V. Spiritual Direction: A Process

A. God and our Experience

Our Image of God

Asceticism in the Christian Life

Guilt and Healing

In Sweat and Tears: Working It through with God

B. Prayer and Examen

Teach Me How To Pray

The Psalms Can Teach Us To Pray

Using the Scripture in Prayer

Centering Prayer: Refining the Rules

When You Can't Pray: Removing Obstacles to Prayer

The Daily Examen

The Examen: A Tool for Holistic Growth

C . Will of God and Discernment

Seeking God's Will

Discerning the Spirits in Prayer

Discernment of Spirits in Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila

Discernment in the Spiritual Direction of St. Francis de Sales

D. Dialogue

Conversion, Pastoral Counseling, and Spiritual Direction

Dreams in Spiritual Direction: Help or Distraction?

Our Images of God

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> This is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (Jn 17:3).

The quality of our praying and living, and of the service we offer to others, depends a great deal on our image of God. The words of Jesus quoted above provoke me to ask: Who is this God whom I am invited to come to know genuinely, to whom I pray, for whom I strive to live? A correlative question follows: What image of God do I communicate to others, do we communicate as religious, as Church?

We all have our image of God, though perhaps we have never paused to articulate that image in words. And whether we advert to it or not, we "religious" people cannot avoid conveying an impression of our God to others. We do so, for instance, by the way in which, as parish workers or priests or headmistresses or nurses, we treat the people to whom we minister. And simple, ordinary things can speak loudly about our image of God, things like the architectural design of our churches (especially the position of the altar), the siting and decoration of our community houses, clerical dress, our style of worship.

Since all religious have their particular image of God, it is obviously important that, as followers of Jesus, our God be the God of Jesus, the God whom he came to reveal, the God to whom he prayed. It would be rash to

presume that his God coincides with mine! It would be equally rash to *presume* that the image of God we project coincides with the God of Jesus!

Recently, I attended a lecture by the retired Anglican theologian, E.L. Mascall. He was discussing the role of theology in the university. *Theo-logy* is a word about God. He questioned whether the word about God that was declaimed in the lecture theater was verified in its turn by the word about God so eloquently proclaimed by the life-style and structures of the Theology Department—an interesting question, one that is capable of being transposed to our Churches, hospitals, classrooms, religious communities. A recent contributor to this review maintained that the structures and patterns of seminary life have considerable influence (for the worse) on the students' image of God.[1] This in turn has a negative effect on their prayer.

From what do we fashion our image of God? Later in this article I shall attempt to share with you some reflections on the Scriptures' image of God. With my head I can acknowledge it as accurate and authentic. But deep down I have another image, a "gut-level image," and this is the image that so often seems to determine my living and my praying. I sometimes feel as though I'm watching a slide show in which two projectors are being used and the slides fade into one another. There are the scriptural slides, and then there are the "experience" slides. Sometimes the transitions are smooth and corroborative; at other times there are conflicting and distorting idol-images.

One of my friends is a keen golfer. Over his fireplace hangs a picture of a little man in a flat cap who has hit his ball into a bunker and is having difficulty in extricating it. He is Just about to move it by hand—ever such a little—when he looks round at the skies and sees a vision of God: an elderly gentleman, with long, flowing beard, his finger waving threateningly. I find it easy to identify with the little golfer.

I had a marvelous relationship with my father. I was always sure of his love and understanding and help. I knew he was on my side, I could trust him implicitly. On the other hand, when I was about ten years old, I went for a holiday to the seaside. We were staying with a Catholic family, and they had two children of my own age. On Saturday evening we went to confession. I hadn't too much to say, and as I was preparing, I read through the pages of sins which, according to my prayer book, Catholic boys could commit. As a variation on the usual lies and disobedience, I thought I'd add something from the section on the sixth commandment. After all, I had kissed the little girt we were staying with, and maybe that was adultery! The priest behind the grill in that dark box was not amused, but tore strips off me, making me feel utterly evil and rejected by God. When we returned to the hotel, I broke down in floods of tears. The scar remains. That slide often fades on to my screen. Maybe God *is* like that—just maybe.

An acquaintance of mine told me that when he was young, he never felt sure of his mother's love. If he was naughty, she gave the impression of with-

drawing her love. This made him fearful and anxious and unsure, desperately keen to please and not to make mistakes.

It is factors like these that have helped to fashion our "gut-level image" of God. Figures like parents, teachers, priests, novice-mistresses have made it easier or more difficult to accept and make really our own the scriptural revelation of God, the Christian image of God. One writer says: "I am convinced that one of the basic reasons for the current difficulties in both Christian and religious life and practice is that we have lost touch with our God."[2] By "our God," he refers to the God of the Bible. So let us explore a little this biblical image of God.

The Loving Faithfulness of Yahweh

One of the deepest convictions of the people of Old Testament times was that their God, whom they had come to know as Yahweh, had come out of his distance and mystery, and had approached them, spoken to them, and intervened in their history. "At various times in the past, and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets . . . (Heb 1:1).

The story began with the call of Abraham—way back somewhere between the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries B.C. Abraham risked changing his whole way of life in leaving behind homeland—and all that was familiar to him—livelihood, status and security, and migrated to the land of Canaan under the impulse of God's engaging presence in obedience to a promise.

The most dramatic intervention of God in their history, chiseled indelibly into the national memory, was the Exodus event. This theme recurs like a leitmotiv throughout the various movements of Old Testament literature, and was made present again in the annual celebration of Passover. In one of the descriptions of the call of Moses, the prophet chosen to play such a key role in God's purposes, we read:

> I am Yahweh. I will free you of the burdens which the Egyptians lay upon you. I will release you from slavery to them, and with my arm outstretched and my strokes of power, I will deliver you. I will adopt you as my own people, and I will be your God (Ex 6:6).

And Yahweh, they believed, did in fact deliver them in dramatic and exciting fashion from their oppressors. In the ensuing events of Sinai this motley grouping of nomads received a new unity and identity as God's own chosen people, specially favored and uniquely privileged. Yahweh's relationship with them and theirs with him were sealed in the Covenant.

One of the salient features of the Old Testament writings is the profound consciousness which Israel evinces continually that she belongs to Yahweh, that she is his community, his people. An extract from Deuteronomy provides ideal expression of this awareness:

> You are a people consecrated to the Lord your God—the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people of his own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the

> earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples: but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers. . . . Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations (Dt 7:6-9).

Israel was called, then, because of the love of Yahweh and his enduring faithfulness. And she was called to respond in love and faithfulness to him: this is the meaning of covenant pledge. Again Deuteronomy expresses this in language which is amazing for the height of its idealism and the totality of its commitment:

> Hear, O Israel, you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Dt 6:4-5).

Unfortunately, however, Israel did not in general respond very well. Time and again throughout the undulating course of her history, she turned away from Yahweh, failing far short of the demands of love and fidelity, wanting rather to be like the other nations and to follow their ways. Her infidelity is mirrored in the catastrophes which befell her, like the fall of the N. Kingdom to the Assyrians in 721.

But the tragic experience of failure brought growing insight into the nature of her God, the kind of God Yahweh really is. This insight is spelled out most movingly and beautifully by her prophets. These men were sensitively aware of Yahweh, of Israel's special calling, of the demands of the Covenant-, they were deeply distressed by her waywardness and infidelity. Their image of God, their understanding of him, can be summed up in the twin concepts of love and faithfulness which we have already met.

> Does a woman forget her baby at the breast,
> or fail to cherish the son of her womb?
> Yet even if these forget,
> I will never forget you.
> See, I have branded you on the palms of my hands . . . (Is 49:14-16).

> For the mountains may depart,
> the hills be shaken,
> but my love for you will never leave you
> and my covenant of peace with you will never be shaken (Is 54:10).

> I will betroth you to myself forever,
> betroth you with integrity and justice,
> with tenderness and love;
> I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness,
> and you will come to know Yahweh (Ho 2:21, 19, 22, 20).

> I have loved you with an everlasting love,
> so I am constant in my affection for you (Jr 31:3).

And with this realization of God's constancy amidst their failure is born a firm hope for the future. As Jerusalem was about to fall to the Babylonian troops, Jeremiah proclaimed:

> Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and teach his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord (Jr 31:31-34).

And there are those inspiring words of Ezekiel:

> Then I am going to take you from among the nations and gather you together from all the foreign countries, and bring you home to your own land. I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies, and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and respect my observances. You will live in the land which I gave your ancestors. You shall be my people and I shall be your God (Ezk 36:25f).

Yahweh, then, is constant; he continues to be present with his people, present in love, and in faithfulness to his choice and to his promise.

The Loving Faithfulness of Jesus

Centuries later, a man was wandering through the towns and villages of lakeside Galilee, preaching and healing and exorcising. From amongst those who were interested in him, he singled out twelve, as Mark says (Mk 3:13-15), "to be with him," to share his friendship, life, ideals, and "to be sent," to share his mission. But these men consistently failed to understand him and his message, they were unable to accept the implications of discipleship. They continued to foster the old expectations, to cherish the old dreams, to think in the categories of success, political and nationalist liberation and prosperity, power and glamor. They failed to grasp the meaning of the *king-dom* he constantly talked about. They lacked insight to perceive who he was, this Jesus from the backwoods of Nazareth.

But Jesus did not go back on his choice. One evening, as they were at supper in Jerusalem around the feast of the Passover, he spoke to them with sadness in his voice, telling them that one of their number would shortly betray him, and another, their natural leader and spokesman, would deny all knowledge of him. He went on to say that they would all run away and desert him in the end.

At the same time, as head of the table, he broke bread and shared it with them as a sign and pledge of his love and friendship. And he offered the cup of wine, and spoke of the longed-for new covenant, the new fellowship with God, his Father, that would be sealed in his own blood.

And one of them did, in fact, betray him very soon; Peter denied all acquaintance with him, cursed him even; and the rest of them took to their

heels in flight, to a man. The Roman authorities executed him by the hideous and shameful torture-death of crucifixion. The God whom he had proclaimed to be near seemed very far away.

But early on the Sunday morning, some women friends found that his tomb was empty. Shortly afterwards, this Jesus appeared to Peter and then to others of the group, and they came to know that the Father had raised him from death, Thus, their Risen Lord brought together again his disillusioned and scattered band, whom he loved still, and forgave, and whom he still looked on as his, his chosen ones, to whom he was faithful still. And he breathed his Spirit into them, and constituted them the nucleus of the new covenanted People of God, a God whom, like him, they could now address as Father. These men came to realize that in Jesus they had encountered the love and faithfulness of God present in their midst, enfleshed.

The Loving Faithfulness Which is The Spirit

The Farewell Discourses of John's gospel provide us with valuable insights into the wav in which the love and faithfulness of the Lord are expressed in the age of the Church:

> It was before the festival Of Passover. Jesus knew that his hour had come, and he must leave this world and go to the Father. He had always loved his own who were in the world, and now he was to show the full extent of his love (13:1).

After washing their feet as an expression of his loving service, a prophetic sign of his self-giving on the cross, Jesus returns to recline in their midst. Judas departs into the night. And Jesus opens his heart to his friends: "My children, for a little longer I am with you . . . where I am going you cannot come" (13:33). There is an atmosphere of sadness, of impending loss and bereavement: "You are plunged into grief because of what I have told you" (16:6). Jesus seeks to comfort and reassure them: "Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me" (14:1).

Jesus' love for his friends is palpable. Evident, too, is his strong desire to remain with them, faithful to those whom he has chosen. They are his friends, not servants. He has disclosed to them everything that he has himself heard from the Father. He has shared with them all his secrets. His willingness to lay down his life is token of his love for them. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love" (15:9).

The manner in which Jesus shows his faithfulness and love (and therefore continues to reveal the nature of the Father as Faithful Love), and also continues to he present with them after returning to the Father, is through the gift of the Spirit, the Paraclete:

> If you love me and keep my commandments, then at my request the Father will give you another Paraclete to be with forever. He is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept since it neither sees nor recognizes him: but you do recognize him since he remains with you and is in you (14:15-17).

For John, the mission of Jesus is to reveal the Father and to give life. The Paraclete is almost another Jesus. His role is to continue Jesus, mission, to be his presence now that he is absent. He functions as teacher and guide, and as witness to the disciples and to the world (see 14:25-26; 15:26, 16:7-11, 16:13-15).[3]

A similar understanding of the Spirit's role is to be gleaned from the letters of Paul. When writing to the Church at Corinth, he says:

> And if you and we belong to Christ, guaranteed as his and anointed, it is all God's doing; it is God also who has set his seal upon us, and as a pledge of what is to come has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts (2 Co 1:21-22).

As in the Old Testament, we find again an emphasis on the free, elective love and initiative of the Father, bestowing that profound reality and sense of belonging, and pledging his enduring faithfulness. It is the Spirit dwelling within us who grafts us into Christ and assures us of a future. In Galatians Paul tells us: "To prove that you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying "Abba, Father!" You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's act an heir" (4:6).

Through the Spirit we are caught up in the relationship of Jesus and his Father, and so come to know God as love, as Father, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel promised. The fact that we are God's children, and therefore heirs, means that this relationship has a lasting future, that God is faithful.

In that magnificent hymn in the Letter to the Romans we meet those lines which celebrate the heart of the Good News that God is love and faithfulness,

> If God is on our side, who is against us? . . . Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? . . . For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or in life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in the heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:31-39).

Conclusion

The God of the Bible is best understood as Faithfulness and Love. In this way Yahweh reveals himself in the Old Testament period. In his ministry and passover, Jesus reveals the love and faithfulness of the Father. In the post-resurrection time, the Holy Spirit takes us up into the enduring love and faithfulness of Father and Son, enabling us to know and to live in that mystery. We find, then, a threefold expression of the faithfulness and love which is our Christian God.

Returning to our starting point, we need to ask ourselves whether this is in fact our image of God, whether we genuinely know God in this way. "Have I been all this time with you, and you still do not know me?" (Jn 14:9). We must ponder the interaction in our lives and prayer between this biblical image and those many other 'images which the experiences of our past have

fashioned and which tend to become superimposed, creating a distorted picture, preventing us from seeing the God of Jesus in sharp, life-giving focus. Why do we find it so difficult to surrender fully to this God in loving trust? We stand in such great need of healing and integration.

And what about the image of God which we communicate to those with whom we live, those we meet in our work? Partners in Christian marriage are meant to show forth, the one to the other, something of the love, acceptance, forgiveness, tolerance, understanding and faithfulness of God—for Christian marriage is a sacrament, is a sign of God's faithful love. Their experience together is intended to be a window into the mystery of God, to be revelation. The high incidence of marital breakdown amongst Christians is a tragedy!

In a similar way, we in religious and Church communities are called to mirror to one another the authentic face of the God of Jesus. Communities where there exist intolerance, lack of care and compassion, refusal to forgive, authoritarianism, selfishness, harsh judgments, are actually idolatrous; they betray their whole raison dêtre.

Parents, we know, have a vital part to play in shaping their children's understanding of God. Whilst making the demands necessary for growth to maturity, parents must convey to their children a sense of being valued for who they are (and not for what they can achieve), a sense of being loved with a love they cannot lose. Sadly, the imperfections of parental love can so easily impart an unfavorable image of God.

Likewise, in our ministry within the Church and our mission to the world, we religious are constantly and inevitably (albeit at times quite unconsciously) projecting an image of God to those we meet. We need to be alert to and critical of those aspects of our dealing with others, and of our life-style, those facets of our structures, institutions, regulations, forms of leadership and ministry, which give the lie to the joy-filled Gospel we announce, which present to our world instead an image of God which is a travesty, perpetuating idols of power, success, security, possessions, which instills fear, guilt, anxiety and hopelessness.

Jesus prayed to God as Father. The kernel of his preaching was the kingdom, God's nearness to us in acceptance and saving love. He described the prodigality of God's forgiveness in his parables. More importantly, his own way of living and relating proclaimed in language more powerful than words the palpable reality of his mercy and love, especially for the poor and outcast. The source of Jesus' remarkable freedom, his intuition into what in life is really important, his prophetic overturning of so much that had been acceptable in the society, politics and religion of his day, his breaking down and crossing of so many barriers that kept men apart, was, I believe, his image of God.

Because Jesus knew that God is Father and is very near, and because he surrendered to the exigencies of such a vision, he could serve others in deep

compassion and heating care, he could be near to them in self-gift with a courage and faithfulness that did not balk at death. In killing Jesus, men sought to destroy his God, for they perceived that such a God was too uncomfortable to live with, and the implications of accepting him were too challenging and demanding, calling as they did for radical conversion in outlook, attitude and way of living.

Perhaps there is still much in our Church and in our religious communities to suggest that we perpetuate the attempt to deface and destroy the God of Jesus, and present instead to our world a caricature, a dreadful distort I on.

In John's gospel, Jesus, in a moment of controversy with the Jews, exclaims: "I was sent by the One who truly is, and him you do not know. . . . It is the Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' though you do not know him!" (7:28; 8:54)—words which leave us much to ponder. But Jesus also speaks these words of great reassurance and challenge:

> If you dwell within the revelation I have brought,
> you are indeed my disciples:
> you shall know the truth,
> and the truth will set you free (8:31-32).

NOTES

[1] Stephen Happel, "The Social Context of Personal Prayer in Seminaries," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS 39 (1980), pp. 846-854.

[2] Francis J. Moloney, *Disciples and Prophets* (London: DLT, 1980), p. 19.

[3] R.E. Brown. *The Gospel According to John* (London: Chapmans, 1972), pp. 1135-1143.

Asceticism in the Christian Life

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It is generally recognized today that the body and mind are deeply interconnected. We speak of psychosomatic sickness and of holistic health care, i.e. treating the whole person as a body-mind-spirit unity. Practices that are harmful to the body such as extreme lack of sleep, starvation, gluttonous overeating, drunkenness, and so forth, are also harmful to the mind and spirit, weakening it or weighing it down, exhausting it, or making it slow, dull and sluggish. Ascetical practices, on the other hand are a "methodology" for affecting the body in such a way as to lift up and lighten the mind and spirit, giving it rest, cleansing it, making it more alert and attentive, and more sensitive to spiritual realities. These practices seek to regulate food, sleep, work, leisure and environment to affect the whole body-spirit person in such a way as to increase his capacity for prayer, work and a life lived as fully as possible for the love of God and neighbor. Although at times exaggerated in the trial and error process of their development and formulation, the basic principle of seeking the optimum regulation of one's life and environment for a greater spiritual sensitivity and attunement to God and one's true end, makes perhaps more sense today than ever before, with our increased awareness of the psychosomatic makeup of the human person. Faith, of course, remains the basis of asceticism, for ascetical practice takes for granted that one is seeking a greater openness to God, a greater sensitivity to spiritual realities, and an increased giving of oneself in love to God and neighbor.

It is not clear how people first discovered these basic laws for regulating human life in a spiritually optimum way, but their discovery and use is practi-

cally universal and is the common teaching of most religious. Their practicality, usefulness, and truth are also susceptible to experimental verification, which may not be insignificant points in our time when this is standard expectation in many areas of life. One does not simply have to take a spiritual author, such as the fifth-century systematizer of Egyptian desert wisdom, John Cassian, for example, on faith, but one can try out for oneself his recommendations, which thousands of Christians of his day found useful.

I myself became interested in this matter through living and teaching New Testament in a seminary located in rural East Africa, freed from television, telephone and traffic. The real impetus, however, came through reading a number of articles on monasticism, and then from further reading of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the works of John Cassian, several biographies of St. Jerome, one of Origen and several of Charles de Foucauld; the letters of Jerome, and several of the more recent works of Thomas Merton. I then gradually began to make some changes in my own life, experimenting, correcting, and adjusting my course as I went along, making use of both the advice and criticism of others. In this way one can easily convince oneself of the basic value of these "methods."

We must remember, of course, that methods are merely a means to an end, and that our main focus must be on the end itself, God and union with him. Nonetheless an examination of these traditional "methods" seems especially useful today when so many have forgotten or are newly rediscovering them.

There is always the danger of exaggeration when undertaking something new, for a new endeavor generally is accompanied by enthusiasm and lack of previous experience or solid knowledge. One should, for example, certainly have a spiritual director if he wants to progress in this area and avoid some of the pitfalls of a beginner. Some mistakes, I suppose, are inevitable, but one can go a long way towards minimizing them if one works in consultation with other people, especially with those with whom one is living. This may be difficult, but I believe it is worth the effort.

A little reading soon makes it clear that there is no one set way of "living ascetically," and that furthermore ascetical living is open to all Christians, not just to monks in a monastery.[1] The variety is vast, but the basic principles are common to all. This awareness can free one to develop one's own distinctive approach and style, in dialogue with others, which best fits one's circumstances.

The key to this whole endeavor, however, is a conversion of heart. Why would one want to begin to lead a more spiritual and disciplined life, unless one felt called by God to draw closer to him? The call of God, felt in the heart, therefore, is primary. What I am talking about here is wisdom gained through the ages in how to become more attuned and responsive to this inner call.

I would now like to discuss three areas of motivation for living more ascetically. They are: 1) a sense of Christian urgency, 2) a desire to grow in one's transformation into Christ, and 3) a love for the Cross as the way to fullness of life.

Urgency

"Asceticism" is a way of living which has its roots in a sense of urgency. Paul's life was characterized by urgency. He lived within a foreshortened sense of time. The Lord was near, and would return in glory, he thought, within his own lifetime. He therefore felt the need for vigilance and constant preparedness (see, e.g., 1 Co 7:26, 29, 31). The task was great—to be ready and prepared for the Lord's coming, and to have spent his life well in light of that coming—but the time was very short. The same thought is expressed in 1 P 4:7, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers," and in Lk 21:34, "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare."

Whether we picture the Lord coming to us or we going to him is secondary to the main point, namely, a sense of the shortness of the present time of preparation and activity, and the nearness of the Lord and his coming.

The message is simple. A Christian is to be vigilant and to live in a sense of urgency and readiness: "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come . . . lest he come suddenly and find you asleep . . . what I say to you I say to all: Watch!" (Mk 13:33, 36-37). "Know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt 24:43-44).

We should not understand this urgency in the "worldly" sense of the feverish and compulsive production of a consumer society which has lost its identity and purpose. Rather we must understand it in the new Christian sense of an urgency to be taken up with our true end, our true identity: with living and acting in a meaningful way in terms of who we really are, people created by God for him, for communion with him.

The following saying from the fourth-century Egyptian Desert Fathers has, I believe, a lot to say about the quality of urgency and dedication that are the roots of ascetical living.

> Abba Lot went to Abba Joseph and said, "Abba, as far as I can, I keep a moderate rule, with a little fasting, and prayer, and meditation, and quiet: and as far as I can try to cleanse my heart of evil thoughts. What else should I do?" Then the old man rose, and spread out his hands to heaven, and his fingers shone like ten candles: and he said: "If you will, you could become a living flame."[2]

Transformation in Christ

A second essential motivation for a more disciplined ascetical mode of living is the fact of our transformation in Christ. We have been justified—set right before God—not by our own efforts, but by a free gift of God in Christ, received through faith (Ga 2:21; 2:16; 3:11; Rm 3:28; 5: 1; 9:30-32; 3-20; 10:3-4; Ga 3:23). Christ is the new Adam (1 Co 15:45) of a new creation. "Anyone

who is 'in Christ' is therefore a new creation. The old has passed. Behold all has been made new" (2 Co 5:17).

In Christ we are made into new persons. We are to put off the old man and put on the new man (Ep 4:22-24; Rm 6:6; Col 3:9-10). We are to die to sin and rise to new life (Rm 6:34), seeking the things which are above where Christ is (Col 3:1). In short, we are to walk no longer according to the flesh, for that is the way of death, but according to the Spirit, for that is life and peace (Rm 8:4-6).

Flesh and Spirit are, of course, not meant in the compartmentalized sense of body and soul, but in the theological sense of two different modes of living, i.e. life "in Christ," according to the Spirit of God; or life in the flesh, the way of the old man, of the old creation.

Christian asceticism, therefore, has nothing to do with a false kind of Greek, Gnostic, Manichean or Iranian deprecation of matter, the body or creation as evil and the spirit as good. Genuine Christian asceticism is based on the conviction of the goodness of the body and creation, but it is not so naive as to ignore the reality and power of sin in the world and over our own body and spirit. This is the power that the transformation in Christ frees us from.

Asceticism is rooted in this sense of the transformation of the person in Christ. It is the attempt to live more fully "in Christ," in the Spirit, in the new creation, according to the new man. It seeks to resist the opposing influences of the flesh, of sin, and of "the world."

The Cross

Asceticism finds a third area of motivation in a love for the cross. It is a voluntary and active embracing of the cross. Many may object that life itself provides sufficient crosses, and that it is, therefore, pathological or masochistic to seek out additional ones. Yet if this is our *only* approach to the cross, it is not always clear in what way we are people who have freely and lovingly embraced the cross as the royal road of Christ. In what way are we different than even a hedonist who, after all other efforts have failed him, must also accept the misfortunes life brings his way? One may, of course, answer that the difference is in one's attitude, but where is one trained in the attitude of the love and acceptance of the cross? Is it not in one's whole way of life, rather than merely through abstract notions?

Asceticism is motivated by the insight that some kind of training or *askesis* is needed in this area, a training that will make the cross a more life-giving part of one's life. Asceticism is a voluntary daily acceptance of the cross in symbolic expression. It molds and orients the person towards the cross as true wisdom, rather than towards the pleasure seeking values of "the world," so that one is the more disposed when the circumstances of life itself impose a heavier cross which is not of a person's own making or choice.

The Interrelationship of the Ascetical Disciplines

That the various ascetical disciplines are interrelated is a commonplace of

the classical sources of early monasticism.[3] The precise nature of how and why they are interconnected, however, is not generally made clear. This is not an unimportant point, for understanding this interconnection more clearly will give one stronger intellectual convictions as to how the various ascetical disciplines blend into a unified approach to the Christian life. I will deal here with the various traditional forms of spiritual discipline in an attempt to show how and why they are interconnected.

Prayer is the heart of the Christian life. All other "exercises" or *askesis* are meant to develop and increase one's prayerfulness.

In prayer one discovers one's deepest self, and comes back to the center of one's true being. In prayer one's transformation in Christ is extended further and further into the whole person. Prayer is communion with God, and it was for this that the human person was created. The communion with God that takes place in prayer is, as James Finley has noted, the "fruition of our deepest self."[4] In prayer the new man comes into being, grows and develops.

Prayer, however, also affects the body and mind as well. It helps resolve and release tension in the whole person, bringing an inner sense of peace in the midst of turmoil.

A few years ago when various meditation movements were first becoming popular in the United States they were often advertised as methods of relaxation, of finding deep rest and inner peace. While this should probably not be one's main reason for praying, the centering of one's being in God that occurs in prayer does tend to have a re-creative effect. It is a sort of "wasting of time" before God, the source of our most authentic self, and as such is in a certain sense akin to play, re-creating and recreating the whole person.

Perhaps this is behind the monastic motto, *ora et labora*—pray and work. I often wondered why they left out "play," but prayer really does function on the body and mind as a kind of play, and much more. As play relieves and enables one to return refreshed to one's work, so also prayer has something of this function.

This may even be part of the reason why our modern American consumer society is so geared towards recreation, entertainment, and the almost compulsive pursuit of diversion and pleasure. Perhaps in having forgotten how to pray we are starving for that natural built in form of re-creation and recreation that God intended us to have.

Perhaps also this is the reason why the austerest religious orders, which are devoted to a life of prayer (Trappists, Carthusians and others), have a minimum of "recreation" *per se* scheduled into their lives.

One who prays more, therefore, may even find himself capable of more, not less, work. Prayer sends one back to one's work renewed; work on the other hand expresses and extends one's prayer.

The regulation of sleep has always been an important "methodology" enabling one to become more spiritually attuned. We all know the bad effects of too little or too much sleep: both bring on fatigue; the former leads to

exhaustion, the latter to sluggishness. Since our tendency is normally to sleep more rather than less than necessary, it is the second that usually needs more disciplined attention. People differ greatly, some needing more, others less sleep, but disciplining oneself to the right amount—not necessarily the amount that one, out of laziness, might desire—generally tends, once gotten used to, to increase one's alertness and sensitivity in prayer and work. One may, for example, along with the Trappists and other austere orders, find that seven hours, or six, plus an hour siesta, is sufficient most of the time, and in fact leads to greater physical and spiritual well-being.

Regulation of sleep as a spiritual discipline not only enhances alertness in prayer and work, but it may also provide one with just the opportunity one needs for prayer, or more prayer, in a busy schedule, if one should, for example, find that "that extra hour" of sleep was really not necessary, at least not all the time, and that in fact one was really better off mentally and physically without it.

Some find the early morning hours their best time, for the previous evening's meal is largely digested, one is rested from sleep, and, if one rises early enough, there are many good hours for prayer and work before the noon meal. Monastic communities throughout the centuries have traditionally risen long before dawn for this purpose.

Fasting has always held an honored place in the Christian ascetical tradition. In fact it has almost become synonymous with asceticism in the popular mind. Yet among many Christians today its value is rather dimly perceived. There are signs, however, that it is being "rediscovered," if one can judge by a few excellent recent books and articles.[5]

It is certainly well attested in the tradition. John Cassian, for example, clearly underscores its importance when he bluntly states, "it is impossible for a well filled stomach to experience the combats of the inner man" (*Inst*. 5.13). A few chapters later he observes that one must regulate food and sleep with the same care as fornication if one wishes to progress (5.20). Thomas Merton, commenting on Cassian's remarks, observed that "today we have lost a real sense of the importance of fasting. If we do not know how to fast, according to our strength, we will lack a realistic spiritual life right from the start."[6] St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of three benefits deriving from fasting: 1) It controls the passions, 2) it lightens the spirit giving it greater sensitivity in the pursuit of spiritual matters, and 3) it is a reparation for past sins (II/2 q. 147 a 1).[7]

Not everyone, however, can or should fast. Those with a weak physical condition probably should not fast, any more than in perhaps a token way. Prudence and care are necessary in this area. Cassian notes that one will experience no spiritual detriment if his physical condition makes fasting unadvisable, but that one should not, on the other hand, take this as a pretext for gluttony (*Inst.* 5.7).

Fasting is interrelated with one's prayer, work, and leisure time. Since it gives rest to the digestive system and to the body in general, it tends to make

one more alert in prayer and work. By reducing fatigue, it reduces somewhat the need for frequent and prolonged rest, and can even enable a person to do with a bit less sleep than he may have previously needed.

Heavy eating has just the opposite effect. Besides being physically unnecessary, it burdens the body, and hence the mind and spirit as well, making one feel sluggish and fatigued, and making concentration and sensitivity in prayer and work more difficult.

One must, of course, get proper nourishment and try to avoid the pitfalls that an enthusiastic beginner often stumbles into. A traditional key to integrating these opposite goals (fasting and proper nourishment) has been "timing," i.e. dividing the day into a time for fasting and a time for normal eating. For St. Benedict, following the Desert Fathers, a fast day normally meant a normal meal after a significant period of waiting, i.e. later than usual *(The Rule of St. Benedict*, chap. 41). The late afternoon meal on a fast day was the first food of the day. Cassian's balanced good sense in this area is worth quoting:

> Daily hunger should go hand in hand with our daily meals, preserving both body and soul in one and the same condition, and not allowing the mind either to faint through weariness from fasting, nor to be oppressed by overeating (*Conf*. 2.23).

There are many ways one could structure this. One may wish, for example, to rise early and pray and work several hours before breakfast, or extend the time even until noon.

In addition to having this psychosomatic good effect on the person, fasting is also a dramatic physical and symbolic expression of the offering of one's life in love to God. My own experience is that it even increases one's desire for prayer.[8]

That the human person's passions and appetites are interconnected, and that an attack on one weakens them all is a commonplace of traditional wisdom,[9] and something that can be confirmed by experience. Many of the classical monastic texts speak of the good effect fasting can have, for example, in combating lust. Since fasting affects the whole person, orienting body and mind in a new direction, it can hardly help having a spill over into other areas where control of the body's cravings is concerned. Abba Hyperichius, for example, said,

> Fasting is the monks reign over sin. The man who stops fasting is like a stallion who lusts the moment he sees a mare *(Desert Fathers* 4.46, Chadwick).

Work has always been considered an essential part of Christian asceticism. Not only is it normally a necessity for supporting oneself, but, even if one had other means of support, it would still be in itself an essential part of Christian asceticism. Work stimulates the body, engages the mind, and animates the Spirit. This is true of diligently done manual work, but it would seem especially true of engaging intellectual work. When done within the context and rhythm of prayer, it can increasingly become an extension of one's prayer, the

means and the altar of one's self immolation to God in love. When prayer (e.g. the Psalms) intersperses work throughout the day, a more prayerful disposition begins to spill over into the work so that in a real sense one continues to pray as one works.

A striking example of this was the fourth-century Egyptian practice of the night vigil. After listening to the cantor chant 12 Psalms and two readings, the monks returned to their cells to do manual labor (usually basket weaving) and meditate on the Scriptures until dawn. The work was intended as an aid to meditation, concentrating mind and body, and keeping one awake and alert.[10] I would think one could also admirably substitute intellectual work, particularly if it should deal with theology, for example.

The value of work as a spiritual discipline is strikingly brought out in a remarkable saying from the Desert Fathers:

> Abba Moses once asked Abba Silvanus: "Can a man live every day as though it were the first day of his religious life?" Abba Silvanus answered: "If a man is a laborer, he can live every day, nay every hour, as though it were the first day or hour of his religious life" *(Desert Fathers* 11.29, Chadwick).

One of the most venerable forms of spiritual discipline is solitude. A more disciplined spiritual life will generally give considerable importance to times of solitude where one can work and pray in a natural rhythm, attuned to the movements of the Spirit. Whether this be a short time each day or much longer stretches will depend upon each individual, the circumstances of his life and work, and the way he feels God is leading him.

Monastic communities have traditionally cherished the regularity of their day, creating a predictable rhythm in one's life over a period of time, enabling a person to become more centered, more recollected in his prayer and work, and more attuned in general to the movements of the Spirit. If one can manage such a schedule, or even approximate it to some degree, without shirking the necessary responsibilities of one's work, there is considerable spiritual benefit to be derived thereby. Such an arrangement of life, if one is outside of a monastery, will, however, have obvious repercussions on others, and should only be attempted, therefore, after careful discussion.

One form that solitude might take is a voluntary restraint in matters of recreation and entertainment. One may, for example, want to limit voluntarily for a time one's participation in some otherwise innocent and enjoyable diversions: movies, visiting around town, eating out, and so forth, not because such things are bad, of course, but to enable one to savor more deeply for a period of time the joy, peace, and centering of one's person which can take place within a more contemplative rhythm. Again it would probably be well to explain to one's friends what one is doing, lest misunderstandings arise.

Solitude is of course interrelated with the other spiritual disciplines. It can add quality and depth to work. Manual work can be done in a more prayerfully recollected spirit. Its aid to intellectual work is obvious. It is also an ally of prayer, giving God an opportunity to speak, and giving oneself the time and

quiet to listen. It is related to control of sleep in that earlier rising, for example, can provide enhanced opportunity for solitude. It is even related to fasting, inasmuch as eating has a social function. If one chooses at anytime to skip a meal, an opportunity for increased solitude immediately presents itself.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare was a concept dear to the Desert Fathers, and it is the final aspect of asceticism that I wish to comment on here. Men and women went into the desert to do battle with demons, for this was the route to sanctification. Accounts of struggles with demons, tempting him to lust, discouragement, and more, make up a large part of Athanasius's life of St. Anthony, the first Egyptian hermit (chaps. 16-43). We may not feel as comfortable as they did in speaking of demons, but the struggles we go through are the same, and the importance of internal struggle is as central to Christian growth today as it ever was. It is fundamentally the struggle against the old man, a struggle which lets the new man come to birth and grow.

One of the great insights of the desert tradition is that the very struggle itself sanctifies. This insight underlines much of the wisdom of the Desert Fathers, and is well illustrated in a saying of Abba Poemen:

> Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Short that he prayed the Lord to take away his passions. And so he was made tranquil in heart, and came to an old man and said: "I find that I am at rest, with no war of flesh and spirit." And the old man said to him: "Go, ask the Lord to stir a new war in you. Fighting is good for the soul." And when the war revived in him, he no longer prayed for it to be taken away, but said: "Lord, grant me long-suffering to endure this war" *(Desert Fathers* 7.8, Chadwick).

Struggling against anger, for example, is essential to Christian growth. Cassian tells of an aristocratic woman in Alexandria who actually sought out occasion to be tempted to anger in order to struggle against it, and thereby grow in patience and holiness. She asked bishop Athanasius to give her one of the widows who were supported by the Church, so that she could support her herself. The bishop gave her the best widow, who proved a joy to serve and live with. The pious woman was dissatisfied and told the bishop she wanted someone who would provide her with more of a challenge. He therefore gave her the worst and most troublesome of the widows, who had nothing but complaints and abusive language for her benefactor. The rich woman, however, continued to serve her in humility and patience, and returned after some time to thank the bishop for providing her with such an opportunity to grow in virtue.

The struggle against lust is a similarly sanctifying process, and formed an important part of desert and traditional *askesis*. Jesus, concerned about the interior purity of the disciple's heart, said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28). No one, of course, can entirely avoid such thoughts, but the point, I believe, is that

we are to struggle against them, and, according to the wisdom of the desert, the struggle itself sanctifies. The struggle against lust is one more concrete way of putting off the old man, and putting on the new man (Ep 2:22-24). It is one more step in the direction of "not being conformed to this world, but being transformed in the spirit of your mind" (Rm 12:2). It is the difficult winning of one more piece of ground in the battle to "walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit" (Rm 8:4).

The importance of the actual struggle itself is brought out in the following remarkable desert saying:

> Once the disciple of a great old man was tempted by lust. When the old man saw him struggling, he said: "Do you want me to ask the Lord to release you from your trouble:" But he said "Abba, I see that although it is a painful struggle, I am profiting from having to carry the burden. But ask God in your prayers, that he will give me long-suffering, to enable me to endure." Then his Abba said to him: "Now I know that you are far advanced, my son, and beyond me" *(Desert Fathers* 5.20, Chadwick).

Conclusion

Throughout this essay we have dealt with the person as a body-spirit unity involved in a new type of warfare or asceticism—not the old Greek and Gnostic conflict between body and soul, but the Christian battle between the old creation and the new creation; between the old man and the new man; between flesh and Spirit.

One engages in this battle out of a sense of Christian urgency, a love for the cross, and a desire to be more fully transformed in Christ. Its various elements blend into an interrelated whole, forming a unified approach to the Christian life. The variety of its forms, however, is vast, freeing one, if one feels led in this direction, to develop, in consultation with others, an approach and style which best fits the circumstances of one's life and work.

NOTES

[1] M.B. Pennington, *A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983).

[2] *Sayings of the Fathers.* In O. Chadwick, *Western Asceticism: Selected Translations with Introductions and Notes* (The Library of Christian Classics; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958). Henceforth cited in the text as *Desert Fathers*, Chadwick.

[3] See for example Cassian *Inst.* 5.10, 14.

[4] *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1978) 19.

[5] See M.R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, *1981); T.* Ryan, *Fasting Rediscovered: A Guide to Health and Wholeness for your Body-*

Spirit (New York: Paulist, 1981); Pennington, *A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone*, 62-75; A. de Vogüé, "'Aimer le Jeûne.' Une Observance Possible et Necessaire Aujourd'hui," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 45 (1983) 27-36.

[6] "Cassian and the Fathers: Notes for Conferences Given in the Choir Novitiate, Abbey of Gethsemani" (Unpublished mimeographed notes given by Merton to his students, found in the Scriptorium of Holy Trinity Abbey, Huntsville, Utah, no date), part 2, p. 32.

[7] St. Augustine also has a short essay entitled, "On the Usefulness of Fasting" *(de utilitate jejunii)* (Translated by M.S. Muldowney; The Fathers of the Church—St. Paul Editions; Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, no date). St. Jerome speaks at length of its benefits, e.g. *Letters* 107.10; 54.9-11, 77.4. All are included in F.A. Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933; rpt. 1980).

[8] See de Vogüé, "Aimer le Jeûne," 33: "Thus is explained the greater lucidity and agility of spirit, as well as the greater ease in prayer which characterize the man who fasts."

[9] See for example Cassian *Inst.* 5.21, and Jerome *Letters* 54.8-9 (in Wright, *Select Letters).*

[10] Cassian *Inst.* 2.14.

Guilt and Healing

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What I have to say about guilt and healing can be put into a very few sentences. Different people have different senses of their own guilt. One reason why a spiritual director sometimes fails to understand the guilt feelings of a directee is that they each mean something quite different by the word "guilt." The Christian healer, therefore, ought to reflect on the different possible kinds of guilt feelings.

I suggest that three basic types can be distinguished. "Guilt" may be symbolized as:

1) being *separated* from one's community;
2) *failing* in performance; or
3) being *responsible* for some destruction.

While everyone certainly experiences each of these three forms at some time or other, it often happens that one of the three tends to predominate, becoming a focal point in a behavior pattern that characterizes an entire lifestyle.

Each kind of guilt feeling also tends to favor its own remedy for sin. The feeling of being separated demands a reacceptance into one's community. The feeling of having failed generates the need for a confession of one's misdeeds. And the feeling of being responsible for some destruction calls for a restoration of things to their proper order. In short, guilt feelings prompt us to seek healing either through reconciliation, confession, or penance.

That there are these three main kinds of guilt is a very simple idea, really. It originally came to me partly from my reading of the Freudian psychologist,

Karen Horney,[1] but has been reinforced by my experience in spiritual counseling and in my other reading.[2]

Let me put some flesh on the bare bones of this idea, though, You may find it helpful in your own dealings with others.

Guilt as Separation

Karen Horney finds that people generally have one of three ways of reacting to conflict: they move *away from* people; they move *towards* people; or they move *against* people. Each of these reactions is the chief characteristic of each of the three kinds of guilt feelings enumerated above. We see this in the first kind of guilt, the guilt that is experienced as separation.

For an individual who experiences this kind of guilt, no matter what his deed, its ruinous effect appears to be isolation from others, particularly from one's own community, family, homeland, or religion. It makes little difference whether the misdeed is known or not, or whether the damage is permanent or not. What counts, whether the person feels that he or she is a genuine member of the community or just a drop-out for all practical purposes—present in body, perhaps, but not in spirit—is that the person has this need to belong.

When such a person faces conflict, he or she tends to withdraw into hiding. Such persons spontaneously move away from others, so that often, even when they don't feel guilty at any particular time, they will manifest an attitude of aloofness. Persons like this seem to regard themselves as somewhat special, though perhaps as yet undiscovered. "It's lonely at the top," the successful will say. Or, "They'll be sorry when I'm gone," for the unsuccessful.

When these people withdraw, however, they do not want to withdraw completely. Vacillating between hiding the treasures hidden within and sharing these treasures with others, they compromise and, as it were, drop one little silver coin at a time, hoping that someone will glimpse their inner wealth of unusual gifts. It's a game of "catch-me-if-you-can," played on the field of human psyches.

The very threat of dreaded separation infects everything they know. Since so much of what one knows comes through what one believes, their fear of separation can make such persons quite aware of the set of beliefs that is maintained by their community, but also quite uncritical of these beliefs since the beliefs act as their membership card in the community.

On the other hand, their paradoxical fascination with being special persons fosters a good deal of independent thinking along the margins of their community's interests. The result often enough is a roaming intellect in unusual and creative areas, but a blind spot in the area of their traditions.

Connected to this fear of being alone, albeit special, persons who compulsively feel the threat of separation indulge in a very curious brand of lying. In order to get along with others, they have to make small talk. But because they also fear the separation that comes with being too complex for others, they give accounts that are grossly oversimplified, or are downright fabrications. Imagine

a man living in a private world where no one else exists to demand an account. He literally would have no public, shareable memory of, say, how he spent yesterday afternoon. He would have no skill in self-description. In the extreme, he would skirt the edges of schizophrenia, melancholy or anomie. He would indulge in formalities. In public he would play a role; his masks would be either flamboyant or sullen—it would make no difference since his inner self would have already withdrawn to the stage-manager's chair while his public self acted out well-rehearsed roles. Rather than living on principle, he would live according to a script. But notice that this lying, this hypocrisy does not flow from a desire to be highly thought of or to hide some secret crime—at least not originally. It would simply be his strategy, designed to meet the problem of trying to be, at the same time, special and not alone.

A sense of guilt based on the fear of separation is stamped with a quality of unspeakableness, a dark and nameless sense of foreboding that defies description, let alone resolution. It appears to do no good to confess, since one's sin has no accurate name. Nor is it worthwhile to seek help for one's problem since there would remain the fundamental doubt as to the trustworthiness of such figures as psychologists—or even one's friends. This kind of guilt tortures on a rack that stretches the individual between skepticism and envy.

But reality must out. And the reality is that our persons are filled with a wealth of values and meanings that really are common. It is an illusion to think of oneself as alone, as isolated, as peering out upon a world through eyes that betray nothing whatever of an interior, more vital world. Normally reality breaks in upon this illusion of self-containment when one is loved.

Love has no reason, it demands no accounts; it accepts what is, without condition. At one stroke, it acknowledges qualities that are, indeed, ineffable and special, but it does so in a way that binds friends fast, making isolation less possible and less attractive. Love is a diffusive thing, an expansive thing, even in its initial forms. A young boy begins to treat his own little sister more kindly when he falls in love with the girl in his seventh-grade math class. His whole world changes. In principle, it seems that reconciliation with one person implies—and to some degree effects—a reconciliation with an entire community. It is acknowledgment, not in the cool abstractions of the mind, but in the concrete and passionate crucible of the heart.

When one is unloved, the opposite reality takes hold. The illusion of being separate, a single unit, just part of a collection instead of part of a community, not only becomes more convincing, it becomes more true. Loners take charge of themselves. They defend their frontiers and sift their pasts to scrutinize the values they had accepted on the basis of some early domestic faith. Reconciliation becomes more difficult because it is less wanted. Each effort by others to break through their shells forcibly only ends up by teaching them some new defensive technique. Whoever wants to bring a withdrawing person out of that shell had better be ready for a long season of unrequited love.

Guilt as Failing

The second kind of guilt is experienced as failing, as having done one's best, and still botched things up. It is dramatically portrayed in classical Greek theater, where the word for sin is *hamartia*, "missing the mark." One aims as carefully as one can—and misses. Very often persons afflicted with this kind of guilt refuse to believe in bad will. They absolve themselves of fault by saying, "I didn't mean it." Colored by looks of utter helplessness, their eyebrows raised high and their eyes sad, they explain: "I only tried to do what was right!" Such individuals cannot believe that anyone would deliberately choose wrong. Bad judgment is the culprit—or imprudence, or ignorance, or foolishness—but never bad will. Humans are good!

In Karen Horney's terms, persons burdened with "missing the mark" tend to move *towards* people when conflicts arise. In their moral righteousness they neither withdraw nor attack. They maneuver. They find dodges, games, dances, little schemes for getting around problems by way of flattery or legalisms or a spate of fresh plans. They are fascinated by new methods, gurus, short cuts. They revel in companionship, loyalty, friendship, promises and assurances. They leave behind a trail of strained emotions, half-baked ideas, and other petty violations in human traffic. Compulsively optimistic, they look forward to imminent success: "in no time, everything is going to be all right."

This hegemony of good will is not exactly idealistic. It does not aim high in order to create a better world. Rather it aims high in order to create a better and more acceptable self. But by their constantly missing the mark, persons who operate this way appear to be all the more unacceptable, all the more in need of supports, crutches, assurances, and consequently all the more involved in schemes ready-made for future disappointments.

The tragic flaw here is that these dependent persons lack ordinary insight into just exactly who it is that does the willing. They repeatedly confuse what they actually want to do with what they think others expect them to do. They are constitutionally unable to keep in mind two simple facts: X is forbidden; I want to do X anyway. Either they will smother what is forbidden with qualifications intended to make it publicly acceptable, or they will suppress their desires and pretend to themselves that they really do not desire what the public frowns on.

In fact, however, human beings can and do desire what is evil. Augustine regarded his boyhood theft of some rotten pears as the consummate evil it was because he consciously willed to do what was wrong. He loved the evil for its own sake.

It takes great humility to admit this, especially for those who depend on their own goodwill for inner security. They need to admit that beneath their apparent optimism crouches a wide-eyed terror. An inner darkness, overrun with bizarre demons and unheard-of abominations, threatens their narrow zone of conscious thinking and feeling. It is matched by a similar darkness outside that lies beyond the complex of their dependency schemes. Out there a chaot-

ic world rumbles and crashes against the walls of their civility. The result is either paranoia—a common symptom of those who pride themselves on their own goodwill—or an oblivious optimism.

Healing comes with confession. To tell the simple truth that I have willed what is evil opens up the hatches to my inner self and lets light flood in. The bald fact is that I fell, not because my crutches were defective, but because I simply and perversely wanted to fall. Healing begins exactly where that truth is claimed as one's own.

The need to confess goes deep. It shows up in both the most hardened criminal and the simplest child. It makes little difference to the fear of failure whether one confesses to king, spouse, priest or peer. The truth demands its own hearing. While life is rendered more livable by a variety of investments, particularly for dependent types, it is paradoxically rendered more true by periodic divestments, being naked before another.

A person can confess his or her sin in many ways, ranging from the very formal and ritually structured religious confessions to the very informal and sometimes almost casual self-indictments one makes to close friends. It is no virtue to deny such a person a hearing, which we often do from embarrassment, for the sake of avoiding an uneasy exchange. But the worst response, of course, would be to express doubt about the failing where someone's genuine inner failing has been confessed.

Unfortunately, dependent personalities can be rather scrupulous. They will oftentimes distort the very form of confession that might have brought them healing. For such persons, their fixation on the role of will in evil generates endless questions about their own motives, intentions, purposes, and desires in any particular immoral action. They think of motives as rational causes of behavior, as if misbehavior could always be explained. But no one can explain one's motives, either for good behavior or bad. So, unable to clarify to what degree they actually chose the evil, these unfortunate persons swing back and forth between self-forgiveness and self-indictment. They become repetitious in their confessions. Their keen awareness of how deep the roots of their sin go makes them doubt whether they really confessed the sin itself rather than just some manifestation of it. But scrupulosity is only the reemergence, in a new form, of their basic sin: thinking that it's up to them to discover the right path, the proper means to salvation. If they happen to be Christian, they tend to become steeped in the heresy that seeks some "way" to Jesus, as if God had never given Jesus to us as the only "way" to him.

Scrupulous persons must be brought to face the reality that an accurate account of sins will never do. Rather, one must confess one's *truth*, which is a different matter altogether. For them the truth is usually that they genuinely do not know whether or not they deliberately chose what is wrong. On the psychological level, they have to be content with a global admission of having "messed up," leaving further judgment to God. Spiritually, they must hear the gospel in this special way: that there is no Savior but Jesus and that all other

crutches should either be thrown away as false gods or else accepted as *temporary* gifts from his kind hand. When the scrupulous finally believe that their guilt is perfectly known by one who still loves them anyway and demands no accounts, the compulsive need to repeat their sins will die away.

Guilt as Indictment

The third kind of guilt is experienced as being responsible for damage, being blameworthy, being "guilty" in the legal sense of being the one who must make restitution and face punishment. Because of my sin, some part of the world is now scarred, violated, or destroyed. There exists a gap in the order of things and it will forever have my name on it. It is "guilt as indictment"; it points to me; I am the one. Persons with such guilt feelings find it difficult to imagine that the other forms—separation and failing—could ever be as weighty on the human spirit.

The feeling of guilt as indictment is most often found in persons who move *against* others in conflict situations: the aggressive, hard-charging men or women of power or responsibility, who are always ready, with a generous dose of force, to put things in their proper place. They face the world with determination, as though there were an eternal job for them to do. They attack even recreation with vigorous purpose. They always find the ideas and schemes of others somewhat limping, in need of improvement—their improvement. But feelings (their own or others') create a special problem because feelings are so intractable. Sometimes feelings are simply ignored; sometimes they are rationalized and reshaped; and sometimes feelings which are particularly tender will completely disarm these individuals in the way an innocent child can "disarm" a tough soldier.

There is an ambiguity in the word "responsible" which aggressive persons suffer at the core of their moral sensibilities. Responsibility can mean either being in charge or being to blame, either giving the orders or being subject to punishment. To aggressive persons, it appears that the world cannot get along very well without them, and yet their pasts seem strewn with collisions of their own making. Where they came on with high moral purpose, in looking back they see that they lacked compassion for ordinary weakness. Where they built up effective organizations, they now find their machines have no souls. Where they lusted for power, they destroyed the innocent. They feet "responsible" for meeting crises, but they end up feeling "responsible" for creating them in the first place.

Only one thing will allay such guilt: reparation. Somehow things must be put aright, or, where that is not possible, some penance must be done to restore at least an ordered relationship to the world.

Being reconciled to one's community is not enough: they will not enjoy a warm heart if the barn has fallen over. Nor will it do to confess one's guilt: the aggressive person knows human failing very well, seeing it as the cause of all chaos. What matters is the product of those failings. Sin leaves a permanent

scar on the face of the earth, and the sinner's heart will never be healed until that cosmic wound is wiped away.

There is a type of scrupulosity that shows up here, too: not the kind that compulsively vacillates over the morality of actions, but the kind that sees evil where there is none and claims the blame for disorder it never caused. It is the desire for restitution gone haywire. Manuel Smith's book, *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*,[3] deals with this aggressive brand of guilt.

Again, reality will out. The truth is that human persons, of themselves, cannot restore the proper order of things. We delude ourselves when we think that just a little more effort and determination are required to enjoy a sense of real accomplishment. A smiling, toothless, old derelict once explained his happiness to a friend of mine: "A life in ten thousand pieces cannot be put together again!"

An aggressive person experiences genuine healing when he or she is content to obey the cosmos as It is given, with all its imperfection and disorder, but has faith that God has complete authority, power, and freedom to bring about the true order of things. Here, penance can be more helpful than a mere external restoration of damaged property. Thus the word "reparation," with its overtones of penance as well as restitution, seems apt. A penance in harmony with the crime allows a symbolic expression of our radical impotence, while an attempt at restitution could bear with it the underlying Pelagian hope in our own power to straighten out the world by ourselves.

Symbols of Healing

These three kinds of guilt are conceptual types. No one suffers only one kind to the exclusion of the other two. Still, there does seem to be a correlation between one's spontaneous reaction to conflict and one's dominant experience of guilt. We might press the hypothesis and say that the more one's reaction to conflict is restricted to a single posture in all situations, the more clearly does a single type of guilt feeling stand out. Or, conversely, the more mature a person is in the face of conflicts, the more his or her experience of guilt will bear characteristics of all three types.

Note also that this typology prescinds from whether or not one's guilt is justified. It accounts for guilt feelings regardless of their connection to some genuine evil. Where the guilt is false or exaggerated, it reveals the locus of the illusion. Where the guilt is genuine, it indicates the symbol through which true healing can be embraced—be it one's relation to ones community (separation), to one's selfhood (failing) or to one's cosmos (indictment).

At best, these types can raise the relevant questions and give cogent leads to answers. Actual insight into anyone's guilt, though, depends upon the offices of the intelligent Christian healer.

The corresponding "healing" acts of reconciliation, confession, and penance do not, by themselves, have the power to heal. Here is where the Christian healer goes beyond psychology. These acts stand as the symbols, the

sacraments of heating in Christ Jesus. It strikes me as no coincidence that we have three names for the rite of healing: *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, *Confession*, and *Sacrament of Penance*. Perhaps, too, the current preference for "reconciliation" says something about the sin of our times.

In any event, it is Christ who heals through the symbols. Without an interpersonal involvement with him in faith, the symbol becomes either an empty formality (for the withdrawing type), a new and merely human means to reach God (for the dependent type), or a Pelagian act of self-assertion (for the aggressive type).

Faith in Christ Jesus is this: to believe that God has given him all power and authority over every society, over each person, and over the entire cosmos; that he is absolutely free to act on our behalf in any circumstances; and that he loves us. So while the Christian healer ought to understand something about the different possible kinds of guilt, such understanding will not serve genuine healing unless the guilty party can be led to accept the Person who does the healing—the Healer, Christ Jesus.

NOTES

[1] See *Our Inner Conflicts* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1945) for her compelling descriptions of each type.
[2] The origins of these three symbols of guilt may well be seen also as the first three crises in psychological development outlined by Erik Erikson. In infancy, the crisis of basic trust vs. mistrust is a problem of separation and withdrawal. In early childhood, the crisis of autonomous willing vs. doubt is a problem of failure and dependency. In play age, the crisis of purposeful initiative vs. forbidden consequences is a problem of aggression and indictment. See his *Childhood and Society* (Penguin Books, 1950) Chapter Seven, pp. 239-266,
[3] New York, Dial Press, 1975.

In Sweat and Tears: "Working It Through" with God

Eugene Geromel

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Once I was being interviewed on a call-in radio show that had a charismatic orientation. A woman called about the difficulty she was having from living with her mother. When the host rather adeptly had her focus on her behavior, she began to describe the number of times "God had healed her." Finally in our exchange I suggested that she see her pastor or a trained counselor and "work through her feelings." A dramatic hush came over the studio. Had I suggested selling her mother to an Arab slave ring, this reaction might have been understandable. Somehow "working through one's feelings" with a professional, though, was an indication of a lack of faith or of a true healing.

A girl was in her early teens, and she had been raped. She was also a new Christian. The normal feelings of the rape victim—being dirty, guilty, angry ashamed—were intensified by the fervor of her new-found faith. She was told that she must forgive those who had hurt her. Believing, too, that she must be "pure and unspoiled" did little for her self-image. She was led to believe that she must put a cap on all the negative feelings besetting her, and place a smile on her face that said to all the world: "Jesus loves me—and I can forgive anyone anything!"

At certain diocesan functions, I would meet with individuals for counseling or confession. A number of these had been "born again." They were always smiling and talking about the love of Christ at the conference. But in the confessional room the smile would disappear. Pain and suffering would

spill out—depression, the affliction of an alcoholic spouse, infidelity, domestic violence. When they left the room, the smile would return, and once again they would feel the need to witness to God's healing love—even though the same old problems remained at home, unresolved.

For many, it seems, faith is regarded as an instantaneous experience. It is immediately achieved, and thereafter kept unchanged and unquestioned. The ongoing problems of everyday life are to be met with simple platitudes. Doubt and struggle must not occur. If they do, these individuals believe, somehow there is something wrong with their faith. Oftentimes it seems that there is so much peer pressure that they dare not admit openly to doubt, unhappiness, fear, or anxiety. Such feelings, they are certain, are a betrayal of the Christian life.

I do not wish to overstate the case, nor to suggest that this happens *only* among "born-again Christians" nor *only* in charismatic circles. Undoubtedly, too, this is *not* the case with many Christians who have been "born again." But the phenomenon does occur frequently enough in the world of Christian experience to warrant our examination.

I do not "have it in" for fundamentalist Christians or for charismatics. In fact, my spiritual director is a charismatic priest. And for myself, I have instituted healing services at every church I have served. Yet it is also true that nothing created in heaven or earth in incorruptible. Human beings, subject to original sin, often take the easy way out.

There is no doubt that instantaneous, permanent healings, both physical and emotional, do take place. More often, though, the healing takes place over a period of time and requires sweat and tears. There are even times, as St. Paul discovered, when God does *not* take away a physical problem. Our understanding of what it means to lead a Christian life must encompass all these occurrences.

For Paul and the other apostles, life was a *pilgrimage*. Yes, there were glorious moments of their being with Christ. Yes, there were examples of divine healing. Yes, there were examples of the Holy Spirit's power. Yes, there were moments of ecstasy and joy. But, as Paul tells us in his epistles, there were also failures. There were also times when the weight of his ministry crushed him to the point of despair. There were moments of such anger that some misguided Corinthians thought he had actually ordered the killing of a fellow Christian!

If we focus only on the glorious moments of the spiritual pilgrimage, our faith will be lopsided. Our understanding of our life in Christ must include times of failure, times of depression, uncertainty, illness and struggle. Our life must also include those times in which we say to another—perhaps even a professional: "I need help!"

Certainly there are many elements in a healthy spiritual life: a sense of joy in the gifts of the Spirit; a sense of trust in the providence of God; willingness to witness to the meaning of Christ in one's life—all these are vitally important. Yet there are also other elements which must be reckoned with.

Suffering and Failure

In many of the older hymns and prayers we spoke of the world and of our lives as a "veil of tears." This concept did not come out of the morbid thoughts of philosophers from the Middle Ages, but out of the reality of life. Our Lord's own life and ministry never ignored the reality of pain. Nowhere in Scripture is there a Pollyanna view of life's problems. Nowhere is there a promise of an easy life. In fact, Christ is quite clear that those who would follow him must bear their cross. While countless followers of our Lord have discovered throughout the centuries that it was often their cross which helped them learn to trust in God, nowhere do we see the belief expressed that the cross is fun!

Even when Christ knew he had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead, he still wept at the tomb. In the garden he went through such agony that "sweat fell like drops of blood." On the cross he died one of the most painful deaths imaginable. His life is an example that through pain and suffering, death and burial, there is resurrection and hope. Christ went *through* this. Not around it. Not oblivious to it. By no stretch of the imagination can we picture Christ on the cross with a fixed plastic smile saying: "God loves me, and all is well."

If we ignore the pain and suffering, the doubt and anguish of Christ on the cross, we eliminate one of the most important elements of faith. If we minimize and deny the presence of suffering in our lives, we not only do an injustice to faith, but we do a terrible disservice to others. The young girl I worked with was not "allowed" to feel the very feelings which would enable her to live a healthier life. By believing that a Christian must not "hurt," she totally *submerged* the very feeling that she had to work through. By *denying* her anger, she killed a part of herself. She also killed a part of her relationship with God (she had reported that she could not touch, let alone read her Bible). And all this in the name of the love of God!

There are more common examples of how the denial of pain separates individuals from themselves and also from God. How often at a funeral do we see the newly widowed smile and say "It's all right" because her husband "is with our Lord." There is no space for tears, for outward expressions of grief—only for joyous platitudes. Without working through (and going through) grief, she will eventually become a bitter, shallow woman. Oftentimes she will leave the church—just fade away—no longer praying, worshipping, or praising.

How different the end result would be if these individuals were allowed to work through their feelings. If they were allowed to feel and express the anger they experience—at those who hurt or left them (the rapist, the dead husband), at themselves for all the things they "could/should have done," at God for allowing them to experience such pain. By working through the experience, there is the possibility of putting the experience into perspective. By hiding behind a mask of platitudes and plastic smiles, they block out not only the pain but also the chance for personal, spiritual growth.

Continuous Conversion

Everyone comes to know Christ in a different way. St. Paul had his conversion experience on the road to Damascus; but most of the saints came to know our Lord slowly, over a long period of time. Many could point to a single experience as a turning point—slavery for Patrick, a dream for Francis, convalescence for Ignatius, a boy in a garden for Augustine. But each spent the remainder of his life growing in holiness. Each came to know Christ in a progressively deeper and more beautiful way.

In his Rule, St. Benedict speaks of "continual conversion." Each day should be a turning (returning) to Christ. As we come to know Christ more fully, we come also to recognize the ways in which we have separated ourselves from him. We turn from those ways back to Christ (repentance). This is what it means to die daily to sin. Yet if we attach too much importance to that moment when we came to know Christ, no matter how glorious it may have been, then it is likely that we will be hesitant to acknowledge and deal with the problem of our ongoing failures.

On the other hand, if we see our spiritual life in terms of a *continuous conversion*, then each day, each moment, will provide us with opportunity for spiritual growth. We will not hesitate to grapple with our spiritual "failures." We will see them as obstacles in our journey, not as evidence that our conversion experience was worthless.

Acceptance of Our Human Nature

Scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God. But it also tells us that we have leanings toward sin. Theologically we call this "original sin." St. Paul described this quite clearly when he wrote: "The good I would do, I do not. That which I would not do, I do." When we turn from God, we should be sad—not surprised. Accepting our human nature allows us to deal with this. But if we deny or suppress our nature, it is impossible to deal with our failings.

A parish priest once worked with a family in which a very disturbed father terrorized and abused both wife and children. All legal remedies seemed to fall. No one could "reach" the father. One night, in spite of court orders and new locks, he broke into the house, attacked and beat the wife. Emotionally drained and terrified, the wife took him back.

In total frustration, the priest began to fantasize ways in which to have the father simply killed. Realizing that this was hardly "priestly behavior," he went to a retreat house to think things out. While there, he confessed his murderous feelings. The confessor, who was not only perceptive but down to earth, responded in the strongest of terms that it was his pride that was sinful, not those thoughts. "You think that because you're a priest you're supposed to be above these human feelings!"

The confessor was correct. As troubling as those thoughts might have been, the *real* danger lay in the pride. It was the sin of pride and its demands

of what a priest should be that would do the damage in the long run. In the remainder of the retreat, the priest was able to look at all the "little" ways in which his pride had blinded him to the barriers that he himself had placed between Christ and himself.

Psychologists tell us that a sane man cannot retain two conflicting thought and value systems at the same time. If one believes that a Christian is one who is above human feelings like anger, hate, resentment, grief, then it is next to impossible for such a person to deal with his or her humanness. The only "effective" way to deal with such feelings would be simply to deny their very presence. This tendency would be intensified if, additionally, his or her environment were only to speak of the joys of being Christian, discouraging individuals from expressing negative feelings and needs. Such pressure would necessitate splitting oneself—hiding behind an ever-present plastic smile all that is negative.

In the radio interview described above, the host had to remind his audience that if my advice sounded different, it was because I was not only a priest but a psychologist.

Once, on a *cursillo* weekend, an epileptic told me that she went off her medication so that Christ could work through her. Fortunately an assistant director (who had charismatic credentials) was able to speak with her. But this kind of thinking is the eventual outcome of ignoring our human nature. If one is unable to deal with one's failure, pain, or sin, then seeking the help of another human being (a professional) would seem to be questioning the power of God! It would seem to be admitting that somehow we haven't become "fully Christian" like others have.

Certainly a strong case can be made that a mature "born again" Christian would not think this way. In the *cursillo* weekend, the spiritual director was as troubled by the candidate's refusal of medication as I was. But is *not* this precisely the outcome to be expected if only the positive and "magical" side of Christianity is presented? If only the (short-term) success stories are told? Somehow mature Christians have to share *the whole* of their faith-pilgrimage with the neophytes. They need to mention not only the glorious moments but also the moments of struggle and failure. They need to share the tension *of* what it means to be with Christ, yet not fully be with him; *of* knowing him, yet not totally knowing him. Is this perhaps what St. Paul meant in part when he wrote: "Now I see dimly . . . then face-to-face"?

In my own spiritual life, I find the concept of life as pilgrimage to be extremely helpful. This image allows me to accept and assimilate all of my life-experiences. I can reflect joyously on those glorious moments when the presence of Christ was simply overwhelming. I can also accept those times when I made a wrong turn and ended up where I should not have been. This image allows me the freedom to ask for help when I have gotten lost along the way. I can seek forgiveness when I have sinned.

While I can speak truthfully of the "joy" of the journey, I know (and so

do others) that I haven't completed the course. The concept of pilgrimage reminds me that there will be sweat and tears as well as joy. There can be no short-cuts to eternal life—merely the walking of the path in front of us. To deny the existence of mountain or desert before us is simply to terminate the journey.

St. Irenaeus once wrote that the glory of God is man fully alive. In order to experience life, to be fully alive, one must accept all that comes our way, all that is within us. In seeing the full reality of life, we may also catch a fuller glimpse of the glory of God.

Teach Me How to Pray

George Brennan, M.S.

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I once stumbled across a book title: *Can Christians Be Educated?* and was intrigued by the mere suggestion of such a question. Normally, I would regard that question as a given and be inclined to ask about the "how-to" of passing on our faith. Not only was my assumption about education challenged but I also knew that there were other assumptions about Christian life that needed to be addressed by equally challenging questions. In my ministry as a spiritual director I have had to deal with similar questions about praying. In the midst of many attempts to teach the "how-to" of praying I have been led to wonder about some more fundamental questions that are all too often taken as assumptions. My concern, though is not peculiar to those who seek spiritual direction; it is ultimately the same concern of any parents who want to teach their child how to pray.

Prayer and Christian Life

Any attempt to understand what Christian life is all about has to concern itself with the subject of prayer. The story of the Christian tradition shows that ever since the disciples said: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1), Christians have been concerned with praying. The meaning of prayer in the Christian tradition has varied according to internal motives and external circumstances. It has focused on an infinite number of themes and employed just as many different techniques. It has been preached in public as an obligation and confessed in private as lacking. On this subject the Christian community has written prolifically, argued vehemently and experimented continuously. People have prayed at times in formal groups and at other times in private.

Some have challenged the importance of prayer and others have considered it as essential as breathing. Experiences with particular prayer forms have given rise to new questions which have in turn led to new questions. Much has been written; much has been tried and yet there is little that is commonly agreed upon. One of the few nondisputed facts is that Christians have always in some way been concerned about prayer. Whether it has been encouraged or attacked, prayer has always been an issue to be dealt with.

We are experiencing in the Church today a renewed interest in prayer. People are either praying more or asking more than ever to be taught how to pray and the kinds of questions being asked remain very fundamental: "What does it mean to pray?" "How do I know if I am really praying?" "Why should I feel obliged to pray?" For some reason many of the common approaches to prayer tend to pass over the fundamental questions and move immediately to the "how-to" of praying. One of the drawbacks of this approach is that praying people end up in different "camps" and there is more emphasis on the external differences and little awareness of the internal commonality. People easily become more conscious of what differentiates them and less appreciative of what invites and unites them. I have noticed that when prayer is shared with others, it is usually done with others whose praying style is similar: charismatics pray with charismatics; Scripture-oriented people pray with Scripture-oriented people; formal pray-ers pray with formal pray-ers; centering pray-er is shared with centering pray-ers and so forth. That fact in itself is not necessarily bad but often when people express a comfortability with one kind of praying there is also present at least an implied criticism of those whose praying style is different. There is often a *"we-vs-they"* mentality about prayer and it makes me wonder what ever happened to the vision of the Church as a praying community as described in the Scriptures: "they were of *one heart and one mind* . . . devoted to the instructions, communal life and the breaking of the bread and the prayers . . . each spoke *in his own tongue* about the marvels of God" (Ac 4:32, 2:42, 11). Unity and diversity characterized their praying.

I would in no way expect that we all think and act alike when we pray but I have often longed for an understanding of prayer that teaches both the external differences and the internal commonality. I find it interesting that most teachers of prayer tend to use language that is academic and theological to describe their vision for prayer and those who wrestle with the experience of praying tend to use language that is experiential and psychological to describe their difficulties. It is as though inductive questions "from below" are given deductive answers "from above" and it makes me wonder if the people involved in the dialogues (and debates) about prayer are really speaking the same language. Unfortunately, next to nothing written about prayer takes into account the discoveries about the soul made by psychologists such as Carl Jung, Rollo May, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. If attempts to teach about prayer are going to be effective, then it will be important to pay atten-

tion to the kind of language used. Whatever prayer style is taught, the assumptions about what prayer is, why people pray, and who the praying person is also need to be addressed.

What Is Praying?

When people speak of praying, they are not always speaking of the same thing; anything from requests-made-of-God to messages-received-from-God come under the heading of prayer. In the Christian tradition words like prayer, meditation, contemplation and mysticism are sometimes used interchangeably and at other times they denote carefully nuanced distinctions. Without being overly simplistic, I think it would be fair to say that prayer concerns communication with God, and this should be the starting point for any teaching about prayer. In speaking of human communication some skills can be taught but essentially the experience is far larger than the skills used. Should communication with God be any different? I think not. Just as it would be wrong to say that nothing about prayer can be taught, it would be just as wrong to say that everything about prayer can be taught. People who ask to be taught how to pray are asking something about communication.

Communication is concerned first of all with ourselves. Who and what we are is spoken out of us in many ways: words, actions, thoughts, and subconscious activity such as dreams. All of these are aspects of ourselves speaking. As we struggle to listen to all these voices telling us about ourselves, we are led to the Origin of all self. To pray, then, is to listen to these voices because ultimately they focus our attention on God.

There are many models for explaining communication. In choosing one that expresses the kind of communication that goes on in prayer, it is important to remember that the concerns about prayer are expressed in experiential rather than academic terms and therefore the basic model should reflect a common human experience. The experience of friendship seems to offer a lot for understanding what praying is all about.

The experience of friendship is important to all of us and it seems that our desire to have friends is as important as our need to be a friend to someone else. Friendship is one of the first things that we learn to value as young children. Long before we are able to explain it or recognize it in ourselves, we instinctively know the power of the threat: "If you do that, I won't be your friend any more." There are few experiences more devastating than the loss of a dear friend.

When you consider what friends do, the most obvious thing is that they talk; friends usually spend a lot of time talking with each other. Sometimes the talking has to do with sharing some exciting good news; things we would call "peak experiences" are shared most naturally with a friend. It is just as natural that sadness and struggle are also shared with a friend. The kinds of things that stay "bottled-up" inside become much less a burden when they are shared with a friend. Whether the concern is something happy or something

sad, the presence of a friend makes it possible to talk freely about anything.

Part of the experience of sharing is that friends listen. Out of the experience of friendship comes the willingness to listen to the other. It is more than listening to words; it is a listening that is done with the heart. Friends are good listeners.

I have come to believe that there is something more important than the talking and the listening that are so basic to friendship: presence. If I were to single out one thing that marks two people as friends, I would immediately think of time spent together in silence. Usually in the midst of a conversation silent moments are uncomfortable moments, unless it is two friends who are talking. Friends know how to be comfortable together in silence. Friends naturally desire to be together and what they do during that time is not as important as the fact that they spend time.

In the midst of all the talking, listening and spending time each person tends to become more authentically his or her self—role-free, maskless and most in touch with who they really are. In the process of communicating with each other, there results a communication with oneself; the same is true of prayer. Understood in this way, prayer is both interpersonal and intrapersonal; the praying and the individuating process are concurrent realities.

Why Do People Pray?

People have many conscious reasons for praying but if praying is to be understood as concurrent with the individuating process, then it would have to be said that the motive for praying is more than the conscious reasons; it is rooted in the unconscious. Keeping in mind the friendship model of communication, we would have to say that ultimately the motive is to be in the presence of another (God), in a way that is authentically oneself. From the point of view of depth psychology we know that this attempt to communicate and become authentically oneself is a gradual process of moving beyond conscious limits and becoming more and more vulnerable. Ultimately, then, to pray is to acknowledge limits and though this acknowledgment is at first implicit, it eventually becomes explicit. To teach a person to pray is to facilitate a person's desire to become conscious of limits and comfortable with vulnerability. Whatever the method chosen, it must respond to this desire in order to be effective.

Who Is the Praying Person?

Any understanding of persons that is simplistic will never be able to adequately explain prayer; it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the human person. People often describe their experience of friendship by referring to themselves as changed persons. This change is evidenced by the way one thinks, feels and acts. Such a change Is both interpersonal and intra-personal: it concerns the way one thinks, feels and acts toward others as well as the way one thinks, feels and acts in relation to oneself. The experience of

praying needs to pay attention to this notion of the total person and expect just as radical a change. In learning to pray a person needs to pay attention to his or her thought processes, the wide range of their emotions and the various ways of responding to a given situation.

One instrument that many people have found helpful for getting in touch with this complexity is the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator. By referring to the reality of an internal and external world; the way a person takes in information; how a person responds to that information; and a person's basic attitude toward life, people's differences are understood in terms of sixteen main categories. The mystery of the self, the mystery of the other and the mystery of communication are all interrelated parts of the same process.

It is common that a person's first experience of praying is with formal prayers—a ritualized repetition of something memorized. That style of praying it has value if it is understood in the larger context of what praying is all about. However, if it becomes equated with what praying is, it can lead to problems later on. I have often found myself in pastoral situations where people have experienced a crisis because they no longer pray like they used to. Often it is with a sense of guilt and despair that people look for guidance and wonder: "Have I lost my faith?" To arrive at such a question is a painful and awkward moment, but I do believe that it is also an opportunity for a new understanding of a person's total faith experience. It can provide the opportunity to move beyond guilt to an understanding of faith as developmental and an experience of faith that is more mature.

What is being described as a loss of faith is in a sense just that but there is a positive way to understand what that means. Ironically what can appear on the outside as a loss of faith can in fact be just the opposite on the inside. My belief is that when people say that they cannot pray they are often referring to external expressions of prayer that are no longer meaningful to them. If a person is really engaged in the process of praying, he or she should expect that this will happen. There should be a disidentification with externals and a new identification with internals. A person's faith should not be seen as a fixed thing that can be held onto (or lost); neither should praying be seen as a fixed thing that one does. At a time when a person's understanding of prayer has become fixated on externals, the main point about praying has been missed.

People do not communicate authentically, move beyond their conscious limits or deal with their complexity without something visible evidencing that. When the "something visible" of prayer changes, it may very well mean that some aspect of true prayer is going on internally. For anyone who has a static notion of what praying is all about, authentic praying will actually appear (on the outside) and feel (on the inside) like non-praying.

The Person Of Jesus

In the Christian experience of praying the person of Jesus needs to play a prominent role. However, the place of prominence is not the same for every-

one. Due to the fact that people's motives vary and personalities are complicated, the person of Jesus will be a part of this process in different ways.

Sometimes people find that it is in reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' life that they are motivated to desire this communication with God in the first place. A new awareness of some aspect of the person of Jesus can occasion this desire to become authentically oneself before God. Sometimes, too, people begin the experience of prayer without any specific Jesus-consciousness or even God consciousness. The painful circumstances of daily living can initiate the desire for that unnamed Other. In other words, a feeling of vulnerability and limitation can cause persons to seek something which they cannot provide for themselves or even name. It may be something as simple as a feeling of fatigue that makes a person stop and pay attention to this inner process and in all probability it is not named "prayer time." However, the inner experience indicates that this is what is really going on. During these times of stress or struggle it is important to be alone with the experience—the emotions are many; the feeling of vulnerability is real and the inability to understand oneself is frustrating. However, all of this can lead to an awareness of Jesus as the "answer" to what is going on. The answer is not some magical solution but there is some kind of identification with the meaning of Jesus' life and it is connected to the struggle to find meaning in an individual's life. It is not in finding the connectedness but in the search for a connectedness that Jesus enters the picture. Whether as the starting point or as the desired goal, it is the person of Jesus that enables the praying person to interpret his or her experience.

From a pastoral point of view it does make a difference how people understand what prayer is all about. In situations where people might be inclined to be with others in a spirit of prayer, an inability to understand external differences could easily dampen that desire. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered the risen Lord only after they had been together in their shared complexity and vulnerability, people who pray together discover the presence of the same risen Lord only if their way of being together acknowledges the same complexity and vulnerability. If the Church is to he a community of fully alive individuals, the differences cannot be avoided; they need to be acknowledged and celebrated.

When people want to pray (alone or with others), their way of doing so needs to include these basic elements: (1) Authentic communication with God; (2) Acknowledgment of personal limits; (3) Awareness of the complexity of the individual; (4) Identification with the person of Jesus. In this perspective prayer is primarily an interior reality that is inherently unpredictable. There is a wide range of possibilities for what might occur but there is no single thing that must occur. Trying to be open to that fact is no easy task; no wonder the Christian community has always had to struggle with prayer.

In light of the fact that praying is an interior experience, how might we understand what has traditionally been called the "discipline of prayer,"

which stresses the external part of the experience? Discipline in our tradition has taken on a notion of rigidity that makes it hard to be open to these interior experiences. Many stories about dramatic ascetical practices have been passed down through the ages and become part of popular piety. Unfortunately, many practices, instead of being understood as a means toward an end, became an end in themselves. Certain prayer practices helped certain people to experience moreso the kingdom of God. What is important is not the prayer form itself but the fascination with the kingdom of God that led people to want to pray in the first place.

Praying people today need to be just as fascinated by the kingdom of God and this fascination needs to be the primary motive for praying, Oust as the fascination of two friends with each other is the prime motive for their spending time together). This fascination need not be consciously articulated, it could easily be experienced as a deeply felt sentiment. Any valid discipline of prayer presumes this motive. If the coming together of the community of faith is not motivated by a fascination with the kingdom of God, then in all probability its members will soon be driven apart and their time spent together will have been little more than socializing.

No single discipline can guarantee this interior experience but nonetheless discipline is important. Just as with two friends, time spent together is important for nurturing the relationship, true prayer demands a discipline of time. How the time is spent is not as important as the fact that time is spent. Therefore, any style of praying that is rushed will defeat its purpose. Since prayer eventually leads beyond the conscious to the unconscious, and since we live in a culture that does not often encourage spending time with interior concerns, the fact of spending time is a difficult discipline.

The "how" of spending time will vary according to the ability of the praying person(s) to be in touch with their own uniqueness, acknowledge their own limits, be themselves before God and seek to identify with the person of Jesus. An example comes to mind: A woman once came to me at a time when she was experiencing many difficulties and asked me to pray with her. I was more than willing and, after we had gone off to a quiet room, I began by offering some spontaneous prayer. After a lengthy period of silence, I sensed that she had nothing to say and so we concluded. We began to chat together and I mentioned that I was baffled that she would ask to pray together and then have nothing to say. She answered matter-of-factly that she never prayed out loud. She said that her natural way of praying was very interior and that she found it helpful when she did not have to pray alone because she believed in the promise of Jesus: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them." That incident taught me a lot about prayer and what it means to be together in a spirit of prayer. While I was making a false assumption about praying that expected us both to dialogue, she had remained faithful to the prayer style that reflected her personality. The basic elements of prayer were all there but invalid assumptions (on my part) prevented me from notic-

ing. Fidelity to time spent in prayer is more important than how that time is spent.

To speak of prayer in this way is to speak of what the whole of Christian living is all about. The essential elements that need to be present at "prayer times" also need to be part of a person's (or community's) approach to life. In the normal course of daily living people easily lose sight of who they are and where they are going and there is a need to make concerted efforts to get back "in touch." These times of concerted effort are prayer times in the true sense of the word. If these times do not lead to a greater sense of "in-touchness," then something is wrong with the way the time is being spent. Conversely, whatever facilitates this process is an important part of the praying process and needs to be appreciated.

When members of the Christian community want to support (or lead) one another in prayer, it is important that they have this interior process in mind. Since the process is a slow and complicated one, any given occasion of prayer can only address one small aspect of this larger process. Whenever the Christian community attempts to focus on an area of its life where growth is needed, the style of that focusing is within the scope of what praying is all about. By the same token, if the praying does not eventually get around to addressing all dimensions of Christian living, then it has not yet realized its full potential.

A Summary Example

What I have spoken of here is not so much a how-to-do-it treatise on prayer but rather a vision of the Church as a praying community. I had the opportunity once to implement this vision and the results were surprising: While serving as administrator of a very divided parish, I was constantly drawn into the many controversies that were driving people further and further apart. People looked to me for answers for what to do at a time when I was not even sure what the questions were. The more I got in touch with the specifics of the situation, the more apparent it was that all of us were very limited in terms of knowing what to do. A woman shared with me that through all of this her faith was shattered and she did not know how to pray any more. She suggested that all the parish concerns should be dealt with in a spirit of prayer but she was at a loss as to how to do that. The expectation was that I would somehow know how to get answers from prayer, but personally I knew that my vision for prayer was different than that.

I agreed to make the church available one evening for a place of gathering and offered my support to those who wanted to come together to pray; beyond that there were no specifics for what to do. I believed that the willingness of the people to come together contained a spirit all its own and I was willing to trust that process. The end result was that the number of people who showed up far exceeded my expectations.

There was no designated leader of the group, no schedule, no common-

ly shared expectations for what to do, hardly anyone could adequately articulate why they were there. They had come with only one thing on their mind: "we cannot help ourselves and are in need of God." A few were members of a prayer group; some had never prayed in a group outside of the Sunday morning gathering. Some struggled to walk because they were so old: others struggled to walk because they were so young. Some were friends; others were strangers. Some brought Bibles; some brought prayer beads; some brought music; some came empty-handed—the group was divergent in every way. People were so in touch with the interior elements of praying (thirst for God, awareness of limits, willingness to be themselves, and identification with Jesus), the externals flowed naturally. People found the evening a great source of consolation and from that gathering there developed a group of people who continued to meet regularly for prayer. A new source of spiritual life had sprung up in the midst of the larger parish community as a result of people willing to invest themselves fully in the experience of prayer.

In our church communities there is a desire to pray and a desire to pray with others. Our experience is that such a thing does not happen easily and in many ways we look to one another to be taught and to be led. In many ways we ask for the same thing that the disciples asked: "Lord, teach us to pray." The answer to our request is not the specifics of "how-to-do-it" but rather a statement about who we are: "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends" (Jn 15:15).

The Psalms Can Teach Us to Pray

Gerard Mackrell, S.M.M.

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I wonder how many religious see the significance of the quotation from Psalm 50: "Lord, open my lips, and I will sing your praise." It is with this text that we begin the Divine Office each day. As we open our eyes to a new day we open our lips to praise the God who allowed us to open our eyes. As the world floods into us once again through eyes, ears and other senses, praise flows out of us to the God who made that world and those who see, hear, smell, touch and taste it. In that prayer we find the essence of all prayer: the ability to utter anything, and the power to praise.

This is escape. Prayer is escape, not escapism. By prayer we break out of the self into reality; by escapism we retreat from reality into the self. *Escape* means "uttering" or "outering"; *escapism* means withdrawal. Prayer means speaking to and praising God; escapism means speaking to and praising ourselves. The world of the escapist is unreal, a Lotus-land described by Richard Wilbur in his poem "The Smoking Car," in which he describes a tired commuter dozing off:

> Enough that now a honeyed music swells,
> The gentle mossed declivities begin,
> And the whole air is full of flower smells;
> Failure, the longed-for valley, takes him in.

The movement, of escapism is always downward via the "mossed declivities" which ease the descent and are equally effective in preventing escape, should the attempt be made—but that is unlikely. No cries for help come from a valley that is "longed-for." Not at all like the "valley of the shadow of death" from which the author of Psalm 23 screams for help, and finds it: "You are there

with your crook and your staff, with these you give me comfort." Comfort! The staff was used not only for warding off wolves, but for administering a salutary thwack on the back of the sheep. Nothing very comforting, either, in feeling the iron of the shepherds crook around your throat. But it is by such uncomfortable rescue tactics that God yanks us out of the valley of the self if we ask him.

From the "longed-for valley," however, comes not the faintest bleat. For there the escapist is his own God, unthreatened by the competition of the reality from which he has unplugged himself. He is himself the vine and the branches, and both are withering. Nothing penetrates to him, and nothing comes out. His only real hope is prayer, and prayer will always be praise of God: "Hallowed be thy name"! But his "honeyed music" sounds a different note: "Hallowed be *my* name"! All escapism is selfish, and always ultimately idolatrous.

Wilbur's poem describes the dreamer carried on a fitter in "quiet pomp by native girls with naked feet." He presents a fairly conventional picture with familiar features: power effortlessly attained, a hint of the erotic, a pervading languor.

But there must also be *Power*. The escapist never sees his failure as failure. No escapism is possible without the important ingredient of self-deception. It need not be purely passive or sensual. We may indulge a seething and impotent anger at insults, real or imaginary, and rehearse brilliant and devastating dialogues for a future occasion—should one arise. For the escapist is sensitive. Even the gentle air is abrasive when the layers of encrusted selfishness are peeled off to reveal the soft, white, quivering self.

"Hallowed be *thy* name"! Prayer and praise are the only escape from escapism. Yet the praise may not take the form of joyful "Halleluias nor is praise a matter of donning a Salvation Army uniform that may hide a multitude of woes. Nor does praise consist in spending a warm half hour in a chapel while singing emotional hymns—only to be greeted by the cold blast of reality in the church porch.

Praise may well have more "Alases" than "Halleluias"; or, rather, our "Alas" may be our greatest "Halleluia." A glance at the psalms may show us that the most harrowing of them are also the most hallowing, the most comforting—even if the comfort be that of the "crook and the staff." For what gives us true solace and courage is not a running away from the bleakness and suffering which may be ours, but a facing up to it, seeing how others dealt with it, seeing how they not merely survived it, but thrived on it.

If our prayer is to be escape rather than escapism, it must be sincere. It will never be sincere if we fail to grasp the true meaning of praise and its link with reality. Many of the psalms may disedify us by their whining, cursing, fuming, by their anger, self-pity, self-interest. Yet these, too, are praise, and of the highest kind. To ask for help is to acknowledge the power to help of the one we ask. Not to ask may be an insult. To blame others is to recognize their responsibility; not to blame may be to deny them any control, even over events over which

they *should* exercise control. The fact that most people would willingly forego being asked for anything, and seize upon the excuse at being freed from responsibility, makes not the slightest difference.

To ask is to praise. "Give us this day our daily bread" is as much a prayer of praise as "Hallowed be thy name." No need to tell this to the psalmist, of course; he tells us. He blamed God as freely as he thanked him. God could not have it both ways; if he took the credit, he took the blame. We may regard this as naive or even blasphemous, and preen ourselves at being more understanding of the evil around us. But we may need to ask ourselves whether such an "understanding" is in reality a failure to take God seriously.

The psalmist poured all his anger and bitterness into his prayer. For him prayer was not merely "a raising of the mind and heart to God," but a raising of the concrete mind and heart he had *at the moment of prayer.* He did not wait for the "right dispositions"—whatever they might be! He prayed to receive the dispositions of calmness, peace, courage and insight. Faith.

The feelings of the psalmist were worked off *in* his prayer, which was a kind of poultice, sucking out the venom which festered inside him. He spoke to God as we speak to a doctor, a friend, at times an enemy. But he *spoke.* He did not pretend to be disinterested. He knew that his dependence was on God, not Gods on him; and he said so. Said!

We can put his words to music, or intone them reverently. But do not imagine for one moment that the psalmist did that. Often he screamed and raved, and the covers of a Bible do not muffle those screams. The fact that we so effortlessly take such psalms as songs of praise—which is what "psalms" means—may, however, indicate that we take the psalmist no more seriously than we sometimes take God.

Even the prayer which seems to be "pure praise" involves our own needs. Psalm 101 offers us an example of the adroit way in which the psalmist combines the two. At first his prayer seems to be a wistful reflection on human mortality, with more than a dash of self-pity. Until we note the deliberate contrast: "*My* days are like a passing shadow, and I wither away like grass. But *you*, O Lord, will endure forever, and *your* name from age to age." The psalmist is not here concerned with death but about stability during life; and Gods eternity and unchangingness gives him that. He seeks this firmness outside of himself and in God, but he seeks it for himself. Take away human life and he can accept it; take away God, and the psalmists mind topples.

Nor is the psalmist above using his weakness and mortality as his strength. Since "our life is over like a sigh," and since our seventy or eighty years are "full of emptiness and pain," then God should "relent." This is the kind of artfulness Jesus praised in prayer when recounting the story of the woman who disturbed an unjust judge. He, too, spoke not so much of tapping fearfully at the doors of heaven, as rather tearing them off their hinges. For if we leave our real feelings out of prayer, we shall only sink back into them *after* prayer—if, indeed, we can call what we have done prayer.

Praise of God, therefore, is not the vicarious pleasure we may derive from watching the antics, flattened into two dimensions, of the brave and beautiful of Hollywood; nor of pressing our noses against the window of a sweetshop: "Come *in*! Let us bow and bend low; let us kneel before the God who made us" (Ps 95). For the God who made us is the God who still makes us, and who is responsible for his handiwork. He must be praised for making us—even us. To avoid this truth is really to say that prayer is not for us.

Far from removing us from reality, then, prayer brings us closer to it. Prayer enables us to face and cope with it. There is little comfort in facing reality if we cannot cope with it. Every escapist, after all, begins by seeing reality—and not liking what he sees.

The most real part of reality is often suffering, since our awareness of things is never so sharp as when we fear them. In his poem "The Surgical Ward," W.H. Auden describes the plight of a man with a cancerous wound on his leg. For that man the whole of reality is centered on the locus of pain: "All the world lay beneath the bandage." This shrivels the world, but it far from shrivels consciousness.

In another poem, "Fingers in the Door," John Enright describes how he absentmindedly catches his young daughter's fingers in the door jamb and watches helplessly while the child "contorts herself foetus-wise against the burning fact of the pain." After the contortion thus described we have to wait five lines until we come to read: "The childs cry broke,"and we expel our own breath with relief at her scream. The expression, or uttering, of the pain is of course some psychological relief, but it does not remove the *fact* of the pain. The father clasps his daughter to him in a tight embrace, but no osmosis can transfer the child's pain to him. He is forced to conclude that we are all "light-years away" from even those we love. The child contorts herself "foetus-wise," as we all fold up over the point of pain; but there might be in the phrase also an attempt to escape to the womb, to be cushioned from the "fact" of pain and reality.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus looked at a sinful and suffering Jerusalem and longed to gather it to him as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing.—In our human condition such union is of course impossible, and it is important to see the revelance of this to prayer.

When we say that prayer provides an escape from the self we do not, of course, say that the self is annihilated or absorbed. That is escapism; a jumping from the frying pan of one unreality into the fire of another. The Gospel paradox of losing our life in order to find it has to be clarified here. We must lose the self, yes, but only in order to find it. God will never invade the sovereignty of the individual existence. He is behind us and before us; His hand steadies us. But it is we who have to stand on our own two feet. The paradox is that it is only by faith in God that we can be ourselves, and have faith in our own power.

Psalm 8 offers an illustration of this. "What is man that you are mindful of him, mortal man that you care for him?" The psalmist compares the puniness

of man with the vastness of the universe and the ferocity of wild beasts, over all of which man has dominion. God has made him, through giving him a human mind, making him to be "a little less than a god." But that very mind which pitches man between heaven and earth can also suspend him between heaven and hell. For man alone can be frightened by the mystery of the universe. Yet only man can understand it. Not scientifically, but by being able to look beyond creation to the Creator who *does* understand it. And man can conquer his fear of the vastness outside of himself only if he believes that there is a Creator.

When he *does* believe he will praise: "Your name is lisped by little ones; on the lips of children and of babes." The puniest part of puny humanity can praise a God who is "*above* the heavens." So our praise is at once both grateful and nervous. We praise God for simply being, and for giving us a meaning, as we balance precariously on the edge of meaninglessness. This nervous kind of faith gives praise its edge and helps us to face the world around us with greater serenity. By such praise we cut the world down to size; we domesticate it. For it is our home, made for us by God.

"Lord, open my lips." We have seen how a child in pain may experience some slight relief by screaming. But utterance can give a relief and release that is more than slight. For those of us who have lain inert in sleep, locked in a nightmare without being able to move a muscle—even the vocal ones—the opening of the lips will be much more than a mere formal prelude to prayer. At such times we are scarcely thinking of singing Gods praises, nor, in fact, of any kind of singing. A strangled scream would suffice, for we are thinking of escape, the escape that comes from uttering *anything.* It is an escape from the horror of paralyzed dumbness.

In the more agonized psalms we are frequently faced with this refinement of anguish. We find the psalmist in pits and graves that effectively muffle his cries; or in swamps, deeps, and waters that always seem to be at mouth-level. Often his suffering comes from the sense of imprisonment created precisely by this inability to pray: "Imprisoned, I cannot escape. . . . I am drowned beneath your waves" (Ps 88). Yet he *does* escape, and lives to tell the tale—or the psalm.

Psalm 37 is equally depressing at first glance, as the sufferer describes himself as being "like a dumb man who cannot speak." But he does speak, if only to tell us that he cannot! "Parched as burnt clay is my throat," says Psalm 136, "My tongue cleaves to my palate." But his mouth is moist enough to tell us this!

Nor need we confine ourselves to the psalms; some of the finest English poetry laments the poet's inability to write poetry. "And I breed not one work that wakes," is how Gerard Manley Hopkins laments his literary infertility in one of his finest and most creative sonnets.

Making due allowance for literary temperament and exaggeration, we are forced to the conclusion that if we feel desperately the need to pray *we are thereby actually in the process of praying.* Prayer is communication that leads to communion, but often the communication has to struggle to arrive there. Many a baring of soul has been launched only after profound observations about the

weather. In prayer we may simply have to pray about our inability or unwillingness to pray; about what we feel at the moment rather than about what we think we *should* feel. By such unpromising communications will we achieve communion. If only we speak our minds!

Speaking our minds may mean howling or whining, rather than singing Gods praises. There must be no question of faking a mood of well-being while toying with the idea of suicide. We may well have to put on a brave face to others—but not to God. Our prayer, like that of the psalmist, may be "from out of the depths" of what seems totally inescapable torment. And our prayers, like those of the poet Hopkins, may seem to bounce off "a brazen heaven" and echo mockingly back at us. The apparent serenity of others may aggravate rather than alleviate this miserable situation. Or we may think that we are not good enough to pray. This means really that we think that prayer is not good enough for us, that it is inadequate to our needs, something to do only *after* we have solved our outstanding problems. Indeed, *not* to pray may seem to be the brave and stoical thing to do. This, too, is escapism since it means seeking a solution within ourselves; and there isn't one.

This is why the psalms of lament are those which give us the greatest comfort, precisely because they seem to lack it—not in the Aristotelian sense of "catharsis," cleansing us from our own fear by pity and fear for fictional people, but because the psalms express real states of mind—even though the expression of these states of mind is sometimes undoubtedly exaggerated in its imagery. If we read these psalms, or simply stare numbly at them, we shall pray. For the suffering itself is the prayer. The musical instrument in these psalms is not the harp, but the harpist; it is the singer, not the song. His nerves are taut; sounding all the greater twang when God plucks at them. His skin is stretched tightly over his bones; providing all the greater resonance when Gods drumsticks beat on him. Yet such apparently discordant sounds echo most melodiously simply because they *are* sounds—of prayer.

Stick a pin in someone and you will elicit a response, even if it is a sock on the jaw. In the psalms God does not stop at pin-pricks of course, but it is not a willful or malicious God we are dealing with. He does not have to prove to himself that we are alive; he often has to prove it to *us*.

It is true that suffering often seems to have the opposite effect: to numb us. But even then we must *say* and *pray* that we *are* numb, and then see what happens. The prayer will be answered, for the praying itself is partly the answer. "Seek and you, shall find" is really "Seek, and you have already found"—by your very seeking. But, again, this is so only if the prayer is absolutely sincere and as spontaneous as possible.

Psalm 44, for example, comes close to blasphemy when the psalmist accuses God of breaking his covenant. That is the kind of talk one might expect to draw fire down from heaven. But the psalmist is in no mood for reverential preliminaries. He knows as well as the next man the value of patient endurance, but he also knows his own limits! "Lord, will you desert us *forever?*" Enough is

enough. Jesus himself taught us to pray: "Lead us not into temptation," which is really reminding ourselves—and prayer gives this reminder—that God "will not tempt [test] us above that which we are able, but will make with temptation issue."

At times like this the psalmist, to soften his accusation by drawing God's attention to his human weakness (including impulsiveness and loss of temper) will also use weakness as his bargaining power. God will not push us too far "for he knows of what we are made; he knows that we are but dust."

If all else fails, there is still Paul to console us: "The Spirit interceded for us with sighs too deep for words." We normally associate the Spirit with loosening the tied tongue, but there are times when we are faced with the simply unutterable—whether it be pain or joy. John Keats described the love of a young girl as follows:

> And to her heart her heart was voluble,
> Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
> As if a tongueless nightingale should swell
> Her heart in vain and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

Even unuttered and unutterable joy can be painful. It is no use our heart being voluble to our heart; we want to make it voluble to someone else's heart. But if that seems too romantic, consider something rather less so from Jon Silkin's poem "On the Death of a One-Year-Old Son in a Mental Hospital." The child had never been able to utter a sound or betray an emotion, or show the slightest response to a father who strained every sense in the hope of catching it—until the moment of the child's death:

> He turned over on his side with his one year
> Red as a wound.
> He turned over as if he could be sorry for this;
> And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like stones, and he died.

In the straining nasal consonants and long-drawn-out vowels, in the faint echoes of half-rhyme, we can feel, never mind hear, the last great heave, as two big tears are forced out of his eyes, the only fruit of the little tree. And just in time. Before the baby's soul escapes from the body something escapes from the soul. It has finally uttered. "As if he could be sorry for this."

We must never apologize for suffering we endure, even though there will always be fools and prigs who will ask: "Who hath sinned, this man or his parents?" Simply pray that "the glory of God may be made manifest" in us. For the Spirit sighs *for* us, not *at* us.

And if all we can at times manage is a sigh, who knows? It may be worth many litanies.

Using the Scripture in Prayer

Hilary Ottensmeyer, O.S.B.

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> Read Scripture, especially the Gospels. See what stands out for you in the text. That will alert you to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your mind and heart. Then we will talk about that moment in your prayer.

How many times have we not received such encouragement from a spiritual director, or how often have we not given such a piece of advice? And yet, we're sometimes puzzled about the lack of response in our own lives or those of our directees as they read the Scriptures. I can remember drowsing over many a page of the Gospels, or the Psalms, hoping that something, anything, would leap out from the page, and that I would have some offering in hand for my next encounter with my spiritual director. Too often the lines of the text seemed burdened with heavy layers of familiarity. The bright power of what was written there had grown dim.

Any preacher can verify the same experience. When you get up to read the Gospel at the liturgy, you sense a rise of expectation in the gathering. But as you begin to read out the oft-quoted lines, you feel the ebb of interest. You see the glaze of inattention move over the eyes.

Perhaps it would help here to suggest an approach to our daily use of the Scriptures for meditation and prayer, an approach which will help us at times break open the kernel of the Word, and give us nourishment. This much at least: it will prepare us to receive the movement of the Spirit by

doing more than scanning the lines and hoping something will happen. Very briefly, I describe this approach as: 1) befriending the text; 2) searching for the cultural meaning of the text; 3) meditating on why this event or teaching was written down in these charter Christian documents; 4) a prayerful opening of mind and heart through this text so that my personal relationship with the Lord can be strengthened.

As we move along, I will apply this way of prayer to one gospel text, namely, the story of the Gerasene demoniac as told in Mk 5:1-20.

Befriending the Text

The first, and probably most important, step requires little of us: befriend the text. Take up the Scriptures with an open mind, and read them with a fresh eye. A sincere prayer of hope seems appropriate: "Lord, I open this book to meet you again. Reveal yourself to me."

Any text, especially a very familiar one, resists our entry into it. We don't actually see what is on the page before us. Familiarity has dulled appreciation; we scan, and do not read well. It helps to have some simple questions in mind as we begin the reading. As to the *form* of the text, one might ask: Is this a parable, a conflict story, a healing encounter, or an intimate scene from the life of Jesus? What are the movements, or acts, in the event? What is the feeling level recorded here? How do people seem to change as they interact with the Savior? As to the *content* of the text: What are the ideas exchanged in this text? How smoothly, or abruptly, do they progress? With which persons do I identify, or disagree? What is Jesus trying to achieve in this encounter, and do I find him convincing?

The encounter Jesus had with the Gerasene demoniac has always seemed a strange and colorful page in the Gospels. The *form* reveals itself to be a healing-miracle, but in a wild, unfamiliar pagan setting. It is one of the most spectacular events in the Gospels. In Mark's account, there are five acts in the story: setting or background (vv. 1-5); dialogue between Jesus and the demoniac (vv. 6-11); destruction of the swine (vv. 12-13); Jesus interacts with the local people (vv. 14-17); former demoniac sent off to evangelize (vv. 18-20). Powerful words describe the demoniac's condition: "the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces" (v. 4); "always crying out and bruising himself with stones (v. 5); "do not torment me" (v. 7). The violence reaches a climax in the destruction of the two thousand swine. At the close of the story, the fear of the local people contrasts dramatically with the calm of the exorcised man sitting at the feet of Jesus.

The *content* is equally dramatic. We are here with the mystery of the struggle between the power of God and that of evil. Just as Jesus, in the scene preceding this encounter, had "rebuked" a violent wind and sea (4:39), now he will rebuke the storm raging in the mind and body of the possessed man before him. The challenge to Jesus is more personal because the very

image of God within the man has been ravaged. What changes occur? Certainly the frenzied demoniac, from whose mouth spewed the torments of hell, now has repossessed his life. Although he is refused a place among the disciples, he is sent back into his own community where he assumes, and successfully, a witness task. The "unclean spirits," now temporarily housed in the floating corpses of the drowned swine, must search for new dwellings. Theirs is only a change of locale; they remain an ever present threat. Only Jesus is seen as calm and constant throughout the happening.

A Brief Glance at the Cultural Background to the Text

The Gerasene Demoniac story illustrates the need for a step we are sometimes reluctant to take when we attempt to use Scripture for prayer: the necessity of picking up a commentary to get some idea about what this text meant to the original author, what the cultural background of this event was. The shock value of a story, the subtle suggestion it makes, often hangs on a detail unknown to us, for example: the three measures of dough leavened and kneaded by the woman of the parable in Mt 13 recalls three other measures prepared for mysterious guests received in the valley of Mambre by Sarah, Abraham's wife. It is food enough for a banquet of one hundred and fifty. We are here touching the mystery of God's hidden presence among us. On this detail hangs much of the beauty of the story.

I certainly do not mean an exhaustive research project. A brief scanning of any standard commentary, such as the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, or *Peak Commentary on the Bible*, is sufficient.

A commentary on the story of the Gerasene Demoniac reveals what is unusual about this event: Jesus has left his land and his people, and gone into strange territory as is evidenced by pagan people, the herd of swine, and the man wandering among tombs. There's a hint here of how Jesus will search out those whom he wishes to redeem no matter how far away they seem to be. This impression is strengthened from details pointed out in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, where we learn that we are hearing a strong echo of Is 65:1-5. Yahweh reaches out to those who "sit in tombs" and "eat swine's flesh." Jesus confronts evil by demanding to know its name, and by drawing it out into the light. The Savior's presence overpowers the demonic through the violence of the exorcism, and the destruction of the swine. The pagans plead with him to leave their neighborhood. As for us all, the Lord has touched their lives, called them to conversion, but will not force them. However, he leaves them an "apostle" in the person of the former demoniac who is now sent back to his community. We recognize this restoration to community as a familiar gesture on the part of Jesus. But the freed man will go beyond that limited ministry, and will announce what he knows of the good news to all the Decapolis: "How much Jesus has done for

him." There is hardly a page in all the Gospels more colorful or more replete with strange contrasts.

Why Was This Event Included in The Gospels?

Certainly not everything Jesus did was written down in these gospel accounts. The final lines of John's gospel assure us about this: "There are also many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). Yet this strange event, retold with considerable variety of detail, is faithfully put down by all three synoptics. Hence, there is something here that is central to the Christian identity and to who Jesus was for them, regardless of the theological perspective out of which each evangelist wrote.

At this point, the person using the Scriptures for meditation and prayer becomes very responsive to the Spirit. Given the dramatic form of this event, and with some knowledge of how strikingly different these happenings were in the ministry of Jesus, why did the early disciples tell and retell this narrative until, some forty years later, the evangelists began to write it down? What did it mean to them? Of course, no one can say definitely, but we can speculate about each one individually.

Surely there was wonderment over the way in which Jesus, their gracious redeemer, reached into the devastation of soul and body of this possessed man. The demoniac was not a son of Abraham, true, but when confronted by great need, it was always the natural response of Jesus to help. One imagines how the disciples fell back, leaving Jesus alone before this wild spectacle. To a young community of believers, the fact that Jesus was not frightened or overcome by evil as found among the pagans was surely important for them to remember. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70, they were driven out of the synagogue into a pagan world where they experienced a similar evil on every side. Perhaps too, they were heartened to learn, and retell, how this Gerasene apostle, now dedicated to the person of Jesus, had caused those pagans whom he told to "marvel" at what the Lord had done and continued to be for himself. There was hope for understanding, perhaps even new co-believers, beyond the boundaries of Israel. These, and similar intuitions, rise from the text, and bond us with the minds and hearts of those early men and women who told this event.

What Does This Text Mean to Me Today?

In the retelling of the stories of Jesus, we discover, and rediscover, who we are as a Christian community, and where I am in my personal relationship with the Lord. Just as a family gets together from time to time—say at a reunion—and tells its stories, tales of the grandparents, of the "Old

World," of the early years, and in so doing, rediscovers the shared heritage and the bonding love, so do we Christians tell our stories down through the centuries. The older are affirmed; the younger are formed.

At this point, a most personal shift of emphasis takes place in the use of Scripture. We come before the Lord in a very private, intimate way, and, with the Gerasene Demoniac story to guide us, walk into the story as followers of Jesus. For instance, where is the pagan territory, or part, of my heart? Where is that place into which I have never allowed Jesus access? Fearful and wild, somewhat pagan and almost inaccessible, there exists a place in me where I wound and cut myself with a sharp rock of self-destructiveness. On his own, Jesus comes to this forbidden land. He asks me to name—to confront honestly—where my confusion and pain lie. Only then, when we both know its name, can Jesus give me the grace, the power, to cast it out. Many of us do live among the tombs of our self-rejection, beyond the reach of our own mercy. Jesus has the desire, the courage, to enter there. We need to ask Jesus what it means to him to see us barring entrance into our hearts at that very place where we most need his calming word, his healing touch.

The former demoniac became, in a way, a stranger to his friends. That may be necessary for us too. Decisions must be made when a change of heart comes about, decisions which flow over into behavior. We disturb our neighbors, our friends, when we change our ways of doing, our ways of being among them. This is a small price to pay for the newfound peace, for the chance to sit near Jesus in intimate relationship. The former demoniac was not allowed to become a following disciple, the gospels tell us. This is not true for us. If we are not following in some ways, we have chosen to hold back. We can perhaps question the demoniac about what it meant to him to be refused. Further, what joy in the heart compelled him to live from that day on in the memory of the loving presence of Jesus?

Conclusion

To describe this meditation takes a bit of time. To move through it reflectively, prayerfully, need only take twenty minutes or so. The tools are simple: A Bible, and a reliable, brief commentary. Beyond that, we need only a desire to know what happened when Jesus encountered people as he walked through his brief, earthly ministry. An intuitive process follows, during which we ponder what that encounter meant by way of hope and instruction for those early disciples. Finally, and most fruitfully, what does this event, or story, tell me about my own encounter with the Lord?

All meditation should end with a prayer, most often a prayer of praise, or of humble petition for the help we need to change our hearts. But there is more. The monks of old taught that contemplation followed the final prayer of the meditation. That is, one stayed in loving expectation for the

responsive word of God to rise in the heart. One waited in silence. Sometimes God spoke in the quiet moments following the prayer. But if he did not, one remained attentive, expectant, all that day. It was a powerful way to integrate the day through prayer. Maybe, in a glance from a friend, a word heard in passing, a tree seen out of a window, or however God might succeed in circumventing our touchy egos and getting into our hearts, there we might hear the voice of God. As always, like the Gerasene demoniac, the gift of that powerful love will bring us back to Jesus, bring us to sit quietly with him, enjoying his company.

Centering Prayer: Refining the Rules

M. Basil Pennington, 0.C.S.0.

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Centering Prayer is a very ancient Christian method or way of prayer—more ancient, than the rosary or the Stations of the Cross, or most any other common Christian practice. Monks and nuns, lay folks and clerics, have used this way of prayer through fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen centuries. This is not surprising, for it is in a way so *natural* and so effective.

What is new about Centering Prayer is the formulation—and the name. In times past, spiritual fathers and mothers would have taught this way of prayer to their disciples in a few words, guiding and refining the disciple's understanding of it in subsequent meetings. The relatively few fathers and mothers who have written of the prayer have spoken of it in the context of more general teaching on the whole of the spiritual path. No effort was made to make a precise presentation of the method itself. Abba Isaac, as reported by St. John Cassian, came closest to this.

This has been the challenge of our times. Spiritual fathers and mothers are few and far between, while the number of seekers is multitudinous. The tradition has been virtually lost to the community at large. Masters from other traditions are offering their methods in simple, practical ways. It is time to formulate this effective and practical method from our tradition in some simple way so that it can be easily handed on.

Such a formulation is not an easy task, however. Conciseness rules out nuance. The simple formula can be easily misunderstood. This is the great advantage of learning Centering Prayer at a workshop or retreat where the learner can practice the prayer repeatedly and have ample opportunity to ask questions and share with others. But such an opportunity is not available to everyone. Many, many, in all parts of the world, have learned the prayer from books, articles and tapes.

Any reader who has followed my writings through the years since we first formulated the three "rules" for Centering Prayer will have noted that there has been an evolution in the way the "rules" are presented. Perhaps we can look at this and discover how our understanding has been refined.

I have put "rules" in quotes because I have always been uncomfortable with that word. I can imagine many of the holy fathers rolling over in their graves as I say it. Rules for prayer? Rules for making love? For being to one's Friend and Beloved? But what should we call them? Points? Guides? Steps? I have not yet found a satisfactory word. So we keep speaking of rules.

It is precisely here that we find an important difference between Christian prayer and methods of meditation passed on by some other traditions. Natural methods depend on the procedure. And so there are *rules*—spelling out exactly what must be done in order to obtain the desired effect. Christian prayer simply does not work that way. "Where the Spirit is, there is freedom." The Spirit is love. Christian prayer is love; it is a communication in love; it is an encounter between two free persons. No matter what we do, we cannot force the response of the other. He always remains eminently free in his response.

This is a concern some have had about using a method. Are we trying to force God to give us contemplation? No. But since he respects our freedom, we are using this freedom to open the space so that he can, if he wills, give us the gift of himself in contemplative prayer. In a sense, it might be said we are putting "pressure" on God. God is faithful. And he has said, "Seek and you shall find." If we seek him, seek an experiential union with him, then he who is faithful should give it to us, shouldn't he? However, it is not quite as simple as that. For God knows that in all our seeking we are honestly seeking what is best for us, what he knows is best for us, what he wants. That condition is present in all our honest seeking. And God responds accordingly. If we seek, God will unfailingly give us the gift of contemplative union with himself, but only when and how it is best for us and for our true happiness. We can trust him. He is faithful and true—and infinitely wise. He wants our good and our happiness far more than we do ourselves. I have, in fact, never known anyone who has practiced Centering Prayer faithfully who has not found far more than he or she has initially sought. And we seek ever more so that we may receive ever more.

Our initial formulation of the "three rules" was published in REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS in 1976. This formulation was repeated almost verbatim in

Centering Prayer in 1980, but with a number of questions and reservations. A new formulation was not attempted at that time. Perhaps it is now time to reformulate the "rules." Let us look at the original formulation and see where the problems lie.

The Three Rules

> *Rule One: At the beginning of the prayer we take a minute or two to quiet down and then move in faith to God dwelling in our depths; and at the end of the prayer we take several minutes to come out, mentally praying the "Our Father."*
>
> *Rule Two: After resting for a bit in the center in faith-full love, we take up a single, simple word that expresses the response, and begin to let it repeat itself within.*
>
> *Rule Three: Whenever in the course of the prayer we become aware of anything else, we gently return to the prayer word.*

In the course of hundreds of workshops and retreats with thousands of people, responding to tens of thousands of questions, the problem areas of this formulation became more and more apparent.

The greatest problem has always been that of simplicity. I believe our Lord was pointing toward simplicity when he said: "Unless you become as a little child you will not enter the kingdom." Simplicity is certainly necessary if we are going to enter into that kingdom which is within—at the center of our being. But we find simplicity so difficult. We want to make things complicated so that we may have a better excuse to pay attention to ourselves: See how I'm struggling with this! What a mastermind I am to work this one out! and so forth.

Last spring I was invited to share Centering Prayer at a center for alcoholic priests. As I was leaving I was presented with a large picture, handsomely framed (You should have seen me walking through New York with it!). It now hangs over my desk. It shows two seals rubbing noses, under the caption: K.I.S.S. Anyone who is familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous will know what that means. Depending on the day: "Keep it simple, Sweety," or "Keep it simple, Stupid." (It usually means the latter to me!) I think I will make that the motto of the Centering Prayer Movement: K.I.S.S. Each time you center, *kiss* yourself!

This is one reason why we have found the beginning of our earlier formulation problematic: "At the beginning of the prayer we take a minute or two to quiet down. . . ."

First of all, this is not a part of the prayer as such, but a *prelude* to it. But oh, what people in teaching the prayer have done with it! That "quieting down" has become some stretching exercises, some yoga, some Silva Mind

Control, some hypnotic countdown, some breathing techniques, and more. One teacher ended up urging an hour's prayer rather than two shorter periods because it took so long to get through the quieting-down routine he had developed and had imposed on those whom he taught.

Quite naturally we will quiet down when we sit to pray. Some of us who tend to rush into things might need a bit of a reminder to take the moment that is needed to settle down and relax. Sometimes we will need to do a little something to get rid of some of the body tension. That is why at workshops we do offer some exercises or relaxation techniques. *But they are not part of the prayer*. Nor should they be treated as part of the prayer. Nor as a necessary preamble. Each one will find what works best for him or her. Suggestions may be given. But let us not burden ourselves or others with a long and complex liturgy of "quietening down." The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, wise old father that he was, says: "Simply sit relaxed and quiet."

Another problem arises with the next action word: *Move*. What do we mean here by *move*? What kind of movement is referred to? The author of *The Cloud* says: "Center all your attention and desire on Him." The movement here is precisely *centering*. We focus our mind's attention and our heart's desire on the Lord present at the center of our being.

This word of the author points up one of the serious lacunae in our formulation. Our formula speaks here only of faith. While it does speak of "faith-filled love" in the second rule, the omission of *love* in the first is a real mistake. It is not enough to know, even in faith, that God is present in the center of our being. Even the devils know and acknowledge that. Such knowledge is not prayer. It is the response to that presence with the gift of ourselves in love that makes it prayer. So we must move in faith and love.

I am still not sure that *move* is the right word here. It seems to imply more activity than is really called for. In an appendix to the book *Centering Prayer*, I offered a few examples of the movement in faith and love. Perhaps that was a mistake. Looking at them now, I find them too long and complicated. And, in practice, I find people, especially when they are leading the Centering Prayer in a group, formulating long and beautiful prayers that surely invite us to get caught up in concepts and images instead of simply *being* to God in love. I think this might be the better word: *be*—be, in faith and love, to God, present at the center of our being.

What does this mean? It means that we let everything else go and turn our full attention on the Lord, who we know by faith is present in us. He said he would take up his dwelling in us and we know he is true to his word. So we acknowledge his presence there, even though we may not sense it; even though our reason may not be able to prove it—indeed, may challenge the reality of it. We know that he is there, our Father who loves us, our friend who makes up for all our failures and shortcomings. We respond to that love as best we can by giving him our time, our attention, and our love, and our very self, as completely as we can, for these few minutes. We choose him as

the Center of our life, the Center beyond our self-center. We are ready to let him be our Lord, our Master and Teacher, the one who decides how we are to live. That is the whole prayer. We give ourselves to him as completely as we can. We let him have us and hold us as he wills. It is that simple, that total.

Rule One goes on to speak of what happens at the end of the prayer. As I suggested in the book *Centering Prayer*, however consecrated the number three may be, it might be better to place this last part at the end, rather than to combine it with the first guide.

Now let us move on to *Rule Two*. Again, my experience calls for simplicity. There is no need to say, "After resting for a bit. It just happens. To speak of it only invites self-reflection and complexity. People begin to worry about the "bit."

The expression: "a single simple word that expresses the response," is inspired by *The Cloud*. But again, I think it could be said more simply. Just take up a love word. That is the response we are talking about—love. Such a word is bound to be a simple word, and it will almost always be a single word. If it isn't, no matter, as long as it is, indeed, a love word.

People worry about this word. Far too much is made of it. Perhaps this is due to seepage from other traditions. We know that in some Hindu traditions where mantric meditation is practiced, the *mantra* is always given by a master. When Transcendental Meditation came to this country, much was made of transmission of the mantra. The mantra itself was cloaked with a certain secret power. The prayer word is nothing like that. It is a powerful word; it has all the power of our love. It is the word that spontaneously expresses our love. In most cases it will be the name of the Beloved: Lord, God, Father, Jesus. Or it may be, as the author of *The Cloud* suggests, simply the word "love." It matters little. Just so it is a simple word that expresses our being to our God in love.

The rest of *Rule Two* also invites confusion because of the assimilation of ideas from mantric meditation. Mantric meditation is an important form of meditation among Hindus. It involves repeating a particular word, sound, or formula constantly, until the sound brings one into an altered state of consciousness. It is, of course, possible to inform such a practice with faith and love and turn it into a Christian form of meditation. But our use of the prayer-word, the word of love, is not mantric. Our mode of transcendence, of going beyond our ordinary consciousness, of going beyond ourselves, is not through some sound effect or effect of sound. Our going beyond ourselves is an outreach of love to the Infinite. As St. Thomas Aquinas says: "Where the mind leaves off, love goes on."

The use of the love-word in Centering Prayer is to support us in abiding in the state of being-to-the-Lord in love. While we abide with the Lord, we do not consciously use the word. It is there, in the mind, our chosen word, ready to be used whenever we need it, according to the third rule: to

return, or simply to reinforce our being to the Lord in love. On some days we will quite consciously and deliberately take up the prayer word after our initial movement of faith and love. And this might be most often the case until we settle down. But there will be times when we come to the Lord and need little help simply to be with him in love.

We don't have to aim at repeating the word. Being there, it will tend to repeat itself. All our attention must be on the Lord (as the author of *The Cloud* directs: "Center all your attention and desire on him) not on the word, not on the practice, or on ourselves, or anything else—only on the Lord.

There are two kinds of love, or experiences of love: love of desire and love of delight. Love of delight is the pleasure experienced when one is in the presence of someone or something loved. Love of desire is the love that reaches out for the beloved in his or her absence. The author of *The Cloud* speaks of desire, since the experience of God when one enters into the cloud of unknowing is as though he were in fact absent. This is the more common experience in Centering, at least in the beginning. God is truly with us, of course; he is never absent. It is his presence and grace that draw us; otherwise we would not seek him. But we sense only the darkness, and in that darkness our love reaches out to him in desire. "My soul longs for the Lord." It is in such darkness, in such longing, that we may well need the support of our word of love. When he is experienced as present, we hardly need a word to assist us in remaining present to him. Our whole being is drawn into the enjoyment of his love, or his very self. Our self is to his self in a unity that is beyond our imaging or expressing.

So we take up this love-word and let it be gently present, supporting our being in God in faith-filled love.

Already in my book *Centering Prayer* I began some reformulation of the *Third Rule:* "Whenever in the course of the Prayer we become *aware* of anything else, we simply gently return to the Presence by the use of the prayer word."

The original formulation was poor. It tended to lead pray-ers to make too much of the prayer word—to attend to the word instead of to the Lord. The revised formula seems more adequate.

The emphasis remains on the word "aware." What we are concerned about here is that state in which we tend to be so much of the time—one step removed from reality, watching ourselves do what we do, experiencing what we experience, instead of being wholly in the experience. As long as we have our attention on the Lord, it matters little what goes on around us. It is entirely up to him. The child is in the arms of his love, and our Father is content. It is when we come back into self and are aware of ourselves, aware of what we are doing, that we are no longer simple. We are divided. We are doing what we are doing, and, at the same time, we are watching ourselves do it. As long as we are fully in what we are doing, we are not aware of what we are doing. As the fathers say: "As long as a man is aware that he is pray-

ing, he is not yet praying." As the author of *The Cloud* says, "Center *all* (not just part) of your attention . . . on him. . . . " In this sense, too, the prayer is utterly simple. There is no division.

The second part of *Rule One* might well be a fourth guide. This could make the movement of the prayer more clear.

This point, too, might be expressed more simply. We just want the Lord's Prayer, or whatever other prayer we decide on, to help us emerge out of the deep silence, to bring our experience into the conceptual and affective level, insofar as this is possible. For this reason, it is well for us to choose just one prayer and use it habitually, so that the formula will demand a minimum of attention. Thus the experience can emerge. During this concluding prayer, as thoughts gather around the words and call forth affections, we do attend to them. It is for him whom we have experienced at the Center to teach us, to expand our consciousness even at the conceptual level, to enflame or soften our hearts with all the movements of love, especially compassion, the being with the other—God and all those in God, everyone—in the movements of their hearts.

I do not think we have to worry about the time frame here. If we allow each phase to open out, it will take long enough. Again, it is a question of being more attentive to what is and what is happening than to following a method of doing it right.

Because this is such a different movement of prayer, perhaps it is best not to consider it as a fourth guide, but rather let it be an appendix, such as the settling down or posturing is a prelude, and stay with these—

Three Rules or Guides

Sit, relax and be quiet.

1. Be in faith and love to God who dwells in the center of your being.
2. Take up a love word and let it be gently present, supporting your being to God in faith-filled love.
3. Whenever you become *aware* of anything, simply return gently to the Lord with the use of your prayer word.

Let the Our Father (or some other prayer) pray itself.

I have said "sit." The question comes up often enough, "May I walk while I center?" Certainly it is possible to bring walking into Centering. At advanced or intensive Centering Prayer Workshops we do introduce walking practice or meditation. The purpose is to take the first steps towards bringing Centering into our whole life—or bringing our whole life into the Center. In a word: *integration*.

But we will always want those periods when we are *wholly* Centered. Especially in the beginning, until we are living a fully Centered life, we will

need such moments. When we walk, at least some little part of our attention must necessarily attend to the operation of placing one foot before the other. We are not free to attend wholly and simply to God. When we sit in repose, eyes gently closed, we are.

We recommend at least two twenty-minute periods of Centering Prayer a day. It is good to accept this as a given, for the beginner does not yet have the means to discern otherwise. When our lives become fully Centered, we will come to discern how much pure Centering we need to remain fully and peacefully in this state of consciousness. Even then, we will want a certain amount of time just to enjoy the Lord, and let him enjoy us.

Remember always that Centering Prayer is, first of all and above all, an interpersonal relationship, a very privileged one, for the other Person is God. It is a communion and union in love and, besides this, everything else is secondary and inconsequential.

When You Can't Pray: Removing Obstacles to Prayer

Mary C. Coelho

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For Christians, prayer is the route to the inner way, the treasure in the field. Yet many Christians find they can't pray. Feelings of anger, inadequacy, impatience—and perhaps abandonment—arise from our frustration in prayer.

We cannot understand our frustration in the light of the promise that we are continually sought by God. If God seeks us and we try to seek God, what happens to frustrate a meeting? If the soul is naturally Christian, shouldn't the desire of our heart for communion with God issue naturally in the fulfillment of that desire? What goes awry? We know the path is arduous and the gate is narrow, but we doubt if we are even on the path.

Merely delineating some of the obstacles to prayer can help us find our way on the early stages of the path. When we do this, we become less discouraged simply because identifying and recognizing the obstacles means we are aware of the cause of our difficulties with prayer. We no longer project our frustration and failure into anger and disbelief while we remain immobile and unchanging. We can take responsibility for the obstacles and cooperate in their removal. Thus a process of identification of internal obstacles to prayer can be a source of help toward growth in prayer.

Prayer is our response when we have found ourselves possessed and sought by God on some occasion in our life. Our beginning to seek God is difficult and tortured, yet it is one which we are irresistibly drawn to make. William Blake's words, "We are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love" strikingly state this fundamental invitation

to human beings to respond to God. But we find it hard to be open to these beams of love. Part of the response of prayer is concerned with the changes necessary in order for us to become less resistant to and less afraid of the "beams of love."

This quiet openness to change is related to the Christian tradition of the "prayer of the heart." Thomas Merton describes it as "a way of keeping oneself in the presence of God and of reality, rooted in one's inner truth."[1] Merton's insistence on being rooted in one's inner truth shows that learning to bear the "beams of love" involves a deep form of self-knowledge. We have to be willing to face the negative as well as the positive elements which we find in our inner selves. The obstacles to prayer we are going to identify and describe here primarily revolve around failure in self-knowledge and the fear and resistance we often produce to obscure our inner depths.

The beams of love which bear witness to the priority and initiative of God encourage us to face our resistance and frustration with hope. God is working in us at depths beyond our comprehension.

We begin then with the trust that God's love is greater than our failure, however deep that may be. Paradoxically, it is the very activity of God's love in us which uncovers our resistances and invites us to acknowledge them. When we do that, the resistances begin to lose their power. Indeed the whole process is one of recognition of the obstacle, repentance, and purgation. The only justification for this apparently negative activity, which we so resist, is that we may more and more be available to the energies of love working in us.

St. Augustine wrote, "We come to God by love and not by navigation." Isn't our intention to describe obstacles to prayer an attempt at navigation? Augustine gives priority to the love which is always drawing us rather than to the techniques of navigation which we wish to employ to bring us to our destination. We may suspect that our struggles with the obstacles to prayer are only an attempt at Pelagian navigation and an attempt to control the whole adventure of prayer. But navigation can be of a cooperative nature and not the fixing of a forced course to a predetermined destination. What may look like navigation on our part is in reality dependent on the love of God already working in us. It is this very love which encourages us to enter the struggle to be free to bear the beams of love. It is this very love which enables and encourages us to be navigators in relation to the internal obstacles to prayer.

The journey inward is not primarily accomplished by our own efforts: it is rather a double search. In prayer we seek God as our response to knowing that God seeks and loves us. We are invited to collaborate with the creative God who calls us to become pilgrims in the land of our interior depths.

We are ready now to look at some obstacles to prayer in some detail. These obstacles include our woundedness, our fear of darkness in ourselves, our need to achieve, our lack of patience, our lack of gratitude, and our failure to trust our inner longing for God.

Our Woundedness

One reason for frustration in prayer, for our failure to collaborate with the love of God, is our woundedness. We feel rejected, unwanted, unloved. We believe that we have not been loved sufficiently in the past. This has been so painful an experience that we dare not risk accepting the vulnerability which love demands. As one Christian has written, "And because our need to be loved and to give love is so deep and central, to be denied this makes us angry beyond the conscious knowing, and an angry person consciously or unconsciously is tempted to destroy, to kill and often does. Most people in the world are deeply angry."[2] Our often unconscious devices for protecting us from further wounds tend to cut us off from God in spite of an avowed conscious desire to be open to his love and a belief in his graciousness. Likewise anger, often deep and unconscious, can generate an energy which pervades our whole being and thus deflects our attention away from God's healing presence.

A wounded person may find it actually impossible to allow himself or herself to be open and vulnerable. What are we to do in the face of such an impasse? Surely it is impossible to make ourselves suddenly open and vulnerable so that love can work more effectively in us and through us.

Are there any ways of navigating in the face of our woundedness? Although we feel unloved and rejected, we will discover there are some people who care about us, enjoy us and even love us. If we begin, however tentatively, to risk trusting this care and love, we will find the pressure to run away either physically, or in the myriad of small ways by which we shut off personal involvement—greatly diminished. When we begin consciously to admit our desire and need to be with certain people, we will also accept this desire and need and act on them. We do this in the face of knowing that the care and love offered by others will also be wounded and imperfect, and that we will undoubtedly be hurt again. Reaching out to others in spite of our woundedness will often mean finding new friends or deepening our trust and availability to a spouse, an old friend, a priest, a teacher, or a spiritual director. Opening ourselves to the love of others is comparable, on a psychological level, to opening ourselves to God, who reveals himself as One who knows what it is to be wounded.

Not only do we need to allow others to love us and care for us *as we are*, we also need to do the same for ourselves, especially our wounded parts. As an area of woundedness within us is made conscious, we need to accept it, acknowledge it and let it be part of us. This involves a deep self-acceptance. Sister Rachel Hosmer describes[3] praying in a chapel where she felt secure, separated from noise and distraction in the building and separated from her own unhappiness and loneliness in a community. But she realized she did not want this separate, safe place. She writes, "From then on I began to realize that I had to go down to the roots of my own life, where lives a small, rebellious, treacherous, wounded, tear-stained child. I had to encounter her gently, lovingly, take her in my arms, comfort her, listen to her, share with her." Such recognition and gentle acceptance of our woundedness allows us to drop the barriers that pro-

tected our woundedness. These are the same protective barriers that prevent our vulnerability in prayer. Accepting our woundedness means we can move closer to rootedness in our inner truth and that we can better live in the presence of God and reality.

Fear of Darkness in Ourselves

Another reason for disappointment in prayer related to our woundedness is our fear of the darkness in ourselves. On encountering darkness in ourselves, we may have tried to deny its existence or distract ourselves from looking at it further. If we choose to avoid our own darkness we are also choosing to withdraw from any deep involvement with prayer. True prayer will not allow us either to deny our darknesses nor be seduced by distraction. We have no choice but to come back to the darkness if we are to learn to pray. And usually our darknesses are thrown into consciousness in such a way that we can't possibly avoid them anyway.

By coming upon darkness in ourselves, I mean meeting deep anger, emptiness, loneliness, guilt, fear, excessive pride, a sense of failure to live up to ideals, a recognition of helplessness before some desire or habit, a recognition of not truly living, or the sense of living a lie—to name a few! Closing off encounter with these aspects of our personality will not be replaced by light, but by a gray world in which God is distant and detached.[4]

Encounter with darkness in ourselves is an essential element of true prayer. It is part of the movement towards true light. Meeting darkness in ourselves is not a reason for failure in prayer. It is an early stage of prayer. It becomes an obstacle if we fail to acknowledge it or attempt to hide from it.

Once an aspect of personal darkness has been seen and acknowledged, how can we navigate in relationship to it? We need to trust that through it and beyond it, new life will emerge in us. This trust is based on the faith that God is already working in us, calling us to wholeness. We need to trust that the darkness will lose its power and that we will be sustained in our struggle with it. Nor dare we give the excuse that it is inappropriate to concentrate on gloomy things. Conscious work with darkness in ourselves may necessitate the finding of professional help because the obstacle to prayer may have deep roots in our character. A basic confidence in facing darkness is found in the paschal rhythm of the Christian life, the passage from death to life in Christ and our entry into that drama places all our struggles in a wider and healing context.

Conscious encounter with darkness can be the beginning of the dissolution of the power of that darkness, although it is hard to believe that could be true on first encounter with it. We realize it has been a dominant, determining force in our lives and we feel caught, defeated, and totally determined by it. But the initial step of consciousness of the darkness is of critical importance. We were previously unaware of the darkness and it held sway in our lives freely and unbeknownst to us. By acknowledging and facing the

guilt, the fear or the loneliness, the darkness no longer has an unchallenged freedom to operate in our lives. And as we face the darkness, we find that "the king has no clothes." There is a gradual shift in our self understanding which involves the growth and emergence of new life and wholeness.

However painful and slow this may be, the facing of our darkness is an essential task. To avoid darkness is to do so at the price of living in shallowness and unreality. Willingness to face and deal with darkness, instead of denying it and hiding it, is one of the clearest indications that our own reality, rather than an idealized concept of ourselves, has entered into the dialogue to which God is always calling us.

Usually the busy round of normal daily demands prevents buried parts of ourselves from becoming conscious. In fact we often consciously and unconsciously pattern our lives precisely to hide from the truth about ourselves and to maintain a false, idealized image that we have carefully constructed. Often a weekend retreat or a longer period of silence is the occasion of a sudden breaking of this image, when an aspect of darkness is allowed to come to the surface. For this reason, retreats and other ways of breaking the daily pattern of demands, are essential if we are to move beyond disappointment in prayer.

Need to Achieve

Many of us have a high need to achieve. A person with a high need to achieve as a way of earning identity and self-esteem will try to make prayer an achievement. But he will inevitably be disappointed when trying to turn prayer into a performance. This is because a great deal of achievement in our culture depends on a willful manipulation of life by our conscious selves whereas prayer involves an open availability to life and a desire not to do our ego-will but the will of God. The failure of attempts to pray by sheer effort is a crucial event for the would-be "achiever" which must be recognized and faced honestly.

We approach prayer with the same attitudes with which we approach the rest of life.[5] We aren't different people when we pray, although we would like to think otherwise. Many of the carefully acquired manipulative skills we have learned to earn a place in life, to be "successful," in reality impede our openness to the totality of life as it is. The methods of consulting experts, strenuously learning the latest or oldest method of meditation or prayer, reading all the books, while not unimportant, will not "work" if the information is applied in a willful, controlling, achievement-oriented way.

How does the achiever who has failed at praying continue from the point of his failure? God's hiddenness to him could drive him to ask hard questions and then to abandon his achieving ways, since they don't work anyway! Our own aggressiveness and desire to control and manipulate are systematically humiliated as we begin to face the realization that what matters most in life is not at the service of our achieving devices. The very frustration and fail-

ure are teaching us to learn and try other modes of being and to undermine our view of life as being validated only by achievement.

What aspects of the human being are more receptive to God's love? Learning to listen, to hear, to be passive and receptive, to wait and be patient, to trust intuition, these are qualities most often associated with the feminine side of our life. It takes a long time for both male and female achievers to learn and to trust these qualities of our being. Yet it is through the receptive, feminine side of life that we can learn to pray and know God. Unfortunately it often seems to take an occasion of helplessness to recognize the importance of the so-called feminine side of our personality. This occasion may be serious illness, admission of alcoholism, death of a beloved person, loss of work or the dissolution of an important intimate relationship.

The feminine aspects of personality, however, can be slowly nourished by a variety of means. For example by meditative listening to scripture we learn to let scripture address us personally. This depends on a receptive openness and a capacity to listen. Listening to dreams, which come to us from another world beyond our control, can be of essential importance in a growing consciousness of the restrictedness and narrowness of the confines of the conscious, achieving personality.

In the give and take of friendship or in marriage we slowly learn to let go of our willful ordering of the other person's life and gradually accept the uniqueness and otherness of the friend or spouse with their mixture of strengths and weaknesses, beauty and ugliness.

Participation in a small group, as a "house church," prayer group, therapy group or group for spiritual direction, gradually instructs us in the capacity to relate to life in nonachieving ways. A group has a life of its own, so that living and sharing in its life invites us to participate in a larger life outside our narrowly limited consciouness.

Some types of movement and dance, painting, walks in nature are means for some people to learn to drop their aggressive and manipulative ways. All of these may lead us to a humility before life which calls us to live more prayerfully in it.

Lack of Personal Freedom

We have just described the "need to achieve" as a pattern of behavior that may cause disappointment in prayer. This is a specific example of a larger problem that blocks our prayer. We are disappointed in prayer because we obstinately cling to false or narrow and unexamined conscious goals, opinions, attitudes and feelings. We all do this to some degree and we need to learn to detect the ways in which we unconsciously narrow our lives. William Connolly writes: "The person who is controlled by fear, by anger, by a fixed idea of his or her future, finds himself or herself incapable of more than superficial prayer. When a person begins to be freed of that control, he becomes capable of deeper prayer."[6]

The detection and unearthing of our narrow and unexamined conscious goals and opinions, attitudes and feelings is a slow and difficult process. We are so wedded to them and convinced of their correctness, or so take them for granted, that they are not even a subject of our consideration. How then can we detect them? Often the truth we most need to ponder is initially unattractive. We resist it. It bothers us and even repels us. This is a clue to look again. The more there is at stake emotionally in some idea, proposal or change of the way of doing things, the more we can be sure it deserves our careful attention to detect the causes of our alarm. Or we may observe that we strongly dislike someone who never did us any harm. We should suspect they have qualities and patterns of being that we also have, but have rejected in ourselves, losing conscious awareness of them. But we can gradually become aware of some of the constrictions in our personality and our ways of being so that we are more available to the divine freedom. As we consciously acknowledge these constrictions we are freer to act out of love and caring. God does not force our behavior, but a personality that is more self-accepting and freer is more available to act out of God's love. A person with a raw, unguarded immediacy to God and to life is moving towards freedom to live and love.

Lack of Patience

Another reason for disappointment in prayer may be an unwillingness to be patient with ourselves and with the process of learning to pray. Advice to "be patient" sounds like something you say in the absence of any more specific help. It is especially difficult for Americans who believe, although with diminishing confidence, that, with some effort, discipline and extra work, we can get what we want. I hate to write it, American that I am, and I have learned it the hard way, but I believe that an unwillingness to wait and to be patient is a reason for disappointment in prayer. It is honest, sound advice. The necessity to be patient and wait does not mean that we become passive and listless. Nor does it mean that we are to be patient about all aspects of life. If the landlord doesn't give you heat, you should not be patient about that. But in relation to prayer, advice to be patient is an honest recognition that the transformation of our person by grace toward wholeness is a slow process. The education and training (*ascesis*) of our person to be available to God's love is slow. Even the sudden gifts of moments of grace do not preclude the slow, gradual process of sanctification. Time, clocktime, is not of the essence. There are no shortcuts or tricks in the life of prayer.

When Friedrich von Hugel was eighteen, he was advised by the Dominican priest, Raymond Hocking "You want to grow in virtue, to serve God, to love Christ? Well you will grow in and attain these things if you will make them a slow and sure, and utterly real, mountainstep plod and ascent, willing to have to camp for weeks in spiritual desolation, darkness and emptiness at different stages in your march and growth. All demand for constant light, all attempt at eliminating or minimizing the cross and trial, is so much folly or puerile trifling."[7]

Lack of Gratitude

At times our feeling of disappointment in prayer may result from a failure to celebrate and be grateful for the grace and gifts and strength we do receive in our daily lives and in prayer. Unfortunately it seems easier to focus on our struggles and to suffer than to celebrate and enjoy changes in the quality of our life or that of our neighbor. Small changes of heart, a sense of being reconverted, and simple acts of love seem fragile and transient in the face of major human dislocations.

We need to sing more, if we sing, or dance more, if we dance, in order to sustain our celebration of life. We need the ability to be carefree, to disregard appearances, to relax and laugh at the world and ourselves. These are all ways of being grateful and saying "yes" to life. Douglas Steere often says in his retreats that he doesn't know of a better way to enter prayer than through gratitude.

Lack of Obedience in Small Things

We proudly look for some major insight or a profound illumination or a clear call to an exciting, life-transforming project. However much to be treasured, such desires are often more a need of the ego than a readiness to allow such experiences to transform and shape our lives. It is "the slow mountainstep plod" that does transform us. Failure to carry out small acts of love and caring and to integrate in our lives insights we have received, are what can effectively block us.

"It is clearly absurd to be pining for some grand revelation of God's will while we are refusing to attend to this or that small beginning of a revelation that is already unmistakably before us. It may only be 'something telling us' as we say, that I am not using my money as I thought-not holding it in stewardship. It may be a recurrent doubt about the strict honesty of some habitual practice. It may be an uncomfortable feeling about a certain indulgence I have been allowing myself."[8] We can learn to celebrate and savor small acts of devotion and to do them with joy.

Unwillingness to Be a Beginner

Another obstacle may be the unwillingness to be a beginner in prayer and meditation. We need to be perfectly content to be a beginner, to experience ourselves as one who has little or no capacity to pray and has a desperate need to learn the bare rudiments. This may be in spite of long involvement in the Church, and in spite of highly developed capacities and talents in other areas. Those who think they know from the beginning will never in fact come to know anything. In a way we will never be anything else but beginners all of our life. Our ego consciousness is always a beginner in relation to God because it is not out of its ways of relating to life that we know God.

Failure to Trust Our Inner Longing for God

Learning to pray depends on an inner knowledge that it is worthwhile.

Otherwise our attempts to pray will be experienced as too laborious and difficult. The inner knowledge of our need to pray may be within us, but we are listening to other voices, particularly the voices of a secular culture. Clamoring voices within and without drown out our desire to know God and we organize our lives around the other demands. By comparison to the seeming importance of the other demands our desire to pray seems too tenuous, unproven—simply not worth it. So we need to learn to trust and live out of our deepest inner desire.

Sometimes to avoid trusting experiences of the heart, we demand a rational, causal explanation by some authority in society. This serves to make the claim of these experiences more manageable, in our control. But Pascal wrote that the heart may have reasons that the mind knows not of. A rational explanation serves to deny the uniqueness of our spiritual life and allows us to shed that uniqueness along with our particular personal history, our gifts and our responsibilities. Complete rational knowledge is possible only of things, not persons.[9] We must allow ourselves the fact of not totally understanding our experiences and to live and love and affirm life in the midst of our not understanding. We are called to fall in love with life, not just to try to understand it.

Brother Roger, founder of the Taize community, speaks to the problem of our demand to understand. He writes "A set, juridical mentality was a feature of ancient Rome, and it was handed down to all of Western Christianity. It left us ill-prepared for contemplation, the culmination of the inner life. In contrast, Eastern Christianity is still today rich in lives centered on just this reality. When the mind is less concerned with defining how we know God and what we know of him, there is more room available in which to adore him."[10]

A friend once described in careful and loving detail the experiences and events of a week-long retreat. The week had been profoundly important to him and included a number of unexpected, new experiences. It involved feeling called and directed to seek out specific individuals particularly needing love and attention. After the retreat he said he spent two years trying to explain or discredit the experiences and to find descriptions of comparable events in the Bible or elsewhere in religious literature. "Experiences had to be manageable and understandable." But finally by telling the story of the retreat, sparing no detail, he was letting the experiences speak for themselves, not finally understood but accepted and celebrated for their life-transforming quality. He came to trust his own inner knowledge of the peculiar importance of the retreat experiences.

It is common for people to have a sense of restlessness and an awareness from past experiences of God or from knowledge of scripture, that their present way of living narrows life unnecessarily. The ego must give consent to this inner knowledge if the soul is to grow and bloom by God's grace.

Conclusion

A number of the obstacles to prayer circle around our proclivity to see

ourselves as a static, firmly established, already attained ego-self that needs only to be perfected. Facing a number of the obstacles just described involves recognizing, as Thomas Merton writes,[11] that we are a "nothing," a "possibility" in which the gift of creative freedom can realize itself by its response to the free gift of love and grace. We are invited to accept our "potentiality," Merton continues, as a gift and a commission, as a trust to be used—as a "talent" in the language of the parables. It is through prayer and the profound transformation of personality that it involves that our "possibility" may become a living reality.

NOTES

[1] Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer,* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 24.
[2] Gordon Cosby, "The Invisible World," *Faith at Work*, March, 1976, p. 6.
[3] Sr. Rachel Hosmer, *New Principles for Christian Spirituality* (Center for Christian Spirituality, General Theological Seminary, 175 Ninth Avenue, New York 10011), p. 23.
[4] William J. Connolly, S.J. "Experiences of Darkness in Directed Retreats," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS Vol. 33 1974, p. 611.
[5] William J. Connolly, S.J. "Disappointment in Prayer: Prelude to Growth?" REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS Vol. 32, 1973, p. 557.
[6] William J. Connolly, S.J. "Freedom and Prayer in Directed Retreats," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, Vol. 32, 1973, p. 1359.
[7] Bernard Hollard, ed., *Selected Letters of Friedrich von Hugel* (London, Dent, 1927), p. 266.
[8] John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).
[9] Erich Fromm, "Man Is Not a Thing," *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 16, 1957, p, 10.
[10] Br. Roger Schutz, *Living Today for God* (Mowbrays, Oxford, England), "Life in Ourselves," p. 18.
[11] Thomas Merton, "The Spiritual Father in the Desert Tradition," *Cistercian Studies* III, 4, 1968, pp. 13, 14.

The Daily Examen

Joan L Roccasalvo, C.S.J.

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Among the numerous articles written on the spiritual life, none, seemingly, has received so little attention as the Daily Examen. While publishing houses are flooded with books on prayer, theological and social issues, and the relationship of these to life itself in recent years, the topic of the Daily Examen has remained virtually untouched.

Our consumer society gravitates around evaluations of all kinds. Large corporations regularly conduct surveys that measure sales progress, and their products undergo change and improvement to insure positive results. Their end goal aims at promoting more sales, greater profit, power, prestige—a better life.

Life in Jesus

Jesus tells us about life abundant when he says, "I have come that they may have life, life to the full" (Jn 10:10). Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life for the Christian, offers the opportunity of a full life in him; invites us to reach our fullest potential in him, and from his example. No one can force anyone to choose life in him for we are totally free. The most awe-full aspect of the human person is the gift and the responsibility of our free will.

I decide on the quality of life I will live. My choice depends largely on the use of my experience and my perception of that experience. What I perceive will bring me the greatest happiness becomes my security, the reality which occupies center stage in my life. Whether or not I realize it, all things are seen by me in relation to this "treasure" whatever it may be. If God has become *the* treasure in my life, if he is my beginning and my end, then he will claim center stage in my heart. Regular periods of personal prayer will convince me that my peace and happiness, a full life, lie in placing my entire security in God alone. All created reality, which often seems so secure, pales before this jealous God who reminds me that he is "my rock, my fortress, my safety."

To say that prayer and life-experience go hand in hand is to state the obvious. Nonintegrated prayer results in fanciful delusions and a false approach to God. The person who seeks God in prayer and who can also touch God as he is manifested in his glory, his power, his providence and his mercy, is the person whose life has become full, rich and, most important, integrated. However, the ability to find and touch God everywhere in all things is a lifetime process and requires a deep faith-vision born out of prayer. One's life experience then becomes the raw material out of which wholeness and holiness are made. It is my life that God fashions into his "work of art," if I allow him to do so. I have nothing else to offer him.

Personal Prayer

Life is being with others—those with whom I live, those with whom I work. Life permits events, big and small, significant and meaningless, to happen to me. Life deals out joys and sorrows through events often beyond my control.

Being alone is also part of life. Unlike loneliness, which is a form of defeat, solitude is victory. These are the moments when I move around myself, when I am alone with my thoughts. Indeed, so very often what I say to myself is far more important than what I say to others, and it can often be very revealing.

The quiet time a Christian sets aside each day to be alone with God allows the sacred to break through the human. I am there to be lifted out of the depth of my sinfulness, to be drawn in love to infinite and ultimate Love. I am there to be transformed. God enters my life through the Sacred Scripture as he gives me an interior knowledge of himself. I come to know him intimately, even as he knows me. He dominates my thoughts, my actions, my entire being. Out of this union of love which grows in prayer, I not only become like him, but the rest of my day is seen in relation to him as well. A person, caught up in the love of God desires to follow and serve him as a faithful disciple and friend. Jesus tells us, "I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father." Thus the experience of prayer is at once forming and transforming.

The Daily Examen

However, as busy people we spend most of our life experience not in isolation or in solitude but in the marketplace, among people of all types. We deal with the material goods of this world, we face unexpected events and circumstances, we make major and minor decisions. As Christians, not only must we love God *into* an imperfect world as we carry his presence to broken humanity, but we must also find the hidden face of God as he is carried to us in those we meet and in all that happens to us during the day. We apply to our daily living what we have learned in prayer at the feet of the Master. The power of God working in me at prayer is the very same power working within me when I am in the marketplace. Gerard Manley Hopkins captures this thought when he says:

> . . . The just man justices;
> Keeps graces: that keeps all his going graces;
> Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
> Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces.
> (from the sonnet, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire")

A well-known spiritual director and author, Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., wrote a few years ago: "We must habitually pray over our thoughts, speech, opinions, aspirations, desires, decisions, judgments, over our physical, spiritual, material and mental needs, over our vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and state of life and calling, so that we may better discern the will of God, respect our neighbor and properly understand his or her life, actions and efforts in the spirit of charity." He was referring, of course, to the Daily Examen which St. Ignatius of Loyola gave not only to his companions in Christ but also to the laity and to other religious people as well through the Exercises. The apostolic person—religious or lay—shielded neither by cloister nor by monastic walls, has to deal each day with all types of people from all walks of life. He/she has to face a variety of events and circumstances, with great demands made on one's time and energy and generosity.

How easy it would be for the active person to shuffle along with the crowd, and to be led by false instead of by Christian values. Such associations demanded greater strength and greater experience. The Daily Examen provides a framework for prayer that allows a person to go back over each day, hour by hour, to evaluate how he or she acted or omitted to act, and the underlying reasons for such responses and reactions. It is necessary to discover one's faults in the context of prayer (and not mere self-analysis), and to resolve anew to imitate Jesus tomorrow, and the next day.

St. Ignatius considered the Daily Examen so important in the very active life of the sixteenth-century Jesuit, or any apostolic person that he or she was cautioned never to omit it except for a serious reason, unless God's greater

glory was to be served. If an Ignatian person omitted some other spiritual exercise or a work of mercy for example, it would be during the Examen that he or she would judge *according to God's viewpoint* if these omissions were delinquent or justified. It was the Daily Examen which put all things in their proper perspective at the end of the day. Ignatius exhorts busy people: ". . . they should practice the seeking of God's presence in all things, in their conversation, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, in all their actions, since his Divine Majesty is truly in all things by his presence, power and essence. . . ."

Thus my life with God, my life with myself, and with all created reality are three overlapping and interrelated circles forming a kind of trinitarian relationship: God, myself, the world. Reviewed daily in the examen, a practical approach to find God in all things, this way of prayer can be as forming and transforming as any other way of personal prayer. Taken together, the conscious entering into this threefold relationship can result in wholeness and holiness for religious and laity, married or single people, for it allows a person to touch God at every moment of one's experience. This is true mysticism. Did the Lord not assure us that he would be with us all the days of our lives? It is the mystic who not only believes his words but lives them.

An outline for the Daily Examen is offered here. This restful prayer should occupy approximately fifteen minutes to do.

Daily Examen

1. How has God shown his love for me today/this morning/this afternoon? What did God do for me today?

   Thank the Lord again and again.

   Lk 1:47-47: The Lord has done marvels for me; holy is his name.

   Ps 116:7-8: Return to your resting place, my soul; Yahweh has treated you kindly. He has rescued me from death, my eyes from tears and my feet from stumbling.

2. I ask the Spirit of Jesus for the grace of self-knowledge.

I ask for light to have God's viewpoint,
enabling me to see my day as he sees it.
Ask for the grace to see how and
why I have failed to respond to God's love.

1 S 3:10: Speak Lord, your servant
is listening.

Ep 1:17: May the God of our Lord Jesus
Christ grant you a spirit of wisdom and
insight, to give you a fuller knowledge
of himself.

Ga 5:16: Learn to live and move in the
Spirit; then there is no danger of your
giving way to the impulses of sinful
nature.

Ps 51:6: Yet, since you love sincerity
of heart, teach me the secrets of wisdom.

3. What has been my response today:
   to God?
   to myself? What I say to myself is
   more important than what
   I say to others.
   to others: to those with whom I live?
   to those with whom I work?
   to things?
   to circumstances and situations?
   More importantly, why did I/did I
   not respond/react in a certain way?
   Every moment is a gift from God.
   He is always at work, always drawing
   me closer to him, in and through my
   experience—the raw material of my holiness.

4. I express sorrow for my faults while I gaze
   at the crucifix.

   Ps 51:1: Have mercy on me, 0 God,
   in your goodness.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,
a sinner.

5. I resolve to do better tomorrow.

   Lk 7:50: Your faith has saved you;
   go in peace.

6. "Give me only your love and your grace;
   it is all I need."

   The Lord's Prayer—prayed slowly.

The Examen: A Tool for Holistic Growth

John Govan, S.J.

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As a spiritual director I have been very privileged to accompany people on their unique journeys through the joys and pains of their lives. In these individual stories there is one common concern that keeps surfacing. It is the problem of integrating these ordinary human events with those rare moments in which the person has a real sense of God's presence. Unfortunately, these moments seem to be limited to times of prayerful activity. The greater part of their day is seen in their eyes as a time in which God is not only absent but unable to enter. This felt experience often results in some type of anxiety and frustration with daily life and an ever increasing conviction that these regular activities are an obstacle to spiritual growth. It is this need for a vision which integrates all activities in the spiritual life of an individual which has prompted me to write this article.

What follows is an attempt to be as practical as possible so that one might have at one's disposal a concrete way of growing into a vision which integrates everything that happens in one's life so that God is always seen as present and nothing is necessarily an obstacle to spiritual growth. If practiced faithfully, the daily Examen can lead to a deep and personal relationship with the Lord so that everything is understood in terms of that relationship. This type of vision is needed if spiritual and human growth are to be seen as interdependent.

The prayerful and reflective practice that is being suggested as a possible way of developing a holistic and integrated vision in which all things can lead to God is the Examen. This exercise can be explained by a consideration of three questions: Why is the Examen important? What is the Examen? How does one do the Examen?

Why Is the Examen Important?

Grace works upon nature. It is not simply God's grace that enables us to grow, nor is it simply our human effort. We need to be helped by God and we also need to help ourselves. The truth of our identity as humans needs to be taken by us as seriously as God takes it. We have the responsibility of bringing everything in our day before the Lord so that his grace can radically transform its meaning and significance for us. Thus our spiritual growth is also a human growth. A divine and a human component are needed. The Examen time is a definite activity which brings these two parts together so that we can fully grow in "wisdom and age and grace" just as the Lord did.

Growth always begins from the present existing reality. Our present reality includes all the events and experiences that make us the individuals that we are. This means that our identity can only be truthful if it takes into account the events of the day. But our identity also includes the relationships that belong to us as creatures. These relationships are four in number: my relationship to God, my relationship to myself, my relationship to the world of things and my relationship to other people. The time given to the Examen brings these four relationships plus the events of my day into the presence of God in such a way that God has the possibility of enlightening me.

The holistic vision that we need is the vision of faith. But the vision of faith is the vision with which the Lord looked at the world of his time. And he had a vision which simultaneously contained both the world as it was and the kingdom of the Father which was to be built. This means for me that faith which does not have an incarnational element is suspect. All it can do is create a radical tension between our human realities and our spiritual desires. But Jesus became flesh, entered our history and redeemed us from within our own condition. If we wish to follow Jesus, we need to follow him in this world of ours and not merely in some dreamlike world which does not exist right now.

Paul is a very good example of one who has a faith in the resurrected Lord but acts in this world on the basis of that faith. If we reflect on his missionary activity (see the epistles of Paul), his emphasis on the analogy of the body of which Christ is the head and we are the parts (1 Co 12:12-30), his conversion experience in which he was transformed from being a persecutor of the Church to an enthusiastic follower of Christ in the Church (Ac 9:1-22), we see perhaps that the Incarnation of Christ continues today. Christ is truly present in my brothers and sisters right now. At the Last Judgment, the Lord will say "I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least

of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). There is a real grounding in our faith-history for an integrated vision which eliminates any tension or opposition between the human and the divine.

In our own day, we continue to say the prayer that Jesus taught us, namely the Our Father. This means that we often pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Let me suggest that this is both a petition from us to God and a request from God to us. It is an implicit call for us to accept the task and the responsibility of being co-creators who by our actions build the kingdom and thus bring about the achieving of his will on earth. Jesus desired to build the kingdom of his Father, but he invites us as his disciples to continue to build in this world. This request can appear awesome and impossible, but he gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us and to make the task possible.

Lest we become centered on our deeds and not God, the Lord cautions us. "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). It is very important to know my own motivation, and such knowledge can only become mine if the Lord brings it to my attention. The Examen allows this to happen.

A final reason why the Examen is important lies in a possible result. This practice can lead to an inner peace which cannot be severely affected by the events of one's life. It is somewhat like the peace that Paul had when he said that "nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus" (Ph 3:8). This comes from one who has an integrated vision of life and sees everything in terms of one's journey to God.

Before we move on to a consideration of the second question, let us recap some of the significant reasons for the importance of the Examen. It brings the fullness of our human situation and the fullness of our creaturehood into the presence of the Lord. It creates the real possibility of looking at our particular day with the vision of faith and growing in the ability to find God in all things. Such an ability might lead to more of an incarnational faith and concrete actions which serve to build the kingdom of God in this world. Finally, it allows us time to become prayerfully reflective and perhaps discover our true motivations.

What Is the Examen?

The basic format of the Examen as I envisage it has four steps: Step 1. Act of Presence; Step 2. Prayer for Light and Wisdom; Step 3. Examination, Thanksgiving, Sorrow; and Step 4. Asking for Help for Tomorrow.

Step 1. Act of Presence

I begin the Examen time by placing myself in the presence of God, and preferably in the presence of Jesus. The Father has given him all judgment (Jn 5:22) and he is the "Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). I thus imag-

ine myself as one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) so that I can talk with him about my day. With his help, I perhaps can understand the deeper significance of what seemed to me like ordinary events. With his help, I can be enabled to find God in these events and thus in my day. In his light, I can understand them as an integral part of my spiritual journey to God. By the act of presence I am consciously entering into a *dialogue with Jesus* and leaving behind the darkness of an introspective monologue.

The awareness within me of his presence has many different degrees of intensity. The disciples in the story of Emmaus were with Jesus all the time but only recognized him at the breaking of the bread. But recognition did not result as a direct consequence of this action. Recognition came because Jesus opened their eyes and allowed them to see. Recognition is always his gift. So even if I fail *to feel* his presence in the events of my day, faith can and does tell me that he was present. "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20:29). The act of presence is an act of faith.

It is true that I personally am being enlightened by the Lord whenever I am in his presence, but one needs to keep in mind how the Lord is coming into that meeting with me. He presents us with the vision of faith which includes justice, the mindset of the corporal works of mercy, the teaching of the Beatitudes, the commandments to love God and to love your neighbor, a total and unconditional love for me and a desire for me to grow into a more complete union with him. Thus he enlightens me about my day's events in terms of this background of his teachings. All of these are centered on building the kingdom of God on earth. So it is not just a "Jesus and me" spirituality that is being fostered, but rather it brings me into contact with a call to greater service.

Step 2. Prayer for Light and Wisdom

In this next part of the Examen one asks Jesus for the gift of light so that one may see clearly and the gift of wisdom so that one might understand what one sees. These are definite petitions and remind us of our creaturehood arid dependency. They create within us a stance of humility, need and childlike trust. They remind us that in the light of Christ there is no darkness and rekindle within us a desire to walk always in that light.

Step 3. Examination, Thanksgiving, Sorrow

Keeping myself in *dialogue with Jesus*, I now prayerfully reflect on everything that happened during my day. This examination will stir up feelings of both thanksgiving and sorrow. I immediately express my feelings to the Lord. Whenever I feel comfortable in his presence while some event in my day is coming clear in my mind, I say thank you in recognition of it as a gift and thus grow in my knowledge of his presence. And whenever I feel uncomfortable in his presence with something that happened, I say I am sorry and

I ask him to enlighten me about this experience. This enlightenment allows me to turn what seems like an obstacle into a source of growth. From God's point of view, all is gift. But, from our point of view, all can become gift if and only if we bring it into the relationship we have with God and see everything as possibly leading to God. It is only when things are seen in terms of that relationship that they are truly gifts. I think this understanding can help us appreciate what Paul meant when he said "nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus" (Ph 3:8). Everything can lead to growth if I have a holistic vision which combines the human and the spiritual.

An example in which an obstacle becomes a gift for growth might help make it clear. Suppose I feel sorrow in the Lord's presence when I think about an event which I know was a good deed. Then a further reflection might make me aware that the reason I did it was simply so that others might think well of me. I am getting in touch with my real motivation. The Lord is revealing me to me. Such self-knowledge is a major reason for the Examen.

Step 4. Asking for Help for Tomorrow

As I end the Examen period, I ask the Lord to be a part of my day so that he might concretely help me grow into the fullness of my humanity by incorporating myself ever more into him. This request for help should not be left in general terms, but rather it should be an expression of a very significant and meaningful need of mine. This requires of me a reflective awareness of my predominant desire and predominant obstacle which is related to this desire. Examples might help make this point clear.

Suppose I have a real desire to grow in love for other people but a real difficulty in accepting Charlie. Then I ask the Lord to help me grow in my love for others, especially in my love for Charlie. Or, suppose I really am seeking to grow in patience, but my children sometimes cause me to become angry. In that case, I might ask the Lord to help me be more patient, especially with my children. And if I really need to be more trusting because of a pending operation, I can ask for greater trust, especially regarding my health.

This request for help for tomorrow is very important. What is requested becomes the focus of my examination time the next day. For example, if I have asked for help so that I might grow in love for other people and especially for Charlie, then when I return to the Examen, I review the day in *dialogue with Jesus* in terms of love for others and for Charlie. In this way I am allowing the Lord to nourish me daily so that I might actually grow in something definite. When I have a meaningful and concrete intention, the Examen practice becomes very important. If it is only general, it will soon be forgotten.

How does one determine what the focus and the request should be? A very practical suggestion is the following. Think of three or four things that

are very important for you and your growth. Then ask yourself which of them is the most important for you right now. When you can answer that question, you have found your predominant desire. Then you simply determine what is the greatest obstacle that you need to overcome in order to realize that desire. The combination of desire and obstacle becomes your focus and request when you do the Examen.

How long does one stay with a particular focus? The answer is quite simple. One stays with the same thing as long as it remains important and significant. This is the major criterion. However, keep in mind that growth is a slow process and a change in topic should only be made when there is a consistent felt need for something else. The same need might be there for a week, a month or longer. Do not change the Examen topic unless there is a good reason.

The Examen done this way becomes a tool for holistic growth. But asking for help for tomorrow also has another benefit. It helps us live one day at a time and become more centered on the present. If we are dreaming of the future or remembering the past too much, we lose the full importance of the present moment. Growth takes place in the reality that is there right now. The Examen keeps bringing us back to the present and allows us to go into the future with the Lord at our side. It gives us a vision which helps us see God in things and persons, which gives us courage and hope, and which instills within us an eagerness and zest for the future.

How Does One Do the Examen?

The Examen itself is a time of heightened awareness and prayerful reflection which lasts for about fifteen minutes. Before I begin, there are several things to remember. What have I been focusing on and asking the Lord to help me with? I am going into a *dialogue with Jesus.* What is the mind and heart of Christ?

Let us now consider one example of an Examen prayer. The predominant need is to find God in all things, but, in this instance, especially at the office.

> Jesus, I want to come into your presence now. I am weary after a long day. Please walk with me! Please be patient with me! Make me aware again of how you love me and call me to be both a friend and a disciple.
>
> Journey with me through my day and help me see where you have been . . . where I missed you. . . .
>
> How soon after rising my thoughts turned to you. . . . This certainly was your grace. . . . Thank you for being so good to me.
>
> But then at the office this morning, something happened that was really very insignificant . . . and yet, I was really annoyed. Please help me know what happened. What caused me to react this way? Help me know!

Oh! Now I see! I had totally forgotten your call to love. I indeed was blind to your presence in those people. I really did become self-centered.

I really am sorry. Please help me next time.

This afternoon when I helped Bob at the office, I felt pretty good. I guess good deeds do that . . . I feel this way whenever I do something for someone else. I know your grace makes this possible.

Thank you for giving me this experience. Thank you for letting me recognize you in it. Please help me do something like it more often.

Tonight, the children wanted me to play with them. I was too tired and said no . . . but then I felt I should have said yes. But I really was tired. Should I have played with them?

You mean you are not disappointed in me for saying no to them? But you are—because I feel doubts about it. I'm a bit confused. . . . Please help me see.

Now I see what you mean! How dumb I've been! You want me to start accepting the fact that I am human and was tired, that I can't do everything. I need to say "No" more often and more peacefully.

This is very comforting to me—to know that it's all right to be weak. You don't know how much this means to me. . . , not only with respect to my children, but in all kinds of things. I really want to thank you for this very valuable gift!

Well! It's been a long day . . . but a really good one, thanks to you! Please help me again tomorrow. I want to see you in more things in my day, especially in the office, which seems to be my weakest spot. I really do trust you. Good night, Lord.

In this simple example, we can see all the elements of the Examen working together. With the act of presence, the prayer for light and wisdom, the expressions of thanksgiving and sorrow and the request for help for the following day, there is a real bringing of one's daily life into God's intimate presence. By letting him see the day, we are viewing it with the vision of faith which is absolutely necessary for an integrations which brings together both the human and the divine.

My whole identity is being brought into play by this activity. Part of who I am is contained in the events of my day, and this is the central content of my reflection. but the other parts of my identity which belong to my creaturehood are also being enlightened. My relationship to God is active throughout the Examen. My relationship to others is somehow highlighted. In the example, it has been made present to awareness by dwelling on the people at the office, Bob and the children. My relationship to the world is made clear just as the office milieu was very much a part of this Examen. And my relationship to myself, that is, to my own humanity, is also brought to the

surface. In the example, the person's reaction to his children was the event that resulted in the radical insight that it was all right to be weak. Notice how this understanding is essential for the development of an inner peace which does not immediately understand human weakness as a refusal to follow the Lord's call to love.

One final word seems appropriate. Since our identity is always changing and always in the state of becoming, and since the events of our daily life help to bring about this dynamism, it is very important to frequently bring our present reality face to face with God. The Examen practice is most useful for achieving this encounter if it becomes a daily event. Jesus has said of himself: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty" (Jn 15:5).

Seeking God's Will

Charles J. Healey, S.J.

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A prominent aspect in our continuous search for God and His presence in our lives is the theme of seeking God's will. Although this reality may be expressed and articulated in different ways, perhaps we can best sum it up by simply speaking of our ongoing attempts to seek God's plan in our lives and our efforts to fulfill it as wholeheartedly as we can. Much is contained in this statement for we enter into the mystery of God's ways with us. We focus on the mystery of our unique relationships with God and the unfolding of His providential plan and design in our lives.

Centrality of Seeking God's Will

Scripture abounds with allusions to the seeking and fulfilling of the will of God. Jesus Himself was very conscious of carrying out His Father's will in His life. To His disciples He emphasized: "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn 4:34). In the Garden of Gethsemani He prayed over and over to His Father: "Let your will be done, not mine" (Lk 22:43). It was something He continually enjoined on His followers, and to the woman who cried out to Him from the crowd, He replied: "Still happier are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:27-8). On another occasion, He stressed: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12:49-50). The Apostle Paul also continually encouraged in a similar vein those whom he had led to the faith. He writes

for example: "And what we ask God is that through perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding you should reach the fullest knowledge of his will. So you will be able to lead the kind of life which the Lord expects of you, a life acceptable to him in all its aspects" (Col 1:9-11).

In actual practice, however, seeking and responding to God's word in our lives is not an easy process. It never was, but it does take on an added sense of importance and urgency today with the absence of so many of the guidelines that seemed to formerly make the path a little easier to follow. It is also important because we can get discouraged if we do not experience some sense of harmony and oneness with God and His divine plan. A reassurance that we are carrying out God's plan for us in our individual lives can be a great source of strength and consolation. The purpose of this article is to offer some reflections on seeking God's will in our lives. They are offered not as any clearcut answers but as thoughts and reflections that may prove helpful in our common endeavor to seek and find God in our lives and to respond to His call wholeheartedly.

Importance of the Desire

Here at the outset, I would like to stress the importance of having and nourishing the strong *desire* to do God's will. If this is lacking, everything else tends to be half-hearted. When one is hungry for something, one usually moves and acts; one becomes alive and responsive. This is true in so many areas of our lives. If the desire and the motivation for something is strong, a person will usually be generous and attentive in expending time, interest, and concern. The desire I am referring to here is not just one desire among many, but a desire that focuses on God alone and seeks to make Him central in one's life. It is the desire that overrides all other desires and subordinates them to the seeking after God. I think this is what Abraham Heschel had in mind when he wrote in his *Man's Quest for God:* "God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance."[1] The Psalmist expresses this desire in various ways. He exclaims on one occasion: "One thing I ask of Yahweh, one thing I seek: to live in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life" (27:4). And again he writes: "As a doe longs for running streams so longs my soul for you, my God I go to see the face of God?" (42:1-3).

Merely having the desire for God and His will isn't everything, of course. But its presence and growth is important. Ultimately, the very desire of God is a sign of His presence and of His grace. On our part we can only seek to cherish and nourish its reality and growth in our lives. It is the foundation on which we build. The question naturally arises, however, how can I increase and nourish my desire for God and move on to making him the centrality in my life? An adequate response to this would include many aspects, but here I would like to highlight two of them: first, a deepening experience of God's love in our lives, and secondly a growth in the freedom that flows from this awareness.

Experiencing God's Love

We can speak of a strong desire for God and His will in our lives and about freely committing ourselves to Him, but this will be greatly hindered and limited unless the actual experience of God's love is a continuously operating reality in our lives. The confident awareness that one is loved by God and is of great worth and value in His eyes is really the starting point for any effective response to God. It is the deep awareness of God's personal love that heals, frees, and strengthens, and encourages one to respond generously. When a person is conscious of God's love in spite of one's sins and limitations and failures, he can focus on the Lord and His will in a spirit of trust and confidence. This realization of God's love is something all of us can grow in—some may be in greater need than others—but for all it is a necessary prerequisite for a spirit of freedom in the Lord and His service. An ability to relax and be confident in God's love is a tremendous help to growth.

St. Ignatius' "Contemplation to Attain Divine Love" in his *Spiritual Exercises* seeks to deepen this awareness. He asks the retreatants to reflect upon the working of God in his own life and to bring to full awareness the experience of God's unique gifts. If love is manifested more in deeds rather than in words and if love does consist in a mutual sharing of goods, then a prayerful consideration of God's gifts and blessings should lead to a deeper consciousness of His love and the realization that we are gifted people in His sight. This should lead naturally to a spirit of gratitude—a gratitude that can expand a person tremendously and arouse the deep desire for God alone and the carrying out of His will. It should lead to the spontaneous cry of the Psalmist: "What return shall I make to the Lord for all He has done for me?"

This spirit of gratitude and magnanimity should lead in turn to a strong spirit of trust and confidence that, secure in an awareness of God's love, I can be an instrument of God's peace, hope, and love. It should lead to an awareness and conviction that God can do great things through us if we are united to Him as the branch is united to the vine. This is the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi and the prayer long associated with him:

> Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope: Where there is darkness, light: and where there is sadness, joy.

This deep and profound awareness of God's love, then, is important. For it frees a person from many of the doubts, fears, and hesitations that stand in the way of a full and generous service of the Lord. It is indeed the basis for that spirit of freedom so necessary in seeking God's will.

Growth in Freedom

The sense of freedom we are referring to is an inner personal freedom which allows a person to give God and His will the central place in one's life; it is a freedom and detachment from all other things that would either pre-

vent or hinder one's attempts to focus on God. It is the sense of freedom that allows God to become and remain the central reality in one's life. It is a free and independent attitude towards all of God's gifts so that we love them with a well ordered love, we find God in them, and we appreciate some of them as manifestations of God's will for us. It is an attitude characterized by a profound conviction that the only important thing in life is to love God and serve Him in a spirit of simplicity and joy.

Freedom in this context also presupposes a sense of harmony and order in one's life. It is the sense of wholeness that allows one to focus primarily on God and His will and to make any decisions free of disorders or inordinate attachments. It is a sense of integration and peace that is opposed to any interior turmoil and conflict. Fr. John English writes in his book, *Spiritual Freedom:* "I mentioned very early in these pages that determining the will of God is not the more difficult thing. The more difficult thing is to become free of inordinate attachments so that the will of God may be manifest."[2]

To bring about and to maintain this sense of order and harmony in our lives does not come easily. It does require a certain amount of discipline and abnegation in our lives and the realization that we are in constant need of healing and purification. Our needs and difficulties vary from time to time and from person to person. But for everyone it does take patient and persevering effort and sacrifice on our part to maintain the spirit of freedom so necessary to give God and His will the central place it deserves in our lives and to be open and flexible in our attitude before Him. In no way should this be a source of discouragement and disillusionment for us. Our conviction of God's love for us in spite of our failures and weaknesses and His constant willingness to forgive us should be a source of renewed hope and strength.

Before leaving these reflections on freedom it would seem to be helpful to recall the intimate connection between this sense of freedom and the whole area of maturity. It is very true that often a person's problems are not connected with the generous service of God but with efforts required to cope with one's work and the various relationships with others. For often the problem lies not with the difficulty of seeking God and His will in our lives but with ourselves—our fears, anxieties, and hostilities that can be so paralyzing. An ability to face reality, to adapt to change, to control anxieties, the capacity to love and give of oneself—these and all the other characteristics of maturity greatly influence the extent of a person's sense of freedom. Growth in human and emotional maturity does contribute to one's growth in inner freedom and strength.

Importance of Prayer

It is necessary to remind ourselves constantly that the whole discussion of seeking God's will in our lives has to be situated in the context of faith and prayer. I am speaking here of prayer in its broadest sense—the continual response of persons who are convinced that they belong to God and seek to

grow in union with Him. I am not referring here to any particular type of prayer or method of prayer, but rather the abiding attitude which seeks to deepen and nourish the awareness and realization of God and His love. It is through prayer that we nourish and grow in an awareness and consciousness of God and His workings of love.

The benefits of prayer are manifold. Prayer helps us to grow in our awareness of God's presence and His unique call to each of us. It gives God the opportunity to speak to us and to work more completely in our lives, while at the same time allowing us to adopt a more listening and responsive attitude to His gentle initiative and movements both within us and around us. It helps us to become more sensitive to the many ways God does speak to us and it enables us to grow as seekers after the Lord and His presence. It helps to keep us aware of whatever limits our freedom to respond generously to God and His service, and also aware of the constant need we have of His help and grace.

These reflections are intimately connected with the whole process of discernment, and we might emphasize again that the whole context of any discerning process is prayer and our patient, persevering, and generous efforts to grow in our awareness of the reality of God and His presence in our lives.

Prayer helps us to become more sensitive to God's presence and thus increases our capacity to find God in all the circumstances of our individual lives. If I can grow in my capacity to find God in all things, then all things become for me the means for contact with Him; they become for me the vehicle and means through which He speaks to me and they become the means for mutual dialogue. We become alive to the mysteries of life and the mystery of God's love for us that unfolds itself so often in an unexpected manner. Often His message and word to us is not evident at first sight and at times we must gaze and contemplate in a prayerful context to grasp and see the wholeness of the situation. It is the hidden wholeness of God's presence that we seek and it is a faith-filled vision of life and all the human situations of our lives that is our goal. And for this prayer is an indispensable means.[3]

A Spirit of Readiness

We have been speaking of the desire for God, the conviction of His love, a spirit of freedom, and the context of continual prayer; all of these constitute some of the necessary prerequisites for a fuller seeking of God's will in our lives and the atmosphere in which the process is best carried out. Our practical applications here will be few for there are no easy answers and there are no set steps that assure us of finding God and His will. We are caught up in the unfolding of God's providential designs which at times can be mysterious and incomprehensible. Our life of faith is the life of a pilgrim who travels and seeks in trust on a road that is uncertain and poorly marked at times. But the above aspects can leave us with a sense of readiness and the attitude

which proclaims sincerely: "I want to do your will, O Lord. May it be fulfilled in my life wherever I am, whatever I am doing!"

This spirit of readiness does not absolve us from the task of striving to discover God's will or making any decisions we are faced with as best we can, but it does put a person in the position where he or she can act from a position of strength in making any decisions. This decision-making involves us in the process of discernment about which we read and hear so much today. This should come as no surprise for with the breakdown of so many familiar guidelines we are forced to make more individual and communal decisions than ever before. This presents us with a challenge that calls for the very best within us as we seek to be sensitive to where God is touching us and leading us through His interior movements. But we also have to remind ourselves that the pressure to find some security in a time of acute change and transition can leave us less open and less flexible unless we are courageous and generous in a spirit of readiness and attentiveness to God and His word. This spirit of readiness leaves us open not only to God's promptings and movements within us, but also responsive and attentive to the many ways God can and has manifested Himself from without. In the concrete this can lead us at times into areas of uncertainties, conflicts, and difficult choices; but if approached in a spirit of faith, trust, and spiritual freedom before the Lord, they will be resolved.

The advantage and role of the spiritual director might be mentioned in passing in this context. An experienced and interested director can be a great help in providing the necessary objectivity and perspective that is so important. The spiritual director can also help us in those areas of freedom, awareness of God's love, and prayer that we have been discussing, and help us also to clarify our own experiences and interior movements as we seek to see where God is touching us and leading us.

We might also call attention to the great help a proper perspective can give to our searching for God and His will, for it is easy to get too close to the things we are involved in. Often it is only in stepping back and seeing the larger picture that we are able to see things clearly and with greater depth. For example, seeing our lives in retrospect and the various threads that have weaved a pattern in the past and formed a continuity can furnish us with insights about the present movements and evcnts in our lives. Then, too, the realization that the future always lies unknown ahead of us, not to speak of the uncertainty about the length of our days here on earth, can be incentives for giving God and His will the centrality it deserves in our lives.

Conclusion

We are still faced with the reality that we seek God and His will in our lives through faith. There will always be the elements of uncertainty and doubt, and often we can only do our best and leave the rest to God trusting in His love and mercy. At the beginning of this article the notion of desiring

God and His will was stressed. It should be a source of consolation to realize that the very desire to follow Him and carry out His will is a strong indication that we are fulfilling His will, for the desire itself is God's grace working within us. Thomas Merton sums up this point very well in one of his prayerful reflections in *Thoughts in Solitude*, and with this we might conclude:

> My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.[4]

NOTES

[1] Abraham J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), p. xiii.

[2] John J. English, S.J., *Spiritual Freedom* (Guelph, Ontario; Canada: Loyola House, 1973), p. 183.

[3] Thomas Merton writes: "In all the situations of life the 'will of God' comes to us not merely as an external dictate of impersonal law but above all as an interior invitation of personal love. . . . We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. His inscrutable love seeks our awakening" (*New Seeds of Contemplation* [New York: New Directions, 1972], p. 15).

[4] Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Garden City: Doubleday/Image, 1968), p. 81.

Discerning the Spirits in Prayer

William Sampson, S.J.

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After centuries in which little was said of discernment of spirits, we are today presented with a great mass of contributions. Some people still can find it hard to apply it in their own lives. I would like to present, in concrete instances, how discernment can be applied to a person's prayer life. First, three cases will be presented. Then some conflicting spirits will be detailed and evaluated in the abstract. Lastly, the evaluation will be applied to the three cases. It may be a help in learning how to use discernment practically. The three cases:

Case 1: Kevin feels his prayer life is poor. He does not pray regularly. There are, though, times when he finds he can pray easily, periods of peace in his life when for a few hours, or even a week, everything fits together. But there are big stretches when he does not advert to the Lord at all. He finds himself on a merry-go-round. Days fly by, accompanied by a vague sense of unease about his spiritual life.

This has been his experience for so long that he honestly does not hope for much of a change. All the spiritual input he has received doesn't seem to affect these dead stretches. When he does think of prayer it gives him an unpleasant feeling, so he thinks of it very little.

Case 2: Sam is very aware of being on a new wavelength with God. He has followed the advice of a retreat-director, and now prays regularly for thirty minutes each day. He is delighted with the consolation he finds in prayer, and doubts that, he could get through the day without it. This new intimacy with God pleases him. He can sense his growing spiritual health. He wonders how he ever got by before he

learned how to pray. He would like to share with others the peace that fills his life, but he finds this a mixed affair. Some are receptive and a strong support for him, but many are apathetic, unconcerned, inert.

He has found that he can see God "popping up" in his day now. At times he senses God working through him to touch others. When he is in some bind, the Lord moves mountains. His confidence is great. Jesus' life comes alive for him and Sam sees himself as working alongside Jesus in his apostolate, working effectively, at last.

Especially has prayer helped him to counter within himself the depressing influence of some members of the community who are caught in destructive patterns—time-wasting, excessive television-watching, drinking, and so forth. He now sees the kingdom coming into the world and into his life, and he feels a strong call to bring others to see it and to experience his own joy.

Case 3: Chuck would have a hard time saying how he is doing. His prayer is not regulated. It resembles, in his eyes, a "foxhole" spirituality. When he is up and all is humming, he tends to pray very little—often less than ten minutes. But when he is in pain from some personal relationship or job situation, he tends to pray much more.

He feels he is not very responsive to the Lord, nor sensitive to the needs of other people. He is constantly noticing in retrospect instances of callousness and manipulation in dealing with others. When this gets to him—as at times it does—he finds the Lord always comes with strength and consolation, assuring him that He is, in ways unseen, leading him out of his lovelessness. Chuck wonders whether he is ever going to get really serious about prayer.

There are many ways of looking at the three cases presented. There are a variety of norms that can be applied to them to indicate just where each man is, and where he should move. What I shall do is outline *one* criterion that I find useful, and then apply it to the three cases.

This criterion is based on two contrasting images of God. In the one image, man sees God as somewhat remote, as difficult to contact. To get God's ear is a costly process. To get God's favor, a price must be paid. To make sacrifices in order to become intimate with him is taken for granted. At times, such intimacy demands the sacrifice of life itself.

The second, contrasting image is one in which it is God who is having a very difficult time making contact with man because of man's remoteness. To get man's ear is a costly process for God. To get his cooperation God must pay a price. He must make sacrifices if he wants to enlarge his intimacy with man. In fact, he must sacrifice his very life.

The struggle of the spirits within us is the movement back and forth between these images; now one affects our moods and choices, now another. While it is not a great problem to identify the second image with the gospel-revelation, this intellectual clarity does not free us from the patterns of behavior that spring from convictions that are more in accord with the first image—God's remoteness.

Notice how a person would act and feel in the grip of the sense of God's inaccessibility. There results a focusing upon the self. What needs to be done,

must be done "by me." The distance between me and God is *my* problem. There is a sense that a massive effort is being called forth from me.

One of the clearest cases of this feeling I have run into was a priest who told me that he would have great difficulty with the directed retreat because of the suggestion that the prayer periods be limited to one hour. He told me that ordinarily he prayed for three hours: it was usually one hour before even the sense of God's presence came. Here was a man who found God remote, requiring a great input of time just to make contact. Almost as with a great industrialist, you take for granted you may have to use up an hour just getting him on the phone.

He also told me that he had not prayed in over two years. With such an image of prayer springing from such an image of God, it wasn't surprising. This is so far from St. Ignatius' assurance to the young scholastics: "expect great visitations of God even in brief visits."

Now this was an unusual instance, but it is a common problem in prayer. A sense that God is not so readily available, that a price must be paid—in time, or quietness, or reading, or even a sacramental confession—is part of our natural makeup. It is hard for us to believe in practice—that is, to act upon our intellectual awareness, that *God is near*.

This conviction that a price must be paid can keep a person from intimacy with God. Returning to the Lord, in certain situations, can seem to involve such a great burden. There are things that must be done first before I can expect him to let me get near. It's like having borrowed a large sum from a friend. If I can't pay up, there's an inclination to avoid the person, to take a different route home, to go on an earlier bus. Because of the debt, thinking about the friend can produce a depression. What was once a consoling thought is now unpleasant. God has become someone to whom I owe too much for comfort. "Some day, Lord, I'll steel myself . . . but not yet!"

The thought of God has become a bit depressing. He is not "good news" to me anymore. I may just need ten dollars to get me through today, and I know he has it, but there's that huge debt. To ask for more would mean promising again how I will get to the big debt, and I no longer believe myself. It's too obviously hypocritical.

The man is chained by a false image of God. That image has him in despair about a close friendship with the Lord. From day to day he expects very little from God. He's on his own. Somehow the Lord must break that false idol he is so unhappily worshipping. The Lord must touch him, heal him, and break the chains. The most troublesome aspect is man's lack of awareness that his image of God is an *idol*. Were he asked, he would affirm the nearness of God. His thoughts and his words may be correct; but his choices and his moods are governed by the false image he has.

How might the Lord break in" perhaps in the course of the *Exercises* he will see his own behavior in a new light and the suggestion will come: "What if my image of God is not true? What if he *is* near, making no prior demands on me, inviting me into his friendship from exactly where I am?"

As a person comes under the influence of the second image, the one of God-pursuing-man, his outlook changes. Here is a God who deals with us as friend to friend; a God who wants to help and who can help. God's determination is to befriend us. It is a costly effort for him—as Jesus reveals in his preaching and, even more, in his life-work**.** When such a man is in need, turning to God is instinctive just as it would be to seek out a friend whose help is needed.

In the gospel, Jesus speaks of a Shepherd who pursues us who have gone off each in his own way. Jesus came for the sick, as a good doctor. He does not relate easily to the "healthy" among us. He has a task to do, a healing.

In St. Ignatius we have an image of a God who works and labors for us. He puts himself at our service; he becomes our servant. Julian of Norwich presents an image in which God is our clothing; He wraps and enfolds us for love; he embraces us and shelters us. St. John Chrysostom has God call himself our food, clothing, home, root, foundation, everything we could wish for, even our servant.

Now let us apply these images to the three cases we have set forth. The Spirit of Darkness is in each of us, urging us toward a negative image of God. The Holy Spirit is within fostering an image of a God who is really *good news*, surprising us by the completeness of his commitment to us.

In Case 1, Kevin finds it easy to ignore God. He finds it possible to pass his days without any exchange with the Lord. He prays only when he doesn't need it. When he does need it, he doesn't pray. He is treating God as a person who is not a friend at all. God is, for him, a burden, added to his other burdens. He is in the grip of his man-made image of God. This is the effect such a conviction has on us. In Ignatian terms, he is in desolation. God is not the light of his life.

What is the Holy Spirit doing within Kevin at this point? Where could he look to find the Lord? He may well be in the suggestion: "Could it be that I don't know the Lord?" How will that suggestion enter Kevin's consciousness'? Perhaps through a book he reads, or a word spoken to him by someone who sees where he is. Perhaps in the desperation of his painful loneliness and alienation from God there will come a sense that there must be another path.

What is plain in Kevin's life is that his fitful and upside-down prayer life is revealing a conviction about God that is far from Jesus' own conviction. The Spirit will be leading Kevin into a greater awareness of who God *really* is, and this will free him from the circle of frustration in which he finds himself.

In Case 2, Sam offers a very different picture. Here the relationship with God is very positive. God is an important person in Sam's life. But there are questions that can be raised about Sam, indications that all is not so well as it appears. To get some light on this we will have to look again at our two basic images.

Notice that neither of these is just an image of God. Both also contain an image of man. When God reveals to us what he is like, at the same time he must reveal to us his picture of what we are like. And, in similar fashion, when the

Spirit of Darkness grips us with his false image of God, we are also caught in a false self-image.

Typically, man's image of himself is of one who tries his best. "I'm not perfect. But I do what I can." The gap between himself and God is caused, he feels, by God's remoteness, not by any lack of effort on his own part. To climb the mountain of the Lord is a very demanding task, not one for the common man who can only try the best he can, and humbly accept his place. In this image of a remote God is included an image of a man who is basically good, doing what he can, within the limits of his relative weakness. He is a decent sort—if not perfect by any means.

In *God's* image of man, however, we have something quite different. As he reveals to us the *good news:* we have a God who is terribly close to us, concerned with all his fatherly heart, he also reveals to us that we are in flight from him, and this is a very unwelcome piece of bad news. To save us from our deliberate rejecting of love, he must shed his blood. He reveals that we live our lives in such a criminal way that it cannot be undone by serving a five-year prison term, nor even by a life sentence. It calls for our death. We are calling for our death in our day-to-day choices. He reveals that we need a savior, that we need his dying for us.

As man approaches closer to God, this truth looms larger each day: He must die to heal me, so sickly is my misuse of freedom, so hostile am I to letting love into my life—even though he be a brother—and to entrusting my security to another's will—even though he be my God. The saint is filled with this awareness: his own lack of response to the great needs of others, and to the full trustworthiness of God.

These two aspects go hand in hand. The more I see the Lord's passionate commitment to me, the more I will see my own wounds, my own reluctance to respond, my own great need of him. The saint sees himself before the Lord as a living need. What is strange for him is the great consolation that accompanies this entry into the truth of the bad news about himself which leads to the good news about God. There is in the saint a freedom from the need to see himself as a loving, trusting person, a freedom that comes through God's working in him.

That freedom to see himself in all his negativity is what St. Ignatius called mortification, the death of man's self. The path to it that Ignatius points out for us is the *examen of conscience* as a way of life. This involves a persistent surfacing of those concrete choices where I prefer unlove to love, and refusing to trust the Lord over faith. In the centuries that preceded Ignatius it was called *compunction*, a sharp awareness of responding inadequately and personally to a Lord passionately involved in securing my love, and to my brothers and sisters who need me so badly.

Going back to Sam, our second case, we have a mix of spirits. Sam has undergone a conversion, and an influx of consolation. This involves risks. It is very easy to fall in love with what he sees happening within himself. This new

Sam, so grace-filled and bursting with consolation is becoming the object of his self-attention. Pharisaism is a constant danger for the "converted." To avoid it, a second conversion must take place, in which his attention shifts from his own spiritual strength to the needs of his neighbor and the awesome love that God has for him. This second conversion can only arise from a growing awareness of his negative choices. The idol of himself as a loving person will be gently destroyed. He won't need it anymore.

When Sam looks at himself, he is not perturbed, nor filled with the salutary sadness of which the saints speak. His self-image is consoling to him. This is not a gospel consolation. The Lord will shift Sam's focus from the gifts he already has to the gifts he does not yet have, and to his reluctance to receive them. He is still a lost sheep, and God must still bloodily pursue him. He has not passed beyond the need of being saved, but Jesus' dying for him is not playing that same large role that it does in the gospel and in the lives of the saints.

It is others whom he sees as needing grace. They are apathetic, unconcerned, inert. They are caught up in defective behavior patterns. Sam is moving towards the righteousness that inevitably accompanies self-esteem. The Lord is drawing him elsewhere, into the realization that *he* is the apathetic one, the unconcerned, the inert, and that he is caught up in defective behavior patterns. Sam's eye has shifted away from the Lord's painful wrestling within him. It is not the Lord but himself he sees wrestling with the sin around him. That he himself is still the object of the Good Shepherd's pursuit is not central in his consciousness. Part of the gospel is left outside himself to be applied only to others. The image of a God seeking his attention at great cost is not what governs his behavior. Embarrassment at his own persistent, day to day, unresponsiveness to the Lord's invitations, and to the needs of others, is not playing its vital part in his life.

The Lord *will* be working within him. Judging by Jesus' experience, it is a far more difficult task to reveal to man his needs, his sin, his unloving and unbelieving choices, his need to be died for. As it comes into man's consciousness it produces a growing inability to judge others, a growing concern for others' needs, a loss of concern about "How am I doing?"

St. Ignatius cautioned us about relying on quantities of prayer. He promoted instead the ideal of a man alive to his own weakness. For such a man even brief prayers would suffice. A regular prayer-life can produce a sense of well-being that is far from the gospel. The Spirit consoles us even as he reveals our inertia, our indifference to others' need for compassion and bread. It is not the Spirit's role, no more than it was the role of Jesus, to tell us how well we are doing, but rather how lucky we are to have him as friend who alone would persist in befriending us at such great cost to himself.

That leaves us *Chuck*. He has no sense of spiritual strength. His prayer is a spontaneous springing from the sense of need. He is practicing the Ignatian principle of praying longer in desolation, of not letting the Lord go "until he bless." He is taking his spiritual growth on faith and not demanding signs.

Prayer has no quantitative aspect in his life.

The power to surface his unresponsiveness to others and to the Lord is a working of God within him. It frees the Lord to deal with him familiarly.

The Lord will be leading him deeper along the path he is now going. More and more Chuck will be led to see his own callousness, his hardheartedness, until all his consolation will spring from the Lord's promise to give him a new heart—a heart of flesh. In relating to others, Chuck is ready to notice his manipulating tendencies at work. This leads to greater sensitivity to others. His freedom to see himself as he truly is will lead to a humble service of his neighbor, and a more consoling vision of the Lord as he is—boldly and totally committed to us.

Summary

There are deep convictions that affect our behavior. How we actually choose reveals how we imagine God's relating himself to us. Two images are struggling for control of our heart, one man-made, the other coming from the *good news* revealed in Jesus' life and preaching. We are blinded by our man-made image, and depressed by it without being aware that we are in its grip. In some, it produces anxiety and loneliness, a sense of meaninglessness, a lack of enthusiasm for the gospel word. In others it produces a need for denying their own sin, a fear of the truth which, while it enables them to see themselves as co-redeemers with Jesus, keeps them from identifying themselves as the one being redeemed. It leads them along judgmental paths.

The wound that this false image causes is what the Lord is wrestling to heal throughout our lives. In befriending us, he desires to free us from such a crippling, enslaving darkness. As he leads us into the truth of our own self, the truth of God's total commitment to us becomes clearer. A growing assurance of his victory replaces anxiety.

This healing work of the Lord demands no particular quantity of prayer. But it does require a prayer that is like that of the publican in his awareness of need. It requires that I let the Lord lead me into how little I love others, how little I trust him, how little I expect from him, how little I want him at the core of my life. It was through reflection on Jesus' death that the early Church came to realize the horror of sin, the wound being cured. The same is true in my life. I am the one who needs this bloody dying by my God. Only then does God's passion become good news for me.

Discernment of Spirits in Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila

William K. Delaney, S.J.

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The spiritual life is accompanied by a constant need to distinguish the various influences under which one operates, whether they are of divine, human or evil origin. St. Ignatius Loyola summarizes his own experience of noticing and recognizing the various influences on the spiritual life in the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Although St. Teresa of Avila has no such summary anywhere in her works, she does offer advice on recognizing the action of God, the action of the devil, and one's own human weakness throughout her writings. In this paper I compare and contrast her advice on the discernment of spirits, especially as contained in the *Interior Castle*, with Ignatius' rules for the discernment of spirits.

An Overview

The overall purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises is* stated at the beginning of the work:

> Spiritual exercises have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.[1]

This is clarified in the First Principle and Foundation:

> Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

> The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.
>
> Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.
>
> Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
>
> Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.[2]

Jules Toner expresses it this way: "The overall goal is the removal of obstacles in us to the one certain expression of love for God, our seeking sincerely to find and do his will. . . ."[3]

Ignatius is primarily concerned with activities common to the active night of the senses. His focus is on helping the human subject free himself as much as possible from all inordinate attachments which hinder his walking in the way of the Lord.

St. Teresa has a different purpose in her writing: "Few tasks which I have been commanded to undertake by obedience have been so difficult as this present one of writing about matters relating to prayer. . . . "[4] As Peers notes:

> The figure [of the castle] is used to describe the whole course of the mystical life—the soul's progress from the First Mansion to the Seventh and its transformation from an imperfect and sinful creature into the Bride of the Spiritual Marriage.[5]
>
> She intended it for the instruction of her own daughters and of all other souls who, either in her own day or later, might have the ambition to penetrate either the outer or the inner mansions.[6]

Hence, the purpose of Teresa's work is to give a description of progress in the life of prayer from the earliest stages to its highest reaches in the hope that it would be of service to others. It is a guide for her nuns throughout their entire lives. The *Interior Castle is* no outline for a retreat, as are Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, but a descriptive work focusing on both passive and active experiences in prayer and purification.

Teresa's focus, then, is passive, while Ignatius' is more active. In all, Teresa touches a broader spectrum of the spiritual life, especially "the work done by the Lord in the soul—I mean the supernatural work."[7] Her special contribution lies in the higher mystical experiences, especially in the Sixth Mansion, which is the longest section of the book.

The Discernment of Spirits

Ignatius describes his rules as

> rules for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul, and for recognizing those that are good, to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them.[8]

Hence these rules focus on individual movements within the soul, to help one notice them, recognize them for what they are, and respond rightly to them. It is also of interest that Ignatius did not expect his rules to lead automatically to the correct discernment. The "to some extent" makes their tentative and incomplete character clear.

Teresa's purpose in giving her advice is not so precisely defined. All her advice shows the basic intent of facilitating growth in prayer, and in the spiritual life. Some of her advice is directly intended to facilitate growth in receptivity in prayer, either by alleviating unnecessary concerns about deception or by clarifying experiences in prayer. Other advice is given to identify general growth in holiness (which Teresa expects to accompany genuine growth in prayer). Finally, Teresa gives advice which directly facilitates growth in self-knowledge. Here, again, Teresa's interests and perspectives are much broader than Ignatius'.

Concerns

"Discernment of spirits" can concern many things, but not everything. Ignatius' rules are not concerned with

> . . . how to discern between true and false prophets. . . , [how the] true disciple can be discerned. . . , discerning between the commands of God and mere human traditions. . . , discerning authentic from inauthentic beliefs and doctrines. . . , for discerning] whether or not someone is diabolically oppressed or possessed. . . . Neither is he giving any way of discerning whether a person's heart is good or evil, or whether a person is a true disciple of Christ. Such discernment is presupposed by what he says, and Ignatius is telling us how to interpret the *experiences* of those whose hearts are set on God and those who are going from bad to worse (Rules I:1 and 2).
>
> Ignatius' rules are concerned with inner, private events, the movements in the individual discerner's own mind and heart prior to even his own overt acts which flow from these inner movements, whether spontaneously or subject to the agent's free choice.[9]

Teresa's concerns are far broader. She is very much concerned with whether a person's heart is good or evil. That is perhaps her greatest concern. Hence she is very interested in distinguishing the true prophet from the false. Although she is also concerned with interpreting individual spiritual experiences, this is less central for her. It is one important aspect among others. Hence we expect to see advice in the *Interior Castle* reflecting broad-

er concerns, in addition to advice similar to what Ignatius gives in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Particular Rules

Ignatius proposes two basic rules for the discernment of spirits, based on whether the individual is wedded to sin, or is earnestly seeking to follow God:

> 1. In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins.
>
> With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.
>
> 2. In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God our Lord to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule.
>
> Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing.
>
> It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This he does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.[10]

When compared to Teresa's *Interior Castle*, these two types would be persons who remain in the courtyard before the mansion (going from mortal sin to mortal sin) and those in the Third (and higher) Mansions (advancing from good to better).[11]

In Teresa we see a simplification in Ignatius' work. Not all souls fall into one of these two categories. Those in the first or second mansion are sometimes falling into sin, perhaps serious sin, and sometimes turning toward the Lord." For them, the situation will be more confusing, since they experience both states of soul, changing back and forth from one to the other. Hence, both types of temptations should be characteristic for them. Even more advanced souls may occasionally have to struggle with temptations toward pleasures, especially toward "spiritual pleasures."

Teresa mentions a temptation similar to the second mentioned above in the First Mansion.

> . . . so long as we are buried in the wretchedness of our earthly nature these streams of ours will never disengage themselves from the slough of cowardice, pusillanimity and fear. . . . How many souls the devil must have ruined in this way! They think that all these misgivings, and many more that I could describe, arise from humility, whereas they really come from lack of self-knowledge.[13]

This tactic of cowardice and fear begins as soon as one turns so as to consider coming closer to the Lord. The temptation is not to risk the struggle for greatness in the Lord. Teresa even mentions a subtlety. This lack of courage can be disguised as something good. We will mention false virtues again at a later point.

In the Second Mansion Teresa mentions both types of temptations.

> . . . the devils . . . pretend that earthly pleasures are almost eternal: they remind the soul of the esteem in which it is held in the world, of its friends and relatives, of the way in which its health will be endangered by penances . . . and of impediments of a thousand other kinds. . . . On the other hand, reason tells the soul how mistaken it is in thinking that all these earthly things are of the slightest value by comparison with what it is seeking . . .[14]

Teresa shows a clear awareness of a middle state, where a soul is neither committed to sin, nor committed to God, but trying to find its way some where between the two states, and wavering back and forth between them. Here the temptations can go in all directions, depending on the inclination of the soul at any given time.

The concreteness of Teresa's examples of temptations, placed in their context, fills out the teaching of St. Ignatius and illustrates the possibility of a mixed case. There is, however, substantial agreement in the types of temptations to expect. Ignatius presents them in a schematic, logical order. Teresa presents them as they come to mind in describing the struggles of a soul beginning to turn toward God.

The Causes of Aridity/Desolation

In the ups and downs of the spiritual life, one important experience is that of desolation. Ignatius sees three reasons for us to experience desolation.

> The first is because we have been tepid and slothful or negligent in our exercises of piety, and so through our own fault spiritual consolation has been taken away from us.
>
> The second reason is because God wishes to try us, to see how much we are worth, and how much we will advance in his service and praise when left without the generous reward of consolations and signal favors.
>
> The third reason is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire . . . consolation. . . .[15]

Teresa mentions these three other reasons as well. The first is in the Third Mansion, where she says of some who suffer from aridities, ". . . they brood over their woes and make up their minds that they are suffering for God's sake, and thus never really understand that it is all due to their own imperfection."[16] Here, they fail to profit from grace of God offered to them. For it is his will that "they gain a clear perception of their shortcomings."[17]

This combines the first and, to some extent, the other two.

In his first reason, Ignatius mentions explicitly only negligence in spiritual exercises, while Teresa takes a broader view, noting any imperfection. Ignatius' context of the *Spiritual Exercises*, a retreat situation, is probably the best reason for his focus on this particular way of being at fault.

The second source of desolation appears in the Fifth Mansion.

> . . . the Lord permits this . . . so that he may observe the behavior of the soul which he wishes to set up as a light to others; for, if it is going to be a failure, it is better that it should be it at the outset than when it can do many souls harm.[18]

This is clearly identical with the second point of Ignatius.

Finally, in the Seventh Mansion, Teresa mentions occasional short aridities: ". . . for one reason, so that it may always be humble; for another, so that it may the better realize what it owes to His Majesty and what a great favor it is receiving, and may praise him."[19] This is the third reason of Ignatius.

In addition, Teresa adds the aspect of recognizing the positive good the soul is receiving from God, and from that recognition, giving him praise and thanks. These focus more on the general growth of the individual. Teresa stresses strengthening our humility throughout the spiritual journey: ". . . without humility all will be lost."[20]

Dealing with Temptations

In discussing the devil's manner of operation Ignatius says: "The enemy . . . is a weakling before a show of strength, and a tyrant if he has his will. . . ."[21] Marcel Lépée sees the same teaching in Teresa: ". . . the devil . . . is as cowardly when we know how to resist him as he is impudent when we yield."[22] His reference is to the *Way of Perfection*, but Teresa has a similar statement in the *Interior Castle:*

> Let him have a fixed determination not to allow himself to be beaten, for, if the devil sees that he has firmly resolved to lose his life and his peace and everything that he can offer him rather than to return to the first room, he will very soon cease troubling him.[23]

Both clearly see the devil as a bully and a coward. If one is timid and gives in, or resists halfheartedly, the devil sees his chance and exerts a great effort to vanquish the soul.

On the other hand, if the soul resists firmly and resolutely, and does exactly the opposite of what he suggests," then the devil will see the futility of this line of attack, and in the end, give it up.[24] In this battle against the devil there is no turning back. The willingness to invest all is necessary for success.

Ignatius also offers a second piece of advice on dealing with the devil.

> Our enemy may also be compared in his manner of acting to a false lover. He seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered . . . he earnestly desires that [his wiles and seductions] be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking once his evident deceits have been revealed.[25]

"St. Teresa insists on the necessity of spiritual direction. . . ."[26] In discussions with one's confessor, she is unwilling to limit the matter for discussion to one's sins. "You should speak to your confessor very plainly and candidly . . . in describing your experiences in prayer."[27] Further, one should not act on locutions "without taking the advice of a learned confessor."[28] Giallanza notes:

> The reason for direction is a relatively simple one: it affords some objectivity in reflecting on one's own prayer life. . . . The alternative to this is self-reliance. . . . Direction elicits humility in the directee; and this is nothing less than the realization that all growth is from the Lord.[29]

Humility instead of self-reliance is indeed an important point for Teresa, but she has other concerns as well. A second reason for consulting a spiritual director is that one may grow in self-knowledge. "It is a great advantage for us to be able to consult someone who knows us, so that we may learn to know ourselves."[30]

Finally, there is the danger of deception.[31] Without consultation we may be misled and wander from the way. This last reason is essentially the same as the one Ignatius gives us. The matter is revealed to some spiritual person in order that the deceptions of the devil may come clearly into the light. Self-knowledge and not relying on one's self are part of Teresa's emphasis on general spiritual growth. Because Ignatius' rules deal primarily with sorting a genuine inspiration from a deception, only the aspect of deception shows up in them.

Ignatius does offer one rule which implicitly indicates the need for self-knowledge:

> . . . the enemy of our human nature investigates from every side all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral. Where he finds the defenses of eternal salvation weakest and most deficient, there he attacks and tries to take us by storm.[32]

Ignatius clearly believes that the evil spirit is well-informed about our various strengths and weaknesses and, in his temptations, attempts to exploit these weaknesses. Ignatius focuses on the enemy's strategy, but if we know his strategy, we can prepare ourselves for the expected assaults. This involves arming ourselves with self-knowledge, that we, too, may know our strengths

and weaknesses. In that way we are less likely to be surprised at our weak points.

Teresa comes at this from a different angle: "[The devil] will run a thousand times round hell if he can make us believe we have a single virtue we have not."[33] However high a state the soul may have attained, self-knowledge is incumbent upon it.[34] Teresa focuses on the danger of overestimating one's virtues with good reason. It can blind us to dangers in which our unknown weaknesses may place us, and strengthen both vainglory and pride. Giallanza gives three characteristics of self-knowledge by Teresa:

> [1] self-knowledge is a constitutive element of the spiritual life . . . [2] . . . from this is born the realization that one is dependent on God for all things . . . [3] . . . as a discipline, self-knowledge is not an activity in which one simply engages. It is a process.[35]

Though Ignatius and Teresa come at the subject from different perspectives, both agree on one essential point. Lack of self-knowledge leaves one open for the assault of the enemy. Teresa especially emphasizes the need for self-knowledge throughout her works.

Consolation Without Cause

> Ignatius finds it necessary to write additional rules for dealing with times of consolation:
>
> God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause . . . that is, without any preceding perception or knowledge of any subject by which a soul might be led to such a consolation through its own acts of intellect and will.[36]

This one type of consolation is free from deception. Ignatius indicates the reason: it is one in which human acts of imagination and reasoning play no role. Implicitly, Ignatius is saying that the devil cannot touch the soul without going through the faculties. The devil must make use of human imagination or understanding to cause consolation. Ignatius gives his reason: "It belongs solely to the Creator to enter into the soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty."[37] Only God can touch the soul from within.

Teresa places much confidence in the intellectual visions she has received, basing her confidence on the results.

> . . . it brings such great benefits and produces such effects upon the interior life as could not occur if it were the result of melancholy. The devil, again, could not do so much good; . . . such peace and such constant desires to please God and such scorn for everything that does not lead it to him.[38]

"No one thus favored has any better opinion of himself."[39] Here the results are a deep peace, a single-hearted desire to please God, and a deep

humility.[40] The deep humility and care for pleasing God are characteristic of Teresa's discernment. In addition to the above, Teresa includes the reason Ignatius has given as a ground for accepting an intellectual vision.

> So far down in the depths of the soul does this contact take place, so clearly . . . and so secretly are [the words] uttered [that it becomes] certain that no part is being played by the devil.[41]

In addition to the effects of the vision/locution, Teresa mentions some qualities of the experience and the fact that it occurs so deep in the soul. In discussing these points Teresa rejects the possibility that the imagination is active, or that the words are thought up.[42] These are precisely the points Ignatius gave. The experience seems to occur at a depth in the soul where only God has free access. Teresa expresses a similar openness concerning "jubilation:" "Such interior joy in the depths of the soul's being, such peace, and such happiness that it calls upon all to praise God cannot possibly have come from the devil."[43]

Teresa adds one other occasion where we may have confidence that an experience is from God. This is the case of the wound in the Sixth Mansion. ". . . although the devil can give delight, he can never conjoin extreme physical or mental pain with tranquillity and joy in the soul."[44] Teresa adds two more reasons. "This delectable tempest comes from another region than those over which he has authority. Thirdly, great advantages accrue to the Soul . . ."[45] Teresa again indicates that the experience is somewhere in the depths of the soul where only God has access, and in this way it is similar to an intellectual vision. She mentions the effects, in this case a desire to suffer for God, and to withdraw from worldly distractions,[46] as is typical for her. The combining of pain and tranquillity has no parallel elsewhere.

Deception in Consolation

Ignatius is well aware that not all consolations are from God.

> If a cause precedes, both the good angel and the evil spirit can give consolation to a soul, but for a quite different purpose. . . . It is a mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of an angel of light. He begins by suggesting thoughts that are suited to a devout soul, and ends by suggesting his own.[47]

Ignatius distinguishes this case from the case of consolation without cause, where God alone can act. Here the situation is more ambiguous. There are human acts of perception and knowledge involved, and either the good angel or the evil one gives consolation. In particular, the evil one attempts to mislead the soul by disguising itself as a good angel, and only gradually directs the soul away from God. Ignatius gives the following as a sign for identifying the evil spirit.

> The course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquillity, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit. . . .[48]

Here Ignatius focuses on the effects in our thought—what happens to our intentions and to our tranquillity.

Teresa, too, is well aware of the dangers of deception in the spiritual life. ". . . we should not cease to be watchful against the devil's wiles test he deceive us in the guise of an angel of light."[49] She describes this more fully later:

> But the devil comes with his artful wiles, and, under the color of good, sets about undermining it in trivial ways. . . . Little by little he darkens its understanding and weakens its will, and causes its self-love to increase until in one way or another he begins to withdraw it from the love of God and to persuade it to indulge its own wishes.[50]

Teresa gives a few illustrations of this kind of deception. "He inspires a sister to do penance . . ." but, against the order of the prioress, she ruins her health and is unable to do what her Rule demands. . . . Another sister is inspired with zeal for the greatest possible perfection, but is so zealous over the faults of others that she does not notice her own.[51] This illustrates the use of something which is good in itself to lead us into a false path. Teresa also notices other apparently good things which can mislead us. She considers a continual absorption in prayer or a continual experience of consolation in prayer to be very unsafe.[52] "Teresa cast the clinical eye on nuns who fall into swoons and call them raptures. . . . Ecstasy or raptures, which involves the union of all the faculties, is wont to last a very short time."[53] Concerning experiences of spiritual sweetness, Teresa notes that "they are sometimes bound up with our passions."[54]

Teresa notes one situation which particularly exposes one to deceptive experiences. "If we are really very fond of vanities, the devil will send us into transports over them."[55] She also warns those who want to experience imaginary visions that they should not seek them: ". . . such a person is quite certain to be deceived, or to be in great peril, because the devil only has to see a door left slightly ajar to enter and play a thousand tricks on us."[56] One must always be cautious, but special dangers occur when we are seeking favors from God. In that case we are especially vulnerable to see what we want to see, and the devil, who knows our weaknesses, will take advantage of them.

An additional deception in this area is that of false virtues: "The wiles of the devil are terrible; he will run a thousand times round hell if by so doing he can make us believe that we have a single virtue which we have not."[57] Of the many possible examples, false humility will be sufficiently

instructive:

> Some souls, when they are at prayer, think that, for God's sake, they would be glad if they could be humbled and put to open shame—and then try to conceal quite a slight failure. Oh, and if they should be accused of anything they have not done—! God save us from having to listen to them then![58]

Teresa gives us the reality test. If the intentions we experience in prayer are unrelated to our actions, then our intention was not of the will, but of the imagination. The deception of the devil is to be found there. Although Ignatius does not become this specific, he notes that the devil can be recognized "by the trail of evil marking his course, and the wicked end to which he leads."[59]

In talking of locutions, Teresa indicates that a true locution from God (1) has the power and authority to effect what it says; (2) causes tranquillity and readiness to sing God's praises; and (3) remains in the memory for a long time.[60] Peace and bearing its own fruit are her positive correlates of Ignatius' rule.

In all this, the fruit is judged. What effect does it have? Ignatius restricts himself to the immediate fruit of a given consolation and whatever thoughts accompany it. Teresa also looks at the long range effects and growth, giving an additional perspective, which is brought to life by her concrete examples.

The Experience of Deception Itself

One more of Ignatius' rules will close our discussion.

> In souls that are progressing to greater perfection, the action of the good angel is delicate, gentle, delightful. It may be compared to a drop of water penetrating a sponge.
>
> The action of the evil spirit upon such souls is violent, noisy, and disturbing. It may be compared to a drop of water falling upon a stone.
>
> In souls that are going from bad to worse, the action of the spirits mentioned above is just the reverse.[61]

To this we will bring just one statement of Teresa.

> This disquiet . . . is of such a nature that one cannot discover whence it comes. The soul seems to resist it and is perturbed and afflicted without knowing why, for what the devil says is not evil, but good. I wonder if one kind of spirit can be conscious of another.[62]

This is an example of the negative experience Ignatius mentions when the devil comes to a soul progressing in virtue.

Conclusion

The similarities between Ignatius and Teresa are so strong, that one can

only conclude that they are dealing with basically the same experience, and have come to very similar conclusions concerning it.

However, their purposes are different. Ignatius has gathered together a series of rules summarizing his experience of discerning spirits.

> They are concerned with inner, private events, the movements of the individual discerner's own mind and heart prior to even his own overt acts which flow from these inner movements, whether spontaneously or subject to the agent's free choice.[63]

As these are intended primarily as a guide for the one directing the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius perceives that only a brief, systematic summary is necessary.

Teresa intends her advice for the nuns of her order, and hence does not presume any uniform background. She gives her advice as it comes to mind in relation to a concrete experience of prayer. Hence her advice is sporadic, but enriched by many examples. She is interested not just in interior movements in the individual, but far more in external actions and other evidence of growth, or lack of growth, in the spiritual life. Hence her advice is more directed to general growth in the spiritual life.

NOTES

[1] *Sp Ex* [21]. Translations of the *Spiritual Exercises* are from *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Trans., Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951).

[2] *Sp Ex* [23].

[3] Jules J. Toner, *A Commentary on Saint Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: A Guide to the Principles and Practice* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1982), p. 39.

[4] St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, Trans., Ed., and Intro., E. Allison Peers (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1961), p. 23.

[5] *Interior Castle*, p. 10.

[6] *Interior Castle*, pp. 14f.

[7] *Interior Castle*, p. 36.

[8] *Sp Ex* [313]. See Toner, p. 213.

[9] Toner, pp. 10f.

[10] *Sp Ex* [314-315].

[11] *Interior Castle*, p. 59.

[12] *Interior Castle*, pp. 32f, p. 46.

[13] *Interior Castle*, pp. 38f.

[14] *Interior Castle*, p. 48.

[15] *Sp Ex* [322].

[16] *Interior Castle*, p. 63.
[17] *Interior Castle*, p. 63.
[18] Int*erior Castle*, p. 122.
[19] *Interior Castle*, p. 226.
[20] Interior Castle, p. 37.
[21] *Sp Ex* [325].
[22] Marcel Lépée, "St. Teresa of Jesus and the Devil" in *Satan*, ed., Father Richard de Jésus Marie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948), pp. 97-102; p. 98.
[23] *Interior Castle*, p. 50.
[24] *Sp Ex* [325].
[25] *Sp Ex* [326].
[26] Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., "Spiritual Direction According to St. Teresa of Avila," *Contemplative Review*, 12:L 1-9, Su '79, p. 2.
[27] *Interior Castle*, p. 189.
[28] *Interior Castle*, p. 144.
[29] Giallanza, p. 2.
[30] *Interior Castle*, p. 68.
[31] *Interior Castle*, p. 189.
[32] *Sp Ex* [327]. See *Sp Ex* [334].
[33] *Interior Castle*, p. 115.
[34] *Interior Castle*, p. 37.
[35] Giallanza, p. 4.
[36] *Sp Ex* [330].
[37] *Sp Ex* [330].
[38] *Interior Castle*, p. 180.
[39] *Interior Castle*, p. 182.
[40] See Francis X.J. Coleman, "St. Teresa on Demonic Deception and Mystical Experience," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS 38:346-361. (May 1979), p. 357.
[41] *Interior Castle*, p. 145.
[42] *Interior Castle*, p. 145. See Coleman, p. 353.
[43] *Interior Castle*, p. 168.
[44] Coleman, p. 354. See *Interior Castle*, p. 137.
[45] *Interior Castle*, p. 137.
[46] *Interior Castle*, p. 137.
[47] *Sp Ex* [331-332].
[48] *Sp Ex* [333].
[49] *Interior Castle*, p. 42.
[50] *Interior Castle*, p. 121.
[51] *Interior Castle*, p. 42.
[52] *Interior Castle*, p. 73, pp. 177f.
[53] Coleman, p. 356.
[54] *Interior Castle*, p. 80. See Pierliugi Pertuse, O.C.D., "Spiritual Direction in the Major Works of St. Teresa," in *Spiritual Direction*, ed. John Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: Institute *of* Carmelite Sources, 1980), pp. 35-60; p. 37.

[55] *Interior Castle*, p. 99.
[56] *Interior Castle*, p. 191.
[57] *Interior Castle*, p. 115.
[58] *Interior Castle*, p. 151.
[59] *Sp Ex* [334].
[60] *Interior Castle*, pp. 141f.
[61] *Sp Ex* [335].
[62] St. Teresa of Avila. *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Trans., Ed., and Intro., E. Allison Peers (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1960), p. 237. See Lépée, p. 99.
[63] Toner, p. 11.

Discernment in the Spiritual Direction of St. Francis de Sales

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Most treatises on Christian discernment identify Jesus' teaching: "By their fruits you shall know them" (Mt 7:16), as the general principle of discernment in the gospel. In other words, the ultimate test of an authentic movement of the Holy Spirit within a person or a community is its enduring fruitfulness. In this article I am suggesting that the same criterion be used in assessing approaches to spiritual direction. Specifically, this implies that the test of the authenticity of any approach to discernment or spiritual direction is its effectiveness in guiding a person to union with the Father and loving service of humankind. This in turn would lead us to a close examination of those spiritual guides whose direction has proven consistently fruitful for countless persons.

Few spiritual guides throughout Christian tradition will fall more naturally into this category of successful direction than St. Francis de Sales. At the turn of sixteenth-century France, where the unity of Christendom had only recently been shattered, where violence undertaken in the name of religion had grown commonplace, where public piety had become ecclesiastical and clerical, and where the general tenor of the populace was one of anxiety, Francis for some thirty years guided hundreds who sought his discernment.

Francis' spiritual direction is worthy of study for two additional reasons. First, his teaching on the spiritual life was not intended merely for an elitist

audience. He maintained rather: "My purpose is to instruct those who live in town, without families, or at court, and by their state of life are obliged to live an ordinary life as to outward appearances."[1] Secondly, Francis' writings, especially his letters and conferences, provide us with not simply a theory of discernment but rather with first-hand instances of its practice. For Francis, the truly devout life is expressed not in abstract piety but in deed, in action. Quite consistently, then, in his writings Francis is less concerned with the delineation of a theory than he is with the direction of souls.

In this article I intend to draw together the key elements of this approach to Christian discernment that, for Francis, was more lived than elucidated, more exercised than expressed merely in words. Our treatment will be focused upon three concerns: first, the major presupposition of Francis' approach to discernment; second, its foundational principles; third, the criteria for its exercise.

Divine Providence—a Presupposition

Francis de Sales' approach to discernment is intelligible only within the context of his notion of Divine Providence, which is the primary presupposition of his spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is possible only because God does in fact reveal his will to the particular believer. This revelation for Francis is expressed in the very relationship of God to the world and to humankind. In his "natural providence" God, by means of his creation of the world, has provided men with all the natural means necessary for them to render praise to the divine goodness. What is more, in his "supernatural providence" all of God's works and activities are ordained to the salvation of men and angels.[2] God's providential love is thus manifested not only in the created world but also within the person himself by means of the natural inclination of his will toward the love of God. It is this confidence in the ever-present love of God that liberates the soul from anxiety. It is noteworthy that when speaking of Divine Providence, Francis frequently personifies God and depicts him as a loving parent, as in the following letter to one of his directees.

> He has watched you till now; all you have to do is to keep a tight hold on the hand of Providence and God will help you in all that happens and where you cannot walk he will carry you in his arms. . . . What can a child fear in the arms of such a Father?[3]

God's love is actually poured forth upon the world so the world embodies and expresses his providence. Francis actually considers it a "graced" world in which "the sovereign goodness poured an abundance of graces and benedictions over the whole race of mankind and upon the angels, with which all were watered as with a rain that falleth on the just and the unjust."[4] The incarnation of God's love in the world is epitomized in Jesus, who embodies not only God's love for the world but also the natural inclination of the human will toward God.

Francis' view of Divine Providence, then, is very much that of the Christian humanist. The human is created in the image of God. Since God is love, this likeness to God is especially expressed in man's natural inclination toward love. The human will is therefore central in Francis' anthropology. He maintains that "the will governs all the other faculties of man's soul, yet it is governed by its love which makes it such as love is."[5] This is to say that the will is naturally oriented to the love of God and this love of God in turn orders all other loves in a person's life. Put more simply, this means that the task of the spiritual director is to discern the movement of authentic love in the life of the directee, for this love alone brings the soul to God. What follows will suggest how Francis himself more practically discerned this movement of authentic love. Suffice it to say at this point that according to Francis, God's providence is revealed in whatever moves the believer to the genuine love that finds its concrete expression in a life of charity.

Principles of Discernment

Francis's approach to the discernment of interior movements within the soul is founded on specific principles which are reflected consistently in his spiritual direction. The following three principles especially recur in his writings.

Signified Will of God

A first principle of discernment for Francis is that it always begins with "the signified will of God." This "signified will of God" comprises his commandments, counsels and inspirations, which are then the principal sources for discovering God's will.[6] They are the three essential ways in which God continues to signify to us his will that all should be saved. In one of his conferences to the Visitation Sisters, Francis describes these parts of the signified will of God and then states: "You must always then submit to what is asked of you in order to do the will of God, provided it be not contrary to that will, as signified to you in the manner above mentioned."[7] While God's commandments may be evident from the teaching of the Church, God's counsels and inspirations will require greater discernment because they are not given equally to all persons. The criteria for this discernment will be developed below. However, at this point, it would be well to note that Francis follows the tradition of previous discernment theology in acknowledging that not all inspirations come from God. In the *Treatise* he distinguishes between "the deceiving spirit" which "makes us stay in beginnings" and "the Divine Spirit" which "makes us regard beginnings only in order to attain an end."[8] In a similar way he writes to Madame de Chantal:

> . . . I have a supreme dread of natural prudence in the discernment of the things of grace; if the prudence of the serpent is not tempered by the simplicity of the dove of the Holy Spirit, it is altogether venomous.[9]

Inspirations and inclinations may originate not only from God or from the evil one but also from within oneself. In his direction Francis is careful to stress that human inspirations may not express the signified will of God and must therefore be discerned.

Communal Process

This leads us to a second principal characteristic of discernment for Francis, namely, that it should be a communal process. In other words, discernment should not be undertaken privately or in isolation from the advice of others. In particular, the person seeking God's will in significant decisions should enlist the aid of a spiritual director. Francis writes that this is especially true in evaluating inspirations.

> Before you consent to inspirations with regard to important or extraordinary things, always consult your adviser so that he may examine the inspiration and see whether it is true or false. When the enemy sees a soul ready to consent to inspiration, he often proposes false ones in order to deceive it. He can never accomplish this as long as that soul humbly obeys its director.[10]

Not only is communal discernment to be sought with one's spiritual director but also with one's associates or with legitimate authorities. When asked by Jean-Pierre Camus to advise him whether or not he should surrender his bishopric at Belley, Francis writes in response that "a person may be said to be inspired by serious motives if he is prepared in good faith to submit to the counsel of wise men, or at least, to the judgment of his superiors."[11] He writes similarly to the Visitation Sisters reminding them that God "does not wish us to decide for ourselves whether our inspirations are really his will or not . . . but he desires that in all matters of importance . . . we should have recourse to those whom he has set over us to guide us."[12] Francis also advises the sisters to trust in communal discernment when voting in community, knowing that "the Holy Ghost presides over communities, and amid the variety of opinions, that mode of action is chosen which is judged to be the most likely to redound to his glory."[13] For Francis, then, because God's love is incarnate within the world and because the Holy Spirit dwells within each Christian, the discernment process can most reliably arrive at the signified will of God when undertaken communally.

Freedom of Spirit

This emphasis upon communal discernment is balanced in Francis' spirituality by a certain freedom of spirit, which is the third principal characteristic of his approach to discernment. Madame de Chantal describes this dimension of his spiritual direction when she writes that "he preferred to leave souls quite free so that the Spirit could lead them while he himself followed behind, letting souls act by divine inspiration rather than on his own personal instructions."[14]

She describes, in other words, Francis' firm belief that the discernment process must leave some room for freedom of spirit, which refers to the particular manner of the movement of the Spirit in the life of each person. It was in this way that he allowed for the uniqueness of each person who sought his direction. For example, we see him at times reminding the Visitation Sisters that "it is quite certain that we are not all led along the same road."[15] Similarly, when asked by Msgr. Fremyot for a rule of life to guide him, Francis responds, but with the caution that this rule should be adapted to his own spirit and situation.

> To obey, I send you the enclosed, but the greater part of these points will be useless to you for I know by experience that we must accommodate ourselves to the necessities of time, place, occasion, and of our occupation. . . . For God has given me the grace to love holy liberty of spirit as much as I hate too great latitude and looseness.[16]

This is the same principle established by Francis in the *Treatise* when he writes that not every one is bound to practice all the evangelical counsels but only those which his particular situation permits. We can see, then, that Francis' approach to discernment is characterized by a certain objectivity in that it is rooted in the signified will of God and guarded by the counsel of wise persons, especially one's director. However, at the same time it honors and respects the unique design of the Spirit in the life of each soul. In his discernment, Francis seeks not to control the soul but to enlighten it, not to constrain it but to free it for submission to God's will.

Criteria for Discernment

With an overview now of the foundational principles of Francis' approach to discernment, we are prepared to examine in detail the criteria he relies upon for the discernment of spirits. As previously indicated, the natural orientation of the human will is toward loving union with God, which union can only be sought by conformity with and submission to the signified will of God. Francis' most detailed presentation of specific criteria for discerning the will of God is contained in Book VIII, chapters 11-13 of the *Treatise on the Love of God*, in which he describes the marks of authentic inspirations. Nevertheless, the discernment that Francis' exercises in his letters and conferences considerably expands what we find in this short section of the *Treatise*. Relying upon all of this material, we find that for Francis, there are three fundamental criteria for discernment: 1) perseverance in one's vocation or present duty; 2) the presence of certain identifiable affective states; 3) the action of specific Christian virtues. We will treat each of these three sources separately.

Perseverance in One's Vocation or Present Duty

First of all, in the *Treatise*, Francis states that the movement of the Spirit of God usually is such that it enhances perseverance in one's vocation. Therefore, "the inspiration which moves us to quit a real good which we

enjoy in order to gain a better in the future, is to be suspected."[17] This emphasis upon fidelity to the duties of one's immediate vocation is a consistent element in Francis' discernment as is evident also in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

> I can in no way approve the idea that a person obligated to a certain duty or vocation should distract himself by longing for any other kind of life but one in keeping with his duties or by engaging in exercises incompatible with his present state. . . . The enemy often supplies us with great desires for absent things that we will never encounter in order to divert our minds from present things, from which, small as they may be, we might obtain great profit.[18]

Furthermore, Francis maintains that every state of life assumes the practice of particular virtues so that "in practicing the virtues we should prefer the one most conformable to our duties rather than the one more agreeable to our tastes."[19] This is the same principle that underlies Francis' teaching in the *Treatise*, that we are not necessarily expected to observe all the evangelical counsels but only "such as are suitable to our calling."[20]

Francis' letters and conferences abound with instances of his exercise of this criterion for the discernment of God's will. In a letter to Sister de Soulfour, Francis offers some signs for the discernment of consolations and advises that "when we do not slacken our pace to enjoy the consolation, but simply use it to refresh us on our way and give us new courage to do the work assigned for us, it is a good sign, and God sometimes gives it for this purpose."[21] In another letter to Madame de Grandmaison, he relies upon this same principle of the priority of one's immediate duty in gently urging her to refrain from fasting and mortification while she is pregnant.[22] Again, when he writes to others who are married, the same principle is quite evident, as in the following letter.

> Then there are particular commandments for each according to his vocation, and unless he keeps these, if they be of grave obligation in grave matters, though he were to raise the dead, he does not cease to be in sin. . . . A married woman may work miracles; but if she does not do her duty to her husband and children, she is, as St. Paul says, "worse than an infidel."

It is no surprise, then, that when speaking to the Visitations about the criteria upon which to evaluate a person's suitability for religious life, Francis singles out the one criterion he considers the "best of all" in advising that "if a person shows a firm and persevering determination to serve God in the manner and place to which his divine Majesty calls her, she gives the best proof we can have that she has a true vocation."[23] It is evident, then, that in his personal exercise of discernment, Francis consistently stressed the importance of fidelity to the immediate duties of one's

vocation. However, this criterion in itself is not absolute but must be exercised in connection with the other criteria that follow. It might be noted here that while Francis does not absolutely rule out the possibility of a change in one's vocation, he does clearly suggest that the presumption should be against such a change. Yet, a convergence of the other signs for discernment may suggest that such a change is authentically inspired.

Affective States

A second criterion or source for discernment in Francis' spiritual direction is the presence of certain identifiable affective states within the soul. It is here that we can recognize the distinctively psychological approach to discernment that Francis very likely drew from his Jesuit education. Nevertheless, we find in his particular assessment of affective states more than a mere application of Ignatius' rules for discernment. In fact, his evaluation of emotions reflects throughout his own deep personal trust in God's providence. In our treatment here we will focus upon those three emotions or affective states that receive the most constant attention in Francis' discernment process: peace or tranquillity, joy, and the presence of consolation and desolation.

1) *Peace or Tranquillity*

It is undoubtedly his personal trust in the constancy of God's love and protection that leads Francis to recognize peace and tranquillity in the soul as an authentic sign of God's Spirit. Therefore, in the *Treatise*, he presents "peace and tranquillity of heart" as one of the marks of true inspirations, teaching that

> . . . for though, indeed, the Holy Ghost is violent, yet his violence is gentle, sweet and peaceful . . . on the contrary, the evil spirit is turbulent, rough, disturbing; and those who follow infernal suggestions, taking them to be heavenly inspirations, are, as a rule, easily known, because they are unquiet, headstrong, haughty, ready to undertake or meddle with all affairs.[24]

Anxiety, worry and fear will only distract one from perceiving and accepting God's will. Even in the midst of troubles, anxiety can only be a temptation, as Francis cautions Philothea.

> Anxiety is not a simple temptation, but a source from which and by which many temptations arise. . . . If it is out of love for God that the soul seeks escape from its troubles, it will do so patiently, meekly, humbly, and calmly and look for deliverance rather by God's providence than by its own efforts, industry, or diligence.[25]

Francis' correspondence is a perpetual appeal for this tranquillity of heart and freedom from anxiety. In a letter to Madame de la Flechere, he emphasizes the importance of tranquillity together with one's vocational duties in allaying her worries about the need for greater mortification.

> The most important thing of all is to make sure of having tranquillity, not because it is the mother of contentment, but because it is the daughter of the love of God and

> of our own will's resignation. . . . O my dear daughter, how holy and pleasing we should be to God if we really knew how to use the occasions for mortifying ourselves which our vocation provides.[26]

Therefore, we see that Francis uses both the presence of tranquillity and perseverance in one's vocational duties as effective signs for discerning the movement of the Spirit in the soul.

2) *Joy*

A second affective state which flows naturally from tranquillity and which also serves as a sign of the Spirit is the presence of joy. As Francis tells Madame de Chantal, the person who has abandoned himself to God's will and possesses true liberty of spirit "does not lose his joy, because no loss or lack can sadden one whose heart is perfectly free."[27] In another letter to her, describing the proper way to live the devout life, he says: "Live joyfully and be generous, for God whom we love and by whom we are loved wants us to live this way."[28] The person who is convinced of and motivated by this awareness of God's constant love cannot be without an inner joy even in the midst of difficulties. To a young woman, especially afflicted with melancholy, Francis writes:

> I cannot imagine how as a daughter of God you are able to admit this excessive sadness into your heart; rest awhile in the bosom of his compassion, consecrated to his love. You must relieve yourself by scorning all these sad and melancholy suggestions which the enemy sends us only to worry and annoy us.[29]

In this way, Francis identifies sadness and melancholy as often the work of "the enemy" so that it is not to be trusted. In another letter he refers to sadness and melancholy as "the enemies of devotion" and then says to his directee:

> Should one who is a daughter and servant of him who will always be our joy, allow herself to become sorrowful? Only sin should annoy and vex us, and even at the conclusion of our annoyance at sin, joy and consolation must be found.[30]

Therefore, for Francis, a spirit of joy is possible even in the face of sin and evil. In fact, it is this joy which distinguishes the Spirit of God from that of the enemy.

3) *Consolation/Desolation*

We come finally to the third affective state that for Francis is significant for the discernment process, namely, the presence of consolation or desolation. In his understanding of these opposite movements within the soul, Francis is undoubtedly influenced by and generally follows the treatment of Ignatius. Nevertheless, he is not as interested as Ignatius in undertaking a careful analysis of these movements. For example, Francis does not analyze the phenomenon of "consolation without previous cause," nor does he dis-

tinguish between consolation experience before and after moral conversion. Moreover, whereas Ignatius identifies consolation with all interior movements leading to love of God, Francis identifies it more simply with sensible satisfaction. Francis will conclude, then, that the true origin of all consolations and desolations can only be known from their fruitfulness for the soul. In the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he acknowledges that these "tender, delightful affections are sometimes very good and useful" because "they arouse the affections of our soul, strengthen our spirit, and add holy joy and cheerfulness to active joy." He then concludes

> that certain sensible consolations are good and come from God, while others are useless, dangerous, and even pernicious and come either from nature or from the enemy himself. How shall I distinguish the one from the other, or know the evil or useless from the good? With regard to the affections and passions of the soul, dearest Philothea, the general teaching is that we must know them by their fruits.[31]

In the *Treatise*, Francis also acknowledges that "when God enters into our soul and speaks to our spirit . . . the will receives therefrom a great complacency."[32] However, he does not include this sweet complacency or consolation among the later marks for discerning authentic inspirations.[33] We see, then, both in the *Introduction* and in the *Treatise* that while consolation may be a sign of God's Spirit, it is only reliable when supported by another sign of the Spirit, e.g., fruitfulness, tranquillity of heart, or perseverance in one's duties. This is quite evident in Francis' letter to Sister de Soulfour, in which he reminds her that "feelings and sweetness may proceed from the good or the evil spirit" but that the good feelings "give us new courage to do the work assigned for us."[34] Suffice it to add that spiritual dryness or desolation is even less able by itself to be a reliable criterion for discernment. Francis tells Philothea to "look for the source from which this evil has come" since many times "it is ourselves who are often the cause of our own sterile, arid state."[35] Although this dryness or desolation may originate from a personal fault or an evil spirit, it may also embody at times a special action of God. In this vein, Francis writes to Madame de Chantal:

> Let us keep on and on, making our way through these dark valleys; let us live with the cross in our arms, humble and patient. What does it matter whether God's voice comes to us amongst thorns or amongst flowers? Indeed, I do not remember that he has ever spoken where there are flowers, but his voice has often been heard in deserts and thorny bushes.[36]

Therefore, consolation and desolation for Francis, are an aid to discernment only when they are accompanied by other signs of the Spirit, especially fruitfulness and perseverance. Francis' personal trust in God's providence renders any further analysis superfluous.

Presence of Virtues

As the final source or criterion for the exercise of discernment, Francis

points to those virtues whose action within a person's life can only flow from the grace of the Spirit of God. The virtues that Francis consistently stresses in his discernment are three: humility, obedience and charity. When they are present in a person's motives, decisions and actions, they indicate an openness to the Holy Spirit which will lead toward conformity with God's will.

1) *Humility*

First of all, the witness of humility is especially effective in distinguishing good inclinations from evil. Francis writes in the *Introduction* that "humility drives away Satan and keeps the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit safe within us."[37] Humility and modesty will be found in the truly wise man.

> So also, in order to know whether a man is truly wise, learned, generous and noble, we must observe whether his abilities tend to humility, modesty, and obedience for in that case they will be truly good.[38]

In the *Treatise*, when identifying the marks of true inspirations from God, Francis writes that "to peace and sweetness of heart is inseparably joined most holy humility . . . a noble, real, productive and solid humility which makes us supple to correction, pliable and prompt to obedience."[39] In his previously cited letter to Sister de Soulfour on the topic of consolation, Francis identifies humility as another touchstone for good inclinations.

> Again, good feelings do not inspire thoughts of pride, but instead of thinking itself something on account of them, the soul argues and acknowledges its weakness and humbles itself lovingly before its Beloved. . . . Whereas when these feelings are evil, instead of making us think of our weakness, we imagine we are getting them as a reward and a prize.[40]

To another sister experiencing conflicting inspirations while deciding whether or not to remain in religious life, Francis writes very simply that "the essence of inspiration is humility, meekness, tranquillity, piety."[41]

2) *Obedience*

In Francis' exercise of discernment a second virtue consistently present in the person acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit is obedience, which is identified in the *Treatise* as a reliable mark of true inspirations. Francis writes that "when God puts inspirations into a heart, the first he gives is obedience."[42] In his conferences to the Visitation Sisters, he repeatedly stresses that obedience to one's superiors is a reliable way to discern God's will. He implies that this will be true even when a particular directive, though not contrary to God's signified will, seems not to originate from God.

> . . . perhaps God had not inspired this desire, but he has inspired you to obey it, and if you fail to comply, you are going against the determination to do in all things God's will, and consequently neglecting the care you ought to take of your perfection.[43]

Similarly, Francis tells Madame de Chantal that "the will of God is known not only by the claims of necessity and charity but also by obedience, so that if you receive a command you should believe that this is the will of God."[44] At the same time, it should be noted that Francis does not apply this criterion to obedience absolutely and in isolation from other criteria of the discernment process. In no instance is this clearer than in Francis' critical advice to Madame de Chantal to leave her initial spiritual director to whom she had pledged her obedience. Henri Bremond relying upon the *Memoires de la M. de Chaugy*, describes the strenuous process of Francis' discernment of this situation, which concludes with his advice to Chantal that she withdraw her previous pledge because "all these, your former vows, have but availed save to destroy peace of conscience."[45] In this instance, Francis considers not only Madame de Chantal's promise of obedience but also the absence within her of peace and tranquillity of heart. It is this latter criterion that predominates in his decision. In a subsequent letter he urges Madame de Chantal to recognize this as God's will.

> It was God who launched you on your first period of spiritual direction, profitable to you at that time; it is God who has led you to this decision and he will make this direction fruitful and useful even though the instrument is unworthy.[46]

Therefore, we see that a unique element of Francis' gift of discernment is his sensitive balance of the various signs of the movement of God's Spirit.

3) *Charity*

We arrive finally at that virtue which may be seen as the culmination of the discernment process for Francis, namely, the virtue of charity. It is the demand of charity that will often resolve a conflict of values faced by the Christian, for charity reveals the duty of the immediate moment. It is charity that serves as the ultimate criterion for discerning which counsels of God are to be practiced.

> Not every one then is able, that is, it is not expedient for every one, to observe always all the counsels, for as they are granted in favor of charity, so is this the rule and measure by which they are put in practice. . . . All is made for charity and charity for God. All must serve her and she none.[47]

Therefore, charity will command fathers not to give away all that they have to the poor but to retain what is necessary for the support and well-being of wife and children. If one's assistance to father or mother is necessary to enable them to live, then this is not the moment for one to retire to a monastery or convent. Charity also serves as the criterion for discerning the appropriateness of mortification. Francis cautions that "lack of moderation in fasting, use of the discipline, hair shirts, and other forms of austerity make many men's best years useless for the service of charity."[48] Similarly, he writes to Madame de Chantal that "the will of God shows itself in two ways: "necessity and charity," and he then describes how the exercise of charity will often have precedence over the exercise of piety.

> For example: try interrupting the meditation of someone who has got attached to this exercise. You will see him taken aback, upset and irritated. A person who has real liberty of spirit will leave his prayer with an unruffled face and a heart well disposed towards the importunate friend who has disturbed him. For it is all the same to him whether he is serving God by meditating or by bearing with his neighbor; both are the will of God, but helping his neighbor seems to be necessary at that special moment.[49]

Francis is quite consistent in using much the same test to discern divine ecstasies from human and diabolical ones. Those ecstasies are authentically from God which affect not just the understanding but the will and are then expressed in a renewed life of love and action.

> . . . it will suffice for my purpose to propose to you two marks of the good and holy ecstasy. The one is, that sacred ecstasy never so much takes and affects the understanding as it does the will, which it moves, warms and fills with a powerful affection towards God. . . . The second mark of true ecstasy consists in the third species of ecstasy which are mentioned above, an ecstasy all holy, all worthy of love, the crown of the two others—the ecstasy of act and life.[50]

In short, for Francis the life of charity is the life of devotion itself, for "charity is spiritual fire and when it bursts into flames, it is called devotion."[51] Therefore, the life of charity will be the true expression of the human's desire to love God, and the demands of charity will serve as a final test of conformity to his will.

Conclusion

Having considered the principles and the criteria of the discernment process for Francis de Sales, we will conclude with a brief view of this process as it is actually exercised by the Christian seeking to do God's will. The most concise description of this process is given by Francis in the *Treatise* in a section entitled, "A Short Method to Know God's Will." Here Francis writes that

> in matters of moment we are to use a great humility, and not to think that we can find God's will by force of examination and subtlety of discourse; but having implored the light of the Holy Ghost, applied our consideration to the seeking of his good-pleasure, taken the counsel of our director, and, perhaps, of two or three other spiritual persons, we must resolve and determine in the name of God, and must not afterward question our choice, but devoutly, peacefully, and firmly keep and pursue it.[52]

In this passage Francis identifies six steps in the process of seeking to discover God's will. First, the Christian must begin with an attitude of humility rooted in the awareness that it is God who reveals his will to man and not the man who deduces God's will by human effort alone. Second, the believer must seek God's will within a context of prayer, especially prayer for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Third, he must be predisposed to the implementation of God's will whatever it may be. In other words, the Christian must

have already sincerely decided to act according to God's good-pleasure whatever that good-pleasure may be revealed to be. Fourth, he should undertake his discernment communally by consulting with a spiritual guide or other trusted and spiritual persons. Fifth, he must make a decision about the particular course of action that God seems to be suggesting. Here, Francis especially warns against procrastination or excessive deliberation. One's trust in God's love and continued guidance should obviate needless anxiety. Sixth, the Christian should devoutly, peacefully and firmly live out the decision he has made without constantly worrying about the accuracy of the discernment. Francis teaches that normally such decisions should not be changed or reversed. The implication here is that if God desires that a decision be reversed he will make it eminently clear. Practically, a decision should be questioned only if the Christian over a prolonged period of time finds that it brings him neither to personal tranquillity nor to charitable service of others.

In conclusion, we must now acknowledge that the critical emphasis in Francis' approach to discernment is clearly his stress upon the centrality of the human will. For Francis, God's image is most clearly impressed upon the human soul through the natural orientation of the will toward the love of God. Quite consistently, then, those interior movements and inspirations are most reliably authentic which move not merely the intellect to knowledge but the will to love. This love is expressed concretely in the life of devotion or charity. Herein lies the practicality of Francis' approach to discernment, for it was to make accessible the true design of a devout life to all persons, both religious and lay, those in towns or at court, those with extraordinary tasks or seemingly commonplace ones, that Francis undertook his teaching and directing of souls. Therefore, the process of discernment in his direction is focused uniquely upon the responsibilities and duties of each person's state of life. The necessity of the given moment is paramount, and necessity is especially determined by the demand for charity. For Francis, man is never more like God than when he gives expression in deed and in action to the love which is God's movement within him. Therefore, in his exercise of discernment, Francis distinctively affirms that the love of God must be also love of neighbor and that the devout life is not only one of prayer and piety, but one also of charity and service.

NOTES

[1] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, translated by John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1966), p. 33. Afterwards designated *Introduction*.
[2] See *Treatise on the Love of God*, Translated by H.B. Mackey (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1949), II, iii-iv. Afterward designated *Treatise*.
[3] E. Stopp, ed., *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 261.
[4] *Treatise*, II, vii.
[5] *Ibid.*, I, vi.
[6] *Ibid.*, VIII, iii.
[7] A. Gasquet and H.B. Mackey, eds., *The Spiritual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales in His Letters*

(Westminster: The Newman Bookshop, 19451), XV.
[8] *Treatise*, VIII, xi.
[9] Sisters of the Visitation at Harrow, eds., *St. Francis de Sales in His Letters* (London: Sands and Co., 1933), MDCLXXII, p. 197.
[10] *Introduction*, II, xviii.
[11] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 211.
[12] *Spiritual Conferences*, XV.
[13] *Ibid.*, XVII.
[14] E. Stopp, ed., *St. Francis de Sales: A Testimony by St. Chantal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 72.
[15] *Spiritual Conferences*, XII.
[16] *St. Francis de Sales in His Letters*, CCXLVIII, pp. 116-117.
[17] *Treatise*, VIII, xi.
[18] *Introduction*, III, xxxvii.
[19] *Ibid.*, II, i.
[20] *Treatise*, VIII, iv.
[21] *St. Francis de Sales in His Letters*, CLXXIV, p. 118.
[22] *Ibid.*, MCCLXXXIX, p. 121.
[23] *Spiritual Conferences*, XVII.
[24] *Treatise*, VII, viii.
[25] *Introduction*, IV, vi.
[26] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 154
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[28] *Ouevres de Saint Francois de Sales* (Paris: Annecy, Imprimerie J. Abry, 1904), Tome XIII, p. 89, Translation from *Ouevres* are my own.
[29] *Ibid.*, XVIII, p. 417.
[30] *Ibid.*, *XV,* pp. 31-32.
[31] *Introduction*, IV, xiii.
[32] *Treatise*, II, xiv.
[33] *Ibid.*, VIII, xi-xiii.
[34] *St. Francis in His Letters*, CLXXIV, p. 18.
[35] *Introduction*, IV, xiv.
[36] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 99.
[37] *Introduction*, III, iv.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Treatise*, VIII, xiii.
[40] *St. Francis in His Letters*, CLXXIV, pp. 18-19.
[41] *Ibid.*, MDXCVI, p. 151.
[42] *Treatise*, VIII, viii.
[43] *Spiritual Conferences*, XV.
[44] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 74.
[45] From *Memoires de la M. de Chaugy* in H. Bremond's *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France* II (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), p. 402.
[46] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 63.
[47] *Treatise*, VIII, vi.
[48] *Introduction*, III, xxiii.
[49] *St. Francis de Sales: Selected Letters*, p. 76.
[50] *Treatise*, VIII, vi.
[51] *Introduction*, I, i.
[52] *Treatise*, VIII, xiv.

Conversion, Pastoral Counseling, and Spiritual Direction

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From the evangelical crusades that fill stadiums and airwaves, to numerous writings both scholarly and popular, evidence suggests that "conversion" is an experience both widely sought after and frequently studied. But what exactly is conversion? And can it be helped along? In this paper, I want both to describe conversion and to discuss how the Christian church's traditional helping relationships may either hinder or foster it. I will propose that the extent to which these helping relationships work with the whole person (or not) is the extent to which they will (or will not) foster conversion, and I will offer a few suggestions on how the church's helping relationships can foster the kind of integration of persons that can lead to ever-deepening conversion.

Conversion

In our popular imagination, conversion can range from something sudden and startling, like St. Paul's being thrown off his horse and then acting on the Lord's call to him, to what happens when one of two fiancés "converts to" the other's faith and church. In the gospels, people like Nicodemus, Mary Magdalen, and Peter are examples of those who have undergone or at least begun to enter into conversion.

The least common denominator to all these cases seems to be that something changes. But what is it that changes? Specifically, is it a cognitive and social change that takes place, or is the change a more deeply personal and experiential one?

If conversion is a cognitive change, it takes place on the level of answers and explanations; it is intellectual, insightful, well-reasoned, and leads to being

able to attribute a new name to oneself: Christian, Catholic, priest, sister, seminarian, novice, Jesuit, Marist, or whatever.

Walter Conn provides an apt image for understanding this kind of conversion, calling it a change in the "master story" one adopts:

> Conversion is commonly understood as a change in the *content* of a person's faith or fundamental orientation. Thus, for example, a person in becoming a Christian adopts the Christian story as an orientation to life—or drops it for another master story in converting from Christianity to something else.[1]

Paul Robb, writing in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, suggests viewing this kind of conversion as a process of socialization, in which "converts learned the certitudes of faith through catechisms and were socialized into the language, customs, rubrics, and rituals of the group on a behavioral level."[2] He goes on to suggest that persons entering the religious life (and perhaps also the priesthood?) often underwent a conversion of this kind.

Without belittling the importance and value of this kind of conversion as a first step—it is, after all, an initial "trying on for size"—I think there is some point to saying that it does not exhaust the possibilities. Conn sees some danger in limiting ourselves to this content-socialization kind of conversion; it could lead to "just emotional highs and superficial language games."[3]

Here is where Robb makes an important contribution in suggesting that we think in terms of *initial* and *second* conversion.[4] Initially, like the many who became disciples of Jesus, people respond to the invitation to "come and see"; in a second moment, as the story of Peter so powerfully illustrates, people enter into the passion and death of Jesus and rise with him to a radically new life; they have died to the unintegrated and sinful persons they were in order to become people touched and reintegrated through relationship with God. Robb writes:

> Conversion, then, is a radical change in the person and personality, a transformation. It is not the substitution of a new self-image, no matter how upright, for an old one. It reaches down into the roots of an individual's affections, images, dreams, and choices. It touches all the dimensions of the human person that St. Paul writes about: "May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May he preserve you whole and entire—spirit, mind, and body—at the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Th 5:23).[5]

This second conversion, which I would describe as a deeply personal and experiential change, or as a cognitive-affective conversion, clearly invites people to lead more integrated lives and become more integrated persons. All the dimensions of the person are involved, and not just the cognitive.

The prayers of the Church often express a yearning for wholeness: "Lord Jesus, you heal the wound of sin and division; Christ, have mercy."[6] Wholeness is sought on a personal as well as on a communal level: "Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ."[7]

Robb understands "second conversion as primarily an affective conversion involving feelings, emotions, and a change of heart," without which "a so-called transformation of self is just a behavioral change" that will not last.[8]

The work of Adrian van Kaam and his associates lends force to what Robb says. In a variety of places, they have used a model of the human person which sees three dimensions to the person: the vital, the functional, and the spiritual.[9] The vital dimension is our physical and emotional side; it is spontaneous and reactive, linked to experiences such as hunger, fear, infatuation, gratification, and more. The functional dimension is our managerial side, ourselves as we make plans, learn things, create order, relate with others, use our intellect, and so forth. The spiritual dimension is our openness to the "more than what meets the eye," to the spiritual world, the world in which we and God come into contact. To work toward wholeness and integration means to ignore none of these dimensions and instead to know them and become familiar and friendly with them.

To ignore any dimension is to diminish our freedom. Carolyn Gratton, who believes that twentieth-century North American culture tends to value only the vital and functional dimensions, asks

> Is there not a danger that exclusive development along merely vital-functional lines only helps people to don more and better masks of specialization and expertise while at the same time they become even more embedded in securities that are false and lifestyles that are defensive and routine?[10]

Robb, who is writing first of all for his fellow Jesuits but also for a wider audience of Christians, stresses the importance of affectivity, of the journey to the interior world where one "is confronted with fear and confusion, with the swirl of opposites, the flowing back and forth of warmth and coldness, of selfishness and love."[11] It is important to attend to what happens in the interior world because

> . . . experiences of failure, of increasing age and frustration, of dreams unrealized, ideals gone stale, of separation, divorce, loss of job, sickness, and the like are often the catalysts which lead us into and are a significant part of conversion experiences. These experiences put us in touch with limitation, with poverty of spirit, with the possible idols we have created in our lives. Through these realizations we can begin to desire forgiveness and fuller life. The importance and integral part of these human experiences in conversion can be lost when asceticism substitutes for the fullness of life to which we are called.[12]

For both Gratton and Robb, then, the issue is one of completeness, of honoring all that is significant in our human experience, or moving toward integration of all our dimensions and all our experiences into one self-awareness and understanding. What distinguishes this kind of integration from merely secular integration is its honoring of how we humans are related to the Lord; it recognizes that "what seekers seem to want most is to transcend themselves, to live in a larger horizon, to seek what is of real value."[13]

In being open to integration, we are open to conversion. To become integrated is to become converted. We may and do resist, but the openness remains. To act on it, however, means that we must die before the rich harvest is experienced (see Jn 12:24). Conversion means knowing oneself in one's sin-

fulness and brokenness, in one's disintegration, and one's need of healing and redemption. Conversion, that is, means a transformation of self, and this "transformation of self begins with a confrontation of myself in sinfulness. As self-confrontation deepens I come to true self-knowledge, to compassion and community with others, to knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord."[14]

Such a confrontation-leading-to-transformation can take place only if we are willing to enter our inner world, the world of our spirit, where we discover a rich activity taking place. If we enter that world, we discover not only how we fall short of the glory of God but also the first and continuing glimmerings of how God means to bring us back to wholeness. In the language of Thomas Merton, we encounter not only our false self but also our true self in God. Or, as Robb explains:

> The arena of this deeper conversion is the human heart and all of its affections with their opposites and contradictions, freedom and compulsiveness. The invitation to conversion stresses the importance of going within, paying attention to, and taking seriously what we discover in the inner world of our spirit. It places emphasis on our feelings, emotions, memories, dreams, imaginations, and the movements and changes we find there. All of these aspects of our interior put us in touch with our own light and darkness, our freedom and unfreedom, the living and stagnant parts of ourselves, our beliefs and our prejudices, with the heart of stone in our bodies that needs to be transformed. Yet this interior kingdom with its contrasts and opposites is the place to discover ourselves and life, the place where I know that God is my God and I am his son or daughter.[15]

The Helping Relationships of Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction

Within the Christian tradition, there are two helping relationships that are suited to fostering conversion and likely to be available. These are pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

Of course, these do not exhaust the repertoire of helping relationships. At one end of the spectrum, there is depth psychotherapy, which "aims at deep structural changes in personality"[16] and "focuses its attention on clients in the abnormal range of psychic health";[17] for the most part, clergy persons are less likely to be trained in this field, while the people who seek out help from the clergy will, for their part, tend to be within the "normal and maturing" range of development, experiencing some stresses or difficulties in living but generally functioning quite effectively.[18] Clergypersons need, however, to be aware of conditions which might warrant referral for psychotherapy.[19]

At the other end of the spectrum are the helping relationships of teaching, preaching, and sacramental ministration. These can have powerful impact but normally do not provide the leisure for one-to-one conversation available in pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

Counseling is very close to pastoral counseling. In fact, it becomes pastoral counseling when it incorporates the use of religious resources.

> Hiltner suggests that, in terms of basic attitudes, approach, method, and so on, pastoral counseling does not differ from other types of counseling. It only differs in terms of the

> setting, and in its use of religious resources. Pastoral counseling, on Hiltner's definition, is "the attempt by a pastor to help people help themselves through the process of gaining understanding of their inner conflicts."[20]

Before discussing some of the distinctions between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, I want to emphasize that these distinctions are made largely for the sake of discussion, to assist the helping person in being aware of the different nuances in how to respond to the one who seeks help. In actual fact and practice, pastoral counseling and spiritual direction tend to merge. Jean M. Ormechea writes that

> while one can, for the sake of discussion and definition or philosophical development, distinguish between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, it is my experience and conviction that *in practice* the two may often merge to the point of being indistinguishable . . . the pastoral counselor or the spiritual director must at all times deal with the whole person. . . . The point of emphasis will vary—sometimes more *spiritual*, other times more psychological/ physical—but never one to the exclusion of the other. . . . My ministerial approach is a *both/and* methodology.[21]

Leo J. Trese plainly states that:

> Spiritual direction is simply pastoral counseling with greater spiritual depth than is usually brought to the immediate situation. The ultimate objective of direction is not merely the solution of the present problem but the release of the client's own spiritual dynamism for maximum growth as a person and especially as a Christian.[22]

Trese thus suggests that pastoral counseling moves into spiritual direction on a continuum from problem-solving to growth-orientation, while Ormechea stresses dealing with the whole person. L. Patrick Carroll and Katherine Dyckman would share that emphasis while speaking of spiritual directors: "Our concern encompasses the whole human being, embracing every deed and attitude, every thought and feeling, every job and relationship constituting the unique person before us."[23]

Pastoral counseling and spiritual direction both benefit from the helper's taking note "of the emerging results of research into the skills and process of a therapeutically helpful relationship";[24] likewise, persons will be effective counselors or directors "largely in proportion to their ability to enter into and maintain deep and authentic human relationships."[25] Methodologically speaking, both counseling and direction share as a common process "the objectification and articulation of experience."[26]

Both pastoral counseling and spiritual direction explicitly make use of the resources that faith provides. These include the ecclesial setting in which the relationship goes on, the Scriptures, the church's doctrines, and its sacramental life. Most important of all, for both pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, is the stance the helper takes vis-à-vis the seeker's relationship with God. Clinebell makes the point well in stating that

> all healing and growth are of God. Unless the God-given resources for healing within the person and his relationships are released by the removal of whatever has blocked them, no healing can occur. The counselor [add "spiritual director"] is a catalyst in a process which he does not create, but which he has learned to release and facilitate. . . .

> His effectiveness depends on his awareness that healing and growth take place *through* him rather than as a result of his psychological cleverness. He must accept in his heart the truth of Paul's familiar words: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth"(1 Co 3:6).[27]

Pastoral counseling, though, does have some characteristics more in common with counseling pure and simple. It tends to be short term[28] and to focus on stress states arising from situational or developmental/ maturational crises.[29] It is considered "effective to the extent that it helps a person increase his ability to relate in ways that satisfy his basic personality needs."[30] Pastoral counseling, that is, focuses "more on solving problems, on effecting better personal integration and adjustment in the process of human maturation."[31]

As to spiritual direction, at least three distinctive characteristics can be pointed out. First, while pastoral counseling focuses on problem-solving or dealing with situational and maturational stresses, spiritual direction alms "at the discovery and unfolding of one's life direction in Christ as revealed by the Spirit."[32] "The director does all he can to protect and promote the integrity and freedom of the person's receptivity to and response to the Lord."[33] Focusing on life-direction and response to the Lord, the concern in spiritual direction is to develop friendship with Christ, grow in charity, and move toward apostolic mission in fidelity to who one is called to become in the light of the Gospel.

Second, while some people may seek out spiritual direction as a result of their situational or maturational crises,[34] others will come "who are apparently living fairly satisfactory lives already and are not in any severe sense out of touch with themselves or significant others."[35] They are people who have "already sensed or experienced in their own lives a touch of the 'more than,' a recognition that there is an invisible meaningfulness which they have just barely glimpsed beneath the visible factual appearances of everyday life."[36]

Thirdly, and most simply, spiritual direction, because it aims at consistent cultivation of a *life* of faith, is "ordinarily a more permanent and continuing relationship that operates beyond 'strategic problem-solving' in faith."[37]

How to Hinder Conversion, or Undesirable Pastoral Interventions

At first thought it may seem unlikely that these helping relationships could actually hinder conversion, but in fact they can be used in such a way that that is what they do. In this section, I suggest seven ways of hindering conversion, seven kinds of pastoral interventions, that the pastoral counselor or spiritual director would do well to identify and avoid. Few helpers, of course, would do things in the stark and crude fashion highlighted in what follows, but lifting things up in clarity may make it easier to identify these things in their subtler disguises. My intention is not to develop a checklist of failures but rather a checklist of possibilities to consider.

First, it is possible to promote ascetical practices that allow persons to avoid awareness of their struggles, emotions, stresses, and sinfulness; at the same time, such practices may foster self-satisfaction and narcissism, since the person

doing them can take pride from doing something difficult. Thus, building a spiritual life on the performance of ritualized prayers can be a way of not introducing one's self into one's prayer. Again, religious guides have at times encouraged people to deny and repress their negative and less presentable feelings by acting as though they felt the opposite; for example, the worried and frightened are told that God wants them to be cheerful and optimistic in their adversity. Or, as Henri Nouwen states:

> Very often religion has become identified with cleanliness, purity, the perfect life. . . . In that case we cannot allow ourselves to have strong sexual urges and cruel fantasies and aggressive desires.[38]

Leech warns that religion with its forms and ceremonies can become an end in itself, cutting off development of the contemplative life, and Gratton cautions against living out a "spiritual materialism" in which observances provide security.[39]

A second way to hinder conversion is to collude with people in their "attempt to find their identity solely in doing things and living up to society's roles."[40] To be sure, our roles and duties do challenge us, but it is not a challenge to unreflective performance never personalized through integration into our true, struggling, and redeemed selves.

Third, and related to the above, even pastoral counselors and spiritual directors can become charmed by a "totalization of the functional," a way of thinking and acting that makes an idol out of one's performance or self-actualization in handling oneself well in the world. We are all touched by our time and culture and are open to what Gratton would call "a fixation on intermediate wholes." If the helper is unaware of being a child of his or her times, it is impossible to pass this fixation on to those seeking help. Nothing in Gratton's description excludes persons to whom religion could be important:

> They have totalized their work and activity, their social relations, individual preferences, or aesthetic likes and dislikes to such an extent that most of their vita I energy is tied up in functionalism, social activism, individualism, and aestheticism. Finding their complete identity in their role as contributors to society in a certain profession or service capacity, in having a socially relevant personality or even character, or in making an exclusive idol of some aspect of goodness, truth, or beauty can reduce the whole person to one totalized part of life.[41]

To deny the place, importance, and significance of sexuality in our relationship with God is a fourth way of closing off access to the self and thus blocking conversion. "Religion and sex are inextricably linked, and the honest facing of human sexuality is vital to spirituality. When it does not happen, spirituality becomes twisted and unbalanced."[42]

Permitting pastoral conversations to remain solely at the level of pious or theologizing talk about God is a fifth way to block conversion. Ignatius Loyola encourages directors to check themselves to see what they are paying attention to: "ideas and reflections, or rather to the spirit itself, which appears through

desires, motions, ardor or despondency, tranquillity or anxiety, joy or sorrow."[43]

Sixth, people can be alienated from their inner world by pastoral counselors and spiritual directors who pass judgment on feelings, give explanations of them, or suggest ways of alleviating the pain which feeling, struggles, and newly discovered issues can cause. To do any of these things may be to shift people from expressing their experience to talking about it in the form of a detached and analytical commentary.

Finally, a seventh way of blocking conversion is for the pastoral counselor or spiritual director to foster dependence on himself or herself. Some helping people are not aware of their need to have others depend on them. If a troubled person comes seeking help, or a well-functioning person comes to talk about prayer, the helper should indeed responsibly offer assistance, but the process of giving help should aim at "the person's taking more and more responsibility for his own life, developing deeper insights which enable him to challenge himself in his own lived experience."[44]

How to Help Conversion, or Desirable Pastoral Interventions

To a certain extent, the ways to foster conversion are the flip side of the ways to hinder it. Generally speaking, since the kind of conversion I am talking about means entering into the inner world, the basic goal of the helper is to facilitate that entry. Many people, however, and perhaps most, are anxious about getting in touch with the depths of their affectivity, so that lowering their anxiety becomes an important part of the helper's effort. These are things one can say, skills one can teach, and attitudes one can promote that might prove useful to the helper.

The most valuable tool the helper has is his or her own self. It is critical that the pastoral counselor and spiritual director have entered their own experience of conversion and possess a reasonably articulate awareness of how it began and progressed and what integration it has led to. It is not that the helper's experience is to be imposed on the seeker; rather, to be aware of one's experience engenders compassion for and understanding of that seeker as he or she takes up new risks and opportunities. Of those who would do ministry Nouwen writes:

> As soon as we feel at home in our own house, discover the dark corners as well as the light spots, the closed doors as well as the drafty rooms, our confusion will evaporate, our anxiety will diminish, and we will become capable of creative work . . . only he who is able to articulate his own experience can offer himself to others as a source of clarification. The Christian leader is, therefore, first of all, a man who is willing to put his own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask his help. In this sense, he is a servant of servants, because he is the first to enter the promised but dangerous land, the first to tell those who are afraid what he has seen, heard, and touched.[45]

A second valuable tool, along the lines of things one can say, is the material and encouragement available in Scripture and in the spiritual inheritance handed on by our Christian forebears. By way of helping people to value their

struggles and not be put off by the anxiety of facing them, it might be pointed out that it was Jesus Christ's full participation in our struggling humanity that enabled him to be our compassionate savior. Strength can be found. The Letter to the Hebrews frequently makes this point; for example, in chapter two, verse eighteen: "Since he was himself tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted." Gospel characters, such as Nicodemus or Peter or Mary Magdalen, and saints, such as Monica who patiently waited and prayed for her restless son to find his peace, can be suggested as starting points for exploring new dimensions of self.

It is important to remember, though, that conversion is a painful process that is not infrequently met with resistance. Teresa of Avila has written that "courage is necessary for this knowledge and for the many other graces given to the soul."[46] Courage could be prompted by reminding the person that it is in the inner world that we find God.[47] "It is helpful to recall that the true self we are to discover, as the false self disintegrates, is the image or word of God that we uniquely are but which is hidden deep within."[48] But since God can also be terrifying as well as encouraging, it is important for the person entering conversion to be able to trust a helper's support and know that others have been there before. A spiritual director or pastoral counselor is one who

> is willing to put his own faith and doubt, his own hope and despair, his own light and darkness at the disposal of others who want to find a way through their confusion and touch the solid core of life.[49]

A third approach to helping people enter the conversion experience is to teach them certain reflective skills. What makes these skills different from simple psychological introspection is that simple psychological introspection "looks at experience in isolation from our graced mysterious life call in Jesus."[50] The skills suggested here, then, help a person look at experience in the context of his or her relationship with and call from God.

Van Kaam's name for this kind of reflection is "transcendent self-presence,"[51] which means attentiveness to know God reveals himself and a person's life-direction in and through one's life experience. Attention is focused on God's speaking. When one becomes aware of sin, imperfection, or psychological obstacles, the first response is not to analyze but to thank God for the purifying experience of one's limitations. The work of the director or counselor is to help the other person renew faith in God's redemptive love. The awareness of positive and negative events in peaceful surrender to the Lord allows one to consider the meaning of experiences for one's life-direction.

William Barry and William Connolly speak of the "contemplative attitude" and "noticing and sharing with the Lord key interior facts." By the first is meant becoming able to get absorbed in someone or something else outside oneself and permit that person or thing to elicit spontaneous reactions from within:

> Such openness runs counter too much of our usual personal activity. We try to control our perceptions; we are threatened by newness or strangeness. As a result, we often see

> only what we want to see or what our perceptual and cognitive structures let us see. To try to contemplate means to try to let the other be himself or herself or itself, to try to be open to surprise and newness, to try to let one's responses be elicited by the reality of the other. So, when we contemplate God, we try to let him be himself and not our projection of him, and to be real ourselves before him.[52]

Noticing key interior facts means paying attention to one's reactions in the presence of the other; such self-exploration does not aim at self-analysis but is a preparation for sharing these reactions with the Lord. A pastoral counselor's or a spiritual director's work, then, is to help a person contemplate the Lord and communicate his or her reactions back to the Lord.[53]

The double awareness of a presence to one's sinfulness or brokenness and to one's Lord is the hallmark of "felt self-knowledge" and "affective self-knowledge," which, Robb says, can become a springboard to the knowledge of God. We should not flee the evil or hurt within us but rather notice that God, healing and enlivening, is present with us in the process of our self-confrontation. As we come to see ourselves as we are, "God reveals himself to us as a Father of mercy with a heart for our misery."[54]

Fourth, in terms of attitudes to promote, it may be useful to encourage people to understand human beings as having a natural disposition to move beyond themselves, to transcend themselves. Thomas Tyrrell, commenting on the writings of John Dunne, suggests that the urgent longing at the core of infatuation may be, as Dunne believes, a longing for communion with God,[55] while John Sanford views sexual feelings as expressing hunger for the fulfillment of relationship and personality, a fulfillment reached ultimately in a relationship between a human person and God.[56]

Finally, since the effectiveness with which we relate to ourselves and others is often paralleled in the way we relate to God,[57] it may at times be necessary to propose psychological counseling to a person. This counseling can help people develop the freedom to accept and express their feelings and to relate to others in a more responsible and satisfying and less distorted way. Ernest Larkin makes the point succinctly:

> Psychological counseling is likewise a propaedeutic to life in the Spirit. By clarifying meanings and values counseling attempts to resolve emotional conflicts. It is a twentieth-century means of bringing order and integration into one's affective life.[58]

Larkin's remarks remind us once again of how closely linked are pastoral counseling and spiritual direction and how one can serve the other.

Conclusion

The point of encouraging and assisting people to enter into conversion could be phrased and justified in many ways. Conversion leads to wholeness and integration. Conversion is called for by the Gospels. Conversion is necessary for people to achieve deeply rooted holiness. Conversion is what a phenomenological reading of human beings will show we are meant for.

Conversion leads to more abundant living.

But I would like to consider the value of conversion in one way in particular, a way already alluded to. When Jesus gave the great commandment to love God and love the neighbor, he closed with words usually quoted but less often grasped in the fullness of their meaning: "*as yourself*."

Unless we enter our own conversion, confronting ourselves in our sinfulness and brokenness and finding God in the process, it is unlikely we will be able to love the neighbor. For, how will we compassionately and genuinely accept in the neighbor that which we are unwilling to face in ourselves? Ministry and service in the Christian community will be superficial to the extent that they are performed by unconverted people.

NOTES

[1] Walter E. Conn, "Conversion: A Developmental Perspective," *Cross Currents*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Fall, 1982), p. 325.

[2] Paul V. Robb, S.J., "Conversion as a Human Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (May, 1982), p. 5.

[3] Conn, *Cross Currents*, Vol. 32, p. 327.

[4] See Robb, *Studies in.* . . . Robb finds a basis for his distinction in the call and covenant experiences reported in both the Old and New Testaments.

[5] Robb, *Studies*, p. 3.

[6] This prayer is taken from the fourth alternate form for the penitential rite of the Roman Catholic Order of the Mass.

[7] These words come from the alternative opening prayer for the second Sunday of Easter in the Roman Catholic Sacramentary.

[8] Robb, *Studies*, p. 7.

[9] Many authors and works form part of the school of thought I refer to here. For this paper I relied on Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp., *The Dynamics of Spiritual Self Direction* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Book, 1976) and Carolyn Gratton, *Guidelines for Spiritual Direction* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1980). I also made use of my own class notes taken in ongoing formation seminars conducted by Vincent Billotta at the House of Affirmation in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, which I attended between 1978 and 1982.

[10] Gratton, *Guidelines*, p. 59.

[11] Robb, *Studies*, p. 10.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 12-13.

[13] Gratton, *Guidelines*, p. 81.

[14] Robb, *Studies*, pp. 7-8.

[15] *Ibid*., pp. 9-10.

[16] Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J., *Christotherapy II: Me Fasting and Feasting Heart* (New York and Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 97. Tyrrell is basing his remark on a distinction made by Dr. Gerald Corey in *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Monterey, California: Brooks/ Cole Publishing Company, 1977), p. 9.

[17] Robert Rossi, O.S.C., "The Distinction Between Psychological and Religious Counseling," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, Vol. 37 (1978), p. 550.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 551.

[19] According to Rossi, certain signs may indicate that referral to psychotherapy is called for. On pp. 569-570 of his article in REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, Vol. 37, he offers a list of possible signs:

(a) Morbid anxiety without discernible cause, or anxiety out of all proportion to its apparent cause

(b) A painful or intolerable sadness ("depression") without reasonable cause
(c) Loss or normal adaptation, e.g., a student who cannot study, a mother who cannot take an interest in her children
(d) An inverse relation between an individual's expressed aims and the means he adopts to achieve them
(e) Over-eagerness to verbalize conscious ego-directed efforts to achieve levels of aspiration out of all proportion to actual levels of achievement
(f) Too much sheer physical involvement, e.g., in prayer, or in overcoming temptation, esp. of a reflex organic kind
(g) Psychosomatic disturbances—severe headaches, localized anaesthesias, paralyscs, fainting, nausea, and so forth
(h) Any threat of suicide

It would take me far beyond my ability and the scope of this paper to comment on all of these, but I think the list makes useful reflection material for people who want to be responsible helpers and are not afraid to be aware of their limitations and seek additional assistance when those limitations are encountered.

[20] Kenneth Leech, Soul *Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 94.

[21] Jean M. Ormechea, C.P., "A Theoretical Approach to Spiritual Direction," *Spiritual Life*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring, 1980), p. 25.

[22] Leo J. Trese, writing in the foreword to Jean Laplace, S.J., *The Direction of Conscience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967). Trese's comment is found on page 10.

[23] Katherine Marie Dyckman, S.N.J.M., and L. Patrick Carroll, S.J., *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York and Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 20.

[24] Peter Cantwell, "Spiritual Direction and Counseling: Some Reflections," *Supplement to The Way*, No. 38 (1980), p. 80.

[25] Ernest E. Larkin, O.Carm., "Spiritual Direction Today," *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 161 (1969), p. 209.

[26] Dyckman and Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic*, p. 22.

[27] Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling: New Resources for Ministering to the Troubled* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 48. Dyckman and Carroll, in speaking of the spiritual director's method, describe it as to "turn the person to the source of faith and not rely only on our conversation or the other's isolated reflection for whatever streams of interpretation will arise." (See *Inviting the Mystic*, p. 26).

[28] See Rossi, Review, pp. 558-559.

[29] See Leech, Soul *Friend*, p. 100. Charles V. Gerkin, in *Crises Experience in Modern Life: Theory and Theology* of *Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 65, writes that "crises . . . can be seen as the result of both emergence and intrusion. As initiator and prime shaper of its own experience, the self is constantly emerging into the world and thus initiating what may become crisis experience. . . . But crises experience is also evoked by intrusion of both remote and immediate influences external to the self." In other words, stresses can be either developmental/maturational or situational, and sometimes of both together.

[30] Clinebell, *Basic Types*, p. 20.

[31] Shaun McCarty, ST., "On Entering Spiritual Direction," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, Vol. 35 (1976), p. 858.

[32] Van Kaam, *The Dynamics*, p. 367.

[33] William J. Connolly, S.J., "Contemporary Spiritual Direction: Scope and Principles," *Studies in the Spirituality* of *Jesuits*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (June, 1975), p. 119.

[34] A person is likely to feel the need of spiritual direction at "growing points" in the spiritual life. Such points, whatever may precipitate them (e.g., simple human maturation, crises, changes in prayer, changes in life situation, etc.), involve a certain felt need to integrate, or reintegrate, one's spiritual life at a new level. If the person feels the need of assistance or companionship in undertaking this reintegration he/she may well seek the help of a spiritual director. This request for assis-

tance in progressing in the spiritual life normally initiates the direction relationship" (Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "The Contemporary Ministry of Spiritual Direction," *Chicago Studies*, Vol. 15 [1976], p. 129). The statement underlines once again how closely related and interconnected are pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

[35] Gratton, *Guidelines*, p. 149.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 148.

[37] Rossi, Review, p. 566.

[38] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Intimacy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides/ Claretian, 1969), p. 14.

[39] See Leech, *Soul Friend*, pp. 112-113, and Gratton, *Guidelines*, pp. 163-164.

[40] Robb, *Studies*, p. 19.

[41] Gratton, *Guidelines*, p. 129.

[42] Leech, *Soul Friend*, p. 113.

[43] Quoted in Robb, *Studies*, p. 10. Cantwell, in his article in *Supplement to the Way*, No. 38, p. 75, expresses his concern "that some religious [I assume, though, that the problem is not limited to religious] seem to be developing a prayer life that is fairly detached from the reality of their humanness. It often sounds ethereal, rather 'precious,' sometimes over-pious, does not reverberate with the throb of real life, and seems to bypass effectively the ups and downs of psychological dynamics."

[44] Cantwell, *Supplement*, p. 71.

[45] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 38.

[46] Quoted in Robb, *Studies*, p. 32. The quotation is from *The Interior Castle* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. II, Otillio Rodriquez and Kieran Kavanaugh, trans, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980), p. 388.

[47] Many places in Scripture could be pointed to. Among the apt quotations are Ezechiel 11:19: "I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies and replace it with a natural heart." In Romans 8:23 we read: ". . . we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies." See also Deuteronomy 30:6 and 14 and Jeremiah 31:33.

[48] Robb, *Studies*, p. 22.

[49] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, p. 39. In connection with this idea of the helper putting his or her own experience at the disposal of the seeker, we find an interesting treatment of "helper self-sharing" in Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: Model, Skills, and Methods for Effective Helping* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 198-200. Egan gives three rules of thumb: selective and focused, not a burden to the client, and not too often.

[50] Van Kaam, *The Dynamics*, p. 375.

[51] *Ibid*.

[52] William A. Barry & William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: The Seabury Press), p. 51.

[53] See Barry & Connolly, *The Practice*, p. 65. It is worth reading the entirety of Chapters Four and Five of this book; these chapters discuss the contemplative attitude and noticing interior facts at some length and with many fine examples.

[54] Robb, *Studies*, p. 27.

[55] See Thomas J. Tyrrell, *Urgent Longings: Reflections of the Experience of Infatuation, Human Intimacy, and Contemplative Love* (Whitinsville, Massachusetts: Affirmation Books), pp. 88-89.

[56] See John A. Sanford, *The Invisible Partners* (New York and Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 117.

[57] See Barry & Connolly, *The Practice*, all of Chapter Three, "The Relationship Between God and Individuals."

[58] Larkin, *The American Ecclesiastical*, p. 208.

Dreams in Spiritual Direction: Help or Distraction?

Ronald Barnes, S.J.

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For some time now, dreams have been a curiosity to many people practicing and receiving spiritual direction. Especially with the growing popularity of the Jungian influence in the understanding of spiritual growth, there has been an emphasis on the need for some psychological acumen among those engaged in this ministry Already such techniques as journaling, diary keeping, knowledge of personality types or how to deal with transference have proven useful, and now there is an interest in the understanding of dreams as an aid to direction.

Yet these new incursions, while admittedly helpful in some ways, are not always accepted as unmixed blessings, for they tend to further blur the nebulous borders between direction and pastoral counseling or therapy. Horn time to time, most of those who have been involved in this ministry have asked themselves uneasily if they have not sometimes been overwhelmed in their practice by the modern desire for self-awareness and psychic growth, and so lost touch with what they were trying to do as directors. Dreams are no exception to this quandary.

While many people now coming to direction do expect to discuss their dreams, and a few retreat houses and spirituality centers have been experimenting with the use of dreams during retreats, there certainly are difficulties involved in bringing this material into direction. The main

problem is put quite succinctly by Gerald May in his book, *Care of Mind; Care of Spirit.* "One of the problems . . . is that analysis of dream content can constitute a major distraction of its own if one becomes preoccupied with it."[1] In his opinion, dream material can be "so rich" that it readily becomes an object of "fascination" and "self-absorption." At the same time, May also points out that dreams are subject to as much "mediation, alteration, and distortion as any other kind of experience."

From dealing with dreams as a counselor, I have always felt that adequately dealing with them in direction would demand such concerted attention that, in effect, we would be putting aside direction for a long period of time. Also our focus would shift more exclusively toward issues of past family history, difficulties with intimacy, and other developmental concerns. Approached from this perspective, dreams can become an exclusive concern which bends spiritual direction into a very ambivalent and merging relationship with therapy.

An Alternate Approach

Currently however, there is a new approach to the understanding of dreams developing within psychology itself, one that also holds out new possibilities for the use of dreams in direction as well. I would like to explore briefly one such use in the following pages.

Probably the most significant indication of this shift is revealed in the common substitution of the phrase "dream work" for "dream analysis."[2] The more traditional Freudian analysis stresses the role of the therapeutic expert whose role is to interpret the meaning of the client's dream at the proper time, based on the expert's objectivity, experience and knowledge of the structure of unconscious symbolism. Those who prefer the term "dream work" view the dream as an articulation of an individual person which arises out of the infinite complexity of that person's personal meaning world. Thus the dreamer has to be seen as the ultimate source of understanding for their own dreams.

According to this perspective, other people can help the dreamer to "work over" the dream by teasing out intriguing details and offering imaginative suggestions of what the dream could mean for them, but it is finally the dreamer herself or himself who will be able to recognize whether or not this is the meaning of their dreams. Another person can make suggestions, but they are finally acting as a stimulus to the dreamer's reflections, not performing the function of interpreter.

This general shift of emphasis does free up the possibilities for a less formal approach to dreams in other contexts, since it becomes less narrowly professional and more adaptable. Directors would not feel the same onus to be expert once they perceive themselves as helping the other to search for their own meaning, rather than experts who are finally responsible for giving the correct "interpretation" to another's dream.

Nevertheless, I would still agree with May that there is a strong tendency for dreams to become a distracting preoccupation when they come up in direction. Hence I would like to propose a model of parallel direction and informal dream work which could be used from time to time and which would not shift the focus of direction unduly toward the psychological.

The model, as well as my general enthusiasm about the possibilities of dreams in direction, had its genesis in a dream that came to me suddenly one morning during the leisurely routine of a sabbatical I was enjoying at the Berkeley Theological Center two years ago. That dream, and my subsequent experience with dream groups lead me to suggest that from time to time persons interested in the meaning of their dreams could find a leader and form or join a group with a few similarly interested people which would allow them to pay special attention to this sort of material. Even periods of a month or two could be helpful. Then if they were simultaneously receiving spiritual direction there would be a natural cross-fertilization without the need to co-opt direction sessions for this one focus.

This may sound rather cumbersome, yet I found that the complementarity of being in the two processes at the same time was immensely fruitful. Also, the relative ease of setting up the type of groups I have in mind would make the benefits accessible to larger numbers of people without much difficulty. In order to demonstrate the feasibility of the program I am suggesting, as well as the ease and informality with which dream groups can function at this level, I will spend some time portraying the process as I experienced it.

To do so I will also present a few particular dreams which were both typical for the group members and which I would consider significant for the spiritual life of the dreamer. The point is to give some sense of how beneficial membership in a dream group could be for people in direction, especially by stimulating remarkable insights into their own interiority, and by providing rich and provocative imagery which can be further explored in prayer and in direction sessions. Finally, as I would like to structure the discussion particularly around my own initial dream and the process which it began, I will have to begin with some personal background. Since dreams are largely unique to the person, grasping their meaning requires some familiarity with the general situation of the dreamer.

Personal or Contextual Setting for a Dream Experience

Two years ago I was in the fourth month of a sabbatical. Over the past decade I had been working at a fairly intense level in teaching and administration, and was not anxious to simply put in another hard year of work and go back to the college in the same condition as I was when

I left. In particular, I had a strong desire for a more balanced lifestyle, especially in the relationship between work, prayer and leisure. The past few years had become overly orientated towards work and it was beginning to be burdensome. Moreover, I felt that there was something definitive about this issue at this point in my life, and not just another occasion for making resolutions.

As well, I had had some significant interpersonal experiences in recent years that I knew were influencing me in ways I was not quite able to grasp but which I tended to endorse with enthusiasm. Affectivity was making itself felt in ways that little corresponded to the carefully modulated manner in which I had previously learned to live as a religious. I felt that my attitudes and values were shifting, that I was responding to others and to teaching activity differently, that I was in some way not the same person I had long been accustomed to being.

While this was an exciting intuition, it was also disquieting in its vagueness. I very much wanted to have a clearer impression of where I was going so I could better reconcile the contradictions and inconsistencies which I still experienced in myself. And especially, I wanted to be more alive and responsive to the life of the spirit.

As I began the year, I deliberately sought out a woman to be my spiritual directress as I was anxious to benefit from a woman's perspective for a change. And so, generally, I was fairly open to new directions and had the leisure to take advantage of opportunities.

Nevertheless, for the first few months not very much seemed to be happening. Direction was pleasant and helpful, but very much along the lines of the routine discussions and issues which would have characterized my experience had I still been back in Toronto teaching. Then unexpectedly one morning I awoke from a dream that seemed to have broken into my consciousness with a freshness and authority that was startling. It carried the uncanny impression of being a synthetic and authoritative statement on my life at that time, and I knew that I should pay attention to it.

The Dream

Normally I do not notice dreams or think very much about them if I do. But this one was so vividly real, and had such a classic simplicity that I was immediately arrested by it. As I awoke, I was so involved in the dream story that I only realized with surprise that I had been sleeping rather than actually undergoing the experience. In fact, as the dream gradually faded, I was left with a strong sense of loss.

In the actual "story" of the dream, I was at home, boating on the waters of Halifax Harbor in Nova Scotia where I was born. The

water was bright blue, as was the sky, and I was watching two small sailboats moving slowly about on the water in a sort of dance, while I was on a third. The tiny sails were perfectly etched triangles against the far shore and I was feeling very much at home and comfortable in the situation. Eventually one of the little boats sailed right through a large hole in an old freighter moored in the harbor, and emerged on the other side. This also seemed normal as I had seen such a ship anchored in the harbor during the Second World War when I was a child. A torpedo had made a similar hole through which some small harbor boats were able to pass.

In the dream, I took the feat of the first sailboat to be a friendly challenge, and I set course to follow. However, as we got near, the freighter turned into a large white yacht that came sailing towards us, and just as we were to pass close by, a young woman swung from a rope high up in its rigging and plunged into the water near our boat. She did so playfully, but struck the water too hard and disappeared beneath the surface, so that there was concern for her safety. Knowing with quiet certainty that I would rescue her, I was not alarmed but watched the sea for signs of her surfacing. Finally I could see her arm stretching up from the darker blue of the depths, reaching in a pointing gesture toward the light blue surface water. It was ivory white and perfectly shaped, like the statuesque arm of a reaching Venus in a painting. I dove in and brought the woman to the surface, embracing her with ease and confidence.

And so I awoke with the impression of an unwelcome disruption in which I was being pulled reluctantly from one world that I did not want to leave, to another which was initially less real than that of the dream. For a few minutes I was slightly disoriented while the vividness of the dream took a few moments to dissolve and wakefulness asserted itself I had a distinct feeling of regret, even of protest that something important and actual was being lost before it could be appreciated or grasped.

What gave force to the dream itself was the stark simplicity of the scene and its brilliant colors. It was the first time I was aware of dreaming in color. The water and sky were a deep sparkling blue, exactly as they are in summer in Nova Scotia, while the sails of the three little sailboats were etched as perfect white triangles moving easily about between the blue of the sea and the sky. There was little movement and not much detail, just an easy transition from one scene to the next until a very simple but memorable little story had been etched in my memory. More importantly, as I awakened I had the strong sense that the episode depicted in the dream had been an important event and that it was wrong to just let it slip away and be dismissed.

As I lay in bed savoring the experience, I became aware of how completely relaxed I was. In fact, I felt a freshness and a sense of total well-being which seemed qualitatively different from any I had known before. There was a noticeable lack of tautness or bodily tension, together with a positive sense of the simple pleasure of being alive. It was like a simple realization of how pleasant life could be on its own when something previously taken for granted as normal, and so unnoticed, had been removed and so revealed as arbitrary, some restraint, or underlying tension.

My spontaneous reflection was that this must be something like the physical condition we will enjoy as our bodies are transformed and we move into the final Parousia. Yet at the same time, I felt as though it was a goal I could emulate to some degree in this life if I would somehow respond to the invitation it offered.

I had the impression that there was something nebulous but real at the core of this dream to which I should pay attention. It broke into my awareness as a definite statement which was putting into "words" some inchoate movement taking place beneath the surface of my life, although it was expressed in a language that was not clear to me.

A few days later as I was preparing to see my spiritual director, the impact of the dream and its nascent attempt to communicate something was still there, so we discussed it together in the session. Together we agreed that the dream was an imaginative statement about my life at this time, a sort of subconscious expression of where I was now and what possibilities might be indicated for the future.

Becoming Involved in Dream Work

A few weeks later, I heard that students from one of the programs at the Graduate Theological Union were starting dream-work groups, and I made inquiries. I was able to join a small mixed group of married and religious, whose number varied between six and eight people, including the leader. Because of time commitments the members were only able to contract for five sessions, and as soon as these were finished I joined another group which also met for five sessions on a weekly basis. Finally, after the last meeting of the second group, I had a private session with the second leader for a more thorough review of the sailing dream which had initiated my interest.

Together with assigned reading, dream recording and group discussion, and my previous experience as a psychologist, I gained a fair introduction to dream "work" over the term, and I began to appreciate its significance for my own self-understanding, as well as its general usefulness in relationship to spiritual direction.

The material from the dream groups never entered very much in a formal way into the direction sessions since the work of understanding the dreams was being done elsewhere. But as I hope will become clear as I discuss the dreams themselves, being in touch with the images and themes they suggested was extremely enriching for the process of direction. The themes and material provoked there were certainly part of our discussions.

At this point, it will be necessary to say a few words about the process of dream work itself, but only enough to give some idea of how it functions and as an introduction to the discussion of the dreams which I will use as examples. The basic method and procedures of dream work can be obtained from the easily read reference books I will mention.

Dream Work and Its Primary Technique: the "Tingle Test"

The primary technique for approaching the understanding of dreams was called the "tingle test," a catch phrase which most aptly describes the approach used in these types of dream work groups. We took it from Jeremy Taylor's book, *Dream Work*,[3] where the rationale is explained more fully. It stipulates that the most important criteria in recognizing the value of any interpretation is the reaction of the dreamer. If it struck a cord, jogged a memory, or found a resonance with something the person recognized as meaningful, it was deemed helpful, but not otherwise. No matter how convinced a person might be of what she or he saw in another's dream, the main criteria was always how relevant or fitting their contribution seemed to the dreamer.

This principle very soon engendered a nonthreatening, caring atmosphere that characterized the normal disposition of the group as we sought to bring light to one another's dreams. The leader of the second group especially favored the opening comment, "if this was my dream," when we were addressing a person whose dream was under discussion. The implication being that the meaning for the dreamer could be quite different, thus lessening any sense of intrusion or judgment by interpretation.

This simple directive protected everyone from insistent or unwelcome interpretations, and kept the tone of the meetings pleasant and unthreatening. It also enabled a freewheeling, imaginative and frequently helpful interchange. Everyone was an equal partner in the process and could offer his or her thoughts and inspirations without needing to feel exceptionally competent, and also without fear of offending.

Presuming that the leader is competent and is using the basic approach that I experienced, anyone in the group is able to go at his

or her own pace, whether or not they have been exposed to much formal self-reflection or affective self-expression in other formats. No one was expected to share a dream that he or she did not feel comfortable revealing, and anyone who did not have a dream available could pass without comment. There is little room for prepackaged interpretations, or for the extensive use of theoretical assumptions about the unconscious in evaluating the dreams of others. The tendency to do that tends to recede quickly as the genuineness of attending to the meanings of the dreamer takes root in the group. Otherwise, of course, the leader would have to deal with attempts to dominate or to insist on particular interpretations by individual members.

Leader's Input

An important feature of the meeting format was the guidance which the leader provided. Both of the leaders with whom I worked had considerable experience in working with their own dreams under the direction of recognized Jungian directors, and they conveyed confidence to the group. The need for instruction was more pronounced in the opening sessions but it occurred whenever it was necessary during the other meetings. Primarily, their role was to familiarize us with the "tingle test" and to ensure that we used it.

As well, they helped us to deal with some basic techniques for remembering and recording dreams, facilitated the group exchange and helped us to grasp the most common levels of symbolic images whenever questions arose. Often they simply recommended a chapter or two from a book, usually Taylor's *Dream Work*, or either of Faraday's *Dream Game*[4] or *Dream Power*.[5] Also the self-help manual of Strephon Kaplan Williams, *Jungian-Senoi Dreamwork Manual*,[6] was mentioned from time to time. There are many other texts available, but one of the attractive features of the process for me was that I really did not have to spend much time outside of the meetings working at the process and yet was able to find it quite profitable.

One difficulty that leaders can help to overcome is the tendency among articulate people to become preoccupied with posing questions for understanding rather than dealing with the reality of dreams themselves. When this happened, a discussion period developed at the beginning of a few meetings which cut rather heavily into the time available for dream work. The leader has to take steps to resolve this tendency if the group is not to become frustrated.

Dream Work as a Complementary Parallel to Direction

During the whole time I was engaged in dream work, I had continued with spiritual direction. I was used to spiritual direction, having been involved at one pole or the other for more than twenty-five years,

so it was not as new or exciting as the dream work seminars. One sometimes hears the adage that "good spiritual direction is dull spiritual direction," meaning that if it is going well the parties are not seeking exciting events, but rather concentrating on fidelity to the responsibilities of ordinary life, a familiar theme in John of the Cross.[7]

At any rate, my experience of direction followed the usual pattern of reporting prayer, discussing relationships, reflecting on the possible deficiencies of my lifestyle, exploring attitudes and social responsibilities, and seeking to be attentive and responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in all of this. I think that the many years of active ministry had led to a certain dullness or resignation that made it difficult for spiritual direction to take root.

It was into this state of "normalcy" that the dream of the sailboats and the subsequent involvement in the dream groups burst like a ray of sunshine. My imagination was suddenly awakened, and the subsequent involvement with dream work opened out a whole new contact with personal issues and insights that frequently stimulated lively discussions in spiritual direction as well in the dream groups.

Yet we did not have to divert from direction to clarify the meaning or implications of my dreams. I was doing that on my own through the groups, and the new insights and issues raised there were already available as part of my ongoing self-awareness. They naturally became part of my discussions with my directress without necessarily being explicated as dream material. The two processes became complementary as supportive modes of exploration and insight, and the input from my dreams proved to be a valuable incentive and stimulus in direction.

In fact, almost as soon as I joined the first dream group and began to record and read my dreams, I was shaken loose from the sense of psychic immobility, and projected into contact with more imaginative and suggestive material than I had been alive to for a long time. I found myself dreaming of strange and intriguing adventures with my parents, relatives, siblings and forgotten acquaintances, and marveling at dramatizations of fundamental themes and concerns that had been ignored in the background of a busy life for many years. And here they were encased in highly expressive and symbolic form which had its own logic and playful suggestibility that bypassed the slower, more careful and often stymied rational discourse of reflection. In effect, the dreams became windows to my own intentionality, opening out fundamental orientations and bringing originality and vitality to my self-awareness after many years of being absorbed in work and out of touch with the excitement of life.

As the semester went on, the imagery and reflections flowing from my dream work informed my sense of what was currently important in my life so that I had a much better sense of focus when I went to direc-

tion sessions. Whereas earlier I could affirm a sense of struggle to change and adapt, now I had concrete feelings and intuitive suggestions expressed in the rich language of the intuitive and the unconscious. In particular, much of the year was spent within the general ambience conveyed by the first dream.

Implications of a Dream; Directives for the Future?

Looking back on the progress of the year and the development of the direction sessions, it is obvious the early dream of the sailboats had spoken rather directly to the current state of my spiritual condition. I came to see it as one of those simple but significant dreams that Jung refers to as an archetype, one that synthesizes for us our subconscious strivings for wholeness and gives shape to our instinctive hopes for the future.[8]

Even now, whenever I go back to it, the lines and details of the story remain fresh and rewarding. I can sense the solid calm of the scene, enjoy the colors and recall how the old freighter turns into a yacht, and the sailboats dance, or the young woman plunges playfully into the sea.

Part of the meaning of the dream is conveyed simply in the delicacy and unrestrained freedom of imagery as the lilting sailboats dance easily before the wind and the water. These boats are like butterflies, not tense and forceful, but moving with the natural rhythms of nature, playing joyously in the harbor as part of God's creation. Their primary occupation is not pragmatic, as perhaps motorboats cutting across the bay regardless of the movement of air or water might have suggested.

So this dream is an enactment of a felt hope for the future. It expresses the belief that it is possible for me to balance the flow of life and work, to move easily in time with natural forces and a pace that leads to the sort of relaxed at-homeness I knew on waking. There is a premonition of actual possibility here that is felt, not simply a statement of fact. There is even the suggestion that I can expect to be rejuvenated like the worn old freighter which was miraculously transformed into a graceful yacht; that the push of the masculine can be softened and completed by the flow of the feminine, as the playful invitation of the woman in the dream intimates.

Besides the imminent energizing of the body in this life, I understand the profound relaxation and euphoria I woke to that morning as an anticipation or intimation of the final rising when we will know the full harmony of selfhood and relatedness in the resurrection. That was my first association on waking. Thus the dream comes out of the faith of the person as well as his or her psyche. Interwoven with aspirations for human wholeness and balance there are the transcendent aspirations for union with God.

Here the human and the transcendent dimensions of life are closely allied. In the experience of myself diving easily beneath the sea to rescue and embrace the woman, there is a willingness to move toward the wholeness of life, to plunge into the opaque domain of intimacy and the unconscious without fear or rigid control. I knew beforehand that I would save the girl and that, despite the obscurity of the blue depths into which she had disappeared, I would be at home in it and find it cooperative. But ocean expresses both the hidden levels of consciousness where lurk the fears and hesitations about intimacy, and it also stands as part of the benign universe created by a loving and trustworthy God. I plunged below the surface spontaneously and with trust. The sexual overtones of union with the woman are subtly transformed into the most basic yearning for union with the mystery of the divinity in the midst of creation.

Of course there are no charts or objective tests to establish the validity of these interpretations. They are the associations that bring the dream to life for me, and render it true to what I recognize it to mean once the associations are proposed. In general, it seems to me that the dream spoke of a surrender to the spirituality of existence rooted in the ordinary affairs of life. At the literal level, in place of a fear and circumspection of the sexual, there is an easy and assured acceptance of its place. And while this has its own value, there is also a strong affirmation of the yearning for spiritual union with the divine which Taylor maintains, in an insightful reversal of Freud, is often conveyed through sexual imagery.[9]

Thus the dream opened out a rather central window on my inner life. Perhaps in that sense one could say that it was the medium through which grace chose to address me at the time. It proclaims not only that duty and obligation are only part of reality, but that there existed in the depths of my spirit the life and vitality to go beyond such uninspired narrowness if I was willing to listen. In this sort of imaginative expression there lies the voice of my own deeper intentionality toward life and toward how I wanted to live.

What the dream means in terms of my relationships, attitudes toward work schedules, teaching, leisure, and so forth, can be pondered over time in keeping with all the other influences which will come into play But it remains as a clear expression of self-understanding at one moment of my life that thereby becomes a plateau to which I can look back as at a definite point of clarity. Moreover, I can carry away and work further with its images because they remain as symbols, "affect laden images" that have their own force and excess of meaning.

Such dream images evoke the feel and actuality of situations and give them plausibility. That is why the dream struck me forcefully when it occurred. Rather than a thoughtful consideration, it was an

exploratory and imaginative way of living out of an alternative lifestyle. In that way dreams are more than playful fantasies with no connection to reality. They reach beyond daydreams for they are capable of giving expression in artistic form to those rooted intuitions of our deeper selves about what is needed and what we know below explicit recognition is indeed possible for us.

Perhaps we could even compare important dreams to the contemplations of St. Ignatius. They are to be tasted and relished, worked with many times, so that their multifaceted meanings can be mulled over and imbibed, rather than simply understood and recorded. In that way the dream of the sailboats lingers as a comtemplative comment on my own spiritual quest for meaning and harmony in the face of a certain emptiness and impoverishment.

At this point I would like to present a brief review of two short dreams from other members of the groups in order to convey from a different perspective how dream material can be a valuable background to direction. Both are recounted here with permission.

Two Dream Examples:

Dreams of Foreboding

A priest who had served for a number of years in Africa and was preparing to return after the year at Berkeley, dreamed several times about his bucolic childhood days on a farm in Europe. In each instance he was working with his whole family in the fields, sharing a very happy day together as he had often done in reality. But eventually each time a crisis would disrupt the scene and he would have to save the situation. In one case there was a fire in the barns and he had to rush alone to fight the flames. In another wolves appeared to threaten the sheep and no one else noticed or could be aroused to help.

These dreams occurred persistently and for some time he was bemused by them. Then he tentatively began to relate them to the brooding reluctance he was feeling about returning to his mission overseas. In Africa he had frequently found himself contending against his bishops or superiors on behalf of his people in a way that frequently involved him in tension and conflict. As he thought about it a veil of obscurity began to lift and he began to see how basic to his self-understanding the notion of defending the innocent had become, and how deeply seated and eroding of energy these tensions had been for many years.

From this he also began to see that there might be different ways of dealing with such issues in the future, and that perhaps the question of his return did not have to mean being steeped in the same tensions again. He began to wonder if all of his conflicts and causes were actually in the best interests of others, or if some of them might not stem from his own smoldering resentments, some of which he knew

reached far back in his past. Then too he began to wonder if perhaps the people he considered so helpless could not also be capable of taking up their own causes with a little of the right kind of support.

As he went on to think about accepting his own limits and of being more ready to solicit help, he began to feel a lessening of his forebodings about returning to his posting. He was struck with how perceptive and direct his dreams had been once they were understood. How the images of the childhood crises where he had to act on his own expressed a wisdom that encompassed all of his life, illuminating his present dispositions and suggesting a significant shift in attitudes that he recognized as sound and liberating. He was moved with an appreciation of providential care to which he could entrust his future.

Dreams of Growth

Finally, a sister in the group had a dream within a dream. She saw herself in a dream, waking up and stepping away from the bed where she stopped to gaze back in puzzlement at the disheveled condition of the bed she had just left. The pillow especially amazed her. It was twisted and the pillow case was almost off. Yet she had the insistent impression that she had not removed it with her hands but with her head! After spending some time discussing it in the group and not getting very far, the conversation turned away from the obvious suggestions about sexual repression, and she began to speak of her experience at Berkeley, At that point she became excited and began to feel that she was getting closer to what the dream signified to her.

It was not a dream of sexual repression, as she had instinctively known, but it was a response to her experience of the year. Her participation in the academically based renewal program she attended had "turned her head around" and upset many stable and cherished principles of her religious outlook. She had been working hard with her head all these months and was now on the verge of garnering some results.

Up to that point she had been somewhat troubled and unclear where she had been going, but as she talked about the dream she began to feel a growing satisfaction. She was passing the halfway mark of the second semester and was now happy about the challenge that had taken place and was beginning to feel some stability returning to her outlook.

The old pillow case partially represented the structure of her older theological framework which was now almost entirely torn off, and she was enthusiastic about the new one that was beginning to replace it! She was quite happy about the dream, and one can see that such a realization about her ongoing life situation would obviously be very helpful as a discussion topic with her spiritual director.

Dreams as a Quest for Wholeness

From what has been said above, a few reflections can be offered on the basic nature of dreams insofar as they may help us to relate them to direction. Here I am not trying to make an exhaustive analysis of the nature of dreams themselves, but only to comment on those qualities which can render them a helpful background and support to the goals of spiritual direction. Dreams are the expression of a particular mode of consciousness which takes place in the sleeping state, and they represent the creative, free-ranging ruminations of the person when the controls of waking consciousness are relaxed. As such, the person is relatively freed of the strict boundaries of logical cognition, and of the imperiousness of immediate visible reality with its concentration on the pragmatics of survival and responsibility.

In this mode the person is more in contact with those elusive levels of feeling and sensitivity which tend to be more submerged when we are awake. Thus the dreamer is able to cast about much more freely among the more personal issues which underlie his or her life as a person. We are all moved by the deeper issues of existence, whether we necessarily wish to be or not, and if we do not take the time to face our fears, hopes, intuitions, and questions when we are awake, then much of this material will be "processed" at night, even if it is promptly forgotten on waking.

As persons, and especially as Christians, we are important to ourselves, and we have questions about our lives and lifestyle, and our relationships to our society and to God. The relaxation of consciousness during sleep eases the pressure of a demanding schedule and brings us home to the more personal domain where we can mull over these existential issues that are often wrapped up in the realm of the tentative, the opaque, the mysterious. They are products of the imaginative Intelligence playing with the realities which confront our existence.

And so dreams use the language of suggestive expression, of symbol, of "affect laden images" which can point to meanings and to realities that are not entirely susceptible to the "clear and distinct ideas" with which we usually confront everyday events. We are dealing here with the highly personal, where truth is not merely the relationship of the obvious or the empirical, but is mediated by meaning and interpretation.[10]

From these reflections, it seems natural that Jung should find a strong overtone of the future in dreams. But not just a parapsychological or magical supposition about future wants. Rather, as he tries to express in his central notion of individuation, the whole person as a developing organism and a conscious totality, primordially feels its own destiny to be at stake in its pursuit of wholeness, and feels the

need to be actively engaged in that endeavor.[11] Psychologically, the person is more than the conscious mind, and the whole conscious self has a stake in its total welfare and achievement of authenticity or individuality in the psychological sense, and we could say as well, in the spiritual sense.

Even on the common sense level we are comfortable with the idea that we register and deal with an enormous amount more of information than that of which we ever become conscious. And in the process of becoming a person, this is even more the case. Each of us needs to be "somebody," and if we would accept the implications of such thinkers as Carl Jung or Karl Rahner, then we would agree that we know implicitly who that somebody is called to be in a manner that is at once mysterious but deeply rooted.

Indeed, beyond any psychological analysis, the basic biblical and traditional understanding of the movement of the Holy Spirit yearning within us for our own final return to the kingdom of the Father would lead us to anticipate such an openness and orientation in the depths of our consciousness. I would suggest then, that in dreams we are talking to ourselves about ourselves and about our lives and responsibilities. We are responding to these basic currents of human nature and exploring the dynamics of our ongoing prospects as human persons. That, I think, is why people can more easily relate to their own dreams than to the interpretations of others, and why the "tingle test" is so appropriate.

A Model of Dream Work as a Supportive Parallel to Direction

Clearly then, I would conclude that working with dreams can be a very helpful augmentation to the normal progress of spiritual direction. Even for those of us who are too busy to be following each new "fad" of self-knowledge, or do not feel very creative, there is a sphere of our consciousness that plays with the themes of our existence while we sleep, and that leaves us with a fanciful vignette of memories and images from the innate wisdom of the unconscious.

Yet I would like to suggest that for the most part dreams can be used as an ancillary support for direction, rather than a major or even necessarily an intrinsic element of direction itself. In fact, the model I would see as most beneficial and the least tied to the risks of fascination and diversion, would be the type of interchange between two independent pursuits that I have described in these pages. In other words, I would prefer to keep a distinction between the formal practice of spiritual direction and the consideration of dream material as a specific pursuit.

For me, the approaches used, while closely related and mutually nurturing, remain distinct. The symbols and results of dream work

can be readily brought into direction, and will often be stimulating and helpful in raising important issues and indicating directions for reflection and contemplation. And certainly there will be times when persons who are coming to direction or are on retreat will wish to bring up material from their dreams in the course of their meeting with their director.

Perhaps from time to time, also, individuals might be led to devote a particular retreat especially to the consideration and reflection on material from their dreams, as long as this course was fruitful and did not seem to be running contrary to other indications of grace in their experience at the time. It might even be the case that persons who have become particularly at home with the use of their own dreams might agree with their directors to review their dream reflections as part of their sessions in direction.

Nevertheless, I would maintain that the two practices are different and have to be understood as such. Spiritual direction is a specific, and in many ways a broader pursuit than that of dream work. One can be an aid to the other, but neither should be reduced to the other. That is why I would suggest that the most promising approach for people who are primarily interested in consulting their dreams for their benefit to the spiritual life would be to form or join an informal dream group for a certain period of time where there would be the opportunity to develop their dreams in some detail aside from their meetings in direction.

That way they would find that opening themselves to the contents of their dreams would very probably expand their self-awareness and enrich their participation in direction. But spiritual direction would remain a separate and centered consideration of what was happening in their life as Christians over the full spectrum of experience. In talking to their director, they would take account of the whole panorama of their life, including their relationship to God, others and self, whether the issues came up in dreams or not.

The whole message of the Gospel and of one's response is the subject of spiritual direction, and this breadth cannot easily be kept open if the process becomes deeply committed to exploring the single route of dreaming consciousness. The sleeping state is only one mode of conscious access to the realms of meaning and interiority, and we must be free to be attentive to the voice of the Spirit wherever and whenever it can be found. Sometimes it may be that people who come to direction could be so interested in their dreams that they most need to forget their dreams and become open to the voice of the Spirit in whatever form it was spoken!

Working with dreams as a central focus remains a specific project which requires its own methods, purpose and time commitment. For

that reason, it seems to me that regularly trying to do extensive work on dreams in the limited time available in direction sessions would mean less satisfactory access to both realms. Either other issues relevant to spiritual direction would be ignored, or we would never do justice to our dreams, something that is especially likely where the director has limited experience and is without the aid of a group.

In general, I may seem to have confirmed the position that dream material is basically a distraction to the process of spiritual direction. But that would not be totally accurate. For one thing, I now have a much better appreciation of the rich possibilities of dream material for growth and would be much more interested with any content the persons wanted to present in direction, as long as they did not wish to work it over extensively to the exclusion of other issues.

On the other hand, if persons were primarily interested in focusing directly on dreams as the major point of interest, I would be more inclined to encourage them to seek membership in a good group than to anticipate that we could really do justice to a rich and steady flow of dreams.

In summary, I found my own participation in dream work to be a liberating and creative experience, and one which was spiritually enriching. Especially, I found that a rather nice balance can develop between the stimulation of dream work and the steadiness of spiritual direction. But what seems to me normative is that in the usual order, direction should be kept as free and open to the whole range of experience as possible, and that except for special circumstances and probably for a limited time period, the explicit consideration of dream material on a regular basis would normally be a distraction from more important concerns. I would think that the ideal would be for a person to delve into his or her dreams in another forum, perhaps a group of interested believers, while also seeing a director as a separate enterprise.

Dream Work as an Ancillary Means of Growth and Self-help

A final conclusion I would draw from this brief foray into the field is that a dream work group can be a readily available aid to many people without the need for great expertise, expense, or time demands. I would imagine that people who are interested in exploring this dimension of their lives would be able to find someone with at least sufficient experience to act as leader and to enable them to share their dreams with profit on a relatively informal basis.

Obviously, they would have to realize that there would be further depths of symbolism which they may not be appreciating, and they would have to beware of venturing into realms where instability or illness seemed to be manifest. The best way to do this would probably

be to choose group members who are known to be fairly stable and happy people, and to observe the limitations of the "tingle test" carefully so that domination of direct or subtle form does not take place by one member over another in the interpretations offered. To ensure that this is avoided and everyone is at ease is an important function of the leader.

But the commitment made is at a fairly innocent level where no one in the group is entitled to an intimate knowledge of the private lives of anyone else, and there is no contract for any far reaching explorations of one another's psychic motivations. The primary locus of authority and expertise resides unreservedly in the group, and anyone should feel free to terminate whenever he or she has the whim.

It should be mentioned again, however, that there is quite a difference in the casual and almost fun-loving approach to dreams that a self-help group such as I have described adopts, and the general ambience of a more therapeutic setting. There are professional people available who by training and career have developed a much greater capacity to assist a person to understand the meaning of her or his dreams than the members of most dream groups could be expected to possess. Thus the idea of forming a dream work group should not be seen as a substitute for counseling, and it should not be used where there is indication of serious psychological need, without highly trained and competent leadership.

Nevertheless, dream work is an opportunity for people to share their dreams and responses on a very casual and beneficial basis. It can arise from an eagerness to know the self better and to respond to the call of life for greater wholeness and spiritual awareness. As such, it can be very helpful in the quest for greater self-knowledge and authentic living, and it can be a very fruitful support to spiritual direction.

These whimsical messengers from the deep wake us up! They call us out of our routines and allow the psyche to become interested and refreshed with its own energies. And this can be especially helpful for people whose own sense of self-presence may be somewhat overwhelmed after many years of listening to the stories of others.

NOTES

[1] May, G., *Care of Mind; Care of Soul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 39.

[2] Taylor, J., *Dream Work., Techniques for Discovering the Creative Power in Dreams* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38, 44.

[4] Faraday, A., *The Dream Game* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
[5] Faraday, A., *Dream Power* (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corp., 1972).
[6] Williams, S., *Jungian-Senoi Dreamwork Manual: New Revised Expanded Edition* (Berkeley: Journey Press, 1980).
[7] *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (trans. Kavanaugh, K., and O. Rodriquez, Washington, D.C., I.C.S. Publications, 1973), p. 227.
[8] Hall, G., and V. Nordby, A *Primer of Jungian Psychology* (New York: New American Library, 1973), pp. 41-53.
[9] Taylor, pp. 143-151.
[10] Lonergan, B., *Method in Theology* (London, DLT, 1972), pp. 28-31; 238-239, 263.
[11] Jung, C. G., *The Integration of the Personality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940).

VI. Spiritual Direction: Special Concerns

The Practice of Supervision in Spiritual Direction

Pilgrim and Penitent: Direction and Sacramental Reconciliation

Group Spiritual Direction

An Experience of Group Direction

The Practice of Supervision in Spiritual Direction

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Spiritual direction is a growing facet of the pastoral ministry of the Church. We define "spiritual direction" as that form of pastoral care which aims at helping another person to become more aware of God's personal communication to him or her, to respond personally to God, and to live the consequences of that relationship.[1] The formation of men and women who can offer this type of spiritual guidance with competence and confidence calls for a look at the practice of supervision.

At the outset it must be admitted that spiritual direction has not always been so clearly focused on the relationship of an individual with God. Moreover, some present models of spiritual direction may not be so focused. For many of our readers the term "spiritual direction" will summon up memories of discussions of "problems in the community," or "personal problems," or of requests for help with moral dilemmas. Advice-giving, consoling encouragement, and theological, moral, and legal clarification were the mainstays of the spiritual director's trade. As psychological counseling became more of a vogue, the spiritual director often enough became a psychological counselor to those who sought him out. But discussions of experiences of a person's relationship with God were rare indeed.

Moreover, the training of spiritual directors accented theological and moral knowledge. It was presumed that the director should be a believing

and praying person, but little or no attention was paid to the director's own person and faith life and his or her way of relating to others. Since right thinking and right acting were the goals of spiritual direction, the emphasis was on the director's grasp of dogmatic and moral theology.

When present-day Christians ask for help with prayer, however, they are often not ultimately satisfied with theological or ethical formulations, however balanced, insightful and helpful these may be. They want help with a relationship; they want to find a center that holds, a relationship to life and life's mysterious center that will not buckle under the strains of modern conditions. Spiritual directors today surely need theological knowledge,[2] but more than that they need to be the kinds of persons to whom other people can speak about the most profound experiences they have, their experiences of "the mystery we call God."[3] Thus, the training of modern spiritual directors must accent the growth of the director as a person of faith and prayer and as a person who can be trusted with the joys and pains of another's relationship with God. Training for this kind of spiritual direction, therefore, should include the experience of personal spiritual direction and the experience of personal supervision. This article intends to describe as concretely as possible some experiences of supervision in the hope that the description will help spiritual directors understand supervision and see its value. The experience the authors shared as supervisor and supervisee during a ten month period at the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge is the basis for the article.

The Concept of Supervision

Supervision has not been a total unknown in the history of spirituality.[4] Even where it was practiced, however—for example, in consultation with a prudent person when a particularly knotty confessional case arose—the focus was on the person with the problem, not on the confessor or the spiritual director himself. The modern use of supervision in spiritual direction takes its cue from the development of the theory and practice of supervision in psychiatry and psychology. Here the focus is on the person being supervised and on his growth as a helping person since the basic purpose of supervision of a counselor or psychotherapist is to help him to become more therapeutic.[5] In our adaptation of this paradigm, supervision of a spiritual director aims to help him to become more facilitative of another's relationship with God, in other words, to help him become a spiritual director.

If such is the purpose of supervision, then two basic presuppositions must be made: that those who seek such supervision believe that God does communicate with his people individually and in a way that is discernible, and that they themselves want to become or to develop as spiritual directors. The belief in God's desire and ability to communicate must be gained from their personal experience of God's communication, not just from catechism or theology classes. The spiritual director must be a person who prays con-

templatively.[6] The second presupposition, namely, the presence of the desire to become a spiritual director, is the basis for the "working alliance"[7] that is to be established between the director and the supervisor(s). On this basis both agree to the often painful, yet challenging and exciting work of supervision. This working alliance relies on the desire of the supervisee to become a better director at whatever cost (or quit the work) and on the desire of the supervisor to facilitate that becoming.[8] Such a working alliance needs to be strong in order to weather some of the storms of supervision.

Establishing a Working Alliance

When directors ask for supervision, they may have a variety of purposes in mind. They may want help in understanding a particular directee; they may be looking for reassurance that their work is adequate; they may hope to find out how the supervisor would direct a particular directee. In our experience at the Center for Religious Development we have found that all of these purposes, while, perhaps, legitimate and even attainable in a supervisory relationship, are peripheral to the main issue. We believe that the primary purpose of supervision—as well as of studies in the various theological and spiritual disciplines—is the personal growth of the spiritual director precisely as spiritual director. This belief means that directors who seek supervision are not basically asking for help with technique or with spiritual diagnosis or with the proper use of scriptural texts. They are putting themselves on the line and are asking for help to become someone, namely spiritual directors. Supervision is, therefore, a risky and challenging affair, and anyone with common sense approaches the enterprise with fear and trepidation.

The first questions that face both supervisor and supervisee in such a situation is whether they can work together toward the end in view and whether there is agreement between them on what is the end in view.

Working together toward personal growth of any kind requires trust on both sides. The supervisor must trust the capacity and desire of the supervisee to develop as a knowledgeable, competent and confident facilitator of another's relationship with God. If the supervisor does not have or develop more trust than mistrust in the early stages of the supervision, he will communicate negative feelings by his attitude if not by his overt behavior. He will angrily question the director or coolly point out mistakes. The director will not experience him as on his side, but rather as an opponent. None of these feelings need be overt or even recognized by either person, but the atmosphere that they create will be at least somewhat noxious to growth. In these circumstances some spiritual directors in supervision tend to feel more and more self-doubt and lack of confidence; they dread supervision and quickly begin to doubt their capacity for spiritual direction. Other directors react with anger and a posture of self-defense before the supervisor. In either case, growth is only with difficulty achieved, if it happens at all.

The supervisee, too, needs to grow in trust of the supervisor. Otherwise,

he will hesitate to present his actual experience as a director; he will put his best foot forward and will try to figure out what the supervisor wants to hear and give it to him. Before trust develops, concepts are used to conceal experience rather than reveal it. In the shared experience of supervision we had together, words like "contemplative attitude," "take it to the Lord," and "the Lord" sounded hollow, empty of experiential content, before our trust went deep.

It is well to remember that individuals grow and change as persons through relationship with others, and that the amount of the growth will depend on the quality and depth of the relationship involved. Growth as a spiritual director cannot be superficial; it must take root in the core of the person, in the heart, in that center where the director meets God and other people most intimately. He must develop as a person whose heart is open and discerning, whose faith, hope, and love are almost tangible. To develop in this way he needs to relate to God and also to his supervisor in depth. He must risk exposure of his heart, his mind, his faith, his hope, his love, each with all their strengths and limitations, to the supervisor. No one does this lightly; the director with common sense would only gradually develop such trust in another human being. And so the supervisor and spiritual director need to take time with one another to develop the kind of trust we are talking about. Moreover, the achievement of an in-depth relationship of trust is not a once-for-all event. Such a relationship is alive; it shifts and moves, as new levels of trust and mistrust are touched. But its general trend, if it is to be most helpful, is toward deeper trust.

Each supervisory relationship will differ precisely because the persons will differ; the ways any two people interact are unique. With one supervisee a supervisor might be rather passive, having little need to intervene frequently because the supervisee is so aware of his experience and is easily able to share it; the supervisor may spend more time helping the director to understand the meaning of his experience. With another supervisee he may find himself working very differently, intervening relatively frequently with questions about gestures, words, feelings because the supervisee is relatively unaware of certain parts of his experience. It may even be that certain types of supervisors, for example, the more intuitive, are better suited to supervising certain types of directors such as those who are more rational. Whether or not this is true, it is true that each supervisory relationship differs. Thus, as we sketch concretely how we two worked together, it must be remembered that the meld of our two personalities makes the concrete instance which serves to illustrate a general principle.

We knew very little of one another before we began the practicum, but we each had heard positive reports of the other. At a faith-sharing weekend prior to the choice of supervisor both of us were moved by the honesty and openness and courage of the other. The fact that Mary chose to ask Bill for supervision impressed him, especially when it was made clear that she want-

ed supervision from him precisely because he seemed the kind of person who would confront feelings directly.

At the first meeting we discussed the reasons why we wanted to work together. Mary was encouraged to verbalize and concretize what she hoped for from this supervisory experience. We shared expectations and through this process came to an agreement that our task together was to help her to develop as a spiritual director.

The latter point needs some developing. That agreement and the mutual trust that was its base formed our working alliance. Both of us agreed that we would strive to keep to this purpose. But both of us are human beings and thus ambivalent about purposes. Bill would often rather daydream or watch a ball game or do crossword puzzles than do the sometimes hard work of being a Supervisor. Mary only gradually came to the full acceptance of the fact that personal growth, not the learning of techniques and texts, was what supervision was all about. She would sometimes prefer to chat about things in general than to come to grips with her experience of giving spiritual direction. Moreover, as human beings, we willy-nilly ruffled one another's sensitivities, and so got one another angry and upset. In the beginning Bill experienced Mary as too quiet and passive. He felt that he was pulling teeth as he tried to get some idea of what she was experiencing. He began to wonder about his capacity to supervise her. For her part Mary felt that Bill was too intrusive in supervision; she came to fear his directness and the readiness with which he expressed his feelings. She found herself trying to defend herself against him. But in spite of the mutual ambivalence and the sensitivities we both continued to grow in trust.

Perhaps the most important breakthrough occurred when Bill trusted his intuition that Mary was experiencing powerful feelings of concern for a particular directee, but was unable to express them. When he said what he intuited, she was able to own the feelings and became less afraid of them. Becoming a spiritual director means becoming among other things, a disciplined, informed, believing and deeply caring person. Bill already knew that Mary had the intelligence and knowledge necessary for spiritual direction; now he knew that she also had the heart. Mary now was sure that he was on her side and also that he would help her not be overwhelmed by her feelings. The working alliance was firmly established, and although it was buffeted on many an occasion throughout the year, it never was in danger of foundering after this event.

The Process of Supervision

Mary agreed to do a written report[9] each week on one of her direction sessions. Part of this report was the reconstruction of some of the dialogue in the session. At the Center for Religious Development we have found such reports the best vehicle for getting at the actual process of spiritual direction used by a director. Immediately after an interview the director takes notes on

what happened during it, picks out a particular part of the interview and tries to reconstruct the conversation. The director gives the supervisor this report before the supervisory session. The supervisor reads it over, making written comments on it. The report, then, becomes the main focus of the supervisory session unless some other matter is more pressing.

In the beginning the most obvious aspect revealed in Mary's reports was her anxiety to say and do the right thing. As a result of this self-preoccupation it was difficult for her really to hear the directee and to concentrate on the directee's experiences in prayer or in life generally.

It seems almost universal that when people begin a supervised experience of doing counseling or psychotherapy or spiritual direction they become self-preoccupied. They take on a role and seem to lose the major asset they have for helping other persons, their humanity and their interest in others. In this supervision experience (as in every other one) the first need was to help the spiritual director to trust her own humanity, her own love and concern for the people she was directing.

In the beginning, too, there is a tendency for directors to be preoccupied with what they *think* they are supposed to say, what texts they should propose for prayer, what they should recommend. Again such preoccupations hinder them from being contemplative toward the directee, i.e., from looking at and listening to him or her. Directors also find it hard to pay attention to their own reactions to their directees, reactions which often enough are clues as to what is going on between them as well as to where their own strengths and weaknesses, faith and unfaith lie.

In supervision it took hard work to help Mary to trust God and her own prior learning and experience as dependable sources of whatever suggestions she might need to make to a directee. Gradually her need to have answers and solutions diminished. There was less and less need to arrive at a spiritual direction session with a prepared agenda. She grew in the conscious conviction (not without recourse to prayer and her own personal spiritual direction) that God's Spirit was present in the interviews to help her and the directee.

This conviction in turn increased her ability to enter into the other person's experience, no matter how much it differed from her own. Indeed, she became more and more excited about the possibilities of learning more about God through listening to the experiences of her directees. The work of spiritual direction fed her own life with God just as her own prayer life nourished her spiritual direction. It seems axiomatic that, generally speaking, the more contemplative one becomes in doing spiritual direction, the more contemplative one becomes in prayer, and vice versa. What Mary also found was that in her spiritual direction sessions responses, texts, and suggestions came to her as they were needed. She had a fund of knowledge and experience that was at her call because she was not anxious about what she should say.

Earlier we mentioned the spiritual director's reactions as she listens to the directee can be clues to her own faith and unfaith, i.e., to those areas where she does believe in the grace and power of God and to other areas where she does not—or at least hesitates. If I am afraid that God cannot heal my anger, for example, or will not accept me if I let my anger out, then I will be less able to let another person struggle with his anger in his relationship with God. In the present instance when Mary began to pay attention to her own reactions, she became aware of her fear of letting directees experience sadness and a sense of desperation before God. Her tendency was to avoid discussions of such experiences or to offer counterarguments to feelings of worthlessness. If a directee said that he felt he was useless as a priest, for instance, she tended to point to instances where he "as successful. What she seemed reluctant to do was to help the person to turn to God in this state of hopelessness and ask for help. Supervision helped her to see this tendency and to deal with her unbelief in this area in her own prayer and in the direction she herself was receiving. As the year progressed, she was more and more able to listen to such experiences and to help people to turn to God for comfort and healing. She became more and more a believer in God's desire and ability to comfort the comfortless and hopeless. As a result of her own growth, more of her directees seemed to grow in their ability to share the dark sides of themselves with her and with God.

In another instance she came to a realization that her deep feeling for people was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it enabled her to establish a strong bond of trust in a situation like the following. She was directing a person who was beginning to sense the emptiness of a rather successful life. She felt his longing for something more, and she wanted him to experience deeply the love of God for him. On the other hand, the strength of her desire for his good kept her from finding out whether he really wanted to meet God at this time. Their interviews focused on everything but his relationship with God. Mary began to notice a growing impatience with the man because nothing much seemed to change. In supervision one day it was even discovered that she had avoided focusing on a significant religious experience which he brought up, an experience that clearly manifested his ambivalence before the invitation of God to a deeper relationship. As we talked, it became clear that she wanted to save him from the pain he would have to suffer if he faced his resistance to this invitation. Growth and deeper relationships, however, are often bought with pain. Spiritual directors need to be able to let people pay the price—indeed, help them to face up to the struggle. Compassion does not justify the removal of a person's suffering. It rather establishes a sense of solidarity with him in that suffering which encourages him to present himself for healing to the God who loves him.

"As long as we try to avoid pain, we avoid life," says Henri Nouwen.[10] If we do not want our friends to avoid life, we cannot help them to try to avoid pain.

It must be obvious at this point that effective supervision requires that both persons be willing to work close to the bone of experience. The sessions can be humorous and light, but they can also be intense and emotionally draining.

The supervisor, too, finds his belief and unbelief touched, finds that he, too, must risk or fail. During the year under discussion Bill found that he had to trust his feelings and intuitions much more than his reason. His own insecurities, his lack of confidence in the help of God became clearer. He, too, was often tempted to try to spare the supervisee pain; he, too, wondered at times whether God would really "come through" for Mary and for her directees. He was tempted to "go by the book," to prepare agenda, to trust his tested ways rather than to put his faith in the presence of the Spirit who seemed to be teaching him what he must say. He found that he needed to turn to God for healing and light. In the course of supervising he came to put more trust in his heart and in the God who gives hearts of flesh.

Both of us, then, were changed by this process of supervision. There were times when we resisted the changes that seemed to be demanded; we were tempted at times to give up the process as a bad job. It is our present conviction, though that we are better persons and better spiritual directors for having engaged one another so deeply.

Conclusion

Although this article was based on an experience of supervision in a training program, the value and importance of supervision do not end with the conclusion of the training. Supervision ought to be an ongoing process. None of the relationships to God which directors facilitate is identical to any other. God always treats individuals as individuals. Because of this fact, spiritual directors are drawn into the inner core of many different personalities and relationships. Spiritual direction is a demanding and awesome enterprise. To continue to be helpful, directors should have constant and serious recourse to prayer, personal spiritual direction, and continued supervision. The latter may be with a group of peers, or with an individual. God is ever greater, and those who desire to work closely with experiences of him had better be ready for constant growth and challenge. We are always becoming spiritual directors; we never really arrive.

NOTES

[1] Barry, W. A., "Spiritual Direction: The Empirical Approach," *America* 134, no. 16 (April 24, 1976), pp. 356-358, and "Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Counseling," *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. 26 (l), Fall 1977. Also W.J. Connolly, "Contemporary Spiritual Direction: Scope and Principles: An Introductory Essay," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. III, no. 3, 1975 (St. Louis, MO:

American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality).

[2] Barry, W. A., "The Prior Experience of Spiritual Directors," *Spiritual Life*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 84-89.

[3] A phrase often used by Karl Rahner.

[4] One instance of the reality seems to be in the practice of the early Society of Jesus. In his Constitutions, Ignatius says of Jesuits in studies: "After they have had experience of the Spiritual Exercises in their own selves, they should acquire experience in giving them to others." Then in a note to this paragraph he says: "They could begin by giving the Exercises to some in whose cases less is risked, and by conferring about their method of procedure with someone more experienced, noting well what he finds more useful and what less so" (*Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, nos. 408-409, trans. George E. Ganss [St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 19701, pp. 202-203).

[5] For a useful, insightful and full treatment of supervision in counseling and psychotherapy, see William J. Mueller and Bill L. Kell, *Coping with Conflict: Supervising Counselors and Psychotherapists* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972).

[6] For a more extended discussion of the contemplative attitude, see W. A. Barry, "The Contemplative Attitude in Spiritual Direction," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS 35 (1976), pp. 820-828.

[7] This concept is developed by Ralph R. Greenson in *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. I (New York: International Universities Press, 1967).

[8] There is a parallel here to the working alliance in spiritual direction itself which relies on the desire of the directee to grow in his relationship with God at whatever cost and on the desire of the director to facilitate that growth.

[9] Confidentiality is, of course, an issue in supervision, especially when reports are written. It can be protected by the use of pseudonyms. The supervisor is also bound by the same code of confidentiality as is the director. In our experience at the Center, people who come for direction are not taken aback when told that directors are supervised; indeed, many seem to welcome the idea.

[10] H. Nouwen, "Compassion: Solidarity, Consolation and Comfort," *America* 134, no. 10 (March 13, 1976), p. 198.

Pilgrim and Penitent: Direction and Sacramental Reconciliation

Shaun McCarty, S T.

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The emergency call from my niece came early one Friday last winter. Her seven-year-old was balking at the prospect of first confession with her class several weeks hence. Reassurances seemed of little help. But Heather *was* willing to talk with her great-uncle. Faced with the formidable task of meeting with a seven-year-old (I'm used to dealing with grown-ups!), I agreed to come over after school that day for . . . what? Was it to be penitential catechesis? Spiritual direction? Pastoral counseling? Talk about intimidation! In my own mind I settled for just an avuncular chat!

Some hours later, I found myself in peripatetic fashion sloshing through the melting snowbanks at a local park. In between kicking her patent leathers into every icy puddle along the way (and stopping to watch a freight train pass), Heather's predicament unfolded. (It's O.K. to write about this. She said I could tell.) Yes, she was clear about the meaning of the sacrament (she called it "reconciliation"!) and about the ritual involved. Yes, her God-image was in good shape (God was her "friend"). No, she didn't have trouble telling God she was sorry when she didn't behave properly (though she did have some trouble telling her brother!). No, she wasn't afraid of the priest (he was "real nice" with the kids).

What her hesitation came down to was: (a) she didn't want to have to tell all her sins to anyone (at least no one "outside the family!") and (b) she was afraid that, if she did, the priest would tell her parents (apparently they didn't count as part of "the family"!) After some reassurances that lots of grown-ups had difficulties with confession (she was surprised that grown-ups had to go too!), but many I knew found it very helpful. I asked if she thought she might give it a try. Her response: "I'll have to think it over." By that time we were back to the house. It seemed right to end this avuncular chat at this point.

There is a certain irony in what appears to be a simultaneous rise of interest in prayer in the United States[1] and a sharp decline in the number of sacramental confessions by "grown-ups" in the last two decades.[2] Nor is the latter decline limited to the United States. Church-wide concern was manifest at the Sixth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which addressed "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church."[3] At the close of the synod, Pope John Paul II called for a "contemporary penitential catechesis."

With personal prayer "up" and sacramental confessions "down," there has been correspondingly an increased search for spiritual directors and a decreased demand for confessors. Perhaps it would be mutually advantageous for both the sacramental ministry of reconciliation and the non-sacramental ministry of spiritual direction to see them in relationship to one another. That might be one step toward a contemporary catechesis, hopefully leading to a deepened understanding and appreciation of both ministries.

It is my purpose here neither to analyze the reasons for this simultaneous rise and decline, nor to trace the historical development of either ministry to any great extent. Rather, I shall explore some distinctions and similarities between the two; weigh the comparative merits of keeping them together or separate; and, finally, suggest ways in which the two ministries might be kept correlative and complementary in the lives of Christians called to be both pilgrims and penitents.

My two basic premises are: (1) it is generally helpful and sometimes necessary to talk about one's experiences of both grace and sinfulness; (2) spiritual direction and the sacrament of penance are two distinct, but not necessarily separate forms of pastoral care providing forums for such sharing. The choice is not to be pilgrim or penitent; it is how, when and where to assume the modality of each.

I use the term *pilgrim* in a symbolic sense to indicate a person's graced movement towards God which often leads to spiritual direction; I use the term *penitent* in a symbolic sense to indicate a person's movement away from sin which often leads to confession.

To expand the symbols somewhat, a *pilgrim* might be described as one who chooses to embark on an intentional faith-journey. The journey

becomes intentional to the extent that a person makes a commitment to give serious and consistent attention to the quest for holiness of life as a disciple. Life becomes a faith-journey to the extent that one believes in and acts as though there is a transcendent dimension to all reality and belief in a God who continues to provide for and to guide creatures as they move through life. There is an outer dimension to this journey as the pilgrim interacts with people, places and events that occur in providential sequence and become part of one's sacred geography. There is an inner dimension to this journey as the pilgrim follows a path that leads to deeper union with the divine. Above all, the pilgrim style is prayerful in that it provides for uncluttered space for reflection so that the people, places and events of the journey can become revelatory of God's beauty, design and call. For help with this discerning prayer, pilgrims often seek out spiritual directors who act as companions, counselors, guides for the journey.

As a symbol, a *penitent* might be described as one involved in an ongoing process of conversion as a sinner loved by God who shows a spirit of true penitence in seeking forgiveness of sin and reconciliation within the community of believers. Conversion is a lifelong process of allowing the grace of God to unify and to free our divided hearts for perfect love. It is a movement away from self-absorption and towards self-surrender to God's designs. True penitence involves knowing and owning the reality of one's sins, being sorry for them and seeking forgiveness. This inner disposition of penitence becomes outwardly manifest in acknowledging one's sins not just to God, but to another who, as an agent of reconciliation, can enable the process of forgiveness. This mediation can happen in both sacramental and non-sacramental ways. Sacramentally it can occur in baptism, anointing and Eucharist as well as in penance. Nonsacramentally, it can happen in a variety of ways including healing services, therapeutic counseling or just a talk with a trusted confidant. There is a splendid example of this latter means in the Fifth of Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps which states: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs."[4] Prescinding from any canonical necessity, A.A. attests to the efficacy of confessing to another human being:

> This practice of admitting one's defects to another person is, of course, very ancient. It has been validated in every century, and it characterizes the lives of all spiritually centered and truly religious people. But today religion is by no means the sole advocate of this saving principle. Psychiatrists and psychologists point out the deep need every human being has for practical insight and knowledge of his own personality flaws and for a discussion of them with an understanding and trustworthy person. So far as alcoholics are concerned, A.A. would go even further. Most of us would declare that without a fearless admission of our

> defects to another human being we could not stay sober. It seems plain that the grace of God will not enter to expel our destructive obsessions until we are willing to try this.[5]

Finally, a penitent seeks reconciliation within the community of believers. Since one's sins break or fray the bonds of relationship and tend to alienate or isolate the sinner, there is need to seek at-oneness with others who have been affected by one's dark deeds, words or omissions. And this applies to societal as well as personal sin. For help in seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, penitents often seek confessors and confidants with whom they can share their failings and seek absolution.

Distinctions Between Spiritual Direction and the Sacrament of Penance

Before drawing distinctions between the two ministries, a brief historical sketch of the roles of confessor and spiritual director may prove illuminating.

In the tradition of the Eastern Church, there has always been a clear distinction between confessor (parish priest) and spiritual director *(starets)*. According to P. de Régis:

> One confesses to his parish priest, and does so by way of an ecclesiastical obligation. He thus accomplishes a duty of community life. However, he goes to the *starets* solely with the pure desire for personal perfection. . . . A second trait sets the *starets* completely apart from the confessor. He is chosen not because of his priestly character, but solely because of his charismatic gifts which people think they see in him. This situation, without doubt, has always existed everywhere, and it was St. Francis de Sales who recommended that we choose our director carefully from "among ten thousand. . . ."[6]

In the tradition of the Western Church, spiritual direction came to be increasingly combined with sacramental confession, a development that paved the way for the later "confession of devotion."[7]

A significant influence in the development of Western sacramental practice has been that of St. Alphonsus Liguori, who, in explaining the duties of a confessor, declares that one of the most important of these duties is that of "directing devout souls."[8] B. Häring reflects this strong Alphonsian tradition of uniting the role of spiritual director with that of confessor:

> The confessor must also form the conscience of his penitent to an awareness of the obligation to grow in the love of God. . . . The confessor's role is to guide the penitent through the various pathways to holiness, lighting the way to Christ by helping him to develop a fuller prayer life.[9]

Others who highlight the liturgical role of the confessor tend to sep-

arate more the ministries of spiritual director and confessor as, for example, L. Hamelin:

> Nor is the priest I encounter in this sacrament primarily a director of conscience. All the better if he is this, since such direction is a felicitous prolongation of confession. But it is not essential to the sacrament of reconciliation that the confessor be a good director. The important thing is that he is charged with a mission, namely, the proclamation of the world's salvation.[10]

Notwithstanding a variation of stress on the confessor's role as spiritual director, certain distinctions between the ministries of spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation can be made on the basis of purpose (why), minister (who), content (what), process (how), time (when), place (where) and recipient (for whom). These are not meant to be sharp distinctions. Often what happens more properly in one forum occurs also in the other, but in a more secondary way. For example, healing can happen in direction; prayer does occur in the sacrament.

Purpose (Why?): Spiritual direction aims primarily at enabling growth in a person's relationship with God and with others in Christ. In addition to proclaiming the world's salvation, the sacrament of penance aims primarily at mediating God's forgiveness and a person's reconciliation with God, self and others. As A. Von Speyer says, "To put the matter simply, we may say that the main function of the confessor is to set free from sin, that of the director to foster growth in divine love."[11] A further distinction should be made within the sacrament itself—that of penance as a sacrament of *necessity*, following mortal sin and that of *devotion*, useful for spiritual progress. This classical distinction is repeated in the revised *Rite of Penance* (1973) in numbers six and seven, yet, as L. Orsy points out:

> Strangely enough . . . it seems that these two distinct operations of penance are lost from sight; the very term "reconciliation" is used indiscriminately for both, although in its proper sense it should be used for those who "have left the house of their Father," not for those who have remained there.[12]

Minister (Who?): The present complex practice of the Church is that confessors be ordained priests with faculties granted by an Ordinary for the administration of the sacrament to specified individuals or classes of people. Spiritual directors, on the other hand, do not hold formal office in the Church. Ideally, they are those charismatically gifted and who have the requisite knowledge, experience and skills to enable spiritual growth, and who are sought out by the community.

Content (What?): The focus of content in spiritual direction is on the God-consciousness in a person's life and how that person is responding to what is heard/seen/felt. The ministry of direction embraces the entire

range of a person's religious identity. Key are the questions: Where is God and his offers of grace in the experiences of my everyday life? What are God's desires for me? What am I doing about it?

In the sacrament of penance, the focus of content is on a person's need for the forgiveness of sin by an all-loving and merciful God. Key are the questions: What is the shape of my sinfulness for which I am sorry and seek forgiveness? Can I experience God as merciful and myself as a loved sinner?

Process (How?): Confession takes place in the internal sacramental forum according to a prescribed rite and is governed by specific laws. In the revised *Rite of Penance*, there are three modes of sacramental celebration: two communal, one individual. For individual, auricular confession, there are provisions for praying with and for the penitent, sharing of texts from Sacred Scripture, listening compassionately to the confession of sins on behalf of God and the community, helping to discern the spiritual situation of the penitent, conveying the forgiveness of God by absolution, expressing the exigence of God's call to conversion by the imposition of an appropriate penance and possibly offering counsel as it seems fitting.[13]

Spiritual direction takes place in the internal, non-sacramental forum, does not follow any set ritual, nor is it generally governed by specific legislation beyond the basic norms of moral conduct. Direction involves an interpersonal exchange helpful in discerning God's action in the life of the directee. It proceeds according to a style congenial to a particular director and directee, though there are dynamics foundational to all healthy spiritual direction.

Time (When?): Spiritual directors meet with directees on a regular basis determined by a working alliance/contract/covenant mutually agreed upon. Penitents are obliged to receive the sacrament of penance as soon as feasible following mortal sin. For confessions of devotion, frequency rather than regularity seems to be the norm suggested for current Church practice.

Place (Where?): The ordinary setting for sacramental confession is either a confessional with screen between priest and penitent, or a reconciliation room specifically appointed for a more personal and informal exchange between the two. (Heather calls the first "the old way" and the second "the new way"! She likes "the old way"!) There is no designated place for sessions of spiritual direction, though consideration should be given to a discreet setting that provides the requisite comfort and confidentiality for a fruitful exchange.

Recipient (For whom?): The sacrament of penance is for Christians assuming the modality of penitents. Spiritual direction is for those assuming the modality of pilgrims.

Similarities Between the Two Ministries

Just as there are differences between spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation, so are there similarities on the bases of purpose, minister, content, process and recipient.

Purpose: Both are concerned with the spiritual condition of the pilgrim/penitent; one stresses the turning away from sin, and the other, the turning towards God—two sides of the same coin, conversion.

Minister: Both confessor and spiritual director see their roles as instrumental, with the Holy Spirit as the principal agent of both forgiveness and spiritual growth. Their instrumentality is enhanced by many of the same qualities and dispositions like prayerfulness, a listening heart, fraternal exchange, respect for the freedom of the other, observance of confidentiality, Christlike love.

Content: On the one hand, matters of spiritual growth often receive attention, especially in confessions of devotion. On the other hand, matters concerning forgiveness frequently are dealt with in spiritual direction. A report to the 1983 Synod of Bishops indicates several ways in which this happens: ". . . certain forms of spiritual direction are of the nature to redeem sins, as, for instance, the *revision de vie*, the *capitulum culpae*, a talk with one's spiritual director, confession to a *starets* in connection with monastic practice."[14]

Process: Many of the activities and dynamics that enable effective communication with each other and fruitful mutual listening to the Spirit are the same. These would include: prayer with and for the pilgrim/ penitent; sharing of texts from Sacred Scripture; affirming grace; challenging growth; occasional instruction; co-discerning the spiritual condition of the recipient; observing periods *of* silence; gestures communicating God's prodigal love manifested in Christ.

Recipient: Pilgrim and penitent are modalities *of* the same person. Both modalities build on a foundational awareness and acceptance of being a sinner unconditionally loved by a gracious and merciful God. The qualities that dispose one for a more *fruitful use* of both spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation are much the same: honesty; openness; trust; humility; gratitude and not least of all, the ability to keep one's gaze up and out towards God, and not down and in on one's feet!

Together or Separate?

There are some notable advantages in combining spiritual direction with the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation: (1) This situates spiritual direction within a liturgical/sacramental context, thus lending it a more visible ecclesial dimension. To the extent that sacramental celebration brings a deepened and broadened sense of Church, one can experience more solidarity, support and nourishment in the twin tasks of reconciliation and spiritual growth. J. Sudbrack goes so far as to say:

> As Catholicism sees it, the most intimate transactions between man and God become authentically visible in the sacrament of the Church. Now as a matter of fact spiritual guidance has often taken place, historically, in the sacrament of penance. The modern practice of consulting the priest in confession is a revival of an old tradition . . . Even when confession and spiritual guidance cannot be one and the same . . . it is desirable that such guidance culminate in sacramental confession.[15]

(2) Combining both can lessen the tendency to dichotomize one's growth in prayer from the moral attitudes and behaviors of one's life; (3) The forgiving, healing, reconciling action of the Holy Spirit is particularly evident in the revised *Rite of Penance*. It would seem particularly appropriate that these issues so inimical to spiritual growth—alienation, isolation, selfishness, woundedness—be dealt with in the same context as one's growth in the Spirit; (4) With keener discernment in "naming one's demons," in being specific about the shape of one's sinfulness, a person is likely to see more clearly those factors as they dull one's sensitivity to the Spirit; (5) Combining spiritual direction and confession can become an occasion when one can catch a fuller glimpse of self, both the sin-side and the grace-side. With such fuller perspective it would seem less likely that a person would fall prey, on the one hand, to a self-absorbing remorsefulness over sins or, on the other hand, to *hubris* (spiritual pride) over spiritual progress; (6) The penitent/ pilgrim might see more clearly that God saves and sanctifies right in the midst of one's sinfulness, using even sinful acts and attitudes to lead to deeper union. G. Croft has expressed this well:

> Like the father with his prodigal son, God permitted Israel's waywardness of old in order that his chosen people might experience what it meant to be separated from their Father, and thus recognize afresh their need of him. So, too, our Lord's consciousness that he had come to save the lost sheep is reflected in knowledge of him as savior, particularly in the moment when the sinner experiences separation from God and the need of his love and mercy. This moment of grace and of conversion each one of us has experienced . . . not once but many times; so that even when we cry "out of the depth," our seeking is fraught with thanksgiving as we remember his past mercies.[16]

(7) The sacrament is a humbling reminder that no one can grow a whit spiritually on his or her own initiative; (8) As both guilt and giftedness are brought to the same session, it can be seen more clearly that both need conversion, lest one become self-absorbed in either guilt or gift; (9) Coming at once as pilgrim and penitent can bring a more genuine realization of St. Paul's observation, ". . . power is at full stretch in weakness" (2 Co 12:9); (10) Finally, having the same person for confessor and director seems more conducive to the integration of these two valuable outside

helps to holiness in that one person hears the whole story in the same context.

Difficulties in Combining Roles

On the side of the confessor/director, the most obvious difficulty is that this limits the ministry of spiritual direction presently to celibate, male clerics. With increasing demands on time and ministerial skills along with decreasing numbers of priests, it seems hardly likely that they could even begin to satisfy the rising need for spiritual directors. Besides, not all priests have the charisms for this ministry, not to mention the knowledge, skills and experience that facilitate the use of the gifts.

Confessors who feel called to and who are willing to give a priority to spiritual direction for their penitents need adequate preparation for it. The commission's report to the 1983 Synod expressed this strongly:

> It is true that today the authentic form of private confession needs to be profoundly renewed in its spiritual aspects, and this in connection with the revised *Ordo paenitentiae*. Without such a renewal the Church will not be able to cope with the crisis of the sacrament of penance. For this a better spiritual and theological formation of priests is required, in order that they be able to deal with what is now demanded from confession, viz., the latter should contain more elements of spiritual direction and of fraternal exchange. Under this aspect the so-called confession of devotion retains its importance.[17]

On the side of the pilgrim/ penitent, unless care is taken, the integrity of the two distinct ministries can become clouded. There may be some danger, too, that by locating spiritual direction within the context of confession, the project of spiritual growth could become too sin-oriented. At times, a person's sense of sinfulness can become so humiliating and/or immobilizing that open and honest exchange is flawed. Or the preoccupation with sin can so capture a penitent's consciousness that there is little room or energy for dealing with matters of spiritual growth.

When Distinct But Not Separate

In practice, the two can be kept distinct, but not necessarily separate. This is more likely to happen when both confessor/director and pilgrim/ penitent are clear about the distinction and habitually differentiate between the two ministries. If a choice is made to combine them, certain considerations may prove helpful: (1) Every session of spiritual direction need not occur in combination with the sacrament of penance; (2) Especially appropriate times for combining them might be the seasons of Advent and Lent as well as periods of retreat; (3) In preparing beforehand, the very nature of one's examen can be such as to lead to a reflection not only on sinfulness, but also on graced invitations for further

growth. For example, the Beatitudes might provide such a growth-oriented examen for pilgrim/penitents. D. Barry makes this recommendation:

> The Beatitudes immediately recommend themselves as a blueprint for an updated, life-affirming ethical spirituality especially suited to the Christian mission of healing and reconciliation . . . Since they summarize the essence of Christlike living in a form that makes for easy recall, the Beatitudes offer a particularly rich source of meditation or conscience examination matter for the maturing Christian . . . . They readily lead us to questions about our attitudes and conduct that get right to the heart of what contemporary discipleship is all about.[18]

(4) If the penitent chooses to combine both, there should be some indication of this intent at the beginning of the session. The penitential ritual might then be celebrated by itself at the beginning or the end of the time together or the penitent might indicate a desire to use the entire time to open before God his whole spiritual condition, graced and sinful, with a view to absolution at the end. As alluded to previously, one can develop a sensitivity to God speaking in the midst of one's sinfulness showing a side of self not otherwise open to awareness and conversion; (5) It would seem appropriate, on the occasion of confession/direction, that a pilgrim/penitent, in addition to expressing sorrow for sins, also express gratitude for the graced times that have occurred. This, too, is with a view to keeping the more complete self in perspective as one considers his or her relationships to God, self and others.

When Distinct and Separate

Though the 1983 Synod of Bishops was primarily concerned with the sacrament of penance and, consequently, the role of the priest-director, the theological commission's report to the Synod did give recognition to extra-sacramental direction:

> That form of confession of sins, which is tied to spiritual direction, is a very ancient treasure of the Church. On the one hand, it belongs to the very structure of the Church. On the other hand, as can be seen in the monastic and spiritual traditions, it also has a place outside the sacrament. Both these data are factors in the development which is guided by the spiritual experience of the Church.[19]

In the increasing likelihood that more spiritual directors will not be priests, it would seem appropriate that the ministries be kept correlative and complementary to the sacrament of penance. Some provisions that might help this happen are: (1) Alert and resourceful confessors might recommend qualified spiritual directors to those whose confessions indicate they would benefit from such further help; (2) Both directors and

confessors might alert those who come to them to issues that might be dealt with better in the other forum. For example, a director may uncover some significant area that needs sacramental healing. Even if the person feels more comfortable in dealing with the issue in direction, there is the further possibility of celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation later; (3) The relationship between director and directee should be such that the latter will feel free to confide his or her sinful as well as graceful side with a director, lest either side get compartmentalized; (4) Confessors and directors would do well to cultivate a mutual understanding of and respect for each other's ministries so as to see themselves not in competition, but in collaboration with each other in their care of souls.

Summary

In the preceding pages, using the symbols of *pilgrim* and *penitent*, I have attempted to further such an understanding and appreciation of the ministries of spiritual direction and sacramental reconciliation by indicating some distinctions and similarities between the two; by weighing the comparative merits and deficits of keeping them together or separate; and, finally, by suggesting some ways in which they might be kept correlative and complementary in the lives of Christians who are called to be both pilgrims and penitents.

I close with some verses from the heart of one such pilgrim/penitent who has been on the journey somewhat longer than Heather (by about ninety years)! They are entitled, "Confessor-Director ":

> And then above the dark horizon
> of my night
> There beamed a star that
> bathed my soul with light
> And beckoned me upon my
> pilgrim way.
> My spirit soared to meet
> the guiding flame
> That traced a path
> illuminated by His name
> And led me on to greet the
> dawning day!
> The Day that dawns to span
> Eternity.

NOTES

[1] K. A. Briggs, "America's Return to Prayer," *New York Times Magazine* (November 18, 1984), pp. 107-118.

[2] T. P. Sweetser, "What Ever Happened to Confession?" *New Catholic World* (January-February, 1964), pp. 31-32.
[3] J. Ratzinger, "The Necessity for Personal Confession," *Origins* 13 (October 20, 1983), pp. 331-332.
[4] *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1953), pp. 56ff.
[5] *Ibid*., pp. 57-58.
[6] P. de Régis, "Confession and Spiritual Direction in the Oriental Church," *The Sacrament of Penance*, C. de Vaux St. Cyr et al. (Paramus, N.J.: Paulist, 1966), p. 94.
[7] H.B. Meyer, "Confession or Spiritual Direction?" *Making Sense of Confession*, O. Betz, ed., (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), p. 128.
[8] St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis confessarii*, nn. 121-127.
[9] B. Haring, *Shalom: Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), p. 140.
[10] L. Hamelin, *Reconciliation in the Church*, M.J. O'Connell, trans. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980).
[11] A. Von Speyer, *Confession* (New York: Herder and Herder), p. 214.
[12] L. Orsy, *The Evolving Church and the Sacrament of Penance* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension, 1978).
[13] See M. Hellwig, *Sign of Reconciliation* (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1982), especially Chapter VIII which treats the role of the confessor.
[14] International Theological Commission Report to 1983 Synod of Bishops, Penance and Reconciliation, *Origins* (January 12, 1984), p. 521.
[15] J. Sudbrack, *Spiritual Guidance* (Paulist, 1983), pp. 24-25.
[16] G. Croft, "The Sinner Finds God," *The Way* (January, 1968), pp. 34-40.
[17] Report to 1983 Synod, supra, p. 522.
[18] D. Barry, *Ministry of Reconciliation* (New York: Alba House, 1974), p. 111.
[19] Report to 1983 Synod, supra, p. 520.

Group Spiritual Direction

Sister Winifred Corrigan, R.C.

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In an excellent article on spiritual direction appearing in *The Priest* we learn much about this "critically necessary ministry in the postconciliar Church."[1] The spiritual director assists in coordinating the personal faith experience of today's Christian with his or her prayer and daily living. Various needs of the directee tend to describe the director's job as being teacher, catalyst, counselor. Listening and insisting are essential qualities of this triple role. Insisting on what, for one seeking to respond to the gospel? Insistence that the sincere Christian grasp the universal saving role of Christ has both theological and psychological necessity, as the author of the above article, Father John J. Harrington, C.M., has pointed out.

Lay Persons and Spiritual Direction

The present paper carries forward a point which Father Harrington admits without insisting upon. The charism of spiritual direction is not limited to ministerial priests. Thus it appears legitimate to assume, without delaying to prove, the authenticity of the long Christian tradition of non-clerical spiritual direction, dating from St. Barsanuphius, a sixth-century Syrian, to Baron Friedrich von Hügel who lived well into the twentieth. This tradition includes such illustrious persons who engaged in spiritual direction while laymen as the Greek-speaking St. John Damascene of the seventh century and the Spaniard St. Ignatius Loyola in the sixteenth.

In the light of the facts that spiritual direction by laymen was and has continued to be an acceptable and effective instrument of holiness in the Church, we now turn to the contemporary phenomenon of group spiritual direction as practiced in some of the charismatic prayer groups that have been meeting throughout the country since 1967.[2] What happens is that groups of Christians who meet on a weekly basis for Scriptural and charismatic prayer have found their need for spiritual direction whetted from their new contact with the gospel of Christ on a deepening faith experience level. The scope of this article is to indicate what spiritual direction is beginning to accomplish in this apparently rather new field.

One-to-One Spiritual Direction

By way of prelude, let me say that we find the traditional one-to-one relationship usual to spiritual direction happening in this setting too. During a time of friendly exchange known as fellowshipping, one person may seek direction from another person in the group whose insights expressed during the time of common prayer have inspired the former to promote this exchange. Trust has inspired the hope of further communication. A priest who is participating in the prayer meeting finds himself confronted with various requests that might originally be of a somewhat objective nature. What does he think about Watergate? About premarital sex? About women in the priesthood? These hurdles crossed, conversation would soon get down to the personal level. How can I be truthful, humble, patient in the competitive world of cybernetics where I operate? What attitude should I as parent take to my teenage daughter who has run away? What does the Our Father mean when it asks God to forgive us "as we forgive"?

Group Spiritual Direction

I am not going to take time to suggest how an abiding relationship of spiritual direction might be set up at this point of the exchange on a one-to-one basis, namely, between a priest and a parishioner, between a sister and a layperson, or vice versa. My concern is rather to describe the relationship of spiritual direction that sometimes emerges for the person as member of a given charismatic prayer group. What can the praying community, predominantly lay, do for the person who has become a part of it, in response to his or her spiritual need, and how?

Two Times for Direction

There seem to be two times for spiritual direction that we can envisage here: (a) during retreats and similar programs of spiritual renewal; (b) ongoing spiritual direction.

According to this simple division, then, we have two ways of spiritual direction to consider. One way is in time of special prayer which the group

members undertake to make together, such as a day of renewal or a retreat, designated (a). The other way is ongoing spiritual direction which takes place chiefly during the time of the weekly prayer meeting but is extended into the personal prayer and daily living of the participant or, in other words, throughout the rest of the week, thus (b).

It is my belief that a given prayer group as a whole can possess the charism of spiritual direction in at least two somewhat complementary modes: discernment of spirits and prophecy. Discernment of spirits is often exercised in an intensive manner during the time of retreat, especially a retreat that involves considerable decision-making. The manual of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius contains pertinent strategy. Among the introductory observations, or annotations, the fifteenth distinguishes between the attitude that spiritual direction takes within the time when the spiritual exercises of a retreat are being made and outside that time. In the latter instance, the person may remain more on the alert, it would seem, for direction that might come to him or her in an indirect manner, for example through some teaching or exhortation delivered in the praying community. Of course, in either case, inside or outside retreat, listening to the Holy Spirit is of prime importance, as articles on discernment of spirits, especially those from Father Futrell, have pointed out.[3] Since less seems to have been written on how spiritual direction is exercised in the second instance, that is, in the ongoing situation, I am concentrating now on that area. Later on I shall mention what are a few of the traditional norms useful in ongoing spiritual direction. Secondly, I shall say how such norms are being found to operate in the spiritual direction experienced through the weekly charismatic prayer group.

Direction in the Weekly Charismatic Group

Generally speaking, the charismatic prayer group is a fine arena for spiritual direction. In the case of a group that has been regularly praying together for some time, the visitor's impression is that the group has been taken over, to a marked degree, by the Holy Spirit. This is evident in the spontaneous exercise of charisms during the prayer meeting and in the virtuous living of the many people who compose the group. Their mutual search to praise the Lord and upbuild each other habitually goes on in an atmosphere of love.

Having the free exercise of charisms such as tongues, interpretation, prophecy is not of course equivalent to holiness, the prime concern of spiritual direction. Knowing how to possess them, though, calls for a basic attitude of poverty, suggestive of the detached following of Christ through thick and thin that leads into abiding union with God.

We derive a general idea of what takes place in a praying community whose membership is stepping out of the earlier stage (baptism in the Spirit, release of the Spirit) into the less definite one which might con-

sume the whole lifetime of a given member—growth to the point of bearing fruit. Across this span spiritual direction assists the Christian to interpret events in the light of the gospel to which he has already committed himself in repentance and faith. From this point, at which the Spirit of the Father has become so real, from now on in, how is he handling his situation so that his human thought may be imbued with spiritual thinking, so that he may be putting on the mind of Christ? If this whole lifetime process is not to stop there where fullness more or less began, the personal progress in the ways of God, that may have been initiated during a retreat, should be going forward. How does it?

The main thrust of spiritual direction is to get the directee from where he is, in the Lord, to where, in the Lord, he is drawn to be. Thus progress (the *epectesis* of St. Gregory of Nyssa) is of the essence. Those who easily communicate with the Lord and disclose an affinity with invitations of the good spirit are taken to be in the right way. Spiritual direction considers greater generosity as an indication of spiritual progress. Joy in the cross is at the summit. Against these few notes on ongoing spiritual direction, we can now place a brief survey of how they operate in a prayer group.

Second Weekly Meeting for Direction

In "Building on Rock" Bert Ghezzi tells of the situation where some prayer groups in Michigan decided to call a second meeting per week to meet the needs of persons baptized in the Holy Spirit who now wanted to strengthen their life in the Holy Spirit.[4] This "second meeting" seems to have characteristics of a spiritual direction colloquy or dialogue, without being, of course, the one-to-one relationship. As many as twenty might be taking part in it, but twenty who have grown together during a prolonged period of prayer, maybe a year; now they want to proceed further into the realms of spiritual growth and Christian maturation. As problems arise, they have trusted in personal and communal discernment for their solution or, as often as this, for resigned or joyful acceptance. As a result, Bert Ghezzi notes that "the individual members have grown noticeably in the Spirit." Still, for all his encouragement, he does not exactly say how spiritual direction operates under the above circumstances, other than to observe that growth has occurred.

The Mount Kisco Experience

I therefore feel that for specifics on the type of ongoing spiritual direction to which I have alluded above, I would want to go to the groups with which I am familiar. In the one that I know best, at the Cenacle of Mount Kisco, New York,[5] I have noted the phenomenon of spiritual direction to occur in quite some detail. Although we now have a "second meeting" or core meeting regularly taking place to prepare by prayer and planning for the main prayer meeting held each Tuesday, it is chiefly the latter about

which I wish to comment. This is composed of from thirty to fifty persons, mostly married and single laypeople, with a few brothers and sisters from Maryknoll and the Cenacle, a few children, a few clergymen, among whom is almost always a Catholic priest. Thus the opportunity for confession and Eucharist is usually at hand. Besides the sacramental thrust, a dynamism toward a discovery of "vocation" in the strict sense has been observable in the group. Recently a charismatic wedding took place and plans to study for the priesthood were put in motion. The prayer group was involved throughout the course of these procedures. More significantly, the quality of about a dozen witnesses' private lives during the past few months was basically improved. Avowedly, the spiritual values of the Sermon on the Mount have come to predominate over egotistic considerations. All of this points up the role of this particular prayer group as presently concerned with the charism(s) of spiritual direction. To this end a rotating leadership that is docile to the influence of the Holy Spirit, even in the choice of songs to sing and books to recommend, is emerging.

A Typical Meeting

An idea of how this charism works may be gained in examining a typical meeting in the light of some values that were cited earlier on as linked to spiritual direction. I first mentioned the need to get the directee to move from where he is to where the Lord wants him to be. For this it is necessary that the prayer meeting situation be one where trust abounds. A group that articulates itself too exclusively in lofty generalities is one where we will normally be too embarrassed to declare our little failures and bless God for them. As a proud, perfectionist type of person scarcely qualifies for the ideal spiritual director, so conversely does a prayer group that is humble, where the Lord is thanked for windows getting unstuck, really invite to openness of spirit. The person who wants direction begins to say where he knows himself to be at the moment with God. He does not fear to communicate that he has a long way to go.

The climate of trust and openness makes it possible for personal prayer to flourish. The gift of prayer is most helpfully expressed in terms that others too are using. Although it should be possible for any adult to pray aloud in the presence of other adults, the process of substituting words to God instead of thoughts about God is often a slow one. The example of others who use the first and second person in friendly reverent dialogue with God during the prayer meeting is one of the best ways to promote that easy communication with the Lord which was already mentioned as being among the hints that the effective action of the Holy Spirit is presently at work in this person:

> The evil spirit [and he often attends the prayer meeting) too seeks to prevent the soul from advancing. It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage . . . inspirations and peace. This He does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.[6]

"You will know them by their fruit" (Mt 7:16). During a prayer meeting that is alive, there will be evidence, often in the form of witnessing, to the bearing of much fruit (Jn 15:8) as it occurs in a person's current pattern of spiritual development. This fruit could have a strong social dimension or be a quiet work of patience perceived only within the home. This is a point in favor of married partners being one another's spiritual director, but they in turn are part of the praying group that continues to offer encouragement by way of listening, silent acceptance, or even prophetic invitation, to the person who has been taking steps in patience or holy boldness.

Following the Spirit more and more gladly even at the expense of one's own convenience is taken as a sign of growth. To come to rejoice in the cross is regarded as a higher move up the ladder of following the Lord.

When the above norms on trust, simplicity, fruit-bearing, generosity, and love are acceptable to the prayer group, a more developed quality of spirituality than what one might otherwise attain so quickly, brushes off onto the person who comes into the meeting. Prophecies are given in the receptive, open, loving community. It is one who sows and another that reaps.

How is this community spiritual direction of which I speak effectively experienced? The group of thirty to fifty mentioned above as composing a Cenacle prayer group are enough at ease, in periods of regular participation, to engender trust. In trust I can listen and be listened to. In trust the voice of spiritual direction, the voice of prophecy, can dare to be insistent, without fear of being ignored or rejected.

Thus is developed a community of prayer in which the gifts of tongues, interpretation, prophecy are often manifest. Prayer then becomes almost as usual as breathing. The atmosphere of the Holy Spirit wherein we can bear to learn strong truths about ourselves as followers of Jesus can prevail. Leadership, preferably rotating leadership, that is firm, gentle, and sensitive to the Spirit, provides good teaching on a regular basis. Leadership lets people come out of themselves one by one without constraint.

Within the group that has become aware of this collective vocation, as community, to spiritual direction, there are some members who are perceived to exercise the appropriate charisms with peaceful assurance. Others, such as some whose lives are presently full of personal turmoil, are able at least to listen supportively, to be open to the direction, and silently to approve the power of the Spirit operating from within the community.

A Man Named Robert

A man named Robert who came into our prayer meeting the other night soon comprehended the principles of spiritual direction, some of which have been mentioned above, according to which the group was

moving. He heard the father of the bride whose wedding has been mentioned tell how his financial condition (short of funds) had been given over to the Lord as the family prepared for the wedding. Hitherto a do-it-yourself kind of Christian, he described the convincing faith experience he had, in which divine providence worked through good neighbors who effectively produced food and prayed for fair weather. The prayer group over the months had seen Doug's independent spirit blend more and more graciously into an acceptance, then a rejoicing in God's ways (financial reverses) of bringing him to a position of authentic trust. His prayerful narration, to which his wife Mary added her womanly trepidation over invitations, flowers, and gowns, sparked some other members who had attended Melissa's wedding to add their appreciation of different aspects of the same divine bounty—the three-piece orchestra generously donated, the gay grandmothers and so much youth, the harvest moon. "Leave it to the Lord" was the keynote, which carried over into other areas where God's power had been evident throughout the week—the healing of Sr. Teresita's brother in the Philippines, the triumph of the spirit of justice in two cases where a stolen electric leader and a clock had been restored as truth came more and more alive. The spirit of complaint had been overcome when one woman, recognizing that a telephone conversation she had made was lacking in love, had telephoned later to apologize.

The man named Robert who came in to visit the prayer meeting heard some prophecy and singing in tongues too. On the whole, he was the most convinced by the spirit of faith manifested by Doug in the face of financial crisis. For Robert had come in facing business failure himself. And suddenly he could see that whereas it is good to praise God in time of joy, still, to praise Him in going under was even better, at least better for Robert.

The level of Robert's life began to soar from that moment and he has been humming "Glory to God, Glory" ever since he visited the prayer meeting. He has been led into using Scripture on a regular basis and planning some time each day, on his way to work, for personal prayer. He calls it hopefully a good beginning. "By their fruit you shall know them." This is an example of the effects of group spiritual direction, its informal manner and yet the positive ongoing influence that it can have in a person's life.

NOTES

[1] See John Harrington, "The Ministry of Direction," *Priest*, March 1973, p. 25.

[2] See *New Covenant*, September 1973, p. 12, where Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., is reported as stating that the charismatic movement spreading in the heart of the Church is lay in character.

[3] See, *for* example, John Carroll Futrell, S.J., "Ignatian Discernment," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 2, no. 2.

[4] *New Covenant*, September 1973, p. 6.

[5] This article was written while the author was a staff member of the Cenacle at Mount Kisco; the Mount Kisco group has retained its vitality but has now transferred to St. Patrick's Church in Bedford Village, New York, The author belongs at present to the charismatic prayer group that meets at the Cenacle in Warrenville, Illinois.

[6] Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 315.

An Experience of Group Spiritual Direction

Donna Lord, G.N.S.H.

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Spiritual direction can happen in a group setting. This has been my experience in the past eight years as a team member for At Home Retreats.[1] In that context retreatants who are taking time each day for quiet prayer and reflection come to the group session and share the fruits of their prayer with the group. One of the two trained directors (who may be a lay person or a member of a religious order) responds in turn to each retreatant's sharing. The director listens, reflects back what she hears, affirms what seems to be God's action, points out possible pitfalls, interrelates various spiritual experiences, helps with discernment of spirits, and encourages faithfulness to prayer and to living out God's call in daily life. The other group members listen, but do not speak. All the directing is done by the trained directors.

Over the past several years I began to wonder if a group of praying Christians would be able to offer spiritual direction to one another. If the leader would participate as a peer, and all members were free to speak, would real spiritual direction happen? It seemed worth a try.

Twofold Purpose

Influenced by my studies at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Washington, D.C.,[2] I decided to begin the evening with an hour of prayer, then move into an hour of group spiritual direction. The

reasons for beginning with prayer were: 1) support for the participants' own daily prayer practice; and 2) hope that the openness to God in the prayer time would flow over into the directing time.

In one of his recent works, Morton Kelsey speaks of the benefit of groups meeting for quiet prayer and tells how he has been personally affected:

> For many years I was a leader of a prayer group that met weekly for an hour or so. Again and again we discovered that people who were not able to become quiet and reach through to another dimension by themselves were able to do it in the presence of others who were trying to be open to spiritual experience. There was an actual contagion of a positive kind, which enabled some people to break through the barrier of our materialistic consciousness. They could then carry this experience over to their private prayer times. I myself find it easier to be quiet and open when in the presence of others engaged in the same process than when alone.[3]

A letter was sent out in late October, 1985, describing the group, which was to begin meeting in mid-January, 1986, and continue until mid-April. The mailing went to adults in the area who had made At Home Retreats. Within ten days, twelve persons, all women, had called to register. In the end, eight of them did actually participate in the group.

The letter attempted to give a clear explanation of the twofold purpose of the group, plus an indication of what would be expected of participants. The letter said:

> I would like to invite you to a weekly gathering that will include a time for contemplative prayer and an experience of group spiritual direction. Those who come together for this time will be people who are serious about the spiritual journey, who have had prayer experiences like the At Home Retreat, and who now want to continue and go deeper.
>
> Here is a brief explanation of the two parts of the evening:
>
> 1. *Contemplative Prayer: I* use this term to mean a kind of calming down and opening the heart to God. We will gather in silence in a large chapel with carpet, cushions, and chairs. I will talk about a particular form of contemplative prayer such as Jesus Prayer, Centering Prayer, Scriptural Prayer, Mantra Prayer, and so forth. We will be quiet and enter into the prayer for a period of time, perhaps twenty minutes. When the prayer time is over, we will take some time for reflection and journaling.
>
> 2. *Group Spiritual Direction:* How can we understand the way God is moving in our lives? How is God leading us, drawing us, calling us, reassuring us? Sometimes we fail to listen or miss the signs. Sometimes we get confused or led astray. In the history of spiritual traditions (Christian and non-Christian) the spiritual guide has played an important role in helping

> people in their journey of faith. Our own day seems ripe for spiritual guidance to take place in groups. The At Home Retreat is one example of that. I would like to try a format where less directing would be done by the "trained director" and more by the members of the group. This will take place during the second hour each Tuesday evening.
>
> Does this seem like a group you would like to be part of? I think it will be important for participants to: 1) have a discipline of contemplative prayer in their life during the week; 2) come faithfully to the group gathering each week; 3) have some ability and willingness to speak in the group.

In retrospect, I would probably not use the term contemplative prayer, because it tends to connote a prayer free of thoughts, feelings and images. The term meditative prayer seems no better because of its association with discursive thought and reflection. Perhaps a good term to use at this point in time would be quiet prayer, meaning an attempt to be still and open one's heart to God.

Structure

The leader designed the format for the evening and kept to a consistent pattern, thereby freeing the participants from needing to be concerned about the process. One person each week volunteered to tend the door. Those who arrived early went into the chapel and began entering into the silence there. Chairs were arranged against the walls, forming a large circle. In the center of the circle stood a tall candle on a low table.

The first hour proceeded in this way:

1. The leader lit the candle, read a brief Scripture passage, paused for a moment of silence, and then offered a spoken prayer.

2. All were asked to stand for a few minutes of deep breathing, stretching, body movement and gesture prayer.

3. The participants sat down and assumed a relaxed, alert position. Sometimes a short time of awareness prayer (e.g., body, breath, sounds) was used at this time. Then directions were given for a form of prayer such as healing of memories, centering prayer, intercessory prayer, Jesus prayer. Anthony De Mello's *Sadhana* and *Wellsprings* were often used as resources.[4]

4. The group then remained in uninterrupted silent prayer for fifteen minutes.

5. The members were invited to spend ten minutes in reflection on their prayer, using journal writing if they so desired.

At the end of the first hour, chairs were moved closer together to form a smaller circle. The lighted candle on the low table formed part of the periphery of the circle.

During the second hour these steps were followed:

1. For the first few weeks there was a sharing of names and a brief answer to a get-acquainted question.

2. The leader sometimes made a comment on the prayer form, encouraging its use during the week.

3. Especially at first, instructions on group spiritual direction were given or repeated. On the first evening the group met, the entire second hour was devoted to a description of group spiritual direction.

4. The leader asked if anyone in the group felt inclined to share something about her life and her faith with the group that evening. In every case, including the second evening the group met, one person did offer to speak. There was one evening when two wished to speak, but one agreed to wait until the following week.

5. The person spoke for as long as she wanted. Usually, the sharing was brief and to the point. It often focused on one experience or situation that was causing concern.

6. The leader called for several minutes of silence, suggesting that the group pray, reflect and see what response might rise within them.

7. The group was invited to respond to the person who had shared. The directee was free to react, though most chose to receive the responses silently. The leader offered her own reflections as she was moved to but did not dominate.

8. Sometimes the leader would stop the group and call for a few more minutes of silence before further responses would be given.

9. Near the end of the hour, the leader called for a spontaneous prayer of petition, suggesting that it would be good to broaden our awareness beyond ourselves and remember the needs of others, of our society, and of the world.

10. At the very end, one or two minutes were given to a brief evaluation of the second hour.

After the two hours of prayer and direction, participants would go to another room for coffee and cake, and a time of informal conversation.

Definitions

It might be helpful at this point to stop and consider what the term spiritual direction means, and how it can be distinguished from spiritual formation and spiritual guidance. Gerald May, in *Care of Mind*, *Care of Spirit*, defines the three terms in this way:

> *Spiritual formation* is a rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth processes of spiritual direction.
>
> *Spiritual guidance* can apply to any situation in which people receive help, assistance, attention, or facilitation in the process of their spiritual formation. This applies not only to deepening one's personal relationship to God, but also to the dynamic living-out of that realization in the actions

> of daily life. Spiritual guidance can come through almost any conceivable channel. . . .
>
> When spiritual guidance occurs in a formal, one-to-one relationship with another individual, it can be called *spiritual direction*. In the classic form of spiritual direction there is a director and a directee, the one helping the other to discern the work of the Lord in his or her life and to distinguish among the various forces or "spirits" which seem to beckon in different directions.[5]

The three processes can be visualized as three concentric circles: the largest circle is the whole of spiritual formation; inside that one is a somewhat smaller circle called spiritual guidance; and inside that one, a yet smaller circle named spiritual direction.

Using May's definitions, I would like to believe that what I was offering the group of eight women was two hours of spiritual formation, including one hour of spiritual guidance and one hour of spiritual direction. However, May cautions against using the term spiritual direction for direction by the group. He is open to group spiritual direction, but the form he prefers is spiritual direction by one or more trained directors in a group setting. He states: "Here one or two people guide a group on a formal, structured basis. The group members may support each other's journeys and offer insights and directions, but the leadership must remain recognized and definitive in order to warrant the label 'direction.'"[6] It seems that in a group in which everyone is free to respond on an equal basis, without the leader (or leaders) attempting to give the final word, May would not consider spiritual direction to be happening. He would hold out for the leader being the real director, with group members offering their thoughts and suggestions, but in a subsidiary way.

Another author who includes group spiritual direction as a possible form of spiritual direction is Shaun McCarty, S.T. Using the term "spiritual counseling," which is roughly equivalent to spiritual direction, McCarty gives this definition: "That form of pastoral care in which the gift of counsel is mediated by means of intentional, particularized and varied helps offered by persons called, gifted and skilled to other persons seeking to realize more (meaning both 'to come to awareness,' 'to make real') and to be more responsive to the mystery of God's Spirit guiding them in the experience and relationships that constitute the providence of their everyday lives as they bring them to prayer."[7] McCarty clearly includes group spiritual counseling as a viable alternative, listing twelve advantages, twelve difficulties, and twenty Suggestions for forming a group. It is not clear how strong a role McCarty would assign to the leader. However, it is evident that he considers the offerings of the participants to be central.

Among the twelve advantages of group spiritual counseling he lists: "(6) opportunity for a variety of clarifying comments, questions, etc. from more people."[8] Also, among the twenty suggestions he lists: "(11) Interventions from the members should be such that they enable the counselees to clarify their experience and be freer to respond to grace."[9] It is clear that McCarty has in mind a group experience in which the leader or leaders do not do all the directing, but one in which the offerings of the entire group are essential to the process.

One author who describes a specific experience of group spiritual direction, and who makes it clear that she considers the group rather than the leader to be doing the directing, is Winifred Corrigan, R.C. She defines spiritual direction in this way: "the journey of a person from where he/she is to where God wants him/her to be . . . [through a process of] sharing about the religious experience, appropriating Christian wisdom, and discerning lifestyle/strategy."[10]

Included in sharing about the religious experience, Corrigan gives three kinds of questions often brought up: 1) "How do I handle the desert experience?" (how to deal with suffering); 2) "Is it time for me to change my way of prayer?" (how to pray at this time in my life); 3) "How do I deal with pluralism?" (how to handle conflict in relationships).[11] 4) Corrigan makes it clear that everyone in the group is free to respond: "In the Group Spiritual Direction format it is understood that all are participants, not observers. . . ."[12] In the specific examples she uses (e.g., a woman struggling with a job promotion that will require her family to move to another city), Corrigan mentions responses given by group members, not the leader. It is evident that she considers the group to be doing the directing.

Emphasis

In the three definitions of spiritual direction given above, whether the author considers the leader or the group members to be the primary director, there is no doubt that the major focus is on the spiritual aspect rather than on the psychological aspect of reality. Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., makes the point quite succinctly: "The primary content of the spiritual direction dialogue is not the directee's problems or even the relationship of the directee with the guide. It is the directee's prayer experience, both formal and diffused in daily life, in which his or her relationship with God expresses itself and develops."[13]

Gerald May makes a similar distinction, and speaks of the tendency of psychological considerations to capture our attention (he uses the words "kidnap" and "seduction") and take away from the "gentle spiritual attentiveness" needed for spiritual direction.[14]

One might ask why Schneiders and others caution against an emphasis on problems. William J. Connolly, S.J., answered that question in an article that has become a classic reference for current-day directors.

Connolly says this:

> The problems, impasses, and difficulties represent the person's weak side. This is not to say that they are unimportant. Concentration on them rather than on the identity questions will not, however, make him a gospel person but will instead weaken his confidence and sense of identity. For there is something infinite about problems. The more we concentrate on them, the more of them there are. . . .[15]

> The key danger in encouraging a person to plunge about among his weaknesses lies in the enmeshing, fascinating effect produced on each of us by our own problems. He may become so preoccupied with them that he will never let himself look at the Lord. Conflict situations for instance, with the pull they exercise on his fears, angers, and guilt can keep him so fascinated, even for years, that he never directs attention to who the Lord is for him.[16]

My own convictions about what is helpful and harmful in spiritual direction are reflected in the handout I gave the participants on the first evening we gathered for Contemplative Prayer/Spiritual Direction. My hope and expectation for group spiritual direction was the same as the one Tilden Edwards mentions in *Spiritual Friend.* "The primary functions of spiritual direction groups essentially are . . . the same as those of one-to-one direction."[17] I hoped that the same things would happen in group direction as in individual direction. I hoped that the handout, along with an hour-long discussion the first evening, would give participants a clear sense of what our purpose would be and how we would proceed. I hoped that the entire group, rather than only the leader, would do the directing; that the emphasis would be primarily spiritual, focused on prayer and relationship with God; and lastly, that we would not get bogged down in a lot of problem-solving and advice-giving.

Handout

The handout that was distributed the first evening gave an explanation of group spiritual direction and described the role of the directee and the role of the directors (group members). It was worded this way:

> *Group Spiritual Direction*
>
> Spiritual direction occurs when one person helps another be aware of the way God is moving in her life and in her prayer, and make choices that will lead closer to God rather than farther away. Although spiritual direction most often takes place between two individuals, another possibility is group spiritual direction. Here a person shares with the group some aspects of her life with God. All listen prayerfully and reverently. There is a time of silence. Then any who are moved to speak encouraging or

helpful words to the person do so. Finally, the person reflects on what has been said, holding on to what seems sound and helpful, and letting go of what does not help.

Directees (the ones directed)

The directees may choose to share with the group:

1. what is happening in their life.
2. what inner movements they are experiencing in their life and in their prayer: joy, peace, anger, fear, sadness, excitement, and so forth.
3. what is happening in their prayer
4. spiritual experiences they have had
5. how they feel led or where they feel confused and need direction, or what decisions they need to make
6. how God seems to them right now
7. how is their work (inside and outside the home), how are their relationships, what spiritual disciplines are they incorporating into their week.

Directors (everyone in the group)

The director may respond in these ways:

1. Listen. Reflect back what you heard. Ask for more clarification.
2. Resonate with the feelings. Draw the feelings out more.
3. Encourage the person to take the feelings to God in prayer and deal with God directly.
4. See if the person has a sense of what God may be calling her to do.
5. If the person's discernment sounds good, affirm it; if not, gently question it.
6. If the person has practical questions (e.g., what time of day to pray), help them find their own answer.
7. Once you understand their particular needs, offer a suggestion as to a way they may pray or how they may use the journal or what they may read.
8. Share your own experience when helpful.

Don'ts for the Director

1. Don't get hooked on problem-solving.
2. Don't tell the person what to do.
3. Don't moralize (shoulds), judge, or preach.
4. Don't impose your own experience. God works with each of us uniquely.
5. Don't make light of what is said, or, on the other hand, exaggerate its importance.

Experience

Once the group had received an hour-long instruction of group spiritual direction plus a full-page handout, nothing remained but to actually give it a try. This happened on the second evening the group came togeth-

er. At the beginning of the second hour I asked if someone was ready to speak to the group. Angela volunteered right away. Here are her words:[18]

> Lately in my prayer and in my life, I seem to be traveling a different path from other people. That's the basic sense I have in my relationship with God.
>
> I do volunteer work in a drop-in center for street people. Today a mildly retarded woman I have befriended there spoke to me about her need for surgery and having no one to care for her three young children while she is hospitalized. I offered to take them home with me. Afterwards during the day, the matter kept coming back into my mind, and I wondered if I had done the right thing in offering.

The group responded by helping Angela reflect on her discernment. Was there a sense of peace and rightness as she made the offer? Did she have time to reflect before speaking?

Questions were asked regarding the anxiety. Was there a fear of taking on too much? (No.) Was there fear that Angela's husband and children would be resentful? (No.) The hesitation came from a tendency of people to say, "Oh, you are so good to do such-and-such," and Angela's fear that she will be motivated by what others think.

It was pointed out that when we set out to do a good thing, the evil spirit may use anxiety to try to deflect us. Someone also mentioned that there seems to be a connection between Angela's sense of call (to take a different path) and her difficulty (others looking upon her as virtuous).

These were the main questions and comments the group had for Angela. We were off to a good start. The focus of the first experience was primarily spiritual. However, lest complacency set in, the second sharing the following week was not as spiritually-based. One person's self-revelation centered mainly on her problem with trying to give up smoking, and the group fell promptly into a problem-solving and advice-giving mode. "Give your pack of cigarettes to a neighbor with instructions to parcel them out at stipulated intervals," suggested one member. There was some focus on the spiritual, but in general the group's attention kept returning to the human situation.

In the weeks that followed, one participant volunteered each week to share something of her spiritual journey with the group. There was no prearrangement as to who would speak, but each week someone offered. In the course of eight weeks, eight of us took a turn, including the leader. (One group member dropped out before she had a turn.) By my estimate, five of the evenings kept a primarily spiritual focus, and three were more centered on the psychological.

Besides the one already described, the other sharings that led to an exchange that focused primarily on the spiritual were:

1. My difficulty has to do with keeping God in mind all through the day. When I take prayer time, there is peace inside me, but as the day goes on and I am beset by many duties and demands, I tend to lose peace. For example, today I became angry with my mother, who lives with my family . . . .

2. My struggle is with my fear for the safety of my son, who is serving with the Sixth Fleet off the coast of Libya. I am afraid that God may ask me to give him up, and I can't say, "Your will be done." It makes me angry. If God were a woman instead of a man, he would understand how a mother feels and not put me in this position.

3. Lately I have been reluctant to take quiet prayer time because I feel embarrassed. I had a fight with my husband last week. It was my fault, but I haven't been able to apologize, nor have I been able to take it to God in prayer.

4. I need your help with my tendency to fall into a busy-busy syndrome: accelerate the pace, so much to do, wheels spinning, can't slow down. The result is a loss of peace, less effectiveness in ministry, inability to quiet down and pray, and chronic headaches.

In each of these cases, the group's response did focus somewhat on the directee's human situation, feelings and reactions; but at least a fairly good percentage of the responses related to the spiritual. Examples would be: "It seems to me that busyness is a kind of addiction. Are you asking God each day for strength not to be taken over by it?" "You feel a sense of call from God to love and care for your young children, but sometimes our best desires can be used to lead us astray. Perhaps you are trying to be Super-Mom, which can only lead to frustration and failure." "When my husband and I are angry and we can't resolve the issue right away, as we get into bed that night we simply touch hands to show that we still love each other and will get beyond the anger as soon as we can."

On the other hand, in two of the additional sessions, I felt that the sharing and responses were related more to the psychological than to the spiritual. In one case, a woman talked about a specific conflict related with her job. In the other case, a member talked about her struggle with her tendency toward passive behavior. In these cases, neither the directees nor the group made much of a connection between the human situation and the directee's relationship with God.

Leader

In a spiritual formation group, a good leader can provide a valuable service. The leader defines the task, gives clear directions, and guards against sidetracking. The members are free to relax and enjoy the evening, with no need to be concerned about the structure or process. The leader also observes the interactions, and the group can trust the leader to inter-

vene if harmful elements begin to creep in, such as competitiveness, compulsive talking, or judgmental comments. The group feels protected from some of the evils that can affect group life. Morton Kelsey expresses his conviction of the importance of the leader in this way: ". . . I have come to see that the leader in any program will determine its quality and nature. If the leader is unconsciously hostile or destructive, the group will reflect evil and destructiveness. When the leader is led by the Holy Spirit and love, the group can be unbelievably creative."[19]

Many years of experience with contemplative practice groups have led the staff of the Shalem Institute to conclude that participants favor a structure in which a designated leader (or leaders) directs the evening's program. Tilden Edwards came to this conclusion through his own experience with groups, and expresses it this way:

> Very active, independent people who come to groups in my experience consistently seek a different mode of participation in reality during sessions. They do not want to have their egos in the driver's seat trying to achieve something, compete, assert, defend, etc. They are searching for a quality of "being" time, marked especially by a simple openness. It is the director's job to sacrifice much of his or her own "being" time for the sake of the group, so he or she can be trusted enough to be "in charge" for them; then they are free to be openly present.[20]

When I began working with the group in Contemplative Prayer/Group Spiritual Direction, I understood that my role for the prayer hour was to give good directions and set up a time frame, so that participants would be free to enter into prayer without concern about the structure of timing. However, I was less sure about what would be helpful in the second hour, the group spiritual direction time. Ultimately, I decided to spend the entire second hour of the first evening teaching the group the meaning of group spiritual direction, what sorts of things the directee might share, and how the directors could respond. In addition, for the next several evenings I spent a few minutes at the beginning of each group spiritual direction hour reminding the participants of our purpose and procedure. During the actual direction session, I facilitated the process: e.g., asking for a volunteer to be the directee for the evening, calling for a time of silence, inviting the group to respond. However, during the time when the group responded to the directee, I attempted to function as a peer, not dominating the discussion, but giving my reflections to the directee, the same as everyone else in the group.

Many of my contributions to the group direction were attempts to point out the relationship between the experience being described and the principles of discernment of spirits. In addition, I would tend to ask questions or make suggestions related to the persons' sense of God's call, or how they would take their life experience into their quiet prayer time.

Sometimes, however, I would realize at the end of the session that the group had been swept away by considerations related to the life situation, failing to make connections with the life of faith, and that I had gone right along with them.

At the beginning, I felt a certain amount of anxiety about the second hour, and a good deal of concern that the group spiritual direction would be done properly. For that reason I continued for four weeks to give instructions, point out misdirections, and suggest better ways to proceed. My recommendations came at the beginning of the second hour. During the direction sessions that followed, there was a good deal of cautiousness and tentativeness among the participants. Finally, at the short evaluation time at the end of the fourth week's meeting, one of the women said: "I think some people here have things to say and are holding back. Why don't we just say what we want to say without worrying about whether it is right or not? I'd rather have people express themselves freely instead of being so inhibited." At that point I decided that my weekly instructions were becoming counterproductive. If by now the group had a sense of what was helpful to say and what might be less helpful, fine. If they had not yet developed such a sense, there was not much I could do. I decided to relax more and let go of some of my sense of how things should be. The group relaxed, too, and began to interact more freely.

There were times when their comments to the directee were not in keeping with what I would consider the best counseling or spiritual direction skills, but I decided to let them do things their way. The directees seemed to benefit even when the group proceeded in less-than-perfect ways. One week in the evaluation time I said to the directee (she had talked about the spiritual effects of an unresolved fight with her husband): "It seemed to me that some of the offerings tonight were preachy. Did that concern you?" She replied: "If a priest or sister were telling me what to do in my marriage I might resent it, but since the advice was coming from another married woman, I didn't mind."

Effects

As Irvin D. Yalom says in *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, the least reliable way to assess the value of a group experience is to ask the members directly, especially right after the experience takes place. Yalom says:

> . . . any outcome study based on interviews, testimonials, or patient self-administered questionnaires obtained at the end of the group is of little value. At no other time is the patient more loyal, more grateful, and less objective about his group than at the point of termination; at this juncture there is a powerful tendency to recall and to express only the positive, tender feelings.[21]

However, lacking a more objective method, I did elicit comments from group members each week at the end of the second hour, and in the longer evaluation times at the halfway point of the program and on the last evening we met.

Concerning the hour of contemplative prayer, the group said:

1. They liked the quiet place. At home it was difficult to avoid noise and interruptions.

2. They enjoyed the variety of prayer forms introduced. Some they had begun to use at home, with beneficial results.

3. They believed that the prayerfulness from the first hour flowed over into the sharings and responses of the second hour.

4. They appreciated the guidance given during the prayer hour, and having someone attend to the structure and timing.

5. They liked the Scripture reading given at the beginning. It felt right to begin with God's Word, and the passage held meaning for them.

6. The fifteen minutes of uninterrupted quiet was the right amount of time for them.

About the hour of group spiritual direction, the participants said:

1. They felt somewhat inadequate. After the directee spoke, it was hard to know the right question to ask or the most helpful comment to make.

2. They felt more relaxed and confident after the leader stopped stressing "do's" and "don'ts."

3. They were struck by the similarities in their life experiences and spiritual struggles. Each week, no matter who shared or what was said in response, all the participants gained wisdom for their own lives.

4. There was a climate of acceptance in the group, with no evidence of judging or criticizing. It felt like a loving community.

5. The group was less concerned than the leader about focusing on psychological matters and not making a direct connection to the life of faith. One woman said: "God speaks through everything that is said. One of the most memorable things said to me was 'if you want to do it, you will.' That doesn't sound directly spiritual, but it has had an impact on my spiritual life."

6. Often the directee gained greater clarity. One said: "I kept using the term embarrassment to express how I felt trying to face God without first apologizing to my husband. Someone in the group used the expression 'your sense of sinfulness,' and that gave me a new awareness of what the embarrassment really meant." Another woman said: "Previously I thought of the leadings of the evil spirit coming from outside myself. However, after this session tonight, I am beginning to see that some of the things that threaten to lead me away from God are feelings, urges and reactions that come from inside me, not from without."

One evening near the end of the group experience, participants told

how they felt their prayer had affected their life in the past several months. Admittedly, the good effects they perceived came from many sources, but perhaps among them were both the contemplative prayer hour and the group spiritual direction hour. Here are some of the efforts that were seen:

1. "If I make a mistake at work now, I don't get as upset."
2. "I am more generous in responding to the needs of others, even those I dislike."
3. "I am more able to deal with the uneventful prayer time and the ordinary day."
4. "I am less inclined to pressure my husband and my mother into doing things my way."
5. "I am calmer in dealing with others. They seem calmer with me, too."
6. "My big problems haven't gone away, but I find myself more grateful for small joys like spring flowers beginning to bloom."

Future

This first experience with allowing a group to direct one another has been positive enough to encourage me to lead the same sort of group again in the future. I would still be concerned that the group put sufficient focus on spiritual matters and not stray into psychotherapy. In order to help the group make a direct connection between the life situation and relationship with God, I would encourage directees to speak explicitly about their prayer, their sense of God with them through the day, and their awareness of where God may be leading. I would also suggest that the group, in responding to the directee, make direct references to prayer and relationship with God. I would not discourage discussion of the life experience of the directee, but I would put more stress on the need to make the spiritual connection.

As I reflected on my role in the second hour, I saw that I was attempting to function as teacher, facilitator and peer. In the future, it would seem wise to keep the first two, but modify the third. It is good to want all the members' contributions to be received with respect, but the leader is not simply a peer, but someone with education and experience in spiritual direction. Consequently, when the leader speaks, the words may well carry more weight than the words of others, simply because group members put more stock in them. In addition, the very fact that the leader needs to keep one eye on the process makes it impossible to participate in the same way as other members of the group. In the future, I will view my role as leader as one who teaches the group how to proceed, facilitates the process and offers helpful reflections to the directee along with other group members, while still maintaining the stance of an observer and watching out for the well-being of the group.

Director

When spiritual direction is practiced in a group, it is worthwhile to consider the question: who actually is the director? In the group described in this article, everyone was free to speak. Was every person in the group, then, a spiritual director, including the few who didn't speak very much at all? Or was the leader perhaps the real director of the group? My answer to both these questions would be no. I believe the real spiritual director was the group. When the comments, reflections, questions and suggestions of the whole group were put together and presented to the directee in a spirit of love and caring, true spiritual direction was given and received.

Winifred Corrigan concurs with this view. She says: "It does appear that the group as a whole, rather than some individual spiritual director within it, acts as the agent for the spiritual direction."[22]

Conclusion

In this article I have described one experience with group spiritual direction, direction given not by trained directors in a group setting, but direction given by an entire group, with all the members free to offer helpful responses to the directee. In this particular thirteen-week experience, the hour of group direction was preceded by an hour of contemplative prayer. Following the prayer hour, one member volunteered to talk about her sense of God's presence and action in her life in the context of her current situation. After a few minutes of quiet, members of the group responded in any way they chose: resonating with the feelings, relating similar experiences in their own lives, asking questions to help the directee go into the experience more deeply, giving suggestions for how to proceed, and mentioning possible ways to take the experience to God in prayer. Though the leader was aware of imperfections in the hour of directing—moments of psychologizing, problem-solving, advice giving, preaching, and theologizing—the group members found the experience positive and helpful. There was complete agreement that they benefited greatly from the hour of quiet prayer. Regarding the hour of group spiritual direction, they felt somewhat at a loss as to how to proceed, but once they gained confidence in themselves and convinced the leader to relax, they interacted freely and were grateful for the contribution of each member of the group.

It is never a good idea to draw conclusions from one set of experiences. As group spiritual direction continues to be practiced in different places and in different ways, may some leaders and participants be moved to share their experience in writing so that others may benefit, too. In that way many will read about group spiritual direction, and some who are now hesitant may take a step to lead or join such a group.

NOTES

[1] For a description of At Home Retreats, see Mary Sullivan, R.C., and Dot Horstman, "The Nineteenth Annotation Retreat: The Retreat of the Future?" REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, Vol. 36 (March, 1977), pp. 277-285.

[2] The backbone of the Shalem Institute programs is long-term Contemplative Practice groups. See Gerald G. May, *Pilgrimage Home, the Conduct of Contemplative Practice in Groups* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

[3] Morton T. Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way, The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 121.

[4] Anthony De Mello, S.J., *Sadhana: A Way to God* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978); *Wellsprings: A Book of Spiritual Exercises* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985).

[5] Gerald G. May, M.D., *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 6-7.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[7] Shaun McCarty, S.T., "Spiritual Counseling: Realizing Third Party Presence," *Studies in Formative Spirituality, Vol. VII* (May, 1986), p. 226.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 232.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 233.

[10] Sister Winifred Corrigan, R.C., "Group Spiritual Direction in the Follow-up," *Spiritual Life*, Vol. 29 (Spring, 1983), p. 31.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 35-36.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 32.

[13] Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *Spiritual Direction: Reflections on a Contemporary Ministry* (Chicago: National Sisters Vocation Conference, 1977), p. 33.

[14] May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, p. 13.

[15] William J. Connolly, S.J., "Appealing to Strength in Spiritual Direction," REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS Vol. 32 (Sept. 1973), p. 1061.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 1062.

[17] Tilden Edwards, Jr., *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 179.

[18] The name has been changed. This participant and other group members have given permission for their stories to be printed here.

[19] Kelsey, *Companions Are the Inner Way*, pp. 120-121.

[20] Edwards, *Spiritual Friend, p.* 186. See also May, *Pilgrimage Home, p.* 18-23.

[21] Irvin D. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Book, 1970), p. 212.

[22] Corrigan, "Group Spiritual Direction in the Follow-Up," p. 38.