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Inner Sharing: Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Care

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

INNER SHARING

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND PASTORAL CARE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

RICHARD E. LAMONTAGNE

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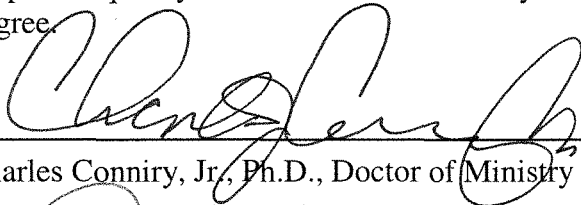
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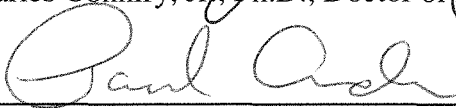
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Title: INNER SHARING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND PASTORAL CARE
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November 20, 2002

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation degree.



Charles Conniry, Jr., Ph.D., Doctor of Ministry Program Director



Dr. Paul Anderson, Ph.D., Advisor

To my wife, Nancy
and
to Sarah Nielsen
without their help these pages
could not have been written

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INNER SHARING: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND PASTORAL CARE

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Submitted to obtain the degree of Doctor of Ministry December 2002.

ABSTRACT: Spiritual direction is a way of assisting people in their growth toward spiritual maturity. Yet, spiritual direction remains a relatively unknown and undervalued link to the life of the spirit despite people's need for guidance. Often, ministers who are normally expected to offer spiritual direction are reluctant to engage in it. This dissertation proposes to reassure clergy and encourage them to risk engagement in spiritual direction. The first section seeks to clarify spiritual direction by providing definitions and distinguishing it from similar disciplines. The second section situates spiritual direction in the history, tradition, and present conversation of the Church. The third section discusses the necessary elements of sound spiritual direction and profiles the spiritual director and directee. The concluding proposition is that spiritual direction, being complimentary to pastoral ministry, clergy can confidently engage in it to the benefit of the individual and the Church.

FOREWORD

Some things capture a person's interest early in life and stay with the person for a lifetime. For me, spiritual direction was such a thing. I was introduced to spiritual direction in my first year of high school. In this boys' boarding school run by Roman Catholic priests, spiritual direction was accepted as a normal spiritual discipline. Although most freshmen had never heard the term before arriving at the school, students soon got used to regular consultations with a faculty member about the state of their young souls.

After four years, spiritual direction was almost second nature to me and I continued the practice in college and later in seminary. After ordination I myself undertook the responsibility of guiding others as I had been guided over the years. There were to be both positive and negative consequences attached to my experience. On the positive side, spiritual direction afforded me the luxury of seldom being without a soul companion. On the negative side, I assumed that all clergy understood spiritual direction as I did, a valuable tool for pastoral ministry. I was soon to be disabused of my too facile assumption.

In September of 1993, freshly installed as pastor and a new member of the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin in Central California, I undertook the pastoral duties incumbent upon me. However in the Episcopal Church clergy are enjoined to take their place in the councils of the wider church. Clergy, therefore, are

expected to participate in the mission of a diocese, a province, or even of the entire denomination. It came as no surprise when my bishop asked me to assume the chairmanship of the Diocesan Task Force on Spiritual Direction. The surprise came when my assumptions about clergy participation in spiritual direction proved less than accurate.

I first wondered just how many people were engaged in spiritual direction in the Diocese of San Joaquin. A survey of the parishes revealed a half dozen lay people and fewer than six pastors were actually involved in spiritual direction in 1993. Clearly, the task force had to address some hard questions: Had spiritual direction ever been introduced to the diocese, why did so few participate in this spiritual discipline, and what could be done to change the situation? I first discovered that two seminars on spiritual direction had been offered and conducted at a large Episcopal conference center located in the diocese. A look at participant lists revealed that the majority had been lay people. By speaking informally to clergy and lay people I discovered that many simply did not know the meaning of spiritual direction. Others, although they were informed about spiritual direction, did not believe it was available in our diocese. Even seminar attendees did not feel qualified to become spiritual directors since no licensing procedure existed.

The need for information seemed uppermost. I therefore contacted all the parishes offering to conduct a short meeting in their own facilities for the purpose of acquainting people with the concept of spiritual direction. A total of two parishes, out of a possible fifty-two, responded. Every year, using my report time

at the convention of the diocese, I repeated my offer to visit any parish and share information about spiritual direction. There were no takers.

Convinced that clergy provides leadership in matters of the soul, I began to converse with pastors in our diocese about the apparent apathy concerning spiritual direction. Some of their comments reflected a lack of awareness. Spiritual direction simply had not been part of their religious conversation. Some said the care of souls was within the purview of counseling whereas spiritual direction seemed to them a strange and somewhat exotic method that really did not fit the Anglican ethos. Others were more direct saying it was a Roman Catholic thing. Other clergy felt unprepared and unqualified. "It really takes some training and I haven't had any." Most stated they did not have time to do any spiritual direction because of other administrative and pastoral duties. Two actually phoned to ask if I could take responsibility for directing some of their church members. These experiences made me aware of a wide range of doubts, misgivings, even fears about spiritual direction among clergy. These fears stood in sharp contrast to my personal appreciation of spiritual direction and its usefulness as a pastoral tool.

Recently, our bishop has designated a retired clergyman as diocesan spiritual director and urged other clergy to consider consulting with him on a regular basis. Although it is still too early to assess its impact, this action seems to be a positive step toward allaying fear among our clergy. The designation of one official person, on the other hand, seems to weaken the foundational freedom one has to choose a compatible spiritual director.

I have also spoken of spiritual direction with Clergy from Protestant denominations other than Episcopal. It is more difficult for the majority of them to distinguish between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling, small groups, mentoring, and discipling. Therefore I have endeavored to share much of the content of this dissertation with a few of them. Our conversations have been rewarding and enlightening. They have compelled me to think out some of my assumptions and to question some of my conclusions. I believe these conversations have had much the same effect on my non-Episcopal friends. Many of the statements on the following pages allude to their questions and comments.

This dissertation attempts to answer the question "Why should I engage in spiritual direction?" It attempts to address doubts, fears, and misgivings. It also attempts to reveal my personal passion for a discipline that has enhanced my own life. Each chapter in this project addresses one facet of the array of misgivings ministers entertain about spiritual direction. My intent is to put those misgivings to rest and to reassure ministers and pastors of the validity of spiritual direction as a powerful means of pastoral care. A final chapter will outline a plan of action for how spiritual direction can be integrated more completely into pastoral ministry for the Body of Christ in the Central California area.

INTRODUCTION

At one time or another everyone needs to confide in someone. In periods of stress a counselor might be of help. Psychiatric counseling has become, in our day, a most popular and, often, a most helpful support for people in stressful or otherwise difficult circumstances. The dialogue between a patient and a professional counselor can result in resolution and balance. At other times, clinical help is called for. If the patient suffers from problems that are beyond the competence of a counselor, a psychiatrist may be engaged to treat the illness and even to prescribe medication. But at times people just need a friend—confidant and guide with whom they can converse, enjoy comfort, and gain insight and direction for their lives. The association with a guide who is experienced in spiritual development and familiar with God's ways can also provide invaluable help in a sustained way. I believe God always provides the right person for this role at the right time. Some people fail to recognize this gift of God, but that does not negate the fact that God uses people to meet the spiritual needs of others.

Spiritual direction is one way of assisting people in their growth toward spiritual maturity. Great spiritual writers, church fathers, monastic leaders, and pastors of souls have utilized spiritual direction through the ages to nurture disciples and to shepherd them along the narrow way that leads to godly wisdom and inner peace. This, in my estimation, is part of the minister, priest, or pastor's call.

Early 21st century observers—Gallup, Barna, and Popcorn—have noted that more and more people are seeking a spiritual dimension in their lives. Trend-watcher Faith Popcorn, church-growth guru George Barna, and statistician George Gallup have conducted similar research that bears this out. Ms. Faith Popcorn's research, for example, reveals that two-thirds of Americans report mystical experiences, 90 percent say religion is important, and 72 percent pray every day. Further, Christian bookstores reap annual sales of \$3 billion, the Internet has 72,000 sites devoted to Christian themes. In the last forty years or so, people have increasingly looked beyond Western traditions to alternative spirituality and healing: one example of this is found in the fact that 3 million Americans practice yoga and martial arts.¹

On the other hand, real depth in spiritual guidance seems hard to find. The April 1, 2002 issue of *Christianity Today* called a popular TV personality, Oprah Winfrey, one of the most influential spiritual leaders in America. The article noted that Ms. Winfrey espouses an eclectic brand of spirituality that includes Christianity, New Age mysticism, Eastern cults, and her own particular feel-good beliefs. All these developments have become particularly appealing to the contemporary American understanding of spirituality. Though our contemporaries express a genuine desire for the spiritual dimension in their lives, that desire remains largely unfulfilled as evidenced by the superficial spirituality of Winfrey and the vigorous experimentation with forms of New Age religion and Eastern mysticism. One search engine, Google, lists 6,280,000 titles under the category of New Age and more than 1 million titles under that of Eastern religion. Popular voices of New Age spirituality include Deepak Chopra founder the

¹ Faith Popcorn, Trends: available from <http://www.faithpopcorn.com/trends/anchoring.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 April 2002.

Center for Well Being, Lyania Vanzant priestess of the Yoruba religion, Marianne Williamson leader of the Church of Today, and Gary Zukav founder of Genesis: the Foundation for the Universal Human.²

This summary begs the question regarding the need for skilled spiritual directors, men and women who are willing to accompany the seekers of our age on their spiritual quest. Yet, spiritual direction remains a largely undiscovered path to inner wholeness. Compared to psychological counseling, psychotherapy, and Eastern spirituality, spiritual direction ranks low on the popularity chart. The question, then, is why spiritual direction is such an undervalued link to the life of the spirit.

Several factors direct us toward the answer. In my experience, many candidates for providing spiritual direction such as pastors, priests, and church leaders resist engaging in spiritual direction because they feel it goes against the traditional ministries of the church or because they question its effectiveness in touching people's lives. On the other hand, Christian leaders may feel inadequately prepared or lack sufficient time to engage in the practice. Yet, it does not seem too lofty an expectation that a pastor, a priest, a monk, a theology professor, a hospital or hospice chaplain, or a retreat master might consider taking some time to dialogue with people who seek a more refined understanding of the life of the spirit. Unfortunately, these are often the very people who resist most. I address this dissertation to those ministers of religion who have yet to find space for spiritual direction in their vision of ministry. I hope to bring them to a real appreciation for the use of spiritual direction in caring for the souls entrusted to them.

In some instances there may be good reasons for resistance. I do not intend to downplay legitimate concerns. Yet, in the face of the need of many, a more generous

² LaTonya Taylor, "The Church of O," *Christianity Today*, 1 April 2002, 44.

response from those whose profession embodies theology and the spiritual life is not too much to ask.

In my experience among pastors, priests, and church leaders, fear and suspicion are the factors that fuel resistance. Here are some excuses I have run across: a lack of time and training, the demands of church administration, the desire to avoid difficult people, the reluctance to encounter religious fanaticism, a lack of spiritual depth in the life of the minister, the conviction that spiritual direction is just another form of counseling, and the belief that spiritual direction is the exclusive domain of the Roman Catholic Church.

Coming at this question from different angles I want to allay some of these fears and address resistance on the part of pastors and ministers, and engage them in an ongoing conversation. By explaining spiritual direction to the reader, I hope to paint a clearer picture of this ancient Christian discipline. I also want to clarify some of the doubts and unasked questions so that the concept and practice of spiritual direction can be accepted as part of the normal response of the minister, priest, and pastor to the congregants' spiritual needs.

My primary focus in this study is to dispel fear and suspicion and to lay a foundation of confidence that will enable ministers, priests, and pastors to enter more easily into the particular area of pastoral care called spiritual direction. This calls for a clarification of the basic forms of direction ministry laid down by significant authorities on the subject. I will review the available literature to clarify a definition of spiritual direction and an elaboration of the concept. I will describe my personal experience, interest, and involvement in spiritual direction and attempt to anchor that experience

within the culture in which we live. I will examine the contributions both of the Christian tradition as well as the involvement of contemporary ministers and pastors in spiritual direction. Since the spiritual director's work area is situated in the zone of divine-human communication, I will analyze the possibility of such communication. I will then paint a profile of the spiritual director in terms of temperament, spirituality, and training and conclude with reflections on the implications of spiritual direction.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Some pastors are not familiar with the term spiritual direction. Those who know what it means often seem apprehensive and even fearful of using spiritual direction as a ministry help. This chapter seeks to diminish the misgivings of the second group while providing information to the first. By providing clarity through defining spiritual direction and differentiating it from other ministry skills, this chapter seeks to help overcome the fear caused by uncertainty about language. Pastors who are presently engaged in the similar discipline of pastoral counseling, for example, will be able to distinguish between it and spiritual direction at the end of this chapter. Definitions and distinctions will help separate the ministry of spiritual direction from other ministries and enable pastors to grasp the difference. To begin, the mysterious nature of the human person and of human relationships gives us pause. Is it possible to speak of a discipline that purports to delve into the mystery of persons and relationships?

Thomas Merton, in *Contemplative Prayer*, writes, "Such a union of prayer and sacrifice is easier to evaluate in others than in ourselves, and when we become aware of this, we no longer try to gauge our own progress in the matter."¹ He is writing for contemplative nuns and monks, but his message for all Christians is clear. One's prayer

¹ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books, 1989), 74.

life and dedication to service is seen and evaluated best when one seeks perspective through the help and advice of another. Merton's phrase summarizes the essence of spiritual direction. Dr. Gerald May continues in the same vein, "The essence of spiritual guidance or direction can be seen whenever one person helps another to see and respond to spiritual truth. It is a human relationship that seeks realization of that which is beyond human comprehension."² And Matthew Fox writes, "Another person is a mystery, a calling of me outside of myself."³

There is a mysterious dimension involved in human relationships. To reach out to the stranger at first encounter with words that are meant to discover his or her mystery quite naturally begins the exploration: What is your name? Where do you live? Are you married? What is your profession? At times, a relationship slowly emerges. The stranger becomes an acquaintance, then a friend, then a confidant. This friend shares personal secrets, hopes, disappointments, and pain. There often emerges a comfort in sharing hidden intimate meanings between these two persons. It is this confidant who provides sufficient perspective to help the other see more clearly into his or her spiritual reality and to evaluate and to respond more confidently. The mysterious other person is not there merely to be discovered; that would be mystery enough. The truly mysterious dimension is that discovery is mutual and involves an opening into the very heart of another. In the contest of spiritual direction, the relationship does not exist simply for itself or on its own merits. But as Gerald May points out, "It is a human relationship that

² Gerald G. May, M.C., *Care of the Soul: The Practice of the Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 1.

³ Matthew Fox, *On Becoming a Mystical Being: Spirituality American Style* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 38

seeks realization of that which is beyond human comprehension."⁴ We have suddenly added another dimension. This dimension—the transcendence of human comprehension—combined with the incomprehensibility of relationships, places spiritual direction in categories that seems beyond the reach of mere mortals like us. Is it possible to understand spiritual direction at all?

It is possible. First, understanding spiritual direction is possible because we are not strangers to human relationships. We experience relationships with others every day and these relationships are definable in exact terms. Human relation exists whenever people establish links and interact with each other. Thus the special relationship present in spiritual direction is understandable because of the similitude of other human relationships. In the context of spiritual direction, a third party—namely God—enters the equation. Or, as Jeannette Bakke has put it, "In spiritual direction we ask another person to listen with us to the Spirit of God from *within* our relationship with God."⁵ Understanding another person's relationship with God may seem utterly beyond us, yet the capacity for self-revelation does not end with human relationships. It extends to all relationships, even to the divine relationship, provided a person is willing to share those experiences with a sympathetic friend.

Second, Understanding spiritual direction is within our grasp because we understand, through experience, that relationship occurs on different levels: friendship, familial, professional, need-based, mutual interest-based, and more. Spiritual direction is

⁴ May, *Care of Mind*, 1.

⁵ Jeannette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 39.

a relationship between two people—plus God—on the spiritual level. In the dynamic of spiritual direction, both people join in listening attentively for the Holy Spirit as the Spirit reveals directions. An aura of mystery surrounds the act of revealing one's self through another person and accepting that personal revelation, especially as that revelation deliberately includes the divine dimension.

Dr. Paul Tournier in *Creative Suffering* describes the spiritual as that which goes beyond all mechanisms and the limitations of their selfish investment. He more succinctly defines the spiritual as "communion." "For me," he continues, "it means a personal relationship with God through intimacy with Jesus Christ. (. . . It) is always the casting away of the mask behind which we protect our real selves."⁶ The human person is a mystery, but a mystery that is capable of self-revelation. Spiritual direction is characterized by this self-revelation, this discarding of spiritual masks.

When Dr. Gerald May says that spiritual direction is a human relationship that seeks realization of that which is beyond human comprehension, he both includes and goes beyond the revelation of the mysterious self. May conjures up the phenomenon of divine communication, a phenomenon that surely surpasses human comprehension. Teresa of Avila in *Interior Castle*⁷ observes the same type of profound contact with the divine at the deepest levels of human consciousness. The scope of spiritual direction, in addition to encompassing the experiences, desires, faults, and secrets of another human being—the mysterious self—also includes a journey into the ethereal realm of another's

⁶ Paul Tournier, *Creative Suffering* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 70.

⁷ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans., ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1989), 213.

encounter with God! When May suggests that such a relationship seeks realization of that which is beyond human comprehension, he reaches over the horizon into the infinite reality of the divine. In spiritual direction two people carefully search for self and search for God's initiatives within themselves.

Many other forms of spiritual companionship claim to provide self-discovery and God-discovery for us. These forms, listed below, either need to be identified with or differentiated from spiritual direction. Distinctions, however, will show up more clearly against the background of a working definition of spiritual direction itself.

Barry and Connolly provide this definition: "We define Christian spiritual direction, then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally-communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship."⁸ Forms of spiritual companionship, other than spiritual direction, might include one-on-one friendships; marriage relationships; study groups; prayer groups; support groups; psychological, pastoral and biblical counseling; mentoring; discipling; and pastoral care. All of these are related to spiritual direction and bear some similarities to it. How do they differ?

One-on-one friendships—the companionable association between two people—often provide a setting for intimate communication between two people. In this way they

⁸ William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of spiritual Direction* (New York: SeaburyPress, 1982), 8.

are similar to spiritual direction. But friendships are not always between Christians nor are they centrally focused on God's personal communication to one of the parties. Even when friendships exist between Christians, they are not always about the spiritual life. Most friendships do not exclusively seek to develop one party's sensitivity to divine truth. Friendships, by definition, also lack the formality and structure normally found in spiritual direction. So even if friendships sometimes delve into the world of the spirit, this is not their avowed intent as it is with spiritual direction. Friendships and spiritual direction differ both in content and intent

Marriage relationships strive to build on a common life between two people, to found a home, to procreate and nurture children. The intent of marriage is therefore different than the intent of spiritual direction. Husbands and wives do well when they help each other to pay attention to God's personal communication, then to respond and live out their commitment to it, but that is not the sole intent of marriage. Seeking God and responding to divine invitations might become the firm foundation on which the marriage is built, but it cannot become the unique thrust of the marriage. Also, as is the case with friendships, the elements of formality and structure essential to spiritual direction are generally absent from marriage relationships.

Study groups, even Christian study groups, center on many things: the Bible, doctrines, moral/ethical questions, marriage and family, history, and culture. Study groups rarely focus on helping one specific member become more sensitive to God's personal, intimate communication—that is the domain of spiritual direction. Unlike in spiritual direction, study groups generally involve more than two people. Their intent is

to gain or increase knowledge about one topic. Study groups do not meet the criteria of spiritual direction as stated in the definition.

Prayer groups sometimes focus on God's direction in a structured setting. However prayer groups do not exclusively try to help one of their members seek God's direction in his or her own life. A person might join a prayer group following a revelation received in spiritual direction, but he or she is not engaging in spiritual direction while participating in the prayer group's activity. Prayer groups have other goals: to praise God, confess sin, render thanks, intercede, and petition. Prayer groups bear some similarity to spiritual direction, but only to the extent to which they become vehicles for tracing God's direction in the lives of their members. They do not fit the definition of spiritual direction.

Support groups differ more clearly from spiritual direction. Support groups have specific purposes. Cancer support groups, support groups for weight loss, adoption, grief and bereavement, parenting and alcoholics anonymous, and debt—all seek their particular goals. Support groups lend encouragement and positive reinforcement as experiences are shared. Any one-on-one interaction works to reinforce the goals set forth by the group. Support groups do not seek to help one person discern God's personal communication. A person might join a support group because of an insight gained through spiritual direction, but both content and intent are dissimilar.

Counseling is often confused with spiritual direction. Indeed much counseling, though not all, takes place one-on-one and counseling, like spiritual direction, qualifies as a helping relationship. Psychological counseling, pastoral counseling, and biblical counseling all have to be distinguished from spiritual direction. Psychological counseling

differs from spiritual direction because it addresses a specific problem submitted by the counselee. For example, one might see a counselor for symptoms of depression, addiction, uncontrollable anger, or any of a host of other warning signs. In psychological counseling, two people—a therapist and a patient—relate to one another in the same type of structured setting as in spiritual direction: in the counselor's office, by appointment, with predetermined time limits. However, the therapist's aim is to bring about change in the person seeking help. Psychological counseling intentionally uses therapy to promote some emotional or psychic growth in the patient. Conversely, spiritual direction does not necessarily seek to change the directee emotionally or psychologically, but only seeks to make him or her more sensitive to and ready to follow God's direction. The goals of counseling and direction differ in this important way.

Pastoral counseling, on the other hand, might be construed as being closer in nature to spiritual direction. However, pastoral counseling is itself based on a psychological model. Introduced in the 1930s and called clinical pastoral counseling or education, it served as a training tool for theological students who spent months in a hospital setting for supervised study and work. Many ministers, convinced that the clinical pastoral counseling model was essential to ministry, subsequently took courses in psychology. Soon pastors all over the United States acquired the look of psychotherapists. Although pastoral counseling and spiritual direction differ in emphasis on psychological aspects, spiritual directors dare not totally ignore the unconscious. There exists a link between spiritual and emotional health. But psychological counseling—even when used in pastoral ministry—is quite distinct from spiritual direction both in methodology and desired outcome. Modern pastoral counseling is built

on the Rogerian⁹ premise that people have the ability to understand themselves and their problems and can change the direction of their spiritual growth provided they are treated as people of worth. Spiritual direction is built on the premise that God provides life directions discoverable through the faith-filled interaction of two people.

A third strain of counseling developed by L. J. Crabb in 1975, and based on his biblical view of humanity, is called biblical counseling. Crabb argues that men and women have two basic needs: security and significance. He traces these needs to the pre-fall condition when security (being loved and accepted) and significance (being regarded as worthwhile) were a way of life granted by the Creator. Because of original sin, humans have been seeking their lost security and significance since the fall. Biblical counseling, according to Crabb, must deal with our primordial but now debilitated components of intellect, will, and emotion. This leads to the identification of wrong behavior and the modification of behavior according to scriptural principles.¹⁰ Although spiritual direction certainly uses the Bible as a source of wisdom and directors guide their clients to read and study the Bible, spiritual direction does not adopt the biblical counseling method described. Spiritual direction, while using the Bible, goes beyond exploring the intellect, will, and emotion. It delves more deeply into experiences, spiritual disciplines, vocational callings, theological assumptions and the life of the spirit.

Mentoring, like counseling, can be confused with spiritual direction because it is a helping relationship. Mentoring takes place one-on-one and often in a structured setting.

⁹ Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology, 1985 ed., s.v. "Rogers, Carl Ransom." Rogers is the founder of Person-centered, non-directive therapy.

¹⁰ Ibid., "Biblical Counseling."

Although it involves conversations between two people, the goal of mentoring is the improvement of one person through the coaching of a mentor. Typically, the mentoring process involves a more experienced and proficient coach developing the abilities of a novice through advice and encouragement. The mentoring relationship requires a goal that is defined by a concrete entity external to the participants such as a profession, a theology, or a life discipline of some kind. The successful mentoring relationship depends on how much the coach can improve the novice's skills or understanding. Mentoring, therefore, clearly does not meet the criteria for spiritual direction. Mentoring is not oriented toward interpreting the direction of God, it is pedagogical in content, and its aim is to develop the novice's functional abilities rather than his or her spiritual growth.

Discipling brings mentoring one step further and needs to be mentioned here. Discipling is a process in which the teacher not only teaches a certain set of precepts to the disciple but also demonstrates the desired behavior by example. Those who disciple others make followers of them by setting a way of living before them to follow. Spiritual direction and discipling are different. One involves training, the other listening; one purposes to make a disciple, the other seeks to assist in spiritual growth.

Pastoral care includes spiritual direction but is broader. Eugene H. Peterson in *The Contemplative Pastor* describes pastoral care as the battle against sin and sorrow, the promotion of faith, the openness to grace.¹¹ It is the day-to-day care of souls to which

¹¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1989), 56.

pastors are called. Peterson's reference to pastoral care as the pastor-parishioner contact that takes place from Monday through Saturday indicates the all inclusiveness of his concept. Yet, Peterson sometimes identifies spiritual direction with pastoral care. For example, when he says pastoral care is a conversation for "discovering the meaning of scripture, developing a life of prayer and guiding growth into maturity,"¹² he defines spiritual direction. Ways other than spiritual direction, however, exist to engage in scripture study, prayer, and growth. I believe what Peterson is aiming at a the wider understanding of care of souls—one that includes counseling, mentoring, prayer groups, crisis intervention, and spiritual direction. Spiritual direction, then, is one of the functions of pastoral care and, as such, is not identical to it.

All these definitions and descriptions still do not tell us what spiritual direction is. Yet, through examining the ways it differs from similar relationship models, we have been able to bring the concept of spiritual direction into clearer focus. During our comparison, we have used this working definition: "Spiritual direction is help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally-communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship."¹³ Like all definitions, this one seeks to give clarity as it includes essential aspects and eliminates unimportant elements.

¹² Ibid., 57

¹³ Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 8.

Let us now examine other spiritual leaders' understandings of spiritual direction so that we might grasp more fully some of its other facets.

Martin Thornton writes simply, "Spiritual direction is the application of theology to the life of prayer."¹⁴ While it eliminates excess verbiage, Thornton's terse definition is incomplete. However, "the life of prayer" for him is the basic relationship with God in Christ. His concept of life of prayer is so inclusive that, "carried on in the world, it ultimately controls all aspects of life."¹⁵ Thornton includes all aspects of life—impacted by prayer—as the object of theology. He assumes, however, that his readers understand the term theology in the broad sense in which he uses it. That is, theology not in the literal sense of the "science of God" but rather in the sense of reflections on the significance of God in all aspects of life. Though Thornton's is a good definition, it is too succinct for our purposes.

A more detailed definition appears in the pages of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

In the technical sense of the term, spiritual direction is that function of the sacred mystery by which the Church guides the faithful to the attainment of eternal happiness. It is part of the commission given to her in the words of Christ: 'Going, therefore, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matt. XXVIII, 19 sq.). She exercises this function both in her public teaching, whether in word or writing, and in the private guidance of souls according to their individual needs; but it is the private guidance that is generally understood by the term 'spiritual direction.'¹⁶

This definition distinguishes between the technical sense of spiritual direction and the

¹⁴ Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1984), 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Encyclopedia of the Catholic Church, 1999 ed., s.v, "spiritual direction" [encyclopedia on line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05024a.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 September 2001.

general sense in which the term is sometimes used. In a technical sense, the definition considers spiritual direction is a function of the Church. Church refers to that divinely established body, hierarchically administered, endowed with the authority of Christ, gifted with the charisms of the Spirit, commissioned to teach and lead believers to heaven. Technically, every effort the Church makes, including public teaching in word or writing that tends to guide people toward eternity, is considered spiritual direction.

However, Spiritual direction is both more and less than an operation of the teaching office of the Church. It is more because it goes beyond teaching to include the care of the soul, companionship, prayer, discernment and compassion. It falls short because spiritual direction is only part of the wide scope of the church's commission to teach and to care for souls in a myriad of ways. Private guidance is by its very nature personal.

Again, the definition applies because the Church considers spiritual direction to be, in part, the private guidance of souls according to their individual needs. Public teaching provides general directions for life that must be adapted to the circumstances of the individual believer either through prayer, personal reflection, or consultation. Private guidance is by nature very personal and begins by examining the particular believer's life circumstances. The "private guidance of souls according to their individual needs" is very broad and could include such things as marriage preparation, discipling, and sacramental confession among many other functions. The church's definition is simply too broad.

Alternately, Dyckman and Carroll in *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet* say, "Spiritual direction is an interpersonal relationship in which one person assists others to reflect on their own experience in the light of who they are called to become in

fidelity to the gospel."¹⁷ This closely parallels Barry and Connolly's definition, "Spiritual direction is help given by one Christian to another, which enables the person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally-communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship."¹⁸ These definitions differ mainly in emphasis between the gospel's call and God's personal communication, between reflection and experience, and attention to divine communication. These last two definitions bring us close to the heart of spiritual direction since spiritual direction includes all these elements. Keeping in mind that we now have a fuller grasp of spiritual direction's broader meanings, I will use Barry and Connolly's definition from this point forward.

Some applications from the definition need to be made. First, the directee is a seeker. He or she searches eagerly to be more open to the action of God and to be more yielded to his will. The director is like a father or mother, kind and benevolent but honest, who gently nudges and guides his or her child toward a growing and more genuine discovery of and surrender to God's leading. Both director and directee are firmly committed to working together to discern the deepest movements of the Spirit. Both acknowledge God as the only true director of souls. Both aim at orienting the life of the spirit through discernment and obedience in the direction of the divine will.

Second, spiritual direction is a commitment to work at the heart of things. It often deals with the most intimate, personal manifestations of God in the life of a person. The

¹⁷ Katherine Marie Dyckman and L Patrick. Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 20.

¹⁸ Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 8.

director and directee purpose to hear, see, and obey God, who is the real spiritual director. To accomplish this, one Christian person offers to help another pay attention to God's communications in an attempt to respond to God. People who enter into spiritual direction hope to live intimately with God and to live out the consequences of their mutual relationship.

Third, personal blind spots and the inherent human proclivity toward self-deception necessitate the assistance of another in the exploration of one's soul. The human vulnerability to deception from outside forces such as the trickery of Satan, the values and standards of society, the pressures from other people, our own brokenness, and sin requires an objective kind of help to identify and discern external dangers.

Fourth, God uses many avenues to manifest his presence and will in the life of an individual. It is true that God comes in ways we can understand through symbols, life occurrences, sacraments, the Bible, and other people. It is also true that God manifests his presence in mystical, direct, and immediate epiphanies to the soul. God contacts us as he wills and God's manifestations are sometimes beyond our capacity to grasp and understand. Sometimes we can only treasure what we have experienced. Other manifestations demand theological pondering. A spiritual director can be of great assistance in identifying revelations and discerning their significance.

Finally, spiritual direction is the cooperation of two people, standing before God, prayerfully grappling with the mysteries of the soul in response to God's initiative. It is not so much the analysis of life to propose solutions to its problems, as it is the exploration of a beautiful, ongoing mystery.

In conclusion, spiritual direction falls into the category of personal relationships. It relates to the discovery of self and partakes of the doubly mysterious finding of the self and discovery of the self in relation to God. Because many ways to establish human relationships exist, it is necessary to distinguish a number of similar ministries from spiritual direction to arrive at a precise meaning of the term. I have proposed possible definitions of spiritual direction which vary according to emphasis. One is too narrow, one too broad and parochial. Two appropriate definitions have been reviewed and one has been selected for use. Observations based on this definition explore the need and value of a spiritual director for those who seek the knowledge and love of God. Because of their concern for the souls entrusted to them, ministers and pastors seem especially called to become masters of the spiritual life and wise guides to those who seek closer identification with the Lord.

Pastors and other ministers are no exception to the dictum: people fear what they do not know. That is why this chapter attempted to bring clarification to the subject of spiritual direction by introducing a definition, delineating its parameters, and distinguishing spiritual direction from similar tools of ministry. These terms and distinctions were offered in the hope that clarity would banish fear. With this knowledge in hand, pastors may be less apprehensive about spiritual direction as a unique implement for their ministry.

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

G. K. Chesterton once said, "Tradition is democracy of the dead, extending a vote to our ancestors, refusing to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who are walking about."¹ To some, the word "tradition" carries disagreeable associations. John Miley's *Systematic Theology*, for example lists tradition among the mistaken sources of theology.² For Miley, tradition stands in contradiction to Scripture and reduces religion to a mere outward conformity to man-made rules.

If we operate under Miley's rules, all tradition must be identified with the traditions of the elders whom Christ so roundly condemned in Mark chapter 7.³ Because they ate food with unwashed hands Jesus and the disciples had been questioned by the law-abiding Pharisees. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God requires a pure heart rather than superficial observances contrived and handed down by men. "You leave the commandment of God," he told them, "and hold to the tradition of men."⁴ The traditions of the Pharisees were dead because they were external, man-made practices that

¹ G. K. Chesterton, quoted in Gervais Dumiege in *History of Spirituality—A Key to Self Understanding*, quoted in Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 35.

² John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 13.

³ [Mark 7:6-13].

⁴ Mark 7:8. Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise specified.

undermine God's law and counteract the moral and ethical thrust of the Commandments. Ironically, Old Testament morality was internal, "in the heart," and God-directed. Based on the Commandments, Old Testament morality was part of the wider tradition transmitted by God through patriarchs, prophets, priests and kings over many generations. The positive value of this type of living tradition is that it expressed the heart of God as it invited men and women to walk unimpeachably in God's way.

It is important to distinguish between living and dead tradition. Jesus characterized the traditions of men as dead partly because they are human in origin. Traditions based on clever interpretations by legal experts that result in creating substitutes for the law of God, are dead. Such contrived traditions are disconnected from the living spirit of divine command. Another mark of dead traditions is their externality. Though carrying out external rules, observing precise rituals, and keeping taboos, may be comforting, these exercises cannot change one's heart. Outward observances fail to address the fundamental condition of the heart before God and how the heart is before God and fellow human beings. In fact, outward observances may even cover up one's alienation from God and others.

Living tradition, on the other hand, serves to transmit the truth of God's revelation faithfully, advancing and perpetuating God's original purposes. Focusing on Christian tradition, one cannot help but note its close relation to the Sacred Scriptures. Christian tradition comes from the apostles who handed on what they received from Jesus and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians had no written New Testament. The teachings, deeds, and character of Christ, therefore, were handed on by "oral tradition" some of which found its way into the written scriptures. This is a

description of the process of living tradition. The written New Testament reveals elements that had already become traditional practices. The blessing Jesus pronounced over the loaves and fishes in Matthew 14, the distribution of the food and the dismissal of the crowds is considered by some to have been a reflection of liturgical practice in the church of Matthew.⁵ The disciples' devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, and common life reflects the spirit of the Lord as lived out by the first believers. The injunction of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:8, to "guard the deposit entrusted to you"—when read it in context—shows much more being entrusted than the content of Scripture.

Living tradition inevitably includes certain actions, and even rituals, but it fundamentally addresses the heart's relationship to God and others. To characterize all traditions as dead unfortunately truncates the real meaning of the word, for tradition, (the transmission of truth, behavior, values, culture, and rules from one generation to another)⁶ is often an invigorating dynamic. Evelyn Underhill wrote:

Tradition runs side by side with experience; the past collaborates with the present. Each new and eager soul rushing out towards the only end of Love passes on its way the landmarks left by others upon the pathway to Reality. If it be wise, it observes them: and finds in them rather helps towards the attainment rather than hindrances to that freedom which is of the essence of the mystic act.⁷

When Chesterton speaks of extending the vote to our ancestors, he is not lauding dead tradition. Rather, he is talking about a living inheritance handed down by generous

⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook Matthew 13-28*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 530-533.

⁶ Author's definition.

⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 300.

pioneers whose wisdom we use as the foundations for our structures of life, culture, religion and understanding. Tradition, according to Chesterton is also a refusal to surrender to the small, proud oligarchy of our contemporaries.

Jesus' contemporaries, the Pharisees, as evidenced in Mark 7:6-13, belittled their forebears while pretending to respect them: they distorted the great Hebraic tradition and substituted their own rules. They reinvented religion and, in so doing, numbed the spirit of the Torah. Their traditions were dead because they were not traditions at all but the inventions of a small powerful class of religious rulers.

In our day, we are indeed a small and arrogant oligarchy if we think we have generated all the answers to all the bothersome questions of humanity. In reality we have rather humbly acquired the wisdom and thought of our forebears. We must admit we are just a tiny slice of a long and lively tradition. To recognize and incorporate the many streams of spiritual care that is our heritage, it is important to spend time considering the origins and development of spiritual direction. Tracing the path of that tradition will clarify the definition, give us an appreciation for the roots and development, and provide strength for taking on the ministry of spiritual direction.

Various authors provide opinions on the role of tradition. This is a review of some applicable writings on the subject. Spiritual direction is part of a tradition that predates Christianity. John T. McNeil, in *A History of the Cure of Souls*, mentions Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Hebrew, and Islamic methods of soul care in his study. He also surveys the pre-Reformation church and numerous Christian denominations.⁸

⁸ John T. McNeil, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 322.

Although *A History of the Cure of Souls* is a good overview, it places undue emphasis on the confessional as a Christian method.

In a book that is more balanced, Sister Benedicta Ward, S. L. G., has provided a scholarly translation of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Her foreword describes the Abba (Father), a desert-dwelling solitary devoted to knowing God. She also depicts the people who come from near and far to seek a word from the Abba.⁹ Ward's translation of the sayings is in itself a testament to her tenacity and scholarship, but her foreword goes even further offering an appreciation of the spirit, culture, and simple wisdom of an important period in Christianity's history of spiritual guidance.

Tilden Edwards' *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion*, explores the historical roots of spiritual direction. Edwards leads the reader from Hebrew Scripture through the desert tradition while attempting to establish the abiding characteristics of spiritual direction.¹⁰ Finally, Martin Thornton, in the appendix to *Spiritual Direction*, provides valuable diagrams outlining the schools of spirituality and spiritual direction through the ages.¹¹

Each of these authors esteems the values, spirit, and methods of spiritual direction that have been handed down to us. None of them advocate canonizing any one element just because it belongs to the past, but they all celebrate life and association in the tradition of spiritual direction. They agree that it is a flowing stream whose waters mingle past and present. Edwards has said it best:

⁹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1975), XXII.

¹⁰ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 2001), 6-18.

¹¹ Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Books, 1984), Appendix I.

We are one inclusive river together, but alone we belong to a never-definitive generation, a bucket of water passing by. In Christian faith, though, the Holy One is an undercurrent running throughout, welling up in us as the particular love called for in the fullness of our gifted moment, our *kairos*. This love is connected with all other loves, which are transformed and reconciled slowly together, in the agony and glory of the Holy One's loving exposed cross.

The holy undercurrent embracing all mysteriously carries us Home, through and beyond history. Spiritual guidance in its many groping ways, now and in the past, exists to help us see, trust and allow this hidden force in and around us, and not in fear or pretense mistake some back eddy for it.¹²

The stream of tradition flows from many sources, but three in particular contribute most: Jesus and New Testament, the Desert Fathers and seventeenth-century European spirituality.

The New Testament portrays Jesus as an observant Jew. He attended synagogue, celebrated the festivals, and observed the purification rituals. Jesus lived, taught, and acted in the context of the Hebraic tradition. That tradition was characterized by the belief in a guiding force described as Yahweh (God) in the Torah, which now makes up the first five books of the Bible. God was the ultimate guide and God's guidance materialized within a covenant community. Other guides emerged who acted for God or interpreted the will of God: patriarchs, priests, prophets, wisdom figures, and rabbis.

Later, guidance came from Wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs, and, to a certain extent, Psalms. Those sources of wisdom sources provided Hebrews with guidance on friendship, family, morality, business, worship, and social practices, among other topics. The Hebraic tradition within which Christ lived also included a primitive mystical element that was distinguished by Moses' desert experience with the burning bush. The revealed name of the Law Giver in Exodus 3:14 is "I Am Who I Am," which

¹² Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 68.

is an untranslatable, mystical utterance. Understood in the sense of the One Who Causes To Be, the inscrutable name insulates the mystery of the godhead from human calculations that would limit the reality of God. Although we cannot know God directly, we can know that the unnamable One is trustworthy. He has surrounded us by "benevolent guidelines for a way of life in human/divine covenant [that have] remained the core of Jewish and the framework for Christian spirituality."¹³ This tradition of a trustworthy but mysterious divine guide expressing direction through the written and spoken word to a covenanted people informed the context in which Jesus lived and ministered.

Did Jesus bring anything new to the concept of divine guidance? Jesus, while he walked on earth, was the image of the invisible God.¹⁴ He brought the reality of God to the world not through a burning bush, nor in a column of fire or cloud. He was the Word of God made flesh dwelling among us.¹⁵ Jesus incarnated God and made him tangible. Jesus further proclaimed a new intimacy with God both for himself and for the rest of humanity.¹⁶ His relationship with the God of Moses was that of a son to a father. He called the Father his "Abba," a personal affectionate term.¹⁷ He declared that the Father and he were one, pushing the concept of intimacy to one of identity.¹⁸ But another factor

¹³ Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion*, 7.

¹⁴ [Colossians 1:15].

¹⁵ [John 1:14].

¹⁶ [John 17:7-9].

¹⁷ [Mark 14:36].

¹⁸ [John 10:30].

remains. It is Jesus' vision to bestow to the whole world the possibility of bonding with God.¹⁹ Jesus desired to extend the covenant to all people.²⁰ He began with the disciples. Apart from Jesus, the disciples could do nothing.²¹ He promised them another helper, the Spirit of truth to be with them always.²² Jesus spoke to them of a kingdom. This kingdom is would no longer be reserved for a single nation but is offered to all the nations.²³ Christ would reign over the kingdom as guide.²⁴

Jesus' method of guidance provided a lasting pattern for the Christian life. What he said and how he said it illustrates Jesus' plan of guidance. First, he spoke to large groups of people.²⁵ They attracted his concern as he looked upon them as sheep without a shepherd.²⁶ At times, (the Beatitudes, for example), he spoke to them with clear teaching. Often, he used parables. Matthew 13:34 states that he said nothing to the crowds without a parable. In this context, Matthew meant that parables were being used as sources of revelation not concealment.²⁷

¹⁹ [John 17:20-21].

²⁰ [Matthew 28:19].

²¹ [John 15:5].

²² [John 16:13]

²³ [Matthew 24:14].

²⁴ [John 14:18-21].

²⁵ There are numerous references to crowds following Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, for example: Matthew 4:25, 13:2, 15:30, 19:2; Mark 1:33, 2:13, 3:20; Luke 12:1.

²⁶ [Matthew 9:36].

²⁷ As is evident in Matthew 13:35 where Jesus quotes Psalm 78:2. "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the world began."

Second, Jesus addressed small groups. In Luke 10, he sent seventy-two disciples to prepare the way before him. He very specifically instructed them about the necessity of prayer, the presence of danger, and procedures for evangelism.²⁸

Finally, Jesus gathered a select group of twelve.²⁹ He elected to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to these disciples³⁰. In a pattern that would (and still continues to) hold true for the Christian church throughout the ages, Jesus was always available to them, guiding them by teaching, empowering, comforting, encouraging and answering questions. From within that group of twelve, Jesus cultivated and even closer circle which was more favored. They shared his intimate moments. Only Peter James and John are allowed to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter.³¹ They gathered nearest him at Gethsemane.³² They were present at the transfiguration. People who shared intimacy with God—Moses, who spoke with God face to face, and Elijah, who heard the still, small voice—stood in conversation with the radiant Christ. Included in this fellowship are Peter, James, and John.³³ Together, they witnessed the dawn of a new age as Jesus was caught up in light.

Why do these methods of communication matter? They matter because they provide generations of spiritual guides with the chosen methods of the Master—how

²⁸ [Luke 10:1-12].

²⁹ [Matthew 10:2, Mark 3:16, Luke 6:14].

³⁰ [Luke 22:24-30].

³¹ [Mark 5:37].

³² [Matthew 26:37].

³³ [Matthew 17:2].

Jesus chose to guide people. Jesus was available, provided teaching, empowered, comforted, encouraged, and personally dialogued with small numbers of people. An examination of Jesus' ministry reveals a pattern of spiritual guidance.

Tilden Edwards, in *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion*, describes this pattern in terms of five Gospel standards which spiritual guides should exemplify:

1. A sense of serving and sharing rather than 'lording it over' another.
2. Confidence in the human capacity and calling to be in contact with the Holy One, and mediate the Presence to one another through word, sacrament and deed.
3. A concern for moral and spiritual development in the history of care in the church.
4. Hopefulness in the possibility of the reconciliation of all creation with its vital source.
5. A willingness to work with all sorts and conditions of people.³⁴

Does Jesus bring anything new to the concept of divine guidance and spiritual direction? Jesus revolutionized the concept because he replaced guidance by law with guidance by truth and love. Gentleness replaced authoritarianism. Intimacy with God replaced alienation. Concern for others replaced legalism. Universality replaced provincialism. Charity replaced status. This was Jesus' legacy.³⁵

The New Testament furthers Jesus' legacy by adopting it and refining it. The Apostle Paul represents the major source of our understanding spiritual direction in the New Testament. He not only epitomized the five Gospel standards, he also contributed a fundamental conceptualization of the life of the spirit. He viewed spiritual life as a

³⁴ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion: A Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, N. J.:Paulist Press, 2001) 9-10.

³⁵ This description of Jesus' guidance is the author's synopsis of Tilden Edwards' thoughts concerning Jesus as guide in Edwards, *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion*, 7-10.

developmental experience. Paul spoke of spiritual beginners in 1 Corinthians 3:2. They are not ready for solid food, he says, and are restricted to a milk diet. In Colossians 1:10 he addressed the mature—those who by the Spirit, are increasing in the knowledge of God. Paul saw himself and the Christian community engaged in the task of bringing new Christians slowly along the path of renouncing the flesh and embracing the fullness of Christ in their lives. Paul announces his goal as "speaking the truth in love," and further explained, we are to grow up in every way in him who is the head."³⁶ Here, Paul set the New Testament agenda for spiritual guidance and direction. He viewed spiritual growth as a weaning away from fleshly values a movement toward greater identification with the ways and person of Christ. His view of a community of believers involved in the effort to let Christ live in them set the stage the next great expression of spiritual guidance; the era of the Desert Fathers.

Certain people in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries measured their search for God by the standards set in the Gospel and New Testament.³⁷ Before the third century, the New Testament church was an unstructured company in the vigor of its infancy. The faithful shared in the apostles' teaching, in fellowship, in breaking bread, in prayer and communal possessing property, as is seen in Acts 2:42-47. Martyrdom—the giving up of one's life for the faith—was an ever-present danger and constituted the premier witness of the young church. The apostles and prophets, and, later, bishops and presbyters engaged in necessary instruction while fellow Christians provided informal encouragement and admonitions.

³⁶ [Ephesians 4:15].

³⁷ Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1975), [XV].

However, as the political leaders and society organized the Church, it lost some of its original fervor and began to admit less fervent members. Political accommodation, formality, and the influence of secular Roman culture slowly insinuated themselves into the culture of the Church. Martyrdom became a thing of the past. The church of Constantine, to some, looked weakened and diluted: a mere shadow of the forceful, enthusiastic New Testament church. Some estimated the problem to be in the quality of the members and the failure of Christians to measure up to New Testament standards. The Church was increasingly characterized by secularism, refinement, and external show.³⁸ It was time for reform. And the face of reform would borrow elements from the Torah, Gospels and New Testament legacies.

The goal of the reform was to live free from the corrupt social and cultural norms of the day. The paradigm of purification exemplified in the desert experiences of Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul served as an ideal. Edwards notes, "Jesus encouraged surrender of the worldly self and its ambition, status, complacency, and material wealth seeking instead the Kingdom of God. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17)."³⁹

Seeking to live up to these standards, Christians made their way into the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor in increasing numbers from the end of the third century and through the fourth and fifth. "Some ascetics (though least in Egypt) embraced a wild and solitary life, without shelter, clothes, food cooked, or even

³⁸ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* Mahwah, N. J.:Paulist Press, 1980), 51.

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

cultivated; . . ."40 but for the most part, the Desert Fathers embraced biblical counsels within communities. Banding together, most of the time around a wise Abba or Amma,⁴¹ men and women sought to live out the kind of life enjoined by Scripture. They sought solitude, silence, isolation, prayer and simplicity of life, not as values in themselves but as ways to demolish personal attachments to the world and to establish an unobstructed contact with God. Rousseau summarizes this: "The value attached to consultation, admiration, charity, caution, humility, active service, and concern, all made a gradual engagement with others the natural outcome of ascetic practice."⁴²

Many seekers came to the desert hermitages for advice and counsel. Tilden Edwards estimates that thousands, monks and lay people ventured out to find an Abba in the desert communities. They came seeking a word of knowledge or discernment, the explanation of a scripture passage, help for daily living, advice about a vocation. The words of the Abba were typically terse but very applicable because the Abba could slice through to the core of the matter and discern a petitioner's spiritual needs. Tilden Edwards says, "This tradition, as applied to diagnosis of interior mental movements, came to be called 'discernment (*diakrisis*) of spirits.'"⁴³ Typical is this example from Anthony the Great: "A brother said to Abba Anthony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to

⁴⁰ Philip Rousseau, *The Desert Fathers, Antony and Pachomus*, in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120.

⁴¹ There are four recorded spiritual mothers according to Edwards in *Spiritual Friend*, 52.

⁴² Rousseau, *The Desert Fathers*, 124

⁴³ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 57.

him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if you do not pray to God.'"⁴⁴

The tradition of the Desert Fathers affects modern spiritual direction in three ways. First, it informs the process itself. Second, it speaks to the condition of the director. Third, it dictates the parameters for the seeker.⁴⁵

In regard to the process, desert dwellers distanced themselves from the secular world and its perceived perversions for the sake of God. To accomplish this, they selected the most hostile, barren, and isolated of spaces—the deserts. In total contrast to the world they had abandoned, they devoted to prayer as they lived in abject poverty and severe discipline. This counterculture had a purpose: undistracted confrontation with the realities of God, self and the universe. Spiritual direction is also a counter-cultural, desert experience. It pulls people out of the usual flow of daily life into isolation for the purpose of concentrating on the "underlying fundamentals of life."⁴⁶ In that out-of-the-way setting, director and directee engage in undistracted confrontation with the realities mentioned above. With the desert experience, spiritual direction is faithful to Scripture. As in the Bible and in the desert experience, the Holy Spirit is the true guide: God's way is primary.

The desert experience also helps from the position of the director. Both the Abba and the spiritual director meet the directee from a perspective of personal integrity. Both embrace the New Testament ideal of a radical commitment in which the false self dies

⁴⁴ Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 4.

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 50-55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

progressively implying spiritual warfare, the cross is taken up daily, and reconciliation and purification lead to a deeper union with Christ. Thomas Merton shows signs of this portion of the tradition when he writes of the first duty of the spiritual director: "To see to his own interior life and to take time for prayer and meditation, since you never will be able to give to others what you do not possess yourself."⁴⁷ The Abba and the director emerge prepared and available to support others in the process of spiritual growth. They engage in personal guidance and meet seekers one-on-one. In the desert, some seekers actually moved in with the Abba and shared his cell for a time. On the personal level, the word "Abba," denoting father, suggests a parental relationship. Both Abba and director are endowed with spiritual awareness as a result of prayer, meditation, confession, and purification. In contrast to the Greek, Roman, and even Hebrew traditions of scholarly teachers, the Desert Fathers offer only a spirit of humility, purification, and love. Abba and director contribute insights gained at the feet of Jesus to the dynamic of spiritual direction.

Finally, the desert experience dictates the parameters for the directee. Submission, honesty, and a willingness to engage in *metanoia*, the process of conversion, were the ordinary requirements imposed by the Abba,⁴⁸ and they are necessary elements in spiritual direction today. Although the seeker submitted to the word of the Abba, the submission required was more precisely a submission to the truth. Inevitably, a long, hard look at one's self results in the denial of inner reality in favor of a flattering self-portrait. One of the conditions of spiritual direction, whether in the third century or in the

⁴⁷ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction*, Sponsa Regis, Vol. 30, 1959, quoted in Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1989), 95.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 51.

twenty-first century, is surrender to the unvarnished self uncovered in the course of direction. Submission to the truth requires honesty. The directee needs to acknowledge honestly the falseness of inner illusions and admit that his or her faith has been placed in pretentious, idolatrous self-projections and false images. Such honesty normally leads to a desire to change from self-centeredness to a wider, more free, and humbly confident trust in one's personal value and potential by the guidance of the Spirit. Some directees seek to avoid painful introspection by avoiding it. However, for the journey of self-discovery to lead to freedom, the directee must embrace it. To embrace it honestly, he or she must trust in self, the director and, most of all, the Holy Spirit.

The present-day dynamic of spiritual direction borrows many valuable tools from the wisdom of the Desert Fathers. It receives and transmits a paradigm of undistracted confrontation with reality—the reality of God, self and the universe. It faithfully concentrates on the fundamentals of life. The director is both prepared through spiritual discipline and available to the seeker. Insights gained at the feet of Jesus are the director's most effective tool. The Holy Spirit is the true guide, God's way being primary. The director brings integrity and a dedication to truth. The directee contributes submission to the truth, honesty, and a willingness to engage in *metanoia*.

A third great tributary in the streams of tradition affecting spiritual direction is seventeenth-century European spirituality. That is not to say that there were no important contributions between the fifth and seventeenth centuries. Ambrose (339-97), Jerome (342-420), and Augustine (354-430), among other church fathers, effectively led souls along the way of perfection. The desert communities after the fifth century evolved into

monasteries and the Abba became the abbot or abbess.⁴⁹ Benedict of Nursia (480-ca. 550), Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and Aelred of Rivaux (1109-67) count among the brilliant monastic exemplars of the care of souls within their monasteries.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are vitally important because spiritual direction took a significant step forward in the area of theology. Theologians began aggressively linking theology with the spiritual life. This brought about "a creative reaction against the separation of theology and spirituality."⁵⁰ In this way, the dimension of deep spiritual faith became attached to the critical clarity of theological reflection.

The importance of this theological-spiritual marriage was emphasized by events shaking Europe where a growing spirit of depersonalization was coupled with the Protestant Reformation, war, dogmatism, legalism, and a general feeling of insecurity. These conditions provoked a reaction that came in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spiritual masters became more sensitive to the dilemmas of suffering souls. They began a more personal ministry of comfort and direction. Based on new theological reflection, sixteenth/seventeenth-century spiritual directors were able to respond to the acute needs for personal security, direction and control that people felt as they reacted to war, social, and religious upheavals.

There were three significant events and one important feature that

⁴⁹ Placid Spearritt, *Benedict in The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 152.

⁵⁰ *Bérulle and the French School: Selected Writings*, ed. William M. Thompson, trans. Lowell M. Glendon (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1989), 32.

characterized this period. First, the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517, challenged the traditional faith of Christians, caused familial and national dissention, placed theology on shifting ground, and divided the church. Second, the Thirty Years' War, a widespread European politico-religious conflict, devastated Europe and ended in 1648. From it France emerged as the preeminent power. The rest of Europe emerged weakened and reduced to religious, moral, and economic anarchy. Third was the Council of Trent (1545-63) that counted on the spirit of Scholastic theology in an effort to restructure the church's doctrinal system. The goal of the Council was to achieve theological conformity. Conformity, however, could come about only through moral and dogmatic legalism expressed in an impersonal, abstract system of theology that had become rigid.

This ancient theological system of Scholasticism was the factor that eroded the entire effort. Scholastic theology by the seventeenth century was not a work in progress. In the thirteenth century Scholastic theology had attained the summit of Christian thought and set the standard for theological reflection. However, that same theology in the seventeenth century was sad in decline. Scholasticism, for all its exactitude, had become abstract, cold, and very rigid. In the late thirteenth century it had systematized the data of the faith, but it could accomplish little for the abused Christians of the seventeenth century. Late medieval spirituality had also suffered depersonalization. The loving spirit of Aelred (1109-67) had slowly been undermined. In monasteries—both of men and women—personal contact and friendships became suspect. Affability gave way to

reserve, finally resulting in the banning of friendship. Even spiritual direction involved distancing oneself for fear of awakening unwelcome desire.⁵¹

Tilden Edwards places the schools of sixteenth and seventeenth-century spiritual direction in the enviable position of offsetting the prevailing spirit of rigidity and dissociation:

On the other hand spiritual direction could involve a kind of compensatory and empowering intimacy, as the great sixteenth and seventeenth century Roman Catholic schools of spirituality exemplify. Such direction seems especially important in an environment enforcing distance between people. It could be the only bridge of near intimacy with another in a person's life, along with the confessional.⁵²

Indeed, even in this climate the Christian world witnessed a rebirth. An impressive list of men and women of God emerged: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Ignatius Loyola in Spain, Martin Luther in Germany, Francis de Sales, Pierre Bérulle, Jane Frances de Chantal, Jean-Jacques Olier, Francis Fénelon, Jeanne Guyon, Vincent de Paul in France, Dom Augustine Baker, Nicholas Farrar, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, Richard Baxter, George Fox in England, and Jakob Spener and Johann Arndt in seventeenth century Germany. They enriched the stream of spiritual direction in several new ways. Of these outstanding personalities, two masters—Francis de Sales and Pierre de Bérulle—best exemplify the spirit of the age. De Sales' impact was as a writer of personal letters of direction with a spirituality linked with to his individualized manner.⁵³ Bérulle joined

⁵¹ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 46.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Elizabeth Stopp, *François de Sales in The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 380.

spirituality and theology. He made Christocentrism his central characteristic.⁵⁴

According to Francis de Sales, holiness is attainable by everyone, including the layperson, who is willing to make the effort. Francis began giving directees individual attention over long periods of time. The simple word of the Desert Father had given way to heart to heart, sustained conversation. Francis hoped to guide his charges toward real holiness. His word for holiness was devotion, which he defined as "that spiritual agility and vivacity by which charity works in us or by aid of which we work quickly and lovingly."⁵⁵ For him, Love and devotion were identical: "Charity is spiritual fire and when it bursts into flames, it is called devotion."⁵⁶ Francis saw the devout life as the prompt, diligent, and active response to God's will in all the actions of life. He called people back to the gospel message by reasserting the supremacy of love and the losing of one's self in submission to God's will. Although Francis' ascetical demands were often harsh, his counsel was not morose. He preferred to concentrate on the joyful consoling truths of revelation rather than on the gloomy topics of predestination and the origins of sin.

He writes inspiringly in *On the Love of God*,

God undoubtedly prepared paradise only for such as he foresaw would be his. Therefore, Theotimus, let us be his both by faith and by works, and he will be ours by glory. It is in our power to be his, for although to belong to God is a gift from God, yet it is a gift that God denies no one. God offers it to all men so as to give it to such men as will sincerely consent to receive it.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ John Saward, *Bérulle and the French School* in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 388.

⁵⁵ Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, ed. and trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1989), 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁷ Francis de Sales, *On the Love of God*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1963), 178.

Francis de Sales methodically followed the pattern for holiness and traced a road map telling us how to get there. He told his correspondent, Philothea, in the *Introduction* that devotion is spiritual alertness that causes us to respond to love's demands. He then told her how to make willful choices in seeking holiness, how to begin the journey, and how to confirm her decision. She was instructed in how to meditate on the life and death of Jesus, how to pray, and how to respond to grace in the sacraments. Francis helped his charge analyze her right and wrong attitudes, as well as the virtues and dangers involved in everyday living. While giving her all these instructions, he also fortified her will for the battle. In the end, Francis wanted to help his directee accept herself and her circumstances, then becoming independent of both, totally abandoning herself to God. Finally, Francis introduced Philothea to the benefits of an annual retreat and review of her life. This is Francis' simple and direct method: the willful choice of holiness through concentration on Jesus in prayer and the sacraments, and guarding one's feelings in order to rise above both self and circumstances to abandon one's self entirely to God.

Bérulle, who was concerned with the training seminarians, offered his directees a more theologically based paradigm. His premise was simple. Adoration is Christ-centered. The Incarnate Son offers infinite adoration to the Father, and our adoration of God, through grace, is participation in Jesus' endless and perfect adoration. He thus reemphasized the reality of the person of Jesus Christ, always incarnate and now glorified. The Jesus of Bethlehem and the Jesus of Calvary, the crucified, risen, glorious Lord is eternally real.

Bérulle explained his theology in terms of the states (états) of Christ. Christ exists in many states: in the heart of the Father, in our humanity, in the Eucharist. These

states are permanent and eternal. Only the Eucharistic state is bound to end in eternity. Because Christ is also in a perpetual state of adoration, men and women can habitually participate in this state with Christ by acknowledging God's greatness and goodness always and everywhere.

Because all the states of Christ impact and vitalize people, Bérulle's Christocentrism launched an extensive devotional thrust focused on the mysteries of Christ's life that long outlasted Bérulle himself. The spirituality of Divine Infancy, for instance, says that the Holy Child Jesus is the cause of and the model for our becoming like little children as we experience spiritual rejuvenation.⁵⁸ The devotion to the Divine Infancy moved many to live a life of perpetual childlike obedience and docility. Thérèse Martin (1873-97) whose name in the Order of Carmelites was Sister Thérèse of the Holy Child Jesus, totally embraced the spirituality of the Holy Infancy and publicized it in her *Autobiography*.⁵⁹

Spiritual direction took on a wholly individual manner in the direction and writings of Francis de Sales. His goal was to introduce everyone to the practice of devotion or holiness. For Francis, Christian revelation was consoling and joyful. His teaching was straightforward and simple but comprehensive: holiness is for all; love, the way of holiness, is foremost; Jesus Christ, meek and humble of heart, is the model. In his youth Bérulle came into contact with Francis de Sales, and was influenced by Francis' spirituality. Bérulle contributed Christ-centeredness to the direction of souls. Christ as man, he said, is in a state of perfect adoration before the Father; Christ, as the Second

⁵⁸ [Matthew 18:3 ff].

⁵⁹ Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul*, trans. John Beevers (Garden City, N. Y.: Image Books, 1957).

Person of the Trinity is in a state of infinite adoration to the Father; and our adoration of God participates, through grace, in Christ's perfect, infinite adoration. Spiritual direction, according to Bérulle, is centered on Christ in all his states: in the heart of the Father, in our humanity, and in the Eucharist. His legacy is one of heartfelt devotion to the Son of God that lives on in our times.

The one inclusive river of tradition is made up of different tributaries. As a Hebrew, Jesus lived and acted in the tradition of his ancestors. However, he guided people in a new way because he was Wisdom personified. As the Word of God made flesh, he represented God directly and proclaimed: those who saw him saw the Father. He reinforced his words with supernatural power, miracles, and healings. He listened, taught, corrected, and empathized. He approached all sorts and conditions of people inviting them into a universal kingdom composed of a new People of God. Yet, he was poor and humble and had no place to lay his head. He was vulnerable to human devices, and was condemned to death by crucifixion.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers valued Jesus' legacy of poverty, humility, and self-effacement, judging it to be the path to union with God. The perceived corruption in the Church and distanced themselves from it in desert wastes. In prayer, silence, solitude, fasting, toil, and mortification, they pursued a direct path to God. Many were given insight into the human condition and brought discernment to those who consulted them. Discernment of spirits became part of their legacy to spiritual direction along with gifts of wisdom expressed in crisp, brief "words."

Sixteenth and seventeenth-century spiritual directors built their guidance on foundations of theology. Designed in the midst of violent turmoil, their direction was

preeminently Christ-centered. It revolved around devotion, love of God and a desire for self-effacement. "God-love replaces self-love" could have been their motto. In reaction to the violence in society and in sympathy with the attractiveness of the new theology, large numbers of people across class boundaries entered into long-term spiritual direction relationships. The river of tradition continues to flow. It brings with it tremendous faith in the attainability of God through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Contemporary Christian spiritual direction is indebted to these many rich traditions that contributed to it. They originated in the person of Jesus and continued through the New Testament setting spiritual maturity as an ideal. They centered on people's development encouraging renunciation of the flesh in order to embrace the fullness of Christ. These traditions evolved within the context of a covenant between God and people, which Jesus described as a kingdom. Jesus, the image of the invisible God, and the mediator between God and humanity, was central to the process. Jesus revealed the essential unity that exists between himself, the Father, and creatures. With compassion, he associated with all manner of people on many levels according to their needs, making his presence and counsel available to all. Christian tradition teaches us the high value of an unobstructed union with Jesus, a union possible only through personal purification and growth. Embracing the gospel principles—loving God above all and neighbor as self, dying to self, renouncing goods and destructive relationships, praying, fasting, and serving—helps to remove psychological clutter, to enlighten the mind, and especially to free the will. This opens a clearer way to growth in Christ. Traditionally, a spiritual director emerges as a person equipped by ascetical practice and available to seekers. Searcher and director engage in a one-on-one, long-term, structured relationship

where discernment plays a major role. They commit to interacting at a fundamental level where self-truth is non-negotiable.

Spiritual direction enjoys a long-standing position of legitimacy in the history of Christian ministry. It is a tried and true method of pastoral care. In fact, spiritual direction flows as a stream of living tradition through the Church's story. That truth should put to rest many apprehensions about its validity as a tool for ministry.

The opposite aspect of spiritual direction—that it is old and out-of-date—may also be of some concern. Some might say that because spiritual direction has exhausted its effectiveness, ministers should favor newer methods to respond to the needs of contemporary Christians. The sustained relevance of spiritual direction as a method for the care of souls must now therefore be addressed.

CHAPTER 3

A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH

Spirituality does not take place in a vacuum. Differing environments made up of needs, anxieties and insecurities, successes, failures, and hopes color each moment in history. Christ came at a time of religious legalism and established a new type of connection with God. Paul cast a vision proclaiming the possibility of renewal. The Desert Fathers fled corruption and imparted wisdom. Seventeenth-century piety developed methods of spiritual growth in the midst of social, political, and religious turmoil. Each of these traditions influenced the discipline of spiritual direction in a unique and lasting way, but that was not the goal. Each was simply trying to address the issues of the age in which it existed. Which issues call attention to themselves in this age? How are we to address them?

To the context of the present age, trust is central. That is because betrayal on several serious levels has become commonplace. Political duplicity has resulted in public indifference. The Census Bureau reports that only 55% of the voting-aged population of the United States voted in the 2000 presidential election.¹ Social contracts are less than certain, as can be seen in the high number of divorces, the breakdown of the family, the

¹ Laura K. Yax, maintainer. *U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch*. [database on-line]; available from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p20-542.pdf>; Internet; accessed 6 May 2001.

neglect and abuse of children, the illegalities recorded by financial institutions, and the treachery committed by ministers and church workers who stand trial in cases of molestation and abuse. These and other areas of lost trust have seriously damaged the institutions of society. Beyond our national boundaries lurk unexpected dangers that threaten war and terrorism. These factors cause instability in the framework of society which inevitably brings about internal turmoil and insecurity. Men and women search for answers in every venue imaginable, including philosophy, mysticism, finance, pleasure, and cosmetic enhancement. That few find the security they are looking for is evidenced by the unrelenting quest for ever-new harbors of tranquillity.

Some of the current literature on the subject of spiritual direction addresses the issue of trust and the related issues of loneliness and confusion that have become so pertinent for our times. In *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Barry and Connolly observe that when institutions are shaken, the fabric of assumptions that they have created begins to unravel.² People find themselves adrift. At those times, people want to make sense out of life and begin to ask what they can trust as their own foundation. Barry and Connolly place faith and trust in God who continues to create, communicate, and redeem as the decisive source and object of trust.

Dyckman and Carroll, in *Inviting the Mystic Supporting the Prophet*, differentiate between the cerebral focus of past spirituality and the present inclination for biblically based study and prayer.³

² William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).

³ Catherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

The present spiritual preferences, which are scriptural in origin, are more open to concrete and personal divine-human interaction. Dyckman and Carroll consider spirituality today to be more holistic and less preoccupied with the dichotomy between body and spirit. Because of this they expect the spiritual director to be more attentive to the whole person, both body and spirit, and therefore to be more trustworthy. Dyckman and Carroll place less emphasis on a Jesus-and-I approach to spirituality and more on the participative dimension of the grace relationship. That is, God is pleased to save us less as individuals and more as a people. "Holistic," and "communal" are words they use to describe contemporary needs. Those descriptive words call for an honest, supportive, and positive approach to spiritual direction.

Nemeck and Coombs, in *The Way of Spiritual Direction*, address the ability of both director and directee to be themselves, to be transparent—to be, in a word, trustworthy. The authors assert that confidentiality is a key ingredient which quite naturally tends to increase the directee's sense of trust and security.⁴ In *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion*, Tilden Edwards says, in response to the period of continual and accelerated change in which we live, that there exists an instinct that drives people to find deeper roots that they can trust—roots that will not be torn up by changes and leave them adrift. God, he says, is not only our foundation of trust; he empowers us to trust and to love.⁵

In *Holy Invitations*, author Jeannette Bakke devotes an entire chapter to trust: trusting God, trusting ourselves, trusting others, exploring the possibilities of trust, God's

⁴ Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresa Coombs, *The Way of Spiritual Direction* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1985).

⁵ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 2001).

trust in us, and trusting the process of spiritual direction. In an insightful analysis of the topic, Bakke summarizes her chapter by saying, "Authentic spiritual direction requires us to trust God, another person and ourselves enough to speak honestly about our Divine/human love relationship. It also provides opportunities to recognize the ways God trusts and entrusts us."⁶

All of the above authors seem to believe trust is central to the context of the present age. They also seem to agree that spiritual direction should be linked to trust. Spiritual direction helps one to acquire and enhance trust at every stage. The very first act of spiritual direction is an act of trust. To speak in confidence with another person constitutes an act of trust in that person. Spiritual direction enhances one's trust in God who reveals his plans and provides insights into his ways. The process of spiritual direction then enhances one's trust in self. Over time, people engaged in direction develop a confident attitude toward God's caring, forgiving love for them. On this care they build their self-confidence. Finally, people engaged in direction perceive how God truly trusts them to seek his will, make faithful decisions, and live out their commitments.

Just as it is reassuring to ask directions of an Old Timer who has been around and knows the local roads, so it is comforting to approach a person who possesses some experience of life in general and of the spiritual life in particular. The spiritual director is expected to have some knowledge of unfamiliar roads in the journey toward intimacy with God.

One great difference exists between the old-timer and the spiritual director. The spiritual director will actually accompany the one to whom he or she has given directions.

⁶ Jeannette Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2000), 78.

The spiritual director takes the opportunity to talk things over with the traveler along the way, ask about past and future directions, the condition of the car, the tiredness of the driver, the dedication to driving until the end is reached. Together, they discuss course corrections and adjustments as needed. They try to figure out the best way to the goal. Basic to the journey is the fact that the destination is already determined and in place. It is union with God. God is the goal. God is also the way, first because it is inconceivable for mere humans to resolve the mystery of God, and to attain it, second because scripture asserts it.

In Hebrews 9:8 and 10:19, Jesus opens the way to the Father by carrying out his assigned role as a priest offering a redemptive sacrifice and in John 14:4-6 he declares himself to be the way by being the truth and the life, the source of revelation and regeneration. Isaiah 35:8 describes a highway that will be called the Way of Holiness. Psalm 18:30 proclaims the way of God to be perfect. The ways of God in the Bible are not merely the ways of good conduct but are the ways that lead to wisdom and salvation. In effect, God is the real direction, the real director, and the real goal. God has planned the itinerary and highlighted the map. It is up to the traveler, with the assistance of the director, to find and follow God's predetermined route. As Jeannette Bakke has pointed out, trust is the precondition of this journey.

Ours is a world of continual and accelerated change that requires unprecedented adjustments. Living in a world that demands course corrections every few days causes people untold hardship. The recent history of the United States has recorded unprecedented terror. We have shared grief and have sought to come to terms with it in various ways. Many, seeking some kind of guidance, some sense of direction, and some

source of assurance, initially turned to God and religion as trustworthy sources of comfort. But these solutions proved temporary and have all too soon been abandoned while people have resumed "life as usual." There is an uneasy feeling among some that we have missed something here. Could it have been a clear call of God that was missed?

To re-evaluate the meaning of our times, we are willing to call upon God. God is also calling upon us. God, I believe, is calling people to a deeper, more personal relationship with him—a relationship built on mutual trust. Trust on God's part is no less real than trust on the part of humans. Edwards may say that God is the empowerment of wise loving and trusting, but God is also an archetype of trust. One of the gifts of spiritual direction is recognizing how much God trusts us. "God entrusts us with bearing God's presence, voice, values, and actions in the midst of a beleaguered world."⁷

God invites people to cooperate in the achievement of his divine purposes. Theologically, this is an incarnational principle—something realized in discernible manifestations of divine origin in this world, akin to Jesus' incarnation which represented the invisible being of God to humanity. According to this principle, people are connected to God through Christ and are, in this way, entrusted with the mission of making God known through their humanity. They enjoy access to God through Christ, and are themselves conduits of accessibility for others. God entrusts such people with tasks, ideas, hopes, and relationships as he increasingly creates new life in them. Learning to recognize and appreciate the trust which God has bestowed on us, and learning to recognize and appreciate the multi-faceted aspects of trust in self and others, is part of the task of spiritual direction.

⁷ Ibid., 77.

I have asked three people, two men and one woman, who have shared a spiritual direction relationship with me for some years to answer the question, "What has spiritual direction meant for you and what are your expectations as you continue this spiritual discipline?" To illustrate the need for trust, and with their permission, I will reproduce pertinent portions of the responses the two men furnished. I want to save the woman's response for another chapter. The first response is from a middle-aged, pre-retirement male who is married, is a corporate supervisor, and attends a Christian church. We have been meeting for six years.

You asked me to give you my thoughts on spiritual direction, and, specifically my 'work' and time with you. My expectations going in were that you would help me sort out all those unsettling questions and issues in my life. Do I have a spiritual life? What role does God play in my life? Is Jesus in my life? Is there really a Jesus and do I honestly really believe he exists? Do I need him? How can I have a spiritual life and still work and profit in a more or less soulless corporate, profit making business? . . . I do consider you a friend, and value your friendship and times together. . . . I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is with us. . . . In conclusion, . . . I do not know what I want, except that if I do not keep God in the center of my life, I suffer distress and depression. . . . The peace of the Lord be always with you. Love D.⁸

He sees spiritual direction as a tool which can help him "sort out" all those unsettling questions and issues in life." The journey is often dark. This man has lived in the shadows of doubt—these shadows are just one of the issues he has identified as needing sorting out. He is also in psychotherapy addressing other issues. His response identifies questions he wishes to deal with. Can God be in his life? he asks. Does God provide answers for situations D. feels are contradictory and/or confusing? he asks. His words exemplify the uncertainty of a generation cut loose from traditional answers. He is searching in the darkness to find a solid life foundation which he fully knows he doesn't

⁸ D., letter to author, Coarsegold, California, July 6, 2001

quite have a hold on. What he desires is absolute certainty, but he knows it will always elude him. This makes D. uneasy and dissatisfied.

Faith or trust is another issue with which he is grappling with in our times of spiritual direction. Centering on the person of Jesus, he asks, Is there a Jesus and do I honestly really believe he exists? Do I need him? As D. doubts the existence and the effectiveness of Jesus Christ, he wishes the Savior to be a real, healing, and reconciling force in his life. I have learned he is familiar with the Jesus Seminar and there is true intellectual doubt in his mind. But D.'s heart yearns for the love and companionship of the living Christ. I pray that one day he will be able to trust Christ and say to Jesus what he wrote to me: "I do consider you a friend, and value your friendship and times together." D. is more comfortable with the mysterious Yahweh of the burning bush and the Spirit than he is with Christ. The flesh and blood person of Jesus intimidates my friend while the ghostly Spirit is an assurance. He writes, "I firmly believe that Holy Spirit is with us" indicating his trust in the guidance of God's Spirit and in our ability to discover that guidance.

D. also wonders, "How can I have a spiritual life and still work and profit in a more or less soulless corporate, profit making business?" He senses the contradiction between his ideal spiritual life and the professional life he has to accept to make living. But he must live day by day within that contradiction. The tension results in depression and anxiety. I have encouraged D. to practice the presence of God and to use short "arrow prayers" to connect spiritually while on the job. D. would greatly benefit from being more incarnational and accepting his co-creative activity in the daily handling of God's created universe. He would benefit from trusting in God's trust somewhat more.

When he confesses, "I do not know what I want," it saddens me, for he is correct. His insight as he writes the following further reveals the contemporary spiritual dilemma: "except that if I do not keep God in the center of my life, I suffer distress and depression." Distress and depression are common symptoms of the lack of trust and the consequent lack of security so prevalent in our time. We have come to that point where it is necessary to repeat that the search for a personal and deeper relationship with the living God requires the willingness to trust God.

Is God trustworthy? The question of how one trusts God resides in the other problem of how one knows God. To know God in the visible, incarnate Christ provides us with an unprecedented access. However, God infinitely transcends our nature and is thereby fundamentally unknowable. But God grants glimmers, especially when we consciously and repeatedly open ourselves to him in prayer, solitude, and silence. These glimmers of the divine within reveal a God who is imminent as well as transcendent. If the way is often uncertain and dark, the glimmer of God's abiding presence calls forth faith and provides safety. It takes patience to come to God. Courage and trust are necessary to continue to seek him when the outcome seems so unsure. But ultimately, God is trustworthy and as the Psalmist wrote, "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust."⁹

As I work with D., I sense he trusts me. He has expressed trust and friendship in his response to my questions. I believe he trusts as a result of the honest sharing we have engaged in over many years. He has discovered that he makes more progress when he has someone else by his side as he engages spiritually. Just as Jesus sent out his disciples

⁹ [Psalm 40:4].

two by two, so the journey of faith is best undertaken with a companion. When we feel alone it is best to have someone else stand beside us. From time to time a companion will share his or her own journey with its own desperate uncertainties. He or she will be willing to share personal brokenness and grief. As two people build trust and confidence in one another while continually acknowledging God as their common director, spiritual direction occurs.

The second respondent in my survey, also a male, is younger than the first. He works in the legal profession, is recently married, and attends a Christian church. We have been meeting for nearly four years. T. is an Evangelical who is exploring a call to contemplative prayer. He writes:

I have experienced the call to a more contemplative life by living a much busier life than when I began the contemplative journey. Left to my own, I may have attached myself to contemplative practices and resisted relationship, and closed off a channel to hear God. I have begun to experience the maxim that the fruit of contemplation is a deeper call to community.¹⁰

The more a person trusts God, the more God reveals of himself. This is the amazing thing that happens when a person exercises trust. As T. has trusted God, God has revealed his secret plan to him. T. has experienced a facility with contemplation and an ease in indulging in contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer, however, did not figure into the prayer style T. had experienced all his life. He was initially unsure of the authenticity of God's call and needed to consult someone regarding the genuineness of what he thought he was hearing. That is why T. first came to me. Soon, he trusted God's authentic call to contemplation but feared it would separate him from others. As time

¹⁰ T., letter to the author, Fresno, California, July 5, 2001.

passed, he discovered that God's lead was not away from community but toward a deeper call to community. T.'s story is the story of faith and trust even when the way is unfamiliar and unclear. I cite this story to show how spiritual direction can be a faith experience and an adventure of discovery provided one is willing to trust.

Both T. and D. are involved in situations that required trust. This often places people on guard against the hazards of the unknown. One who decides to trust must be willing to be open to unexplored possibilities. Unfamiliar ways may be just as scary for the trusting person as for the distrustful one, but the trusting person is more willing to proceed into the unknown. Peace and comfort follow the decision to be open to possibilities. One who decides not to trust is forever hedging his or her bets, resisting the total openness of the trusting person. Distrustful people are busy limiting their actions to what they perceive to be "safe." The fruit of distrust, therefore, is insecurity. D. entertained many doubts. He remained guarded on certain faith questions—the lordship of Jesus Christ, for example. He managed to trust the process of spiritual direction and the spiritual director. If he stayed with the process long enough, D. felt his issues would eventually be sorted out. Furthermore, he considered the spiritual director a friend who would not let him down. T., on the other hand, came to trust in a different way. Suddenly faced with an attraction to contemplative prayer, T. sought guidance from an experienced person. He trusted God enough to believe that God might be leading him to this important new means of self-expression. However, his prudent judgment led him to seek help in discerning the truth of what he felt to be a call of God. Because of that trust, he happily discovered the community dimension contemplation. His discovery freed him to live a fuller life in the Lord.

T. first had to trust God. Trust in God is often called upon when one's faith is shaken, or in times of weariness or grief. But there is an even deeper level of trust—one that asks: Do I trust that God will reveal himself or his will to me? Do I trust Proverbs 3:5 which says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." T. had to believe God wanted to reveal himself in an unfamiliar situation. It is not difficult to believe and trust God when he acts in ways we expect. A just God doesn't let sinners get away with their transgressions, for example, so we aren't surprised when this is evidenced. But what about a God who does not act according to character? Do we trust him? This was T.'s dilemma. He worshipped, and still worships, at a strongly communitarian church whose vision seemed contradicted by the individual call to contemplation he was hearing. God was not acting in character. T. wondered what he should think and how he should act in light of God's confusing call. He could relate very well to what Dr. Bakke meant when she wrote, "Trusting God beyond the God we have understood or known up until now can feel very uncomfortable. Then we are called to depend more on God than we do on ourselves—a very unlikely possibility unless we are aided by grace."¹¹ Spiritual direction came as a great help in T.'s situation. He was led to trust God unconditionally and, as a result, has experienced an expansion of his gifts in the service of God and his church.

T. had to deeply trust another person. He had to trust the spiritual director. I know T. had trust in his work and family setting. He was trusted and trusted others in his church. But it is much easier to trust people with what we do than with who we are. Trusting another person with our story always carries some risk because that person is

¹¹ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 63.

allowed a glimpse into our soul. That is far different from occupational and familial trust. He took the risk and together we explored his calling and his doubts. Our interaction is described by Dykman and Carroll's depiction of spiritual direction: "Our relationship is not that of a guru to the uninitiated, or of a parent to a child, or of a teacher to a student, but a relationship that does whatever it can to facilitate God's own direction in our lives. We are more accurately described as beggars going out together, helping each other search for food."¹²

This is a stark but helpful description of the dynamic of spiritual direction. It suggests interaction on many levels—physical, . . . intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and psychological. It also suggests a common goal: discovering God's direction for the lives of both beggars. It suggests the unknown quantity that is always present when God is involved. It suggests effort because to help each other search for food is going to demand work. Spiritual direction, as Dykman and Carroll have exemplified, cannot be carried out without each party giving trust to the other. T. and I have both been able to accomplish this, and the result of T.'s trusting someone with whom he can relate with confidence has benefited both of us.

Finally, T. had to trust himself. To some people, trusting in self eliminates the need to trust God. But this is not the kind of self-trust I am writing about. Rather, I am referring to what Jeannette Bakke has described as "trusting that the redeemed human self can perceive and follow God's desires and trusting our willingness and capacity to hear and respond to God."¹³ This kind of self-trust gives us the confidence both to hear the

¹² Katherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 21.

¹³ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 70.

voice of God without having to make up the scenario and to cooperate with the will of God once we have perceived it. Dr. Bakke suggests that this self-trust enables us to rest in God and accept whatever he sends our way on the journey.¹⁴ T.'s roadmap in spiritual direction, then, was to trust his ability to hear God and to follow God's desires as he became aware of them. T. has gone on to enroll in a church leadership course, become a board member for a mentally challenged children's home, and begun teaching inner prayer in his local church. The three facets of trust T. embraced—trust in God, another person and self—have led him to a better understanding of his very private prayer style, but he has gained an appreciation of his community, his ministry, and God's leading through the discernment process. Had T. chosen not to trust, he would have remained confused about God's promptings concerning prayer, never broadened his understanding of prayer as a bridge to his commitment to others, and not assumed the ministries that have enriched his life.

To conclude, trust is central to the experience of spiritual direction. Trust has been addressed on many different levels: our trust in God, in self, and in others as well as God's trust in us. The issue of trust is particularly contemporary because of the many instances of betrayal experienced in our world. Everyone, it is clear, deals with trust issues. Family histories, friendships, spousal relations, interactions with co-workers and authority figures, mentor influences, and more all color the way we approach other people whenever trust is required. Paternal neglect, mistrust of superiors, betrayals by friends—all of these affect the quality and level of trust we can offer others. Another crucial element that affects our ability to trust has to do with the timing of the breaches that created our trust issues. If a person experiences the abandonment of a hero figure in

¹⁴ Ibid., 70.

adolescence, for example, the wound can last a lifetime and the person may never come to terms with the effects of the betrayal.

People bring all of their personal trust issues to the table in the setting of spiritual direction. Often, the spiritual director must identify these and speak to them in the course of the meetings. Likewise, the spiritual director carries trust issues springing from the same sources mentioned above. The director and the directee together must deal with all these issues. The process of spiritual direction thankfully provides a setting of trust within its very context. It creates a safe place. Comfort between director and directee assures both parties that their confidences, fears, hopes, confessions, and insecurities will find an understanding heart. Conversation, in the presence of God, is valid and sacred. There is no fear either of being laughed at or ignored. Both director and directee are in a safe place where they can trust the other person deeply. With time, even the hurts of others who have taught them not to trust fade into the background and are often divinely healed. I can be honest, truthful, humble, and trusting in this setting where God is a witness and the other person is a confidential friend.

Spiritual direction works today. It works in a variety of settings and for different people. It works across denominational barriers. Misgivings about spiritual direction's value to contemporary needs should be put to rest. Ministers should wisely offer spiritual direction to postmodern men and women without qualms or misgivings.

Pastors may have other legitimate fears and concerns that focus mainly on the prioritizing of ministerial functions. Discerning pastors weigh spiritual direction's value against a variety of theological, ministerial, and personal goals. To allay these fears and concerns, a look at the value of spiritual direction is therefore crucial.

CHAPTER 4

PASTORAL MINISTRY

Chapter three concluded with the words, "I can be honest, truthful, humble, and trusting in this setting where God is a witness and the other person is a confidential friend." Having addressed God, others, and self, it is time to speak to the "setting" of spiritual direction as an area of trust. People can trust God, others, and self and yet not be comfortable with the process of spiritual direction. There is something unsettling about meeting month after month to face one's deepest thoughts, ask questions, pray, and discuss with another person. One might ask, Do these meetings accomplish anything? Isn't there another way to ask God to bring things to our attention? These questions indicate a struggle with trusting the process.

The creation of trust in the process of spiritual direction lies largely in the hands of the spiritual director, for trust in the process is best exemplified by the trustworthiness of the practitioner. The pastor, as spiritual director, offers much in terms of trust. The entire congregation is involved in calling a pastor to shepherd it, during candidacy, a committee closely examines pastoral credentials, it raises questions about dependability, and scrutinizes the prayerfulness of the candidate. For these reasons, there seems to be no better-qualified person to establish a relationship of trust in spiritual direction than the pastor. Further, spiritual direction is essentially a pastoral (shepherding) ministry. The pastor, as the "shepherd of the Good Shepherd," leads the sheep, protects them from

wolves, and does not leave them except to find the one who has strayed. Trust is the cornerstone of both pastoral and spiritual ministry.

Trust is the link between pastoral ministry and spiritual direction. Pastoral ministry is that special giftedness given to certain members of the body of Christ that enables them to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers.¹ Peter gave a good picture of the pastoral ministry when he exhorted the elders to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain but eagerly."² While pastoral ministry includes a wide variety of roles ranging from preacher to administrator, pastors—as caregivers to the soul—fit into the role of spiritual director almost naturally. Yet, only a minority of the pastors I know admit to using spiritual direction in their ordinary ministries. Admittedly, there may be many reasons for this deficiency. For example, some have no interest in spiritual direction, some feel unprepared, and some sense they are not gifted in that area. Fortunately, large numbers of pastors appreciating the congruence between the two disciplines, make time for spiritual direction within the dimensions of their pastoral ministries. My hope is that this chapter will serve to encourage more ministers to engage in this ministry.

One of the greats of spiritual direction was the pastor, Francis de Sales. His story will serve as an illustration of the wise use of spiritual direction by a person involved in pastoral ministry. Following the illustration of Francis de Sales, I will analyze Eugene's Peterson's concept of unhurried leisure to pursue an answer to the problem of busyness in

¹ *Spiritual Gifts Discovery Workshop*, Charles E. Fuller Institute, fourth edition (Pasadena, Cal., 1989).

² [1 Peter 5:2].

the pastoral situation. Obstacles and objections to the use of spiritual direction in ministry will make up the next portion of this chapter. First, let us look at some of the ways current literature addresses the connection between the pastoral ministry and spiritual direction.

In *History of the Cure of Souls* John T. McNeil, asserts the relief of distressed souls to be a major concern of every society. He lists churches, church leaders, and pastors among the possible channels for soul care.³ Martin Thornton, author of *Spiritual Direction*, maintains that the care of souls begins at the moment distress ceases. Thornton considers spiritual direction to be almost synonymous with pastoral care: a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers.⁴

Eugene Peterson focuses directly on the pastoral care of souls in *The Contemplative Pastor*. One of his chapters, entitled *The Unbusy Pastor*, advises a change in attitude by pastors about how they best utilize their time. Peterson argued for a pastoral attitude much more inclined to unhurried personal conversation and less inclined to the preoccupations of management. His argument literally links pastoral ministry and spiritual direction, even though, for him, the cure of souls is wider than, but inclusive of, spiritual direction.⁵

Holy Invitations by Jeannette Bakke never specifically mentions the pastor as spiritual director. She emphasizes that all Christians on a walk with God are in a

³ John T. McNeil, *History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).

⁴ Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1984).

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1989).

favorable position to work as spiritual directors with people willing to be accountable.⁶ Likewise, Tilden Edwards does not place a special onus on pastors to be spiritual directors in either *Spiritual Friend* or *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion*. However, his list of directors in both volumes includes such pastoral saints as Augustine and Gregory, Bernard and Aelred, Francis de Sales, Nicholas Farrar, Jeremy Taylor, François Fénelon, and Vincent de Paul.⁷ Though none of the above authors limits spiritual direction to pastors, these sources make clear that pastors are not by any means excluded from this uniquely pastoral ministry. The wise use of spiritual direction by a person involved in pastoral ministry is illustrated by Francis de Sales, a man who blended shepherding and direction in a complementary manner.

There was perhaps no busier clergyman in the whole of seventeenth-century Europe than Francis de Sales. He entered the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church as an ordained priest in 1593 a mere 76 years after Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the Wittenberg University church door. Born in 1567, Francis de Sales grew up surrounded by the turbulence of the Reformation.

Upon becoming a priest, he was immediately assigned to the post of provost in Geneva. This meant that he headed the cathedral chapter—the body responsible for the spiritual and temporal concerns of the cathedral church—and was responsible for the care of all the souls who resided within the cathedral's jurisdiction. His charge applied to

⁶ Jeannette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000).

⁷ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1980). Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 2001).

Protestants as well as Catholics. Few clergymen desired to be assigned to that difficult post. But de Sales ministered with an enthusiasm commensurate with his faith in God.

At great personal cost, he immediately engaged in a mission to win Chablais, a Swiss province to the Northeast of Geneva, to the Roman Catholic faith. He was so successful in this, and in all his ministries, that he was nominated in 1599 coadjutor bishop of Geneva, and became bishop of that city in 1602. He administered the diocese, preached regularly, ministered as confessor and director to many, and organized the teaching of the catechism. In 1603, he met the saintly Jeanne Françoise de Chantal and became her spiritual director. They cooperatively founded the religious order of the Visitandines, an order devoted the service of the poor and sick. Francis de Sales wrote *The Introduction to the Devout Life* in 1609 and *The Treatise on the Love of God* in 1616. He died in 1622.

Francis de Sales had been a busy man. His life as a bishop was filled with the daily obligations not only of running a church, but also of seeing to the organization of an entire diocese. His responsibilities included visiting the sick and the poor, writing official letters, deciding on the placement of clergy, conducting staff meetings, planning and implementing evangelistic strategies, presiding at liturgical functions as well as preaching, teaching and counseling. Francis de Sales' ability amid all these duties to maintain his own profound spiritual life and to make time for one-on-one spiritual direction sessions with people who looked to him during their times of need is truly remarkable. He always found time for people, and, like his contemporary, Fénelon, he even directed people in writing when circumstances prevented him meeting them face-to-face.

As evidenced in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis de Sales gave his own inner life high priority and focused on fostering the life of the spirit in others through spiritual direction. To de Sales, the ministry of spiritual direction was an expression of his service within the Body of Christ, and he said as much in the preface to the *Introduction*. After confessing to the reader that he anticipated people would take him, the bishop of Geneva, to task for spending time giving spiritual direction, de Sales wrote, "The ancient bishops and fathers of the Church were at least as careful about their duties as we are, yet, they did not refuse to take charge of the particular conduct of several souls who had turned to them for assistance."⁸ Francis de Sales understood spiritual direction to be part of the pastoral ministry. In the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he counseled Philothea in the following way, "Let us always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ crucified and go forward in his service with confidence and sincerity but with prudence and discretion."⁹

For de Sales, confident and sincere service in the church was synonymous with the care of souls. The foundation of his service was Jesus Christ crucified. Just as Christ had sacrificed himself on the cross, Francis de Sales was sacrificing himself to the care of souls. Perhaps that is why he considered spiritual direction so important in his daily life and gave it such a prominent place there.

The criticism of people who failed to understand the close connection between pastoral ministry and spiritual direction caused Francis de Sales some anxiety, for he

⁸ Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1989), 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

considered time for spiritual direction time well spent. Some, in our churches today, similarly question the allocation of time by pastors. The responsibilities of the pastor seem disproportionately heavy on the side of running a church as opposed to prayer, the practice of personal holiness, and the nurture of souls. There are always so many things to do, to accomplish. How does one prioritize pastoral activity? Admittedly, some pastors do not prioritize at all. There are those who simply take care of what comes up as it comes up, never giving any thought to what is most important. That is a pitfall to be avoided at all costs. Time management techniques instruct us to set our priorities, both in terms of the vision we have for our lives and in terms of our life goals and objectives, before we set up our calendars. Naturally, more time—or at least more quality time—should be dedicated to those functions considered more important because they are more directly linked to one's life vision.

In his busy life, Francis de Sales devoted major blocks of time to prayer and to the direction of souls. How would the twenty-first century minister assess de Sales' priorities? The most common reaction might be skepticism. Yet, Eugene Peterson asks, "How can I persuade a person to live by faith if I have to juggle my schedule constantly to make everything fit into place?"¹⁰

Spiritual direction is time consuming. I know of few pastors who feel they have the time to devote to long-term spiritual direction. It requires the ability to listen profoundly to another person, to connect deeply with that person, and to invest personally in his or her life story. Listening in this way—really listening with all of one's

¹⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 17.

attention—takes energy, concentration, interest and time. "Pastoral listening" says Peterson, "takes unhurried leisure."¹¹ Taking on cues from society, pastors often reiterate the phrase "There just isn't time in the day." Peterson observes:

Leisure is a quality of spirit, not a quantity of time. Only in that ambience of leisure do persons know they are listened to with absolute seriousness, treated with dignity and importance. Speaking to people does not have the same personal intensity as listening to them. The question I put to myself is not How many people have you spoken to about Christ this week? but How many people have you listened to in Christ this week?¹²

Listening takes time. Only as it ranks high on a pastor's list of priorities is spiritual direction, which Margaret Guenther has called "Holy Listening," assigned time on the pastoral calendar. If a pastor is busy, always believing there are more important things to do, he or she will not take time to listen. That person will leave spiritual direction to others—to monks or mystics, who love that kind of thing anyway. But if, like some pastors, this person is beginning to realize that his or her busyness might just be an excuse to avoid the demanding ministry of listening, then he or she becomes more willing to establish values and set goals in terms of "leisure-like" activities such as spiritual direction and the care of souls. It is up to every pastor to decide before God where the call of ministry truly beckons him or her.

Although time is a major obstacle for pastors, it is not the only one which prevents them from engaging in spiritual direction. There are at least five more obstacles to consider.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid.,

The first of these could be enunciated as follows, "I am reluctant to get involved with argumentative people or with religious fanatics who imagine they see visions." Admittedly, difficult argumentative people sometimes do seek spiritual direction. In my experience with spiritual direction, however, not one of these people has appeared. That is because people who take the time to locate and contact a spiritual director almost always fall into one of two categories. The first category consists of people who appreciate the spiritual life and would like some guidance on how to grow in it. The second category of people is made up of people who need to be in direction either because of vocational requirements (such as priest or deacon candidates) or because of some ministerial necessity (such as the case of persons who are themselves spiritual directors). Both categories generally take spiritual direction very seriously because they recognize its potential benefits.

Regarding visionaries, two points need to be made. If they are real visionaries and truly receiving gifts from God, why be afraid of them? Many would consider themselves privileged to be conversing with true saints of God. On the other hand, pastors should easily be able to recognize fanatics and refer them to the appropriate helpers. In any case, a pastor-director, if unable to deal with a directee for any reason, may simply terminate or refuse to begin the process of spiritual direction. In this ministry, one of the first things the pastor must do is lay down the ground rules for the relationship, and one of those rules is that either party may terminate the relationship if it becomes unsatisfactory.

The second obstacle pastors face is a lack of training and a perceived lack of sufficient expertise in matters of the soul. It is legitimate to question one's lack of

training. I believe, however, that someone who is educated in theology, especially in moral theology, and who is acquainted with the spiritual disciplines and traditions of the Christian Church, is a good candidate to be a spiritual director. David E. Rosage in *Beginnings of Spiritual Direction*, added more qualities to those mentioned above. They should be included in preparing a pastor to become a spiritual director: a pastor, says Rosage, should have a vibrant faith in God, possess personal warmth, be generous with time, be prayerful, possess a general experience of life, be under direction, and radiate inner joy and peace.¹³ These traits qualify a pastor to be a skillful and compassionate spiritual director.

But is formal training in the area of spiritual direction necessary? The jury is still out on that question. Some say that no one should engage in spiritual direction without first having some sort of focused training. Many institutions, including George Fox University, offer a fully developed training program in spiritual direction and certify those who complete the training. Other people maintain, as noted above, that general theological knowledge and certain character traits are the only requirements spiritual directors should be compelled to meet. Pastors, according to this thinking, need not feel inadequate to the task and should engage in spiritual direction. Often, spiritual direction is learned through experience—on the job, so to speak. If, after having been exposed to spiritual direction for a time, the pastor feels the need for further training, he or she should by all means avail him or herself of that training.

¹³ David E. Rosage, *Beginning Spiritual Direction: How to Choose a Spiritual Director, What to Expect from a Spiritual Director, How to Avoid Pitfalls* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1994), 49-50.

A third obstacle occurs when pastors do not believe they are "spiritual" enough. However, several answers to this objection exist. The first and most obvious is that any pastor can remedy this situation rather easily. The pastor can begin to develop a spiritual life by initiating such habits as devotions, Bible study, meditation, spiritual reading, and critically reviewing his or her thoughts, words, actions, and omissions daily before God. Over a period of time and with the Holy Spirit's help, the pastor will discover which disciplines in the spiritual life are most effective for him or her. The pastor will also discover first hand that spirituality corresponds to a specific context particular to each person who engages in it. In his or her own unique way, the pastor will slowly begin to draw closer to God. Just as no two saints are alike, no two pastors are alike. Teresa of Avila sought out others to help her reflect on her extraordinary experiences. John of the Cross was an intellectual giant who described one's ascent to God, but both, in their own way, experienced a deep, vibrant spiritual life.

The second counter to this objection is a question: To whom are pastors comparing themselves when they say they aren't spiritual enough? Does any particular pastor who falls into this category fear encountering someone who has spiritually surpassed him or her? Given the fact that the spiritual life is very personal, how does one measure and compare spiritual attainment? All have their spiritual strengths and all have their spiritual weaknesses. To my knowledge, no standard exists that can compute spiritual strengths and weaknesses. If there is no standard, then, to compare one's self to another in the realm of the spirit is a vain exercise. Some people who come to me for direction seem far more advanced in certain aspects of the spiritual life than I am. That is not a cause for alarm, for the spiritual director is also in a position to learn and grow from

the relationship with his or her directee. Spiritual direction, thankfully, is not a one-way street.

Pastors are prone to focus on what they consider most important. If administration, programs and board meetings take first place on a pastor's scale of values, he or she will concentrate his or her efforts there. If, on the other hand, a pastor's prayer and devotional life rank first, it will get most attention. Choices must be made since pastors are only human and cannot accomplish everything. Does one become a pastor to save the church, succeed in business, or become popular? If that is the pastor's choice, spirituality will take second place on his or her scale of values. Does one become a pastor mainly to offer the love of Christ and instill that love into the hearts of others? If that is the pastor's choice, spirituality will be at the top of his or her list of priorities. Happily, help is available in making these choices, and I believe the greatest help is found in the example given by Jesus of Nazareth.

In his fine book, *Jesus On Leadership*, C. Gene Wilkes reminds us, "Jesus did not come to gain a place of power. He did not come to defeat human enemies. He did not come to overthrow an unjust government. Jesus came to show us the heart of God. His entire message and ministry here on earth was to show selfish, power-hungry people like you and me what love looks like."¹⁴ If Jesus came to show us the heart of God, by teaching us what love looks like, then it is incumbent on pastors to schedule ministry in a way that aligns with Christ's priorities? This brings us to the fourth obstacle. It is the argument that since the difference between counseling and spiritual direction is slim and

¹⁴ C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus On Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership from the Life of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 168.

pastors already do counseling, there is no need to engage in a fundamentally equal practice. To answer, the type of counseling the objector is referring to (either psychological or pastoral) must be identified and clarified.

Few pastors are professional psychological counselors. The practice of psychological counseling "focuses on issues of development and decision making across the life span among relatively adequately functioning individuals."¹⁵ In the domain of applied psychology, psychological counseling is related to the disciplines of clinical psychology, industrial psychology and school psychology. Typically, the client is either referred to or chooses to consult with a psychological counselor. The relationship is that of patient to professional. Fees are charged, and tests, therapy, teaching, and training typically take place. Spiritual direction, on the other hand, is a mutually agreed upon relationship where the agenda is set by the Holy Spirit. Testing, therapy, and formal teaching are absent. Generally, no fees are assessed. The relationship is that of spiritual friend to spiritual friend rather than that of client to professional. The two are very different.

The second distinction is between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. Here too important differences exist. In spiritual direction both parties wait for the Holy Spirit to set the agenda, whereas in pastoral counseling, the counselee generally sets the agenda. In spiritual direction, both parties rely mainly on the Wisdom of the Spirit to support the process of discernment, whereas in pastoral counseling, while relying on grace, the participants also rely on psychological principles that render the process more clinical and less charismatic. The greatest difference, however, is in the process itself.

¹⁵ *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 1985 ed., s.v. in CMS, "Psychological Counseling."

While pastoral counseling aims to solve problems, manage crises, or heal memories, spiritual direction is a process by which one pays attention to another's story, explores aspects of another's faith, and prays with another person. Since neither method of counseling is akin to spiritual direction, pastors who are already counselors ought to at least consider participating in spiritual direction also.

The fifth obstacle is the belief that spiritual direction is an exclusively Roman Catholic practice. One might think that for a number of reasons. First, history's most notable spiritual directors appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the very era in which the Reformation challenged the Roman Catholic Church. Second, the reformers largely rejected practices such as spiritual direction, perhaps because sacramental confession was often included. Third, spiritual direction emerged from a contemplative tradition—a tradition closely linked to monastic life. The aspects of contemplation and meditation which were linked to medieval liturgical practices, such as the Divine Office, had little appeal for most reformers. Finally, the great spiritual friendships between holy men and women, like those between John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Jeanne Françoise de Chantal and Francis de Sales occurred largely among Roman Catholics.

Yet, as Tilden Edwards has observed, "A more personal sense of human and divine relationship can also be inferred among Protestant Pietists, Quakers, in segments of the Anglican and other Protestant pastoral traditions, and in the Eastern Orthodox continuation of the early desert tradition of the spiritual father and mother."¹⁶ When

¹⁶ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press. 2001), 12, 13.

Methodist small groups, for instance, met in the eighteenth century, they met for the purpose of mutual edification and correction. Thus they worked at identifying and minimizing the obstacles which impeded their growth toward holiness. This was a work of spiritual direction in the Protestant tradition.

Therefore, the obstacle founded on the belief that spiritual direction is exclusively a Roman Catholic practice is clearly invalid. Spiritual direction has become part of the current conversation in Evangelical churches. In its April 23, 2001 issue, *Christianity Today* carried an interview with Jeannette Bakke, a faculty associate at Bethel Theological Seminary. In that article, she said:

Evangelicals are listening for God in ways that are different from our usual understanding of discipleship. We are looking at many Christian disciplines, including prayer, silence, solitude, discernment, journaling and others . . . Spiritual direction is one of these disciplines many Evangelical Christians are learning about and exploring.¹⁷

There are surely more obstacles to pastors taking up spiritual direction than those listed above. However, these are general enough and typical enough to demonstrate that objections need not prevent pastors across the theological and denominational spectrum from integrating spiritual direction into their ministries.

I have suggested that the role of the pastor is to show the heart of God to his or her people. That leads one to believe that the predominant task of pastoral ministry is more spiritual than temporal. In fact, theologians often define the pastor as the "spiritual leader of a local church."¹⁸ Pastoral ministry, however, is not limited to developing the

¹⁷ Jeannette Bakke, "Making Space for God," *Christianity Today*, 23 April 2001, 88.

¹⁸ Guy P Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E., 1983), 354.

inner life of people. Roman Catholics ascribe a threefold function to pastoral ministry, "teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and ministers of government."¹⁹

Less concerned with central church authority, Evangelicals tend to center more on the pastor's teaching role. In contrasting authority and the teaching function, Duffield and Van Cleave state, "In churches where there were several elders, some might have had a ministry of leadership who were not teachers (1 Tm. 5:17), but the *real* (emphasis mine) pastor was a teacher, 'Especially those whose work is preaching and teaching' (1 Tm 5:17b, NIV)."²⁰ Though many Evangelical pastors assign church administration to lay people or to staff members, some assign pastoral care to a staff pastor, while others retain both teaching and administrative duties.

The Anglican Church assumes a middle posture as it highlights the teaching-preaching function of the pastor while affirming the governing and sacramental functions. For example, part of the examination of a candidate for Anglican Holy Orders reads: "Now you are called to work as a pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the church."²¹

The more charismatic churches consider pastoring a spiritual gift—the God-given ability to "assume long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers."²² The charismatic pastor, with the pastors of the other churches—

¹⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Priestly Office: A Theological Reflection* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1997), 46.

²⁰ Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations*, 354.

²¹ *The Book of Common Prayer: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 531.

²² *Spiritual Gifts Discovery Workshop*, fourth edition.

Evangelical, Catholic, and Anglican—has the responsibility of fostering the spiritual wellness of the group he or she pastors.

Spiritual direction is important in every pastoral setting because spiritual direction and pastoral concerns converge. The first aspect of the convergence of spiritual direction and pastoral concern is that of receptivity to ministry. Whether hierarchical or free, few pastors would prefer parishioners who show no concern for intimacy with God to those who seek a true relationship with the Lord. If, indeed, the pastor's concern is to show the heart of God to his or her people, the most eager respondents are those who are already seeking God's heart through spiritual direction. They bring the quality of fervent expectation to the pastor's efforts. Shepherding them is a joy.

A second aspect of the meeting of spiritual direction and pastoral concern is that of community. The quality of a church member's response to Christ affects the quality of that member's involvement with the community of believers in direct proportion. T.'s story, provided above, bears witness to the truth of this statement. T., in looking inward, discovered communal dimensions of prayer he never suspected. His experience led him to discover that the purpose of spiritual direction was not to give him warm feelings about God, himself and the world. Spiritual direction enabled him to connect with the Church's mission to the wider community and to realize that the aim of spiritual direction is love in the service of others. The fire to warm one's world is often ignited in a spiritual direction session. The call of spiritual direction, therefore, is twofold, outward as well as inward. St. John expressed it this way, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to

love one another."²³ Pastors have cause to rejoice because the engagement in apostolic mission—not the mental health of the directee—is an aim of spiritual direction.

The predominant task of pastoral ministry is more spiritual than temporal. Spiritual direction is essentially working from the inside out. It is helping a person to do God's will, build the kingdom of the Father, and form his or her life according to the gospel. It is also preparing people to fulfill the great commission by nurturing their devotional longings.

Pastors make good use of spiritual direction when they devote time and attention to it. Fears that spiritual direction will diminish or inhibit important aspects of ministry are overcome when pastors accept its legitimacy and usefulness. Addressing the obstacles to spiritual direction, one hopes, has permitted pastors to eliminate doubts and overcome misgivings. Addressing the benefits of spiritual direction has served to invite confident pastoral participation in this important ministry.

However much one would wish it to be so, not every Christian is attracted to spiritual direction. Some, however, do seek help in direction. Who these seekers are and what characterizes them will occupy our attention in the next chapter.

²³ [1 John 4:11].

CHAPTER 5

THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

The purpose of this chapter is to identify some of the characteristics of those people who seek spiritual direction. A clearer understanding of searchers may create in pastors an incentive to consider engaging in spiritual direction. Three factors may lead to this better understanding, the type of person who seeks spiritual direction, the spirituality they are pursuing, and the expectations they bring to spiritual direction.

What type of person seeks out a spiritual director? Three cautions have to be set down at the outset. The first caution is that the following descriptions will be general in nature since it is impossible to identify types in detail. The second caution is that the following is not an exhaustive compilation of every type of searcher, since the possibilities of various combinations are overwhelming. The third caution is that the only aim in trying to establish a "type" of searcher is to provide some of the qualities that are common to most searchers so that they can be identified. No other meaning should be read into the word "type." Searcher types included here are derived from my personal experience as a spiritual director.

In this age of change and uncertainty, the questions concerning life's meaning, personal stability, and relationships abound. Dallas Willard states humanity's dilemma somewhat starkly, "And amid a flood of techniques for self-fulfillment there is an epidemic of depression, suicide, personal emptiness, and escapism through drugs and

alcohol, cultic obsession, consumerism, and sex and violence—all combined with an inability to sustain deep and enduring personal relationships."¹ People who wonder about spiritual direction are often those who feel isolated in the world while striving to live their daily lives according to the Lord's will. The searcher typically asks: Would spiritual direction help me grow in my relationship with the Lord? Those who ask such a question are aware of the Lord's personal presence and of their need to respond to it. Often, they do not know just how to begin their response and want a companion, helper, or advisor to assist them. Typical searchers feel they need help finding a start in their search for increased intimacy with the Lord.

They often seek a spiritual director because of some of the following or similar experiences. Sudden surges in their desire for prayer and scripture reading have brought them up short as they wonder how to deal with these outpourings. They might desire to check the validity of a word they believe comes from God and get advice on how to proceed under this word. They sometimes feel impelled to become involved in a movement or a discipline that seems incompatible with their present life style. They have experienced a recent trauma—the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or the need to make a life-changing decision. Some might have begun to doubt the quality of the life they live, or relevance of their profession. Others have experienced coldness in their familiarity with Christ and need advice on what this could mean for them.

Searchers are faith-filled, eager, and hopeful. Searchers do not believe God would lead them to spiritual direction to frustrate, or worse, to deceive them. They are generally enthusiastic about beginning to meet with the spiritual director and to share

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), VIII.

their unique story. They anticipate the process will yield good results even if it takes time. These are some of the qualities that typify seekers. What spirituality do they pursue?

Usually, searchers want to discover a pattern in the spiritual lives they wish to lead. The pattern of spiritual life in the individual is called that person's "spirituality"—the distinctive form adopted to live out one's life in God. Although a fuller treatment of spirituality will be developed below, this description is provided only to indicate the seeker's spirituality early in the spiritual direction process. Meeting with a spiritual director is an important part of the searcher's spirituality. Searchers generally have some sense of Christ abiding within and have made a commitment to him. Most searchers eagerly desire, however, to attain to a greater level of intimacy with Christ and to know God's love in every part of their being. They hope to find in themselves a more genuine response to God's initiatives. They make the effort to discern God's ways for them as an expression of their spirituality. This leads them to share the experiences of their spiritual journey by telling their story to another. They discuss the quality of their unique relationship to God in the anticipation of knowing God's plans for them with clarity and completeness. They reveal the obstacles to God's will, hoping to eliminate these impediments as they address them openly. They celebrate victories, blessings, and graces with their spiritual director in the knowledge that God warms their lives and encourages their devotion. This spirituality can be described as a spirituality of faithful submission to the living God. From the spirituality of the searcher come the expectations that person brings to spiritual direction.

Expectations best describe what results searchers anticipate from spiritual direction. Most hope, that by enlisting the aid of a director, they will be helped in establishing a closer bond with God. This is almost universally true and sets the goal for most searchers. Many searchers wish to see an improvement in their response of obedience and faithfulness to God's initiatives. They want to be helped in addressing their relationship to God, make sense of it, and see progress in it. Many expect to meet Christ in a new and vital way, and to experience his forgiveness, healing, and the restorative power of his resurrection. Sanctification and wholeness are also desires the seeker hopes to fulfill. There is the hope that the person's future will be a continuation of the divine intimacy found in spiritual direction.

Generally, the searcher exhibits certain personality, religious, and experiential traits, adheres to a particular spirituality in the pattern of life lived in God, and approaches spiritual direction with definite hopes and anticipations. This description paints a broad picture of the typical searcher, why, and how he or she chooses spiritual direction as a vehicle for the inner life. However, a better concept of the approach of the searcher to the person of God through spiritual direction may be illustrated by two examples.

While pursuing a counseling degree in her college years, J. had decided to be more forthcoming with others. She had, until then, been very quiet and retiring and felt a strong impulse to change and open up to other people. Her new openness gave her more confidence and greater facility in communicating with others. She had experienced lonely struggles while trying to follow Christ. She remembers this thought from her youth: "what a wonderful concept it was that someone would be there to help another

pilgrim in this most important part of life's journey."² She found in her husband a person with whom she could share the deepest parts of herself. She experienced immense loneliness after his sudden death two years ago. She was able openly to share her grief with Christian friends thanks to an earlier resolve to be forthcoming with others. Her sharing gave her comfort but seemed strangely incomplete.

Remembering the experience, she wrote: "My friends are supportive, loving and caring and will accept me as I am. But I also find that they are too sympathetic, sometimes lack objectivity, and of course, our relationship is two-way, meaning that I must always consider their needs in the conversation as well as my own"³ J. remembered too that, like her friends, her husband had possessed a normal spousal investment in the outcome of her decisions and because of that fell somewhat short on objectivity. J. prayed over feelings of dissatisfaction and emptiness. She states the Lord gave her a yearning for someone who would provide an "oversight or direction" to her life. About this time, she attended a retreat where she was asked to answer the question, When was the last time you saw your spiritual director? She had never considered spiritual direction. In a private consultation, the retreat minister identified a spiritual director who lived in J.'s area. J. and I have been meeting monthly since then.

Often, although the desire for a spiritual companion is persistent, people ignore that desire or postpone their search. J. was not familiar enough with the discipline of spiritual direction to be able consider it as an option. But she was faithful to her decision to share her deepest self, and was confident she would be comfortable with the process of

² J., letter to the author, July 5, 2001.

³ Ibid.

spiritual direction. A happy, fulfilling marriage had answered her need for several years, but after her husband died, she instinctively sought to fill that void with the fellowship of Christian friends. She discovered that, although friends had their place, they could not meet the need for a soul companion. Her grief led her to an open-ended search that eventually resulted in spiritual direction.

She writes, "I am wanting someone who can be objective . . . someone who will not be too sympathetic, but will confront me with my blind side, since it is easy to deceive ourselves . . . someone who will challenge me to grow and hold me accountable. A spiritual director is the one person who is invited in and who comes to bring guidance, correction and sometimes forgiveness."⁴ J. came to spiritual direction indirectly because of the trauma of the loss of her husband. She came to spiritual directly through an innocent question at a retreat. But when looking over her life, desires, and decisions, divine guidance is evident. She believes God and trusts him in the processes of discernment she presently faces. She confidently moves forward helped by spiritual direction.

Barbara Troxell comes to spiritual direction from a completely different angle. She is a United Methodist clergywoman and the coordinator of spiritual formation at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Troxell became involved with spiritual direction in 1980 while serving as a United Methodist district superintendent in the California-Nevada Conference. Because a superintendent does not

⁴ Ibid.

really have his or her own pastor, she began to feel the need for a director. Barbara felt she was without a shepherd in the isolation of an upper echelon administrative job. She became involved with spiritual direction simply by contacting a woman whom she knew was a spiritual director. The director she selected was a younger woman, but Troxell was reassured by the quality of her training. After some prayer, they decided they were compatible enough to engage in regular direction.

It was important, says Troxell, that her spiritual director be of a different denomination. As one of the first female superintendents in her denomination, Troxell was getting a fair amount of attention. This fact combined with the inevitable overlapping of roles, she thought, would make a spiritual direction relationship within the same denomination difficult.⁵ Barbara's spiritual director is a nun who resides at a Roman Catholic retreat house near Chicago. They meet once a month on the morning of a day dedicated to silence, contemplation, and prayer. "I take the entire day as a retreat," says Troxell, "the first hour to meet with my spiritual director, the rest of the day on my own. This is a very important time for me, both in my ongoing journey with God and in my work with other people."⁶ Both ministry and spiritual goals take shape for her in spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction addresses life as it is lived. It is not an exercise in speculation. It is a very practical, hands-on process. That is perhaps why the women mentioned above both value the impact of spiritual direction on their individual journeys. The word "journey" is important because it indicates a prolonged personal application to the task of

⁵ "Spiritual Direction: An Interview with Barbara Troxell," *Christian Century* (April 22-29, 1998), 441.

⁶ *Ibid.*

submitting to the will of God. The spiritual director, therefore, is sometimes called a companion, someone along for the duration of the task and not just for an occasional chat. Spiritual direction suggests a voyage under God's direction and beside a friend who encourages and sustains.

The above profiles exemplify some of the common characteristics of people who seek spiritual direction. Both women needed help in getting a start on addressing issues in their lives. Both wanted a companion, friend, and advisor with whom to share the deepest yearnings. Both experienced loss, J. the loss of a husband to death, and Troxell, the loss of her privacy being the first woman to hold a prestigious position in her denomination. Both were aware that what was going on deep in themselves involved God. Both were faith-filled, eager, and hopeful of the outcome of spiritual direction. These women evidence a need in their lives for a personal spirituality that will respond to their personalities. The patterns they have chosen to adopt—their spirituality—are particular to themselves and to their spiritual preferences.

The issue of spirituality is central to the concept of spiritual direction. Previously, spirituality was defined as: the pattern of spiritual life in the individual—the distinctive form adopted to live out one's life in God. This definition talks of "living out" one's life in God purposely. The patterns adopted are not inborn but need to be developed, worked out, experimented with, and adjusted occasionally. One's spirituality is like a living organism part of which is growing and part of which is dying and being sloughed off. In time, people outgrow some dimensions of their spirituality and put them aside while they use other dimensions as they strengthen and become more functional. Let us trace the development of Christian spirituality.

Conversion starts the process of organic growth called Christian spirituality. Conversion involves turning away from sin and making a declaration of faith in Christ whose life, death, and resurrection made reconciliation between God and humans possible.

Conversion is followed by a period of sanctification and a time of commitment wherein the believer deliberately sets him or herself apart for godly service and dedication to God's perfect will. Paul the Apostle expressed it this way: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."⁷

According to Paul, we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices. Self-surrender is our dedicatory offering to God. Allen P. Ross, in his summary on Romans emphasizes the fact that the verb form for "to present" is an aorist form and is followed by verbs in the present tense. This, he says, is intended for contrast. The idea is "to present" one's self in dedication to God. The verb is active and does not indicate passive acts of yielding or surrender. It denotes rather the active giving of a gift.⁸ The gift is "your bodies"—the body being the outward form and expression of the inner person—talents, abilities, desires, and hopes.

Giving this sort of bodily gift is a kind of spiritual worship which involves rational, physical, and spiritual service. Just as the first verse deals with one's

⁷ [Romans 12:1, 2].

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *A Syllabus for the January Term Course: The Book of Romans*, (January 3-7, 1994), 72-73.

relationship to God, the second verse deals with one's relationship to the world. "Do not be conformed to this world" is Paul's depiction of the beginning of the sanctification process. If a person lives, loves, and chooses as the world does, that person is worldly. Worldly living cannot harmonize with the total dedication of self as a gift. The spiritual mind is opposed to the carnal, fleshly mind that Paul mentioned earlier in Romans. Therefore, change must happen: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind." The idea of setting oneself apart to God—sanctification—is implied here. Following Ross' thought, the essentials of spiritual growth, therefore, are dedication, separation, and transformation by the renewing of the mind. Dedication, separation, and transformation describe the phases of "organic" spiritual development referred to above. Reference to these phases will be made in connection with the spirituality of the seeker in spiritual direction. Being the basic elements of spiritual growth, they provide a focus for directors and directees alike.

Spiritual direction serves to transform and renew the spiritual mind in an effort to be less conformed to this world and more open to grace and holiness. The spiritual director's role is to help bring a sense of wholeness to the directee's awareness of the offering of self. Wholeness means one offers God a gift of the whole self and not merely the "spiritual" part of one's person. For people of certain religious backgrounds, it is all too easy to believe that spiritual life is actually opposed to physical life. People so inclined approach spiritual direction with the hope of being liberated from the body. The directee must be guided away from such destructive assumptions. Spiritual worship is the work of the whole person. Every effort to avoid being conformed to this world and to transform the mind will be made by the whole person, including the body. Meditation,

prayer, fasting, Bible study, journaling, and scripture memorization are just a few of the efforts which require the inclusion of the entire person—body, soul, and spirit. All include the entire person, body, soul, and spirit. We are not only disembodied spirits. Plainly stated, "Spirituality is simply the holistic quality of human life as it was meant to be, at the center of which is our relation to God."⁹

The director typically guides the directee to adopt a certain type of spirituality. Spirituality can now be defined more completely as the underlying set of principles adopted by a person or group of people that informs activity, thought, service, worship and devotion so as to produce an increasing commitment to God's perfect will. The easiest way to exemplify this is to examine a particular "school" of spirituality.

Benedictine spirituality, for instance, borrows heavily from the Desert Fathers and especially from Abba Anthony. It is best expressed as a model that centers on the abbot as the spiritual director of individual disciples. The abbot is considered father, teacher, shepherd, judge, physician, and steward but is subject to the rule of God. The disciples are monks who live a common life under Benedict's rule. Obedience takes center stage: the abbot is obedient to God, and the monks are obedient to the abbot as the interpreter of God's will. The underlying set of principles here includes a high view of God's direction, a belief in the incarnation of that direction in the person of an abbot, a sense of security in obedient submission, and a resultant spirit of liberation, joy, and cheerfulness. When people agree to live a common life as Benedictines, they must assent to the principles that guide it and the conduct that embodies it.

⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 77.

It is more complicated, however, to introduce individuals to the spirituality of spiritual direction for two reasons. First, people who are approaching spiritual direction for the first time are not monks. Their assent to certain objective, shared principles of life and action is not required. Second, every directee is an individual. Each directee comes already clothed with psychological and religious traits that are uniquely personal. The spiritual director will normally work with the directee to uncover his or her natural spiritual propensity which Martin Thornton calls "attrait."¹⁰ The French word, *attrait*, used by Thornton means an affinity or attraction toward a certain type of spiritual expression.¹¹ The spiritual director faces a wide variety of "attrait" in every individual. Only close examination will reveal these inclinations. When the spiritual predisposition of the directee comes to light, the director will suggest suitable devotional practices. This process takes considerably longer than one or two meetings and the suggested spiritual practices are subject to continual review and modification. People who come to a spiritual director expect, at least implicitly, the eventual discovery of a personal spirituality and the development of devotional practices aligned with their spiritual leanings. People in the process of direction search for a personal spirituality which depends on their own inclinations and character. Together, directee and director endeavor to discover, practice, review and adjust the directee's spirituality. Scripture affords insight on spirituality. Romans 12:1-2 has provided the understanding of the self-sacrificial gift, actively presented, as a pattern for spirituality. The offering, made in

¹⁰ Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1984), 32.

¹¹ My spirituality, for example, might be described as objective and somewhat speculative. It combines an outlook on atonement that is objective and fair with emphasis on the fatherhood of God and the divinity of Christ. Prayer tends to be deferential, liturgy holding the central place.

hope of transforming the mind, contrasts with accepting and living by the values of the world. Spirituality leads to the one purpose of discerning what is the will of God and offering back to God faithful adherence to his will. Yet, it is flesh and blood people who undertake spiritual direction. These people come with both valid and faulty preconceptions about spiritual direction. Some of these preconceptions are the expectations they entertain.

Jeannette Bakke defines expectations as, "how we think something will be."¹² Expectations, she says, are not necessarily reality even when we consider them real. Sometimes they are imaginings based on our personal history. Expectations, both conscious and unconscious, can influence action. In the examples provided above each woman brought a different set of expectations into spiritual direction. As mentioned above, J. expressed her expectations this way: "I am wanting someone who can be objective . . . someone who will not be too sympathetic, but will confront me with my blind side, since it is easy to deceive ourselves . . . someone who will challenge me to grow and hold me accountable. A spiritual director is the one person who is invited in and who comes to bring guidance, correction and sometimes forgiveness." She also expected a director who would not be too easy on her, who would challenge her, and who would correct her. She also expected forgiveness to be offered as she felt the need for it.

Barbara expected a professional who would share her walk and help assess her ministry with others. While each woman emphasized different expectations as she embarked on her journey of spiritual direction, and each continues to expect different

¹² Jeannette Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2000), 80.

things, some similarities do exist between the two cases. Both welcome challenges, both want companionship, and both expect timely healing. But because their personalities, circumstances, and professions differ, both their initial approaches and their current paths in spiritual direction differ.

Just as these two women bore specific expectations, so does every person entering spiritual direction. Some expectations appear more often than others. Many fall into two broad categories: fear and hope. Fear and hope are contrasting but interrelating emotions. Fear is a feeling caused by the awareness or anticipation of some known or unknown danger. Fear often causes courage to fail. It is expressed by anguish and sometimes by agitation and flight. Hope, on the other hand, is always concerned with the unknown, but is an emotion of confident expectation of fulfillment or success. Hope often enhances courage, promotes security, and stimulates action. Fear and hope also interact. Spiritual direction always presents unknown issues for the searcher. Although fear, caused by the threat of danger, is usually present, hope, caused by the probability of achievement is also present. An interesting dynamic plays out between these two emotions in the initial direction meetings as hope overcomes fear.

Fear is a universal expectation. We wonder: Will I be judged? Will I be found adequate to the task? Will I be asked questions that are too personal? Will the director invade parts of my life so that I lose independence? Will I be coerced into discussing concerns I have been avoiding and am not ready to address?

Fearful expectations are more pronounced in less secure people who tend to judge their behavior as outside observers would. One of my directees wonders why she cannot confront her atheist brother-in-law. This inability to witness Jesus Christ to him bothers

her greatly. She is fearful that God is not pleased. She is also fearful her spiritual director is displeased. In such a case, it is important to change the directee's fearful expectation into a hopeful expectation. As her spiritual director, I assist her by praying with her for discernment to determine the wisdom of witnessing at all. If God seems to be guiding in the direction of witness, we might pray over the best method and time. Together we explore the possibility of rejection and what that could mean to the directee. But, most important, we explore the fear she harbors that God and her director are not pleased. By proceeding in this way, I try to replace her fear with hope and rise to a new level of trust in God. Fear is an inhibiting agent. It not only impedes action, it also discourages prudent reflection about the consequences of action. Feelings of hope are preferable to those of fear.

Some people come to spiritual direction with hopeful expectations already in place. They hope to discover some answers about God. They look forward to conversing with another individual about very personal things. They hope to become more pure and holy by the experience. They want to be challenged about certain things such as spiritual disciplines, prayer, or their own assumptions. They know they will receive healing, blessings, and forgiveness.

However, hopeful expectations can contain a danger of their own. When hopefulness is unbalanced, it often becomes wrapped up in two unrealistic assumptions: the conviction that the spiritual director has all the answers and the conviction that spiritual growth will be rapid and unobstructed. Neither is a hopeful expectation because hopeful expectations, even at their most positive, remain within the bounds of reality. Neither of these is realistic.

The first expectation—that the spiritual director has all the answers—is inherently flawed. Spiritual direction is not even a search for answers. It is a relationship among individuals: God, the directee, and the director. The hopeful aspect of the relationship is that the help offered by one person to another will result in the reception of and active response to God's communication. The essence of spiritual direction is found in sharing a journey not in providing answers. Additionally, no reliable barometer, material or spiritual, exists to measure spiritual growth. Surveys and other instruments can measure Church membership, but a person's degree of openness to God's communication defies human methodology. Personal impressions or feelings are not trustworthy, either, since they are so easily distorted by the subtler impulses of the heart. If spiritual growth can't be measured, how can one know what "all the answers" even means, let alone have the knowledge to cover those bases.

The second expectation—that spiritual growth will be quick and easy—is no less absurd. On the one hand, according to Saint Paul's insights on incorporation, the believer is already "in Christ" by baptism. Incorporated into Christ's humanity, the believer shares in the resurrected and ascended life of Christ. This union is already a greater progress than we could make on our own. On the other hand, though, "there is no 'quick fix' for the human condition. The approach to wholeness is for humankind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience."¹³ Incorporation in Christ does not excuse one of us from the arduous task subjecting our rebellious being to the reign of Christ. Instant holiness is not a realistic expectation.

¹³ Ibid., 70.

Negative expectations are almost always tied to fear, and include the fear of seeming inadequate, self-centered, shallow, or exposed. These fears are based on one's self-concept more than on anything objective and they can be replaced by positive expectations as the spiritual director guides the directee toward realistic hopes. Truly positive expectations abound. They include the hope of awareness, discovery, fellowship, improvement, challenge, healing, and blessing. The wonder of spiritual direction is that it has the power to liberate people from their expectations of self, allowing them simply to expect God to do what is best. Jeannette Bakke explains:

In contrast to most areas of our lives, participating in spiritual direction calls us to a certain freedom from expectations—freedom to be open to whatever appears without having to speculate about it ahead of time. This open conversation is a way of trusting God with the past, the present, and the future and believing that the Holy Spirit will reveal whatever is needed. Rather than saying we have no expectations, however, perhaps it is more accurate to say that we shift from having expectations of each other and ourselves to hoping more in God. Our questions revolve more and more on being responsive to whatever the Spirit might bring to our attention rather than speculating about our own speaking, listening, or responses.¹⁴

Fear and hope are the two common expectations of those who seek spiritual direction. Though they are distinct in nature, they are strangely linked in spiritual direction. Both these emotions have the power to add to and subtract from the experience of spiritual direction, but both have to be dealt with by director and directee alike.

The three factors that lead to a better understanding of the searcher are the type of person who seeks spiritual direction, the spirituality they are pursuing, and the expectations they bring to spiritual direction. Spiritual directors take all three factors into account at the beginning stages of the direction process and keep them in focus as the process continues. A determining factor in all the interactions between director and

¹⁴ Ibid., 84.

searcher will be the searcher's "type"—his or her religious inclinations. Type, or "attrait" as Thornton phrases it, points to a particularly suitable spirituality for the searcher. The searcher approaches direction with a mixture of hope and fear. This approach presents the opportunity for both healing of negative fearfulness as well as the reinforcement of realistic hope.

Those who engage in spiritual direction are dedicated to a better life more wholly attuned to God and God's will. They choose to make the efforts necessary one day to reap a rich harvest. They count among the disciples of Saint Paul who want to live lives of active devotion not on the lower level of their nature but on a higher plane. His words in the Epistle to the Galatians fit them well:

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.¹⁵

Paul's words confirm the need of Christians to dedicate themselves to sowing good seed—spiritual seed that is incorruptible. To busy one's self with the works of the Spirit prepares one for eternal life in that same Spirit. The searcher is one who desires to sow and reap in the Spirit. Entering and persevering in the process of spiritual direction indicates the courageous attitude of the spiritual directee who is determined not to waver or "weary of doing good." Here is perhaps the most general description of the searcher's type, one who desires to sow incorruptible seed for eternal life. The seed that is sown in hope and fear is that of one's unique spirituality steadfastly pursued in the expectation of drawing ever closer to God.

¹⁵ [Galatians 6:7-9].

To preserve authenticity and reassure pastors, the words of two persons seeking spiritual direction were utilized. To portray the searcher's approach to spiritual direction expectations typical of many searchers were addressed. Introducing searchers in this way should have provided pastors with a reassuring depiction of perspective spiritual directees.

It is incumbent now to look at the spiritual director. Some pastors fear not being adequately prepared for the task of spiritual direction. By delineating the characteristics and qualifications of a typical director and by describing his or her responsibilities such fears may be diminished. The accountability incurred by the spiritual director positively involved in another's pursuit of perfection will be addressed to assuage any lingering doubts that remain.

CHAPTER 6

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Henri Nouwen has identified the Church, the Bible, and the individual Christians as ministers of spiritual direction. The Church ministers by connecting the believer's story with God's story and inviting the believer to be directed, guided, and make connections as part of the church community. The Bible ministers when it is read as a personal message. The reader searches the Bible asking where and how God is speaking to him or her. Finally, individual Christians are spiritual directors. "A spiritual director is a Christian man or woman who practices the disciplines of the church and of the Bible and to whom you are willing to be accountable for your life in God."¹

Nouwen's reference to the disciplines of church and Bible call for clarification. To practice the disciplines of the church, spiritual director must participate in common worship; engage in personal prayer, scripture study, spiritual direction, and be committed to his or her own continuing relationship to God. To practice the disciplines of the Bible, the spiritual director, convinced that scripture is given by God's inspiration for faith and practice, applies the biblical standards of belief and morality in his or her life.

In addition, Richard Foster suggests corporate guidance as another possible minister of spiritual direction. He defines corporate guidance as "knowledge of the

¹ Henri Nouwen, "Hearing God's Voice and Obeying: A Dialogue with Richard Foster and Henri Nouwen," *Leadership* (winter 1982): 7, quoted in Jeannette Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 95.

direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit *together*."² His inclusion of corporate guidance as a means of spiritual direction is probably attributable to his Quaker roots. The shared experience of direct and inner communication of Christ in the Friends community certainly qualifies as spiritual direction. Viewing each of the aforementioned venues—Church, Bible, corporate guidance, and individual Christians—as ministers of spiritual direction is a valuable exercise, for each provides a different insight into the formation of souls. However, only one area of ministry will claim our attention in this chapter: the ministry in which one individual Christian gives help to another. More specifically, we will consider the spiritual director's characteristics, techniques, and mission.

Several authorities, addressing the characteristics of the spiritual director, are worth consulting at the outset. Richard Foster illustrates some of the characteristics of the spiritual director in *Celebration of Discipline*,³ where he says spiritual direction is a charismatic function based on the strength of the director's personal holiness. Self-acceptance, steadiness, maturity, knowledge of the psyche, experience of the inward journey, a non-judgmental attitude, and a belief in tough love characterize Foster's ideal spiritual director. Foster bases his observation on peoples' ability to discern the Lord's will whenever they gather in his name by citing Matthew 18:19-20. "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." However, Foster clearly included the possibility of individual direction—between

² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 175.

³ Ibid., 175-190.

a director and a directee—in his development. Quoting a seventeenth-century mystic, Dom Augustine Baker, Foster observes that the spiritual director is "God's usher whose ministry it is to lead souls in God's paths, not his own."⁴

Baker's masculine depiction of the spiritual director as usher stands poised against a female depiction—that of midwife—cited by Margaret Guenther. In *Holy Listening*, Guenther likens the spiritual director to a midwife in three essential ways: first, both are present, in deep and intimate areas, for another person who is at risk; second, both are teachers assisting at natural events, seeing what the birth-giver cannot see and knowing how and when to confront; finally, both rejoice in the outcome of the labor.⁵ The images of usher and midwife both seem valid and elucidate the truth that men and women come to spiritual direction from differing perspectives. Although the midwife seems much more involved in the situation than the usher, both images evoke the concept of a helper.

David Rosage, a pragmatic observer and practitioner of spiritual direction, uses the image of a "water boy" in *Beginning Spiritual Direction*.⁶ The masculine image, which comes from the world of sports, suggests another kind of helper. The water boy does not call signals or run plays: he brings refreshment to those who are thirsty. The three analogies of usher, midwife, and water boy are helpful in describing the helper role of the spiritual director. They differ only in the degree of involvement.

⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁵ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1992), 81-109.

⁶ David E. Rosage, *Beginning Spiritual Direction: How to Choose a Spiritual Director, What to Expect from a Spiritual Director, How to Avoid Pitfalls* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Servant Publications, 1994), 45-63.

Others have suggested additional analogies. Less clinical than Rosage, Tilden Edwards, in *Spiritual Friend*,⁷ paints a picture of the spiritual director as a physician. Assuming the soul is sick and always in need of a doctor, the director must do three things: first, cleanse the wound; second, align the cleft parts; and third, give the wound rest. By this analogy, Edwards suggests that the physician does not heal but provides an environment in which healing can happen. Some would say people do not need healing at all, affirming a belief in the innate soundness of the human personality. Edwards contends they do need healing and lists a variety of conditions which need healing: the buildup of anxiety, a crowded mind, and bodily tensions that, in his phrase, "cloud clear presence."⁸ As the director attends to these conditions, alignment takes place. Edwards phrase is, sight provides insight: seeing the wound helps to heal it. Sight is all-important for, as physician, the spiritual director has to appraise the seriousness of the wound and to diagnose the illness. Sight also reveals deeper wounds that are in need of healing. Edwards suggests that rest comes between spiritual direction meetings. This is the time to apply the protective bandages of spiritual disciplines. To the three analogies of usher, midwife, and water boy now comes that of physician. All three refer to the spiritual director as a helper to someone in need.

One more analogy may be added to those already mentioned. It comes from Hans Hoffman who says that the spiritual director should "have no expectation or anticipation of where a person should go—not my will but thine be done. [The analogy of] bee

⁷ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 125-174.

⁸ Ibid., 133.

keeper is the most spiritual, [and] least assuming."⁹ The beekeeper seems indeed to be least assuming among the professions likened to spiritual director. The beekeeper simply stands by while the bees do the real work of building and protecting the hive, cooling it, gathering and storing food. Beekeepers, in fact, have no expectation or anticipation of where their charges should go because they have no control over the trips of the bees or over their work. The beekeeper, however, periodically collects honey and wax from the hive. In doing this, the keeper forces the bees to outdo themselves in producing—to live up to their highest potential. It is in this sense that the spiritual director resembles the beekeeper. The journey of the directee is largely out of the director's control. Like the beekeeper whose only duty is to provide a favorable environment for optimum production, the spiritual director's duty is to provide challenges that are apt to keep the directee alert to the pursuit of spiritual excellence.

Hoffman's analogy of beekeeper reinforces the other analogies of usher, midwife, water boy, and physician. All represent helping functions with more or less hands-on dimensions, physician and midwife being the closest to the object of care. Beekeeper, usher, and water boy provide a more discreet type of care while being involved with the wellness of the subject. These five images may help to objectify the role of the spiritual directors. They suggest, by analogy, the similarities that exist between them and the spiritual director.

These images suggest certain qualifications spiritual directors must possess to be effective. Let us now attempt to spell these qualifications out and paint a fuller portrait of the spiritual director than we now possess. Rosage has made a required qualifications list

⁹ Ibid., 127.

of for spiritual directors. First on his list of credentials is an abounding trust and confidence in God. He then adds genuine happiness coming from inner joy, sincere concern for others, a warm personality, the practice of prayer, an awareness of personal limitations, and liberality with time. Rosage joins to these emotional assets some important intellectual and character resources. The director should warrant trust and confidence, be under the guidance of another, have general life experience, and be knowledgeable in theology, scripture, and psychology. The director should also have the ability to listen, the capacity to affirm, the courage to confront, the ability to hold another accountable, and the capability to clarify things appropriately. He does not suggest that the director should possess all these qualities at the same level. However, allowing leeway for the differences in personality, gifts, and inclinations, Rosage's inventory does not seem overwhelming. Spiritual directors would benefit by testing themselves regularly against his list.

Gerald May also lists important directorial qualities which apply to spiritual directors of all stripes, clerics and laypersons. Several experienced directors agree on the necessity of these qualifications. They are: "Personal spiritual commitment, experience, knowledge, and humility, and an active discipline of prayer/meditation. The capacity to be caring, sensitive, open, and flexible with another person, not projecting one's own needs or fostering long-term dependency."¹⁰ These match Rosage's qualifications in four areas— knowledge, experience, spirituality, and sensitivity—suggesting qualities central to the director. The fact that both Rosage and Edwards agree on these particular

¹⁰ Gerald May, M.D., *Pilgrimage Home* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1979), 158, quoted in Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 126.

qualifications makes them important enough to consider carefully. In addition to the major qualities already listed, Edwards has gleaned other qualities from sources which are included here:

Have experienced a movement from despair to grace: trust in the healingness of the universe, and delight in the freedom of others (James Forbes)

Have gotten through your Messianism (about any particular spiritual path), i.e. that everybody needs this (James Fowler)

Have the capacity to step aside and let the Spirit of Christ do the direction— [realize that] skill development is secondary to this (Peter and Linda Sabbath)

Be in full communion with the whole of your own humanity—not airy-fairy; be in the body of some tradition where there can be external validation of your experience (Graham Pulkingham)

Be capable of noticing the movement of the Spirit, and of providing an environment out of which the person can pay attention and allow this intuitive noticing to become an important part of his/her life (William Sheehan)¹¹

Edwards lists three additional qualities: discernment, discretion, and connectedness. These qualities are more general in tone and tend to apply to all spiritual directors. More important, most sources quote these three qualities in some way. In spiritual direction, discernment generally means distinguishing among many ideas and feelings to identify those that are from God.¹² The Desert Fathers' discernment—their ability to see into the heart—is what made their contributions so valuable. Sheehan, whom Edwards cites above, assumes both discernment in the director and the development of discernment in the directee. The director's strength lies in his or her

¹¹ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 127.

¹² Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 212.

ability to create an environment conducive to the development of discernment—"intuitive noticing"—in another.

The director creates such an environment by leading the directee through a series of pertinent questions: How did it feel when you prayed about this? Are you disturbed when you consider this and how? Should you make this decision, how will it affect your life, the life of your family, and the lives of your friends? Can you contemplate Jesus telling you this if he spoke to you? Such questions teach the essentials of discernment and slowly free the directee to begin discerning on his or her own.

Adding discretion to discernment seems natural. Discretion means to be both thoughtful and respectful. The process of discernment depends on discretion, for who would pretend to discern God's will in another without sober reflection and who would plumb the depths of another's soul without respect and deference? For Kenneth Leech, discretion is related to tradition: "By the fourth century, the term *pneumatikos pater* was well established in patristic writing. The disciples also looked to these men for *discretion*. This virtue was seen as the essential feature of the true spiritual master from the time of St. Anthony the Great onwards."¹³ In part, discretion means prudence or well-judged reflection. The Church fathers considered spiritual directors sober, thoughtful people not eager to jump to conclusions.

"Discretion" also denotes restraint—the maintenance of tact and a respectful distance. This facet of the definition includes respect for the uniqueness of another's search for God. It is the quality in a director which does not allow for preconceived notions of the directee's path or how he or she should go. The discreet director

¹³ Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 41.

accompanies the directee on his or her own journey without prejudice. The discreet spiritual director speaks little, asks supportive questions, clarifies obscure thoughts, and allows times of silence for the truth to sink in.

In addition to being discerning and discreet, Edwards asserts, the spiritual director should also be connected: to God, to self, and to the body of some tradition. The director's relational connection with God should be central to his or her life and ministry. Without personal experience with God through prayer, the director cannot care for souls who seek God. Connectedness to self, means the director possesses self-knowledge acquired through experience, reflection, suffering, and care provided by another. Neglect of self-knowledge tends to create, in Pulkingham's words, an "airy-fairy" kind of attitude which is devoid of realism.¹⁴ Connectedness to the body of some tradition ensures the director's beliefs are founded on a set of principles that provides orderly life-directions. Standing on a firm foundation, the spiritual director can approach direction freely, unhindered by obscure beliefs.

To some, these many qualifications may seem overwhelming. However, it is important to remember that no director can possess all these qualities perfectly since the ministry of spiritual direction is progressive and the development of these qualifications is the work of a lifetime. With that in mind, the director can feel free of guilt for his or her failings and focus on developing the qualities that are most lacking. Patience with self is as important as patience with the directee. However, directors must not neglect to strengthen the qualities they need most. Pastors who are directors would do well to apply themselves to the development of these qualities in their lives.

¹⁴ Graham Pulkingham quoted in Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 127.

No technique or technical proficiency can replace the development of the good, sound directorial qualities mentioned above. However, technique is important since it refers to the set of tools that will be used in the ministry of spiritual direction. Technique is often misunderstood and needs to be carefully explained. No magic formula exists to assure the "success" of spiritual direction. Every spiritual director is uniquely blessed with individual beliefs, inclinations, personality traits, and background issues. No two spiritual directors will conduct themselves in the same way. What follows, therefore, is not meant to be a set of rules, but a set of principles for behavior. John of the Cross is a particularly apt source for these principles having received through divine favor the gifts of saintliness, discernment, and the ability to organize and express his thoughts.

St. John of the Cross, (1542-91) provided us with a pattern for the guidance of souls. Paul Kozlowski, in *Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Direction*, writes: "St. John of the Cross whom Teresa [of Avila] chose as spiritual director for herself and her Carmelite nuns points out that the Lord in leading each soul leads it in: 1) an orderly way; 2) kindly and gently; and 3) according to the particular mode or receptivity, responsiveness of the soul."¹⁵ These principles describe the basic technique of spiritual direction: God's pattern of order, gentleness and according to receptivity.

God is a God of order and not of confusion. The fundamental character of the godhead—one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—furnishes the pattern for the created order. It is the model for creatures in relationship (albeit imperfect

¹⁵ Joseph Paul Kozlowski, *Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Directors: St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, Thomas a Kempis, and St. John of the Cross* (Goleta, Calif: Queenship Publishing, 1994), 247.

relationship) with one another. Just as the three divine Persons are related according to different functions—creation, salvation, and sanctification—created beings are related according to function. God created the cosmos by fashioning beings in a relationship of subordination to their Creator and to each other. The all-knowing God aligned all things in relation to one another. The brilliance of God's design is reflected in the enormity of space as well as in the intricacy of miniscule details—the vast harmony of the universe and the complexity of the human eye, for example. Disorder, however, can replace order whenever the appointed relationship is upset. The order between God and humanity becomes distorted when humans usurp God's sovereignty. The order within each individual human can be upset by anxiety, confusion, sin, or guilt. The order between people and creation breaks down when creation is abused. The result of disorder is the alienation of the creature from the Creator. Spiritual direction is an effort to restore order within people, between people and creation, and between people and God.

The spiritual director might be called the instrument of order in this disordered world. Just as God leads souls in an orderly way, so the director of souls endeavors to rediscover the primal order in a soul and to reestablish it. That is why discernment is so important to spiritual direction. The conviction of God's primordial supremacy naturally calls for the discovery of God's sovereign will. The orderly living out of God's creative plan depends on our continual discovery of that plan, for it is only by knowing what God wants that people can submit to God and honor the order of creation. Submission also places the creature in its proper order—a fact that is vitally important to human fulfillment and happiness. To be out of place in the order of creation means to be out of correspondence with God, self, and the universe. The result can only be frustration,

which leads to sadness and ultimately, to despair. Determining how best to follow God's wishes relates closely to discerning God's will. To separate discernment and obedience would be like separating works from faith.

Directors work with directees at structuring life patterns—choosing a vocation, changing a career, engaging in a discipline, refining prayer, or forging a relationship—in accord with the perceived will of God. The spiritual director also attempts to assess the directee's compliance to discerned directions by following up on projected actions. Review, therefore, becomes part of the spiritual direction session. Even within the review, directee and director are open to discernment, enabling them to perceive fresh directions from God. Respect for God's order and the acknowledgement of orderly relationships with God, with self, and with others concerns the spiritual director at every turn. The elimination of confusion is central to caring for the soul.

Certain external supports can also promote order. Environmental conditions send messages. A cluttered desk, for example, speaks volumes about the state of the director's focus. It might also proclaim unrest to a directee who is looking for a refuge from chaos. A ringing telephone broadcasts the director's preoccupation with other people and is best turned off during a spiritual direction session. The director should also take care to provide the spaciousness that speaks of prayer, peace, and calm. To provide space, some directors prefer to meet in a chapel or airy living room. When an office is chosen, it should be free of clutter. A sense of God's own order needs to prevail wherever the meeting takes place.

External order must not be maintained merely for order's sake, however. Order is maintained to create an environment of prayer, peace, and calm. That environment

permits people to set aside their defenses and creates an atmosphere where it is easier to identify with God, enter into quiet reflection, and engage in discernment. God, in his Wisdom, created all things in order; the wise spiritual director, who assists in the re-creation of the individual, wisely follows God's pattern of order.

According to John of the Cross, gentleness also characterizes God's handling of the soul. Because of this, gentleness should be considered an important technique in soul care. Jesus himself declared that he was gentle and lowly in heart. He taught that the meek would inherit the earth. He said: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" and "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."¹⁶

The words "meek" and "gentle," are translations of Matthew's single Greek word—*praus*—which gives the impression that the words "meek" and "gentle" were identical in Bible times. Why the word *praus* was translated in one instance as meek and in another as gentle depends on linguistic English idiom. When Jesus called himself gentle, we understand him to mean he is kind and amiable. When he uses the word meek, we understand him to be referring to people who endure hardship with patience and without resentment. These are the English idiomatic renderings of meek and gentle. It is more important to know what the words refer to in the context of the Bible. Jesus identified with the meek in Matthew 5:5. The meek of the Bible are the poor, sometimes called the "anawim." A small group of Hebrews, the anawim had gained a keen appreciation of the reality of God. Through bitter experience, they had come to realize

¹⁶ [Matthew 5:5 and Matthew 11:28-30].

that the only way to come before God was with empty hands. It is important to remember that the anawim knew how dependent they were upon God. They knew that God was in control—and they weren't.¹⁷ Jesus, because he, above all others, respected the preeminence Father's will, is the prime example of meekness. Jesus knew the Father to be in control and, therefore, was a man who did not have to assert himself in order to be strong. His gentle strength was fed by faith—by total trust in God's control. Jesus' meekness was possible because of his faith in the dominion of the Father. Jesus described himself as "gentle" in Matthew 11:28-30.

Jesus express his gentleness first, through his invitation to people, "Come to me." He invited people into a greater closeness with God. This was Jesus' prerogative because he was "the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."¹⁸ As the Father's only Son, Jesus gave "God a face."¹⁹ When invited to come by Jesus, one feels naturally invited to come to God in Jesus who, in the Nicene confession, is called "true God and true man." As the Way to the Father, Jesus invited people to come to *him*, indicating that it was in and through him that people possessed the Father.

Second, Jesus did not promise to remove burdens, but to share the heavy yoke people had to bear. In his willingness to share burdens, he effectively joined the concept of gentleness with that of meekness. When he said his yoke was easy, he exhibited the loving kindness—the gentleness— necessary to share hardship patiently—in meekness—with others. In Jesus, the concepts of meekness and gentleness are conjoined, and in him

¹⁷ Albert Kirk and Robert E. Obach, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 57.

¹⁸ [John 1:14].

¹⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, the Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 437.

they become one. Just as Jesus expressed his meekness/gentleness in these two ways, so he listed the elements that call for his gentle care.

Spiritual directors are called upon to recognize these elements and to apply the gentleness and the meekness of Christ to people who come to them. The first element is *need*. The meek are needy because they are poor. The second element is faith in God—complete trust in the One who alone is truly powerful. The third is surrender to God who carries burdens and in whom there is freedom and rest. The fourth element is confidence in Jesus. He invites humanity to come to him so that he may lead us to the heart of the Father.

Just as Jesus was gentle, so the spiritual director uses a technique of gentleness to care of souls. The spiritual director encounters souls that are struggling under demanding tasks and oppressive conditions, toiling to find their way to God. They are in need of rest, healing, and forgiveness. They are working hard to discover who they are in Christ. The spiritual director offers gentle assistance. First, following Jesus' invitation, "Come to me," the spiritual director quietly points the way to Jesus and a personal encounter with Christ. Second, like Jesus, whose yoke is easy, the director helps bear the directee's burden. This does not mean the director assumes responsibility for the directee's spiritual life. Rather, it means the director gently assists in carrying the load by his or her warmth, encouragement, conversation, and prayers. Gentleness is a way of becoming yoked with the directee. It is also a means of confirming the presence of Christ, another yoke-bearer, in the faith journey of the directee. Gentleness is part of the spiritual director's method because it was part of Jesus' method.

Finally, according to John of the Cross, God leads souls according to their particular mode or receptivity. Scripture confirms John's assertion in many places, but nowhere more clearly than in Luke 24 with the Emmaus story. Overcome by grief, the Emmaus disciples were not in a receptive mode when Jesus first joined them. Jesus, content to ask a few questions of them, listened as he let them talk at length. Sharing companionship and conversation, they became comfortable with each other. The disciples became more receptive. Jesus seized that opportunity to teach. He began with Moses and the prophets and traced in the Scriptures those things that related to him. Later, when they were most receptive, Jesus revealed himself completely during the breaking of bread. This story reveals the respect Jesus had for people's feelings, their circumstances, and their readiness to receive.

The spiritual director, like Christ, should sense the directee's climate of receptivity. Directors keep a record of each directee's personal, social, familial and religious, influences. In addition to this general background documentation, directors remain sensitive to the details of the directee's present life situation. What experiences, emotions, or memories are currently influencing the directee's consciousness? A person's receptivity also changes from moment to moment during the spiritual direction session. The director, therefore, should keep the following questions in mind: How is this person reacting to our conversation? Are my questions disturbing? What emotion am I currently detecting? In this way, the spiritual director treats the soul as the Lord would treat it.

If a directee is not receptive, it is useless to attempt to force an issue. Tilden Edwards pointedly addressed this matter when he wrote, "The director's job is not to try

to force something to come. The task is to turn to God during the session and sit in God's unknown hope for this person, wanting whatever God wants for them."²⁰ Patient waiting is sometimes the director's only alternative before a directee whose receptivity has diminished. At times, it is best to postpone the attempt to address a certain issue until a later meeting. On the other hand, sometimes the directee's receptivity is enhanced. Unexpected insights or stirrings turn up, improving his or her receptivity even more. The director can make good use of these opportunities by helping the directee complete and round out the insight. In this way, the director's sensitivity can lead to remarkable breakthroughs in the directee's spiritual life.

To increase sensitivity, the director must pay attention to himself or herself. Maintaining a life of prayer and a healthy relationship with God is essential because spiritual faculties grow dull when neglected. Regular spiritual exercise is necessary for the director to develop sensitivity to the directee's degree of receptiveness through the spiritual direction session.

People enter spiritual direction with a deep desire for God. The director should be aware of this desire and of the fact that the directee will be receptive to whatever seems to be bringing him or her closer to God. Directors should also remember that many directees fear the consequences of drawing close to God, especially when it becomes clear that closeness will make huge demands on their lives. For a time, the directee may be closed to any increase in intimacy. Here, the director has to navigate gently, either allowing a period of rest or intentionally slowing down the spiritual quest.

Receptivity can also be affected by confusion. Neither directee nor director is immune from confusion that threatens progress. At times, when the way is unclear and

²⁰ Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion*, 113.

discernment efforts are not successful, the capacity to receive from God disappears. Spiritual fasting and waiting upon the Lord may be called for at such a time. Emptiness in the spiritual life has the same effect. When prayer seems to go unanswered or becomes intolerably routine, when a discipline feels totally useless, the sense of emptiness can overwhelm receptivity. The director must perceive the problem while appraising the directee's capacity to receive. When receptivity is hampered, the director should endeavor to strengthen the conviction that the Holy Spirit is always active, even in adversity.

An effective technique in treating the soul according to its receptivity is to appeal to the spiritual heart. This is especially helpful when the mind of the directee's mind is struggling to obtain clarity or trying to discern a personal calling. Remembering that perfect clarity of mind rarely occurs, the director points the way toward the spiritual heart. "In the heart," Edwards says, "we sense much but are clear about little."²¹ The heart is able to sense wide regions that lie outside the cognitive mind, so it sometimes senses God just as a divine force at work. "We are left to trust that movement," Edwards continues, "and perhaps catch its tail just enough to give the mind and will something to keep them from starving, just enough to shape the next action called for."²² It may take several sessions to make such a connection. During that time, faith and trust must be the guiding light.

The spiritual director should treat the soul as God treats it—with order, with gentleness, and according to the soul's receptivity. Personal experience has convinced

²¹ Ibid., 113.

²² Ibid., 113.

me that these three principles are central to the spiritual director's practice. Their prayerful application leads to fulfilling the mission of spiritual direction. Order, gentleness, and the assessment of receptivity constitute the techniques of spiritual direction that, in imitation of God, the spiritual director uses in the care of souls.

So far, this chapter has focused on the many qualities the spiritual director should possess and on the techniques used in spiritual direction. But do qualities and techniques serve a purpose? Are they focused on an objective? What exactly does the spiritual director hope to achieve? What is the spiritual director's mission? Since vision precedes mission, we will consider vision first. The function of vision is to define context and create a blueprint for the future. Theologians have undertaken to define the visionary context and plan for the Christian life but a humble monk once described the Christian vision. "The Christian life, together with all the means by which it is sustained and advanced," according to Bede Frost, "has but one end, which, however, can be stated in two forms. That end is God Himself, seen, known, and loved by man. It is also the perfection of human nature finally attained by, and in, the sight of God."²³ Spiritual directors are guided by this all-encompassing, foundational vision.

The vision is also enunciated in 1 John 3:2: "But we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is," and in Matthew 5:48: "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Perfection is the proper goal of human life. Final perfection is found in eternally knowing and being known by God. In this life, however, the longing for perfection persists—theologians encourage its pursuit, and people engage in asceticism for personal purification and greater

²³ Bede Frost, *Lent with Saint Benedict* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1942), 47.

identification with God. The spiritual director takes his or her mission from this vision of perfection. This being so, spiritual directors assume their mission is to assist others in progressing toward perfection in this life, and in believing it will be possible to see, know and love God forever.

Here, the inevitable question arises: Is it possible to attain perfection in this fallen and imperfect world? In the sense of the absolute attainment of perfection, the answer is no. Absolute perfection must await final glorification. In another sense, the goal of the Christian life is not simply to get to heaven but, with God, to embark on the process of perfection even now. C. S. Lewis writes, "The goal towards which [God] is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection; and no power in the whole universe, except yourself, can prevent Him from taking you to that goal."²⁴

None other than John of the Cross himself provided a most balanced view on the question of personal perfection. Perfection, as John understood it, was a state of conformity to the will of God. However, John's concept of perfection was that of a state that gradually became more stable and more continuous in this life. John considered the labors to eliminate sinful tendencies, be attentive to prayer, become more obedient, and grow in virtue necessary to render one's self progressively more obedient to God's will.

John of the Cross understood perfection in this life as a process of maturation, progressing through many stages of spiritual experience. The human spirit envisions perfection. That vision is the ideal the spiritual director must keep in view while ushering the directee through stages of cleansing on the way to union with God. Both director and

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 158. Quoted in Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 85.

directee understand that ultimate perfection, while not attainable in this life, must be sought after as a legitimate desire of the human heart. The director is aided in fulfilling the mission of assisting another in the attainment of perfection by his or her techniques: order, gentleness, and sensitivity to receptivity. These techniques, in turn, are dependent on the qualities of the director.

The images of usher, midwife, water boy, physician, and beekeeper, provide a composite of the spiritual director's role. The director is all of these in varying degrees. Jean-Nicolas Grou (1731-1803) spelled out the meaning in more direct terms when he wrote:

To direct a soul is to lead it in the ways of God, it is to teach the soul to listen to divine inspiration, and to respond to it; it is to suggest to the soul the practice of all the virtues proper for its particular state; it is not only to preserve the soul in purity and innocence, but to make it advance in perfection; in a word, it is to contribute as much as possibly may be in raising that soul to the degree of sanctity which God has destined for it.²⁵

Grou's description of what it means to direct a soul captures the role of the spiritual director from every perspective of his or her ministry and is a fitting summary to this chapter. When one looks for a spiritual director, one seeks to find just such a leader, teacher, guardian, and servant of God and souls. To this description, Kenneth Leech adds another, borrowed from the Eastern Church:

The spiritual father then as seen in the eastern Orthodox tradition seems to have three principle features. First, he is a man of insight and discernment (*diakrisis*). He is able to see into the heart of another, a gift which is the fruit of prayer and ascetic struggle. Second, he is a man with the ability to love others and make the

²⁵ J. N. Grou, quoted in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 68. The French priest and professor, "Père Grou," (1731-1803) is best remembered not for his intellectual pursuits but for his fine spiritual writings. The last ten years of his life were spent in England where these writings were translated and published. His resultant influence on English spirituality was considerable.

suffering of others his own. . . . Thirdly, he is one with the power to transform the cosmos by the intensity of his love.²⁶

Orthodoxy, with its idea of the spiritual father, seems to be more in tune with the traditional understanding of the spiritual director: he or she is charismatic in character, ascetic in lifestyle, and connected in relation to God's creation.

Here, then, is the portrait of the spiritual director. Teacher and guide, he or she bears the Spirit within and lives a life consistent with his or her words. The director is a person of high mind and eternal vision, humble in personal estimation, warm, gentle and caring—just as teachers of Christ should be.

²⁶ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 49.

CHAPTER 7

CARE AND VISION

Some of the concerns, fears, and misgivings pastors and other ministers might have about spiritual direction have been focused on in an effort to reassure pastors and ministers of the validity and usefulness of spiritual direction in pastoral ministry. The six topics addressed were the fear of terminology, the fear of new things, the fear of being old-fashioned, the fear of time, the fear of the client, and the fear of being a spiritual director.

The first chapter addressed the fear of terminology. It dealt with the definition of spiritual direction and its distinctiveness from similar approaches to ministry. The operative question of chapter one was: What is spiritual direction, really? Several definitions surfaced, were examined, and eliminated. A suggested working definition was used throughout the rest of the dissertation. With a working definition in place, it became possible to distinguish spiritual direction from other approaches. Pastoral counseling, small groups, mentoring, and others were shown to be distinct from spiritual direction. This chapter outlined the meaning of spiritual direction.

The second chapter addressed the fear of new things. Is spiritual direction some kind of New Age technique? Spiritual direction was shown to be part of the Church's living tradition with roots in the gospels and in the fourth century

experience of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Spiritual direction's flow and evolution characterize it as a tried and true method of pastoral care.

The third chapter addressed the fear of being old-fashioned. Some people consider reverting to the use of so ancient a method as spiritual direction as irrelevant. Using the words of contemporary Christians served to confirm the relevancy of spiritual direction in our own time. Trust surfaced as a contemporary concern. This chapter addressed trust at many levels: trust in God, in the director, and in the directee.

The fourth chapter dealt with the fear of time: undermining effective pastoral ministry by adding spiritual direction to the pastor's workload. Spiritual direction was shown to occupy a central place in pastoral ministry. Since pastors are singularly qualified to be spiritual directors, they only have to appreciate the value of spiritual direction and set their priorities accordingly. Francis De Sales provided a positive example of the effective use of spiritual direction in pastoral care.

The fifth chapter addressed the fear of the client. It sought to acquaint pastors with typical examples of searchers. These hungry and thirsty souls were found to be faith-filled, hopeful, and eager. Their faith in God's plan for them and their willing trust in another person tended to fuel their enthusiasm and provide them with the hope of good things to come. This eagerness would be sufficient to cause pastors to welcome such sincere believers into the process of spiritual direction and growth.

The sixth chapter looked at the fear of being a spiritual director. A spiritual director's profile included a list of qualifications necessary to each director. Analogies—usher, midwife, water boy, physician, and beekeeper—aided in understanding the spiritual director's role. These images, borrowed from different sources, complemented and added meaning to the basic qualifications. The spiritual principle of John of the Cross—God leads each soul in an orderly way, kindly and gently, and according to the particular mode of the soul's receptivity—was suggested as the guiding technique of the spiritual director. Pastors and other ministers were shown to possess the qualifications

More steps need to be taken to involve pastors, ministers, and others in spiritual direction. The mere writing and publicizing of this project will not be sufficient to change the prevalent mentality described in the foreword.

My vision is that spiritual direction will be continually provided in every geographical subdivision—there are five deaneries—of the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin. For that to happen, a center for spiritual direction where ongoing opportunities for training, study, dialogue, and familiarizing clergy and lay people with the elements of spiritual direction must become operative. The ultimate effect of this training for and provision of spiritual direction will be to dispel reluctance, increase the number of skilled spiritual directors, offer a stronger ministry to God's people, develop an acute awareness of divine guidance within the body of believers, and establish the foundations for a continuing spiritual revival to the ultimate glory of God in the Central California area.

Negotiations with the Episcopal Conference Center, Oakhurst or another retreat facility in central California will be undertaken to secure a permanent training place. Also included could be the Episcopal School for Ministry at Fresno Pacific University where spiritual direction would become part of the curriculum.

The training would begin with one annual weekend session for the first two years. This would serve to introduce the concept of a center for spiritual direction and to solicit the interest of prospective participants. The complete course would consist of two two-week sessions a year with certification of successful participants. Participants include both clergy and Christian laypeople recommended by a pastor.

An executive director with clerical help would begin the project. Staff would be expanded as necessary. The initial training of leaders would take place at an institution that offers certification for spiritual direction. Certified leaders would then develop and monitor the Center for Spiritual Direction's curriculum and conduct classes and workshops at the center.

Funding could depend on available charitable sources, the Diocese of San Joaquin annual budget allocations, tuition, and grants.

This proposal is being brought before the board of directors of the Episcopal Conference Center, Oakhurst. Prayer support is being solicited through the Central California area. Through faithful submission to the will of God and the willingness of generous souls, this initiative will bless God's people in Central California.

AFTERWORD

This dissertation is addressed to those ministers of religion who have yet to find space for spiritual direction in their vision of ministry. I hope to have given them to a true appreciation for the use of spiritual direction in caring for the souls entrusted to them. Spiritual direction has been used from pre-Christian times as a tool for the care of souls. In the Christian era, it has persistently influenced pastoral care and has been the occupation of great men and women. Spiritual direction is a unique kind of ministry that differs essentially from the many others that address the mind, heart, or human spirit. It is a ministry that seems tailored for our world of doubt, confusion, and subjectivity. Several directees have shared first hand accounts of spiritual direction's effectiveness. I hope their testimonies will encourage ministers to understand and respond to the urgency people have for spiritual direction. To allay reservations, the portraits of both the spiritual directee and the spiritual director have been presented in as much detail as possible. The spiritual director's temperament, spirituality, and training have been discussed, as well. This ancient spiritual discipline certainly deserves the consideration of those who would teach Christ to others. In my own experience, it is among the most rewarding, compelling, and Christ-like ministries in the Church.

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