

PREPARATION OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS OF THE LAY APOSTOLATE

It is with approximately equal parts of enthusiasm and caution that I undertake to propose for our consideration the elements which should give us ground for fruitful interchange during the latter and major portion of this seminar. Personal conviction concerning the need of an increasing phalanx of spiritual directors in our country and in our time is sufficient to outbalance whatever timidity may exist that I may not be the ideal one to propose them.

Begin with this observation: we will not solve all the problems in the matter of spiritual direction; it may well be that we will not be able even to list all of them. If you have noticed that there is a difference between the title of our seminar as listed in the preview summaries sent to you over a month ago, and the title as listed in the program, you begin to see some of the difficulty; *preparing* directors would seem to be a different problem from the *actual directing* of the lay apostolate. Yet the problems, at least right now, are quite identical. I am satisfied to repeat, as applicable to either or both titles, the problem as listed in the summaries.

For almost 25 years there has been a voice of increasing volume protesting that there is a startling reluctance on the part of most [*sic*] priests to give spiritual direction to groups or individuals who seem to be or authoritatively are called to full Christian life. On the other hand, the priest's experience with priests attests to a fountain of good will among them, to a desire to discover and help form outstanding lay leaders in the Church, plus, in both cases, a timidity about undertaking the work.

I. REVIEW OF THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING ON SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

With accidental differences, most writers would accept as a suitable definition: spiritual direction is the guidance of souls towards Christian perfection.¹

¹ P. Parente, *Spiritual Direction* (St. Meinrad: Grail, 1950), 3. On the

This particular aspect of the care of souls, at once most important and most difficult, is of different kinds. Sacramental: guidance in the administration of the sacrament of forgiveness which has as its purpose to insure that the reception of the sacrament is both valid and fruitful, that the confession is entire. It will include all sorts of instruction, of correction, and of exhortation. It is an obligatory part of the confessor's role and is normally treated in moral theology. Evidently, it is an integral part of the next kind, but is important enough to deserve a place by itself. Direction is also pastoral: that guidance which a man gives because he has a sacred office with the care of souls: pope, bishop, pastor, curate, chaplain. It includes the total ministry of the word,² the ministry of the means of grace in sacrifice and sacraments. This kind will always include *general* or *common* direction: intended for the entire flock or community committed to the shepherd's care; normally such direction consists in the presentation of the principles of the spiritual life with practical application to moral conduct; it may also become increasingly *particular*: for example, when a priest gives direction to a special group within the flock. This particular direction tends to flow into the third class.

PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Personal spiritual direction or direction in the strict sense of the word: here the Christian person opens his conscience to the priest confessor, manifests his difficulties, temptations, special inspirations and graces, and asks the priest to point out the way to virtue and perfection; once this procedure has become habitual with the same director, the full reality is attained. Parente observes that this is personal both because it involves assistance to one individual and also because the priest has a personal habitual interest in the particular person's progress.³

scarcity of directors: cf. Parente, *op. cit.*, v-vi; L.-M. de St. Joseph, O.C.D., "Spiritual Direction—Its Nature and Dimensions," *Theology Digest* VI, 1, Winter 1958, 39-40.

² In the spirit of St. Paul in II Tim. 4, 2.

³ Parente, *op. cit.*, 4.

HOW NECESSARY

Ascetical writers generally list spiritual direction in the strict sense among the exterior means of perfection, along with a rule of life, with spiritual reading and devout exhortations, with the sanctification of our social relations.⁴ While it is obviously not *absolutely* necessary for sanctification (for indeed then, how few would be sanctified!), it is *morally* necessary, it is one of the normal means of spiritual progress.

The general principle underlying its necessity was stated by Pope Leo XIII: "It is part of the ordinary law that as God in His Providence has ordained that men for the most part should be saved by men, so He has appointed that those whom He calls to a higher degree of holiness should be guided thereto by men."⁵ The classical example in Sacred Scripture is the conversion of Saul and the role enjoyed in it by Ananias. A remarkable list of other authoritative statements inculcates the necessity of spiritual direction. Reason and experience likewise support its necessity; moreover, both indicate that the need is at every stage of life and in every place.⁶

Of considerable importance in the practical exchange to follow after this summary is the knowledge of this historical fact: spiritual direction is a monastic concept.

The original, primitive meaning of spiritual direction suggests a particular need connected with a special ascetic task, a peculiar vocation for which a professional formation is required. In other words, spiritual direction is a monastic concept. It is a practice which was unnecessary until men withdrew from the Christian community in order to live as solitaries in the desert. For the ordinary members of the primitive Christian community there was no particular need of personal direction in the professional sense. The bishop, the living and visible representative of the apostle who had

⁴ A. Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life* (2nd & revised ed.; trans. Herman Branderis; Tournai: Desclée & Co., 1930) p. 257, n. 530.

⁵ Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter: *Testem Benevolentiae*, January 22, 1899, to James Cardinal Gibbons. *ASS*, 31, 474-78.

⁶ The standard works on ascetical theology develop these at length. Cf. Tanqueray, *op. cit.*; Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (trans. Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., St. Louis: Herder, 1951); etc.

founded the local Church, spoke for Christ and the apostles, and, helped by the presbyters, took care of all the spiritual needs of his flock. The individual member of the community was "formed" and "guided" by his participation in the life of the community, and such instruction as was needed was given first of all by the bishop and presbyters, and then, through informal admonitions, by one's parents, friends and fellow Christians.⁷

The solitaries did retire to the desert to seek Christ and they did so with the approval of bishops. But several other things followed: separation from the Christian community with all its benefits and from the Church and Holy Mass; temptation by Satan, with the need for "discernment of spirits" and for a director. In other words, among the principal safeguards which could justify such a life, was the training and formation of the novice by a "spiritual father." The latter thus replaced the bishop and presbyter as representative of Christ; but he did so not as a member of the hierarchy; he did it as a holy man (a charismatic function); many of the greatest desert fathers were not even priests.

II. PREREQUISITES IN THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR HIMSELF

On this level, some qualities have been demanded traditionally; others should be added in the light of many changes in the modern condition.

Traditional

Knowledge. It is generally recognized that a spiritual director must have adequate theological knowledge. He must have a mature grasp of dogmatic theology, because the supernatural life is grounded precisely upon the great truths which are examined in the field of dogma. He must also have a solid grasp of both moral and spiritual theology, according to which he must guide the souls who come to him; it is generally held that this aspect of his theological knowledge ideally should include a basic knowledge of the schools and literature of spirituality.

⁷ T. Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960) 3, 4-12.

Prudence and Sound Judgment. These two qualities are required because the soul must always be directed, *not* according to the priest's own ideas, *but* according to the motions of grace, the temperament and character of the one being directed, and also his supernatural attractions. The principal notions involved here are these. (a) The spiritual director is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. He must discreetly learn what God's action is on the soul; then he must guide the soul in accordance with that knowledge. Here the spiritual director must take care to avoid forcing his own personal tastes, his own individual attractions, his own way of acting, or his own point of view. Yet, where he encounters the sluggish and the lukewarm, the director may and should take the initiative; hence, he should exhort, counsel, rebuke, etc., as required. (b) The prudence in question here is primarily supernatural, and it must add dependence on the gift of counsel. Hence, the director ought constantly to pray for this prudence and this gift; he should constantly cultivate his own docility, his own spirit of surrender to the Holy Spirit.

Prudence must guide not only the actual giving of direction or spiritual counsel; it must also determine the other matters associated with it. For example, it ought to determine the amount of time given to direction; as much as is needed, no more than is necessary. Time is a very important gift, especially to busy men. Prudence should guide also the choice of a place: for men, this could be almost anywhere; for women, ordinarily in the confessional.⁸

Experience. (a) The priest gains experience first from his own practice of the supernatural life. On this point, the Holy See has been most explicit. For example, Pope St. Pius X hoped to achieve the goal expressed by his motto: *Instaurare omnia in Christo*. First, by the fervor of priests to produce the lay shock troops; second, through the select laymen produced by those priests for the task of transforming society.⁹ (b) He will likewise draw experience from

⁸ One of our esteemed colleagues directed an observation on this matter during the discussion. Point: necessary to distinguish clearly what pertains to the sacramental reality and what pertains to the office of director; too many would be inclined to put the direction ahead of the sacrament. All concurred.

⁹ J.-B. Chautard, O.C.S.O., *The Soul of the Apostolate* (Trappist, Kentucky: Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc., 1946), New English Translation, 165-67.

the spiritual direction he received during his earlier formation and which he now receives in his sacerdotal life, whether that direction be good or bad. (c) Finally, his experience will be gained by the direction he *gives*; ultimately, direction is an art.

Holiness and Charity. This quality almost repeats what we have mentioned about the priest's own practice of the supernatural life (in (a) under *Experience* above). Direction is essentially cooperation with the action of grace in guiding souls. The charity is supernatural and paternal, exercised toward children given to the priest by God.¹⁰ It must be shown toward *all*; while by reason of natural attraction he may be drawn more to one person than another, the priest must constantly make the effort to show the same thoughtfulness, the same care for all. Moreover, he must aim to bring the souls to God through Christ; there is no room here for fashioning attachments to himself. Equally, he must learn to be both firm and frank with the directees. He can achieve such balance if he provides sound, fatherly admonitions; if he points out defects; and if he refuses to allow himself to be directed by the penitent. To firmness and frankness, the priest must join a certain special reserve when he is directing women.¹¹

ADDED REQUIREMENTS

The traditional requirements seem to stand up well even in the changed and changing conditions of the present moment. But they are no longer sufficient by themselves. At the very least, some implicit connotations must be brought into explicit focus in the days of up-dating.

In Knowledge. (a) The priest must have knowledge of the world in which men must sanctify themselves and bear witness to Christ. Pope Pius XII was careful to warn that even in minor seminaries the adolescents are separated from "the natural environment of their home." Whence it follows that the life in those seminaries must be made to correspond as far as possible to the normal life of boys.¹²

¹⁰ Gal. IV, 19.

¹¹ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Development of Holiness in Priestly Life, September 23, 1950) n. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, n. 84.

Further, part of the development of the sense of responsibility in the seminarian (along with the capacity to use his judgment concerning men and events, and the spirit of initiative—all of which contribute largely to the formation of character), will be to keep them "in contact with the events of the day."

If young men—especially those who have entered the seminary at a tender age—are educated in an environment too isolated from the world, they may, on leaving the seminary, find serious difficulty in their relations with either the ordinary people or the educated laity, and it may happen that they either adopt a misguided and false attitude toward the faithful or that they consider their training in an unfavorable light. For this reason, it is necessary that the students come in closer contact, gradually and prudently, with the judgments and tastes of the people in order that when they receive Holy Orders and begin their ministry they will not feel themselves disorientated—a thing that would not only be harmful to their souls but also injure the efficacy of their work.¹³

(b) The priest should be up-dated also in his knowledge of the *authentic* advances and even well-founded theories in dynamic psychology and psychopathology. Much can be learned on this matter from the ascetical seminar of the 1963 Convention of CTSA in St. Louis.¹⁴ Our esteemed colleagues, among other contributions, made three points pertinent here: (1) that the priest needs to know the theories and principles of dynamic psychology; (2) that he must be able to discern when a person needs a competent psychiatrist or psychologist; (3) that we must realize that spiritual direction (like good counseling) will be effective when there is a genuine interpersonal relationship between the people involved. In other words, there is needed here real contact on a genuinely human level; real understanding and interest. "The spiritual director's main resource is not his academic degree, the title on his office door, or any other

¹³ *Ibid.*, n. 86.

¹⁴ E. G. Kennedy, M.M., "Counseling and Spiritual Direction," *CTSA Proceedings 1963*, 117-23. G. Hagmaier, C.S.P., "Spiritual Direction and Non-Directive Counseling," *CTSA Proceedings 1963*, 125-29.

claim to wisdom; it is *what he is* and *who he is* in his work with others."¹⁵

In Prudence and Sound Judgment. We speak here of the *additional* requirements. Perhaps it will not be amiss to note that this quality is partly innate, as some authors observe.¹⁶ If the natural deficiency is considerable and invincible (*insanabilis*), such a person may never be able to be a spiritual director. On the other hand, both the natural and the supernatural endowments can be increased. This increase, belonging somewhat to the field of experience also, may be achieved in part: (a) by trying to limit the inclination to judge hastily; (b) by making a careful check *afterward* on direction given; (c) by learning actually to take counsel on some matters; (d) by special care in distinguishing the diversity of souls. Thus the priest will learn to avoid leaning on prejudice, and the making of a *priori* conclusions.

In Experience. The Holy See bears witness to a holy concern for the proper acquisition of experience in this delicate field. Thus Pius XII provided that the young priest must be gradually drawn into his work.

The passage from the sheltered and tranquil life of the seminary to the active ministry may be dangerous for the priest who enters the open field of the apostolate if he has not been prudently prepared to the new life. You should realize that the many hopes placed in young priests may fail if they are not gradually introduced to the work, wisely watched, and paternally guided in the first steps of their ministry.¹⁷

In fact, to accomplish this very gradual adaptation to the realities of the ministry, the Pope approved in principle the formation of special institutes for young priests, and erected one in Rome to be used by the priests of that diocese.

¹⁵ Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 121.

¹⁶ I. DeGuibert, *Theologia Spiritualis Ascetica et Mystica*, Edit. III^a, (Romae: Universitas Gregoriana, 1946) n. 201.

¹⁷ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, nn. 102-103.

III. IN PRACTICE, WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE

While the preparation of spiritual directors for the laymen in the apostolate will begin prior to the actual direction of the laymen, as the time more closely approaches the practical exercise of the pastoral ministry, so also the preparation and the direction will tend to mesh more and more.

The Preparation

1. The preparation should begin even during seminary days. The principle involved: the levite should have not only a theoretical but also a *practical* knowledge. (a) *CTSA* has long been interested in this matter and actually named a special committee to consider it in our earliest years.¹⁸ (b) The Holy See has actually given some authoritative directions on the involvement of seminarians in the highest forms of the apostolate. Thus Pius XII, responsible for the restoration of the true concept of Sodalities of Our Lady through the Apostolic Constitution, *Bis Saeculari* of 1948, found delight in the

. . . Sodalities of priests and seminarians. These Sodalities not only have great achievements in past centuries to testify to their painstaking service of the Church, but are also achieving much for the Church today. With great emphasis do We recommend this type of Sodality since such Sodalities are very useful both for the formation of excellent priests and for the timely preparation and instruction of future Sodality Directors.¹⁹

Pope Paul VI is even more explicit in his direction. The Holy Father, treating the education and preparation of the priest, envisions as an important part the student's participation in the life of the diocese.

As he approaches major orders, and in the first years of his priesthood, the student must be introduced to the problems

¹⁸ Report of a Special Committee to investigate: Catholic Action in Seminaries (*CTSA Proceedings 1948*, 15-21).

¹⁹ Pius XII, *Letter to Louis Paulussen on the World Federation of Sodalities*, July 2, 1953, n. 15.

of pastoral theology, and take an increasingly active part in the life of the diocese.

This will include a participation in the liturgy, catechetical instruction, the direction of Catholic Action amongst the youth, and apostolic work on behalf of the missions. In this way the future pastor of souls will gradually become acquainted with his particular field of activity, and receive a suitable preparation for it.²⁰

Thus even before sacred ordination, the seminarian should begin his preparation for giving spiritual direction to lay apostles in two ways: by active membership in a special group like the Sodality for Priests and Seminarians; by actual direction of Catholic Action groups among the youth. My own experience in seeking to enlist spiritual directors, especially for the formation of groups of adult men in the Sodality, bears witness that it has been almost impossible to interest the young priests *after* ordination.

2. The priest should have a spiritual director himself. As was observed earlier, this is one of the sources of his continuing formation: his own experience in receiving direction.²¹ In practice, the priest will likely have to begin with the grace of a regular confessor in the full sense of that term; he may have to be contented with a regular confessor for the foreseeable future.

Actual Involvement

Neither his original nor continuing study nor his membership in a group like the Sodality which assists mightily the timely preparation of the future director nor the benefits of his own regular confessor and spiritual director will be sufficient. The only adequate solution to the need for spiritual directors, which prompted this very seminar, will be *actual* involvement in the direction of souls.

1. Priests should be encouraged to overcome the shyness which may prevent them and, ". . . relying on the help of God, be em-

²⁰ Paul VI, *Summi Dei Verbum* (Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the 4th Centenary of the Establishment of Seminaries by the Council of Trent, November 4, 1963) N.C.W.C. Edition, p. 16.

²¹ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, nn. 68-69.

boldened to give advice and encouragement in the confessional when there is time to do so."²²

2. If any additional motivation be needed to move with the Church in the restoration and promotion of the liturgy, the priest should find it in his realization of what the liturgy, and the sense of community did in the early Church to form and guide the individual member of the Christian community. To fulfill their obligation to give such liturgical instruction to the faithful as to promote active participation in the liturgy is already to be involved in spiritual direction in the sacramental and pastoral sense. Moreover, for many souls, this will likely be sufficient.²³

Special Utility of Movements

Movements of Renewal. Some dramatic results are being attained through the wise use of the *Cursillos in Christianity*. The *Cursillo* is a carefully designed instrument which relies very much on actual experience to bring about in the candidate an awareness of what it means to be a Christian, to live the life of grace, to be a living member of the Christian community. Moreover, while it cannot replace the formation of mind and will over a much longer period of time, the *Cursillo* does two great things among many others: (a) it seems to penetrate the heart in a way and to a degree that no other available instrument has been able to achieve for many, many decades; (b) it dramatically disposes the renewed Christian man to take a generous role in the apostolate of the Church through one of the genuinely apostolic organizations already existing. Among the means of perfection which it insists upon for the renewed Christian is regular spiritual direction. From reading and personal reports, we learn that the Movement for a Better World is reaping similar good effects; but I have insufficient information to provide a judgment here.

Apostolic Organizations. Many others, with the Legion of Mary in the front line, have already been praised for various works and

²² Merton, *op. cit.*, Preface, p. i.

²³ Hagmaier, *op. cit.*, p. 125. See also: *Constitution on the Liturgy*, December 4, 1963, nn. 1-2.

influences on the parish. On the basis of fifteen years study and experience, I choose to mention here the one I know best: the Sodality of Our Lady for adults, especially adult men. The Sodality, in its 401st year, and newly enlivened by the various actions of the popes, notably by Pius XII, is authoritatively termed a most excellent way to form the perfect Catholic. Its work is the promotion of the mystery of Christ and the Church; it demands apostolic action; it provides for sufficient study to make that action intelligent and prudent; it insists upon a regular program of spiritual exercises. I know of no organization for the layman which *asks* more of those who aspire to serve Christ, none which could *do* more if it were properly used with adults, invariably meaning men first, if not exclusively. The special utility of this (and other groups which may resemble, but not duplicate it) way of life to the priest and the people: (a) the Sodality brings members and priest into an abiding pastoral relationship, much closer than the general one of pastor to parish; (b) it gives a prominent role to the priest as spiritual director. Admittedly, this does not necessarily mean the personal and individual spiritual direction spoken of by the authors. But it does mean that spiritual direction which we have termed *particular*—that is, the direction of a special group within the larger flock of Christ. Such a process allows the priest to give attention to a group which can become the selective corps needed so desperately in almost every area of the life of the Church; yet it does not bind the priest to endless individual direction which, if desirable, does not seem practically possible, even in the United States where the ratio of priest to laymen is comparatively so high.

That same process can bring great benefits to the laity also. All those who have both the capacity and the willingness to give Our Lord a more generous service, will profit by living their Christian life within such a group. For within that group they will be in a position to receive particular direction well attuned to their needs. In the event of increasing success of the "reform and promotion of the liturgy" coming from the Second Vatican Council, that kind of direction should suffice—perhaps abundantly.

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