

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE CONFSSIONAL

THE discussion was led by Very Rev. Thomas J. Riley of St. John's Seminary, Boston, Mass. Monsignor Riley first commented briefly on the summary of points for discussion which he had previously prepared. In the discussion which ensued, the following points were emphasized:

(1) The need in Seminaries of a special course in Ascetical Theology distinct from the conferences of the spiritual director. This course, it was suggested, should be given during either the third or the fourth year of theology, for at least two semester hours.

(2) The relation of spiritual direction with the Sacrament of Penance. Some felt that spiritual direction, while not to be dissociated completely from the Sacrament of Penance, should remain distinct from it. Others felt that the relation of the penitent with his confessor affords a helpful starting point for the work of spiritual direction, and that continued relations with the same confessor make possible a degree of efficiency in spiritual direction, which is not otherwise attainable. In this connection it was pointed out that while in many cases it is inadvisable to undertake the spiritual direction of women outside the confessional, prudence and experience will indicate when this can be done with profit and without danger.

(3) The great need of spiritual direction for young people. It was suggested that an effort should be made to convince all young people of the advantage of consulting at least once with a priest on the subject of their state in life.

(4) The help to be derived from spiritual reading carried on in accordance with the suggestions of the spiritual director. The great difficulty of convincing people to read even the Bible was noted. It was suggested that efforts to create a group consciousness of the desirability of spiritual reading would be of considerable value. The possibility of achieving this end through the Catholic Action cells was also suggested. It was pointed out that efforts to introduce mental prayer into our Catholic High Schools might be helpful.

(5) The difficulties connected with spiritual direction of religious women. It was suggested that the large number of women so often assigned to a single confessor constitutes a hindrance to effective spiritual direction.

(6) The many distractions incidental to modern parish life which tend to lessen the interest of priests for the work of spiritual direction and create in the faithful the impression that priests are not available for spiritual direction or not qualified to give it. It was suggested that confessions be heard not only on the eves of Sundays and Feast Days, but at other times as well, particularly on Sunday mornings before Mass. It was suggested also that priests be available for confessions at times other than those regularly assigned in order to create the impression that the faithful are welcome at all times to present their problems to their priests.

(7) The advisability of introducing courses in empirical psychology and abnormal psychology into the Seminary curriculum. It was suggested that many priests are handicapped by lack of knowledge of the elementary principles of abnormal psychology and that without attempting to become psychiatrists, they might improve the efficiency of their spiritual direction by studies along the lines indicated. It was suggested that summer courses in psychology might afford great help to priests after a few years of experience in the work of spiritual direction. The possibility of cooperation between priests and psychiatrists was suggested. It was felt that, while certain dangers might be feared in the relations of Catholics with non-Catholic psychiatrists, the priest might be greatly helpful in training the efforts of psychiatry towards the benefit of the patient. In this connection, the great need of Catholic psychiatrists at the present time was pointed out.

(8) The dangers which often result from injudicious spiritual direction and efforts on the part of spiritual directors to urge their penitents towards progress of which they are not capable. The dangers of false mysticism and perfectionism were pointed out.

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