is, at every moment of time, our Creator.

St Thomas argued that "God is pure act." Whatever that means for in metaphysicians, for us it means that God is always acting in time and place. It means that when we look for God, we are looking for the One who is doing and acting, not for someone far away and passive. When we find God, we will find an active God doing real things at this time, not the god of nirvana, the All Nothing.

God our Creator acts constantly in each human life. The Church has declared infallibly that God directly and Personally creates each human life in the mother's womb. Not two, but three are involved in each human life's beginning. Parents want a child, perhaps hoping for one or the other, but God has known each person's name from eternity. God chooses the moment and the place of our birth.

God chooses our parents and our siblings and cousins, we do not. God chooses whether we are to be male or female, American or Chinese. God creates us so tall and so stout, of this or that color and ethnic group. In truth, everything about us that we do not choose comes directly from God's hand, because He loves us to be as we are.

God does not stop making us as we grow, either. God gives us talents in language or art or sports, and chooses the cultural influences that shape the worldview we are to share.

The gifts that God gives to each one are not only for the individual, but also for their lifeworld (which is the spatial equivalent of one's lifetime). For as the gifts of an Einstein and of our own grandparents shaped the world we live in, so our own gifts are to shape the world of those whom God gives us to love and to be loved by. This is how God wishes to bring about a world of justice and peace.

We are in truth co-creators of our lifeworld, and even of our selves. For God gives us understanding and freedom, and we are to choose which of our gifts to develop and which to leave aside. In becoming who God wishes us to become, we are also making our lifeworld -- hopefully, the way God wants it to be.

Grandest of all, God gives to each one of us a Personal Vocation -- the thing that God wishes us to do which no one else will or even can do. This personal vocation is a kind of lived dialogue with God, making the self and making the world. As Pope John Paul II used to say, each of us is "unique and unrepeatable." And God loves us as we are.

Spiritual Situation Three: Xavier.

You have known Xavier for a long while. He had gone through the RCIA while you were directing the program, and the two of you hit it off well. Xavier is a serious man and deeply religious. He eagerly learned the doctrines of the Church and has been very steady in his practice of the sacraments. You felt and still feel that he has not entirely accepted the Church's stances on some social issues. He talked with you, for instance, about the bishops' statements on the death penalty and you could feel that he was struggling to be open-minded.

Xavier has several children. Two are middle-school aged and a boy is playing football at the Catholic high school. His oldest is a daughter who has been off at college. It was the daughter that brought Xavier to talk with you after the "spring break" of the universities was over. It proves a difficult conversation.

Xavier explains -- after a lot of struggling and hesitating -- that his daughter had returned from college and told him his wife that she is lesbian. His wife took this news very hard and has been weeping on and off. He tells you that at first he did not believe his daughter -- there is so much foolishness around and so much confusion. He wanted to find out whether his daughter was under the influence of a teacher or of someone who had seduced her, but she had claimed that she was not and had come to this on her own. You wonder, yourself, but do not ask, what did happen to the daughter.

Then, he says, he had gotten very angry. He said that he did not show that to his daughter -- what good would that do? -- but he was angry at himself and his wife. What had they done wrong, and how could he love his daughter as he had always loved her? What was he going to tell her? When he got to that point, he said, he was afraid that he had demanded of God, Why did you do this to my daughter?

But now he is really fearful. He keeps asking how God can be good who would let someone suffer from this kind of confusion? He is afraid that he is losing his faith. He feels strongly that the homosexual orientation is somehow produced by human culture in a vicious way. Does the Church really believe that it's a "metaphysical disorder" and what does that mean in his daughter? But he knows that those who live this lifestyle really have a hard life ahead of them. He cannot, simply cannot, understand how anyone could express love this way. As he says these things, he begins weeping. "How could God do this?"

How would you describe the spiritual difficulty Xavier now goes through? Is it a matter of faith? of morality?

Where are you going to start to help Xavier? If you decide to give him advice, what advice will you give him?

FOUR: Some thoughts about desire. *The desire drives the American worldview. Advertising elicits desire which drives consumerism which shapes our lifestyle which is a vast advertising board (Izod, Ralph Lauren, and all that). Our kind of individualism goes this way: "You asked for it. You got it," that is, you wanted it so you have it. We tend to trust that each person's desires, sincerely acted on, will lead to that person's fulfillment, and we tend to distrust authorities when they try to guide personal desires ("repression" is a nasty word). Still, desire is at the core of spirituality. What do we need to know about desire?*

God our Creator makes known in many ways what He wills. As the Christian worldview appreciates it, God first of all creates all things seen and unseen in an intelligent design. This, for instance, makes the universes expand outward and radioactivity decay at a steady rate -- as God wills. Then, God weaves deep in our bodies and souls this intelligent design. This teaches us, for instance, that oleander kills and spinach nourishes and that love builds and hate destroys -- as God wills. For centuries, the Church has called this intelligent design *the natural law.*

To humankind as a whole, God reveals that natural law. God also reveals what He wishes and hopes for through chosen prophets like Moses, Isaiah, and Jesus of Nazareth. These report the Commandments and the Beatitudes to The People and, at the time when God chose, to all peoples. Unhappily, false prophets who mislead about God's will are always among us.

In this, the "last age," God also confirms the Church to declare clearly what God wants here and now. Pursuing this, serious disciples try hard to think and feel with the Church. We listen to the pope about abortion, for instance, and to the bishops about peace and poverty. This is no simple matter; it requires discernment.

Finally, to every single person, God reveals what He wishes. He does this, first, by giving us concrete gifts that enable and also limit what we can do: being male, Chinese, healthy. Our gifts indicate God's wishes in us and God's hope for us. The intelligent person, for instance, can be sure that God wishes her to think and grow wise.

God makes us intelligent and free, so that we must decide what God wishes for our life as a whole and in particular matters. God does this giving us desires. A personal vocation in life rises first as a desire to do or be something.

Our deepest authentic desires rise directly out of God's passionately creative love. Desiring Jesus as my Savior comes right out of God's wish that Jesus should save all humankind.

In everyday life, each person's desires are influenced by of others. The infant wants to learn words. The adolescent wants what every other adolescent wants. The adult wants to be in fashion and to have a Lexus. This is why advertising works -- and it does work.

And here comes the problem. Because our desires are influenced so profoundly by others and do not rise unhindered out of God's pure, passionate love, our desires tend to get skewed. We tend to desire things that are not authentic to our selves. In most matters, what we want is of no great consequence (sugar in your coffee? No?). But what we want in big things counts: What vocation do you want to follow - and what makes you

want that? Whom do you want to marry -- and did that desire grow in holiness?

Each person is free to follow the desires that rise right out of God's passionately creative love or to follow another way. The vast numbers of humankind follow another way -- the world, the flesh, or the Evil One.

A little aside: In spirituality, we feel concern mainly for conscious desires. Certainly, we are driven by what psychologists call "unconscious" desires: a person overeats because he unconsciously feels inferior. That difficulty, psychologists handle. The spiritual guide would be concerned with the conscious habit of overeating.

The desires we address here are *conscious*. I want something and I know that I want it. Set aside for a moment the moral issue whether what I want is good or evil and notice several things about our desires.

First, they come from what we *value*. The worldview we share includes many values, and one way we know whether we are following Christ's or the world's is by noting what we really desire. The person who cheats others in order to get rich does not value what Christ values. Values also rise from the mind and heartset that each of us slowly develops. Jesus said, "Where a person's treasure is, there is that person's heart" -- meaning their desiring. Spiritual guides listen for what a person desires, as that reveals what the person values.

Second, our desires rise right out of our habits. Everyone has many habits, otherwise no one would get anything done. When I get up in the morning, I want to clean my teeth and comb my hair -- matters of habit. Some of our habits are part of our worldview (Americans tend to neighborliness) and some from our personal heartset, as Jesus pointed out.

But notice that we *develop habits* by deciding to do this or that repeatedly. In a real sense, we are responsible for the habits that we have. Taking responsibility for our habits goes against our culture, which tends to consider any habit – but particularly a habit that we particularly like or particularly hate – either an addiction or a compulsion. We may recognize some ways of acting as addictions (incessant excessive drinking) or compulsions (incessant attempts to please co-workers). But the spiritual companion recognizes that we can choose to develop or defend a habit and would want to know why.

Third, there are two points in spirituality worth noting. One: taking responsibility for our habits usually frees up some surprising authentic desires that God raises in us. Developing greater simplicity of life, for instance, has quite often freed people to feel the desire to help others. And a habit of daily reflection certainly clarifies our authentic desires -- prayer lets God do what God wishes in us.

Two: a negative consequence of enduring bad habits is that such a habit all too commonly prevents us from correcting inauthentic desiring as it hides behind the habit. A man argues and insists on his own opinion, claiming that it's a bad habit from high school debating days, and therefore not taking responsibility for his desire (inauthentic in a disciple of Christ) to dominate others or to be superior. A woman wastes her evenings by drinking more wine than she needs. She never recognizes that she is wasting time; it's just a habit she has.

To take responsibility for our desires requires constant reflection on our values and on our habits.

Spiritual Situation Three: Walter

You are in charge of the liturgy group in the parish. You have tried to keep their ministry on a spiritual footing, leading them in prayer and starting spiritual conversations with them. You have to train the readers, the Communion ministers, and the choir, too. You have wisely appointed what you call the "Leader" -- the Lead Reader, and the Lead Communion Minister, and Choir Leader. You meet with them almost every weekend informally and formally in preparation for the change of liturgical seasons. And of course, the parish has its regular "retreat" and you have good input into that.

The first two leaders, Reader and Minister, are working out very well. Not so the Choir Leader, a man named Walter. You were hesitant when you accepted him as leader -- that is to say, when he insisted so much that he wanted to do it that you finally gave in. Actually, Walter is a skilled musician and can conduct the singing at Masses well. He is not a good leader, however, and choir members are complaining that he is disorganized and too passive. Now as Advent begins you have to decide what to do.

You had discovered how difficult he could be at the most recent meeting of the choir and other music helpers. Three issues rose. The guitarists for the youth Mass had suddenly quit, and Mary not only took up the slack but also made a lot of changes. She explained what she had done and why, and then wondered whether she had the authority to do things. You waited for Walter to approve and give her the OK to go ahead, but he said nothing. A couple of people asked questions. Nervously, Mary then said she'd just go ahead as thought she had the right, for the youths' sake. Walter still sat silent.

Then Tommy, who had been planning Midnight Mass -- integrating a children's group, the choir's work, and how the pastor would like to sing his part -- gave copies of the plan he had drawn up. Suddenly, Walter said that the piece chosen for the children was not appropriate. Tommy was surprised and said softly that he'd already shown this to Walter. Walter denied that he has seen it. Tommy said, "I showed it to you a month ago." When the other leaders said they felt the children's piece appropriate, Walter truculently waived his hand and said, "Go ahead. It's too late. Whatever you want."

Finally, the choir wanted to know what pieces they would have to learn for Laetare Sunday, only two weekends away. Walter asked what they wanted to do. Several mentioned preferences and two ran a long discussion promoting their own preferences. Walter said all of them were good and he would decide later. Some pointed out that they need to know promptly what to practice. Walter said he understood that but he could not decide right away. Then they went to another topic.

You now feel that Walter really does not have the skills to be Choir Leader. He does not plan well. He showed clearly a lack of any sense of delegating, in the way he handled Mary and Tommy. How you are wondering: you face a management issue, removing an unskilled leader; and you face a spirituality situation, helping Walter find what he really wants.

Reflection:

What do you see as the spiritual issue here?
On what grounds will you try to help Walter understand what is going on?

Five: Theology of desiring, *We need to take responsibility for our desires and we need to know how to distinguish which come from God and which from somewhere else. This is not simple in a culture where desire is incessantly elicited. One way to distinguish among desires is by testing the spirit behind them. Here are the first two of four "spirits" -- the world, the flesh, and the Devil, Christlife -- with their worldviews and answers to the great questions.*

Noble humanism. "So Paul stood before the whole council and made this speech: 'Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters...." (Acts 17:21). Think of public figures like U Thant and Edward R. Murrow, thinkers and artists like David Thoreau, scientists dedicated to progress like Buckminster Fuller, political leaders like Golda Meir.

Their answer to who we are is in terms of the human community as it is now and in its future promise. What's going on is human progress, which is furthered by science and democracy, but which is marred by the disorder of human violence, poverty, and injustice. The earth is made for all and adequate to support all in dignity. All of the wrongs are due to ignorance and lack of good governance. The solution is within humankind, which is able to organize itself to bring universal peace and prosperity, if only each person will recognize the unity of the human community and learn right thinking. Some noble humanists (think of Mohandas Gandhi) find God while
others believe this life is all.

This spirit inhabits libraries and museums. It animates the research of doctors and psychiatrists. It is behind the creation of the United Nations, the World Food Organization, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Conservatives. Noble humanism appears in magazines such as The Economist and finds concrete expression in architecture and urban design. The spirit often drives a person to genuine self-sacrifice.

"Make sure that no one captivates you with the empty lure of a 'philosophy' of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and no on Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

St Paul's "flesh"-- fallen humanism. "When self-indulgence is at work, the result are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things" (Galatians 5:18; cf Rom 1:23).

Think of public figures like Cassius Clay, thinkers like Ian Ryan and artists such as Gore Vidal, characters like Agent 007, Sophie Tucker, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley. Think of the fashion section of every Sunday newspaper, of publications such as GQ, Playboy, Home and Garden, and so on. The places where all this happens is, innocently enough, shopping malls, Wal-Marts, and five-star restaurants. Not so innocently, it happens in bars, massage parlors, and rock concerts. Think of what's on TV now and in advertisements.

Those who live this way tell who we are: we are temporary creatures whose main drive is pleasure and who do well not to think of mortality but to have fun, instead. What's really going on is pleasure -- do whatever makes you feel good, and that is the right thing to do. What's wrong? Well, there's not enough time to enjoy everything, and money isn't spread widely enough. And of course, government is always trying to limit us. What can set this all straight is each individual's own determination to grab life with two hands and let no one frustrate the dreams. That's also the only thing that can set all this straight -- that, and enough money (of which there is not really ever enough).

"I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

Spiritual Situation Five ¤ Valerie and Vincent

Valerie and Vincent are a couple who have belonged to the parish since they were young. They married there and had their five children baptized there. They attend Mass regularly and on occasion volunteer to do something at a fair or special event. Vincent has a middle-management job and his salary has allowed them to buy their home (just five more years of mortgage payments) and to take summer vacations in New Mexico or on Padre Island. They have put their children through the parish school and the local Catholic high school, and now are preparing to send the two oldest (twins) to college. This provokes a crisis and since you and your spouse have known them all these years, and you are now the diaconal couple in the parish, they ask you opinion.

Their thinking is this: If the twins go to a first-rate university, they are more likely to get ahead, and even more likely to finish their educations successfully. Both are capable and could make good professional careers if they have the right preparation. The couple feels that it would be a come-down to have the children go to the local state school, which they consider dangerous in any case. But the problem is that the twins are good students but have not reached the level at which universities would compete for them and give them scholarships. The twins have been accepted, for instance, into Loyola University in New Orleans and St Louis University, but while both offered some grants-in-aid, neither granted scholarships. Hence, if the twins are to go to such institutions, Valerie will to have to take a job to raise income. The problem with that is the welfare of the three other children, one of whom is in high school and the other two, in middle school. The dilemma is this: while the older children need her to have an income, just now the younger children really need Valerie's attention, full time.

Vincent and Valerie are torn. After all, if they cannot send the twins to good universities, they won't be able to do anything for the younger ones, either. And the difficult truth is that most of their friends' children are making it into good institutions. The couple are not sure they want to have to admit that the twins just did not make it into top-flight schools. They are wondering what you think.

Reflection:

Analyze the spirit or spirits that move Valerie and Vincent.
In the last analysis, how would you counsel them?

Six: Theology of desiring, 2 *We all feel desires rise out of all four spirits and will have to continually look at which spirit we serve. Each of us, however, commits himself or herself to live principally out of one of the four.*

The Spirit of the Dark "You are from your father, the devil, and you prefer to do what your father wants; he was a murderer from the start" (John 8:44).

Persons clearly embody evil in our lifeworld. Think of Idi Amin and of Saddam Hussein in the secular realm, and think of the religious guru Jimmy Jones who poisoned scores of his followers. Think of drug pushers and pimps and those who give themselves to violence as a way of life. There are places for these dark actions: houses of prostitution and pornographic websites, are first instances. But this spirit tinges a great deal in our lifeworld: nihilism in politics is dark and so is cheating depositors and investors. And anyone who gives himself or herself to hatred and bitter enmity has taken on a tinge of the dark.

For the spirit of darkness, the human person is totally isolated and self-sufficient and all other humans are means to some end. What's really going on is the destruction of human nature along with the destruction of God's creation. The only thing wrong is the hope of some, naive and unfounded. That hope can be set straight only by violence and destruction.

"Father..., I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One" (John 17:15).

The Spirit of Jesus Christ "In the abundance of his glory may he, through his Spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love... you may be filled with the utter fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16f).

We looked at the worldview of the Christian and at the mindset and heartset. Here, we need to note that these form the basis of desiring, because they weave together values that we hold, habits that we form and maintain -- which inform our perceptions and our perspective on everything that comes into our life and lifeworld. In total, this gives us the core project of our lives: to "put on the mind which is in Christ Jesus."

Pope John Paul II was constantly stating and re-stating who we are -- persons for others, sent into the world with good news, living in communion with Christ. Holy people like Mother Theresa are constantly calling attention to what is really going on -- the rich thrive and the poor suffer. The U.S. bishops keep calling attention to faulty social mores and legislation, defending the forgotten people of Appalachia, for example, and absolutely refusing to condone abortion. The Spirit of Christ dwells in the Church and -- if people live well -- in every Christian family, neighborhood, school, and institution.

At the same time, we need to accept the revealed truth that each one of us has been given a unique personal vocation, "marked out beforehand" (Eph.1) and made manifest to us by the desires that rise in our

selves from our personal gifts and even our limitations. We can trust them because "He has given us a share in his Spirit" (1 John 4:13), a share that forms us in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). All desires marked by those gifts and deepening those gifts are from the spirit of Christ.

"We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10).

Spiritual Situation Six ¤ Utley and Ulrika

You are stationed in a small parish which is almost rural. You have responsibility for all marriage preparation and for witnessing most weddings. This past Spring, you instructed a couple whom you've grown close to, particularly since you had known the young man for some years. You knew that Utley was from a very difficult family and that he and his only sibling had suffered a good deal in childhood. He was quite intelligent and lively, though he had struggled in school because of his family situation. Utley had the searing experience of returning one afternoon from high school to find his father in a pool of his blood, having shot himself in the head.

Ulrika, too, you learned during the marriage preparations, had had a difficult childhood as the only child of parents who did not live together well. They argued a good deal and had not slept in the same room for some time. They had coddled Ulrika but did not show her real love and all the while pressured her to do very well in school.

When they asked you to give them marriage instructions so they could marry, you agreed as a matter of course. The instructions went well, actually; the young people were in their late twenties. They were good Catholics and conscientious adults, and it was clear that they were in love. You came to appreciate them deeply. They had some areas of tension, you could see. They were open when you talked to them about different attitudes towards money and finances. They also had different tastes in relaxation and having fun; Utley liked parties and Ulrika did not; Ulrika enjoyed serious dinner conversation and Utley tended to become dull drinking beer after work. But you felt that they were aware of these things and knew what was moving them. They really wanted to embrace matrimony. The plans they made for the wedding Mass were fine. So was the wedding.

You saw them sometimes after their marriage, but then there were some moves as Ulrika got a promotion and began working harder. Utley had a modest job which did not seem to be leading anywhere. So you didn't see them for some months. Then Utley phoned one evening, a bit late, and asked whether they could, please, come by. You both were getting ready to retire, but the tone of his voice made you say, Of course.

When the doorbell rang, you were faced with two very serious, solemn young people. You were distressed to see that Ulrika had a great bruise on the side of her face. You were not surprised to hear that Utley had punched her. He had been drinking in the evenings, not really getting drunk but making himself quite dull. You suspected he also made things difficult in bed.

Ulrika had begun complaining that he was not making enough money. Both knew the drinking was getting out of hand and she began harping on it. Earlier that evening, they argued, and then it happened. Both wept. And they wanted badly to see you.

After you counseled them, you prayed over them a longish while.

Reflection:

While they were telling you what happened, what were you listening for? What data -- information and affects -- would you think to pick up?

If you look at what spirits are driving them, what do you see? How would you anticipate that these particular spirits would grow from their experiences?

Come to advice: What would you advise them to do or not do?