

## **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: ASSUMPTIONS AND APPLICATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*People are hungry for authentic spiritual companionship. Many are concerned about the coarseness of larger culture and the pace of life--they desire to slow down and notice more about who they are and how to be connected with God. The nature of the Christian life is such that no one grows spiritually without some help from others. Being in spiritual direction, sharing their faith journey with another, helps believers to pay more attention to their own lives, how they are responding to and resisting God as they move along. It assists believers in noticing grace in ways they might have missed. Even the most mature Christian needs help from others from time to time. Spiritual direction is simply the formalisation of this basic fact of life.*

*This article looks into what spiritual direction is, what processes are involved in this kind of pastoral work and why there is a renewed interest in this ministry by the church at large.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In today's world, religion is a matter of free choice. Faith is no longer automatically handed on through family links, cultural heritage or national identity. As Kenneth Leech rightly suggests, the attitude that marks people in our society is not so much one of atheism or indifference as one of a perplexed uncertainty (1994:9). Religious questions are not absent from people's minds, rather, they rarely occupy an important place.

Currently we see an increased respect for personal responsibility. Eddie Gibbs in *Winning them back: tackling the problem of nominal Christians*, aptly observes that people are often willing to consider

what Christianity means without necessarily wanting to become a practising member of any church (Gibbs 1993:45). The Christian tradition is seen as a source of meaning from which one can draw freely, while at the same time preserving one's freedom and critical distance (Gibbs 1993:45).

At its best, today's culture allows people to determine their own path in their search for meaning, free from any sort of coercion and indoctrination. Our secular and pluralistic society is faced with a superabundance of information and a wide variety of opinions, all constantly changing and often contradicting each other (Leech 1994: 35). It is deeply suspicious of bigotry. Any search for the truth has to involve dialogue.

Faced by this kind of society, the church has two choices. It can be in the business of providing clear-cut, exclusive formulae for people to accept, which is the way many of the more conservative churches approach evangelism and nurture. Or it can accompany men and women who are on their individual quest for meaning in their lives, in their search for truth. The church can accompany people in their openness to a faith that contains both truth and meaning.

The key value of this second attitude is open communication against a background of religious freedom. It involves a willingness to adapt to people's different religious experiences and questions and a willingness to respect their individuality. Spiritual direction then, is the way forward. It is the positive nurturing of humankind's relation with God. It stands in stark contrast to pastoral care which assumes that religion can only offer "little bits" of help in emergencies. As Morton Kelsey in his book *Companions on the inner way* states, "we are attempting to move away from judgmental moralizing towards an attempt to understand and heal the psychic wounds that drive errant behaviour" (Kelsey 1983:7).

## **2 WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?**

"Spiritual direction" is one of the more pretentious terms church ministry has inherited from the past. It is also one of the most confusing. Words such as "spiritual" and "direction" carry meanings that may not be true in practice.

For most people "spiritual" implies something to do with the soul or prayer or spirituality. Nowadays it refers to a person's inner life, which involves a life of prayer. It is also used with an adjective to

describe a particular approach to prayer, as in Franciscan, or Ignatian, or Pentecostal spirituality.

Difficulties also arise over the concept of “director” and “direction.” In normal usage, the words carry a sense of authority, perhaps even authoritarianism. “Direction,” the activity of directing someone, or the experience of being directed by someone, suggests the rejection of personal responsibility and the acceptance of the authority of the one who does the directing. As Alan Jones explains, confusion arose when, in a society and church organised according to a hierarchical structure, spiritual directors, usually ordained, mistakenly assumed obedience was owed to them rather than to God (Jones 1982:30). Jones clarifies that this kind of authoritarianism is foreign to those who are currently involved in spiritual direction (Jones 1982:34). What is essential is that the person directed is fully respected as an independent human being. The director may discern, advise and guide, but the other is free to decide.

Difficulties also exist in the designation of the person who seeks spiritual direction. The word “directee” is often used by British and American Roman Catholics and sometimes by Anglicans (Thornton 1984:14). This title sounds foreign and impersonal with tones of passivity. “Client” is also used frequently (Conn 1994:34) and it has advantages in the way it indicates the independence and authority of the individual. However, it has overtones from the different disciplines of social work and psychotherapy. The nineteenth and early twentieth-century directors spoke simply of “souls” (Leech 1994:4), but this sounds religious. Simply to say a “friend” is used by some (Edwards 1980, Jones 1982), but it does sound vague.

“Spiritual direction” is entrenched in the tradition and is more widely used than any other term that has been proposed to replace it. Although the term is liable to misunderstanding, it is probably more descriptive of the experience it points to than “religious counselling,” “spiritual counselling” or “spiritual advice.” Although discarded as less appropriate, these terms do however indicate the realm of pastoral care within which spiritual direction operates.

In most Protestant churches some form of general direction takes place through preaching and teaching. But direction in its specialised sense is a one-to-one relationship. The director offers the directee personal help in achieving full maturity in Christ. A case study will illustrate the nature of spiritual direction.

### 3 A CASE STUDY

A 40 year-old divorcee visits her neighbour and wishes to talk about her problems. She reveals that she has a crippling disease that will gradually paralyze her. She feels that God is punishing her for her sins, and thinks that God is unfair and unjust. "I am angry at Him," she says, "and that makes me feel even more guilty." Her neighbour is seen as a regular church member and as a trustworthy person. This has given the woman the courage to confide in her.

In this case study a person needing help approaches a church member for help. The church member could respond in a variety of ways. She could ask for more information and try to help the person understand the cause of her situation. She could merely listen sympathetically and offer her encouragement or help her understand that God is a loving Father by reading relevant Bible verses. This could provide some comfort. Or she could refer the person to someone else with more knowledge or skill. All of these methods could be helpful and all of them could be called "pastoral care" after a manner but they could however, not be called "spiritual direction."

Instead, spiritual direction is concerned with helping a person directly with his or her *relationship* with God. In each situation the most fundamental question is the spiritual relationship and its underlying questions is: "Who is God for me, and who am I for him"(Reese & Anderson 1999:169).

Firstly, in direction, the church member could respond in a variety of ways. She might undertake a careful explanation to help the sick woman realise that God is a forgiving and loving Father. Or that her illness does not have to be seen as punishment for sins, but as one of the sufferings that all humans must expect. The sick woman may benefit from realising that her concept of God is not the only valid one.

It is fair to say that this kind of help described above has been the prevailing mode of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction includes the process of listening to the life of another and then teaching people to open their eyes and see what is there, everywhere, teaching them to become detectives for the presence of divinity. Traditional manuals on spiritual direction will bear out this assertion (Thornton 1984, Edwards 1980, Jones 1982). The stress in much of the literature has been on the norms and typical practices of the spiritual life.

Some questions, however, remain. How does the divorced woman who feels angry with God and distanced from God, address

God? Does she tell God that she knows He knows best, even if she is not sure that He either knows or cares? These and similar questions point to another kind of help. The ministering person helps the directee to address God directly and to listen to what God has to communicate. This individualised Christian life is nourished by and in the Christian tradition; it is not just “my personal relationship with God.” The person is helped not so much to understand that relationship better, but to engage in it, to enter into a dialogue with God.

Spiritual direction of this type focuses on what happens when a person listens to and responds to a self-communicating God. Thus, the divorced woman is helped to voice her desire for a closer relationship with the God who can respond to that desire. She can tell God directly how she feels, how ambivalent she is, and to listen to his response. Once the person has begun to listen to God and to tell God how listening to God affects her, then she may want continued help with the ensuing dialogue and relationship; that is, she may want ongoing spiritual direction.

In this case study as in other spiritual friendships, it is important to establish clear boundaries to help the director assess whether to enter into a covenant with someone desiring a relationship. Aelred of Rievaulx, a twelfth-century exemplar of spiritual friendship, gives warning to avoid aimless, evil and self-seeking relationships when considering such an intimate relationship as spiritual direction (Houston 1983:15).

All these aspects of spiritual direction are fittingly covered in the definition of spiritual direction by William A Barry and William J Connolly as:

...help given by one Christian to another which enables the person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with God and to live out the consequences of the relationship (Barry & Connolly 1983:8).

As we have noticed in this case study there is a progression of spiritual growth in the sick woman. The Christian life is defined by a distinctive common pattern revolving around the story of Jesus Christ. Martin Thornton views this growth as covenant-encounter-incorporation (Thornton 1984:102-4). There is a relational move-

ment as the directee moves from merely obeying orders (covenant) to getting personally acquainted (encounter) to a relationship of some measurable depth (incorporation). Tilden Edwards has developed a similar approach to spiritual direction based on a pattern of growth that stresses the personal-existential dimension of progress (Edwards 1980:251). This pattern is called “cleansing, aligning and resting.” The whole process is called the “healing process.” Spiritual direction is undertaken in this broad framework of growth.

#### **4 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

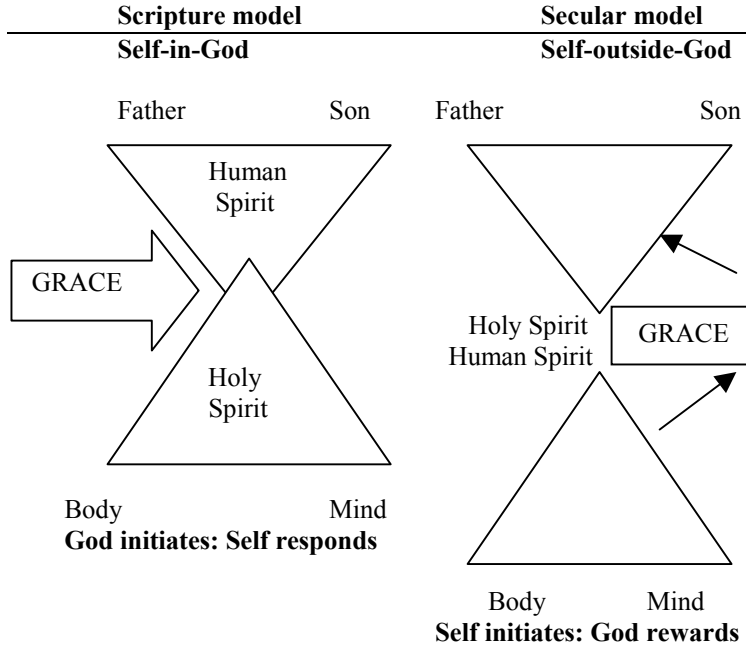
The Christian story is about God’s work of initiating us into fellowship and making us true conversational partners with the Father and the Son through the Spirit and hence with each other (1 John 1:1-4). In other words, *God initiates* our communication and relationship: *we respond*.

Spirituality is the means by which Christians develop an awareness of the presence of the loving Lord in their lives, and the processes by which they keep that awareness alive and vital, to the end that they become formed in the Spirit of Christ. Spirituality is the means by which persons may be related to the Spirit who is God; it is the joining of a person’s spirit with God’s spirit. The secular model of spirituality, according to Richard J Hauser (1982:11), is inconsistent with the spirituality demonstrated in Scripture, which is diagrammed in Figure 1

According to the secular model of spirituality, external behaviours are more important than internal motivators. Because the Spirit is outside the person, the motivation comes from the person’s own natural capacities. The self is the initiator of good deeds, and God rewards the person by grace outside the person. The focus is on a reward for oneself, now or in heaven.

In the scriptural model, there is an inner power flowing from the Holy Spirit within the person. Grace is extended to the whole person who is transformed into the likeness of Christ. The focus is on the love of God and others here and now, not at some later time or event. Such an emphasis is on inner attitudes and consciousness of the internal movements of the Holy Spirit (Hauser 1982:19).

**Figure1: Secular model versus Scriptural model of spirituality**



Justification frees believers to develop in this new Christian identity. The development of Christian identity is known as sanctification. The life of faith that begins with believers being accepted by God through Christ must continue to grow in love by means of various disciplines.

Spiritual direction is central as it highlights two things in Christian maturity. The first is the enormous effort people put into frustrating and avoiding the very things for which they long. There seems to be no end to the facility for self-deception (Coate 1989:48). That is why people need a spiritual guide to keep them honest. Spiritual direction also highlights the miracle of God's transforming love, which through the agency of another person, is always drawing the individual out of oneself into a wider relationship with others.

Spiritual direction is essentially concerned with companionship: first with God, and second with our fellow human beings (Kelsey 1983:17). Firstly, our relationship with God is of primary and fundamental importance. Without a sense of God-connectedness, all other relationships are impoverished. Secondly this relationship with

God is bound up with inter-personal relationships with others and with the whole of the created order.

Spiritual direction assumes the centrality of prayer as the catalyst in spiritual maturity. One of the basic beliefs in spiritual direction is that God is at work in people's lives, which means, among other things that God's grace is at work in their praying. There are many types of prayers: from institutional to contemplative; from meditative to intellectual and charismatic styles (Michael & Norrissey 1984:23). A spiritual director's task is to identify and to value what is actually happening when people pray, to help them recognise whether these are signs that spiritual development is taking place and to encourage them in new ways.

Christian prayer involves a corporate element. Martin Thornton states that "private piety" or even "private prayer" aimed at some sort of spiritual feel-good culture is unchristian, heretical and a contradiction in terms (Thornton 1984:34). Yet spiritual direction is unashamedly individualistic, because it guides and develops that individuality without which corporate action and influence by the church is impossible. A person must be helped for instance, to discover his/her rule of life in accordance with his/her own individual need and temperament.

Spiritual direction is also discernment about discernment (Mueller 1996:6) as Christians are always in the process of discovering God's will for their lives. Self-knowledge is the root to discernment and prayer (Guenther 1992:67). When faith is important, people often consider such questions as, "Where is God in the midst of this experience?" "How is God inviting me?" "Is God pleased with me?" People often struggle with these issues. Spiritual direction gives people a place to talk out aloud and confidentially about what they are thinking.

Still, to be clear, a spiritual director does not "direct" or tell the other what to do; he or she simply asks questions, and suggests readings and practices to help the other discern God's presence. Directors do not create relationships between God and their directees; they simply foster these relationships so that they may deepen and grow. In this relationship, God is the ultimate director, and the spiritual director simply assists the seeker in uncovering and discovering the direction of God in that person's life. This enables the directee to see, own, and revere God's voice and God's acting, in such a way that it elicits a genuine response.



Spiritual direction is ultimately a gift of the Spirit rather than a skill to be learned. It comes from being completely open to the Spirit of God (Edwards 1980:56). This charismatic type of spiritual direction is exemplified in the desert fathers. Their guidance often consisted of spontaneous counsel inspired by the Spirit – a prophecy. (Culligan 1983:21-23). In our modern context the need of such direction is often overlooked. Yet, the very nature of *spiritual* direction requires it. Since directors are working at a level of personal awareness – the human spirit communicating with God -- where rational analysis becomes inadequate, spiritual direction must include the charismatic model of direction.

Another important assumption of spiritual direction is that it is not to be equated with psychoanalysis. Psychotherapy can help people to grow spiritually because it helps them towards psychological maturity and thereby releases in them the possibility of growth and holiness, as led by the Holy Spirit. But a psychological goal such as personal maturity is not the same as spiritual maturity (Conn 1994:126). Spiritual maturity involves a relationship with God, while psychological integration does not.

Nevertheless, some knowledge of counselling techniques and psychology is useful for the spiritual director because spiritual development is closely tied to psychological development. The spiritual director will also need a developmental perspective to help people work through issues (May 1979:28). This is important as help can be interpreted as conformity to role expectation or freedom could be viewed as a license for self-indulgence.

## **5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND COUNSELLING**

One way of clarifying the nature of spiritual direction is comparing it with counselling. Spiritual direction and counselling are closely linked but at the same time they are very different disciplines.

Counselling is a way of helping people cope with a crisis in their life, usually a specific problem or problems that involve less frequent meetings and the conversation often more wide-ranging. Spiritual direction, on the other hand, offers long-term companionship to people who are looking for guidance on their journey of faith. The pastoral counsellor's concern has tended to be with states of emotional

stress. The ministry of spiritual direction is more important where there are no particular crises.

Secondly, the counselling movement in some cases has been clinic-based or office-based rather than church-based or community-based. In this case it has lacked the continuous involvement with people in their homes and families which is essential to pastoral care (Leech 1994:101). Spiritual direction on the other hand, is firmly located within the liturgical and sacramental framework, within the common life of the church.

The kind of transference that often occurs between a counsellor and client is different from that of a spiritual director and directee. People use the counsellor as a substitute for those with whom they have serious issues. The clinical distance in counselling is crucial to bring about objectivity and healing. This does not happen in spiritual direction. In spiritual direction discernment is based upon the intimate engagement of two people in the presence of God in the context of prayer. The human director is attentive to God and tries to act as an agent for God for the other person. Unlike counselling, spiritual direction may involve self-disclosure on the part of the director. Sometimes in the spiritual direction session there would be a candle or some other non-verbal symbol representing the Holy. It may be an open Bible, a cross, or some water, something that is understood to represent the Holy.

Spiritual direction deals with one's relationship with God and the life of prayer. A spiritual director should be able to help with teaching about types of prayer and discernment, and so forth. More than anything else, a director should be a fellow-traveller and a co-discerner. It should be someone who knows about prayer from personal experience, (Guenther 1992:6, Jones 1982:47), and is able to guide someone who is making the spiritual journey to God.

Gerald May (1979:158) uses the example of depression or anxiety to illustrate the differences between psychotherapy, pastoral care and spiritual direction:

If you wonder what you can do to get out of depression or anxiety, you are being your own psychotherapist. If you think God has given it to you to learn from for your own growth, you are being your own pastoral counselor. If your concern simply is to give yourself to God, then you are being your own spiritual guide.

In Table 1, Gerald May (1979:160) also provides the clearest distinctions between these three concepts, though any outline of distinctions is bound to be an over-categorised approach that in fact can merge into each other at times.

**Table 1 A comparison of helping roles**

	Psychotherapy	Pastoral care	Spiritual direction
SUBJECT	Disordered patient to cure	Troubled client to help	A soul searching for meaning
GOAL	Resolution of conflict, adjustment to society (medical model)	Healing sustaining, guiding (holistic)	Being and becoming in God
METHOD	Techniques of the trade to get desired results	Helping acts beneficial to the client	Self and the relation are vehicles of grace
ATTITUDE OF HELPER	Responsible for the cure of the patient "My will be done"	Client or relationship is responsible "Our will be done"	God's grace responsible for cure "Thy will be done"

It is important to remember that the above concepts overlap, since they are different focal settings on the same ultimately indivisible human reality. Spiritual directors should not substitute uncritically the goals and techniques of secular therapy for spiritual guidance. As important as therapy may be, it can become a diversion. When both disciplines of pastoral counselling and spiritual direction are practised well, their aim is to enable people to live fully mature lives, part of which consists in accepting responsibility for their own choices.

Spiritual direction attempts to help the directee listen to the Lord who is working within him or her, especially in the life of prayer.

Pastoral counselling tries to aid the counsellee in finding workable solutions to problems dealt with in everyday life. The two overlap, yet are different in their approach and emphasis.

## 6 IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

The tremendous growth of interest in spiritual direction, especially over the last two decades, points to the accuracy of Martin Thornton's prediction, more than thirty years ago, that spiritual direction is the greatest unmet pastoral need of the Church (Thornton 1984:34).

Things have changed a great deal since then. Now more people, not only Anglicans and Roman Catholics, are asking for spiritual direction and training in direction. Spirituality and spiritual direction have become big business. Van den Blink states that this very popularity has become a problem. He continues that much of this new spirituality has become caught up with dominant themes of individual self-interest and self-actualisation (Van den Blink 1999:432).

The result of this has been not only an absence of social or ethical concern but also more distressingly, an often unconscious idolatry of the self which uses spirituality as a means to self-improvement (Eden & Wells 1991:56). This brand of spirituality tends to be suspicious of creeds, dogmas and the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition. In the recent critique of Thomas Moore's popular book on the care and feeding of the soul, Gregory Jones observes perceptively that this approach "would reduce Christian spiritual disciplines and practices to yet another consumer item in a religious smorgasbord." According to him much of it lacks grief, struggle, passion, those features, which are so central to the spirituality of the crucified Christ (Jones 1996: 107).

It is therefore crucial that we see direction in the context of the church, otherwise it could be reduced to a process of self-improvement. This is why it should be undertaken within the context of the sacramental life. Leech notes that the sacraments have always played a central role in the work of the spiritual direction (Leech 1994:121).

If spiritual life is essentially life in the body of Christ, then spiritual direction must help individuals grow within the spiritual organism of the body. In the case of healing and deliverance, there is a real danger of distortion and sensationalism in our day. It is all the more necessary to see these ministries within the life of the church and within the normal channels like prayer, fasting, confession of sin and

Communion. (Leech 1994:131) The spiritual director uses these resources for guidance to help the individual personally discover the path of progress (Edwards 1980:94-99).

The Christian receiving direction is more likely to experience solid spiritual advance over time than one who is constantly seeking new spiritual experiences and experimenting with the latest techniques of prayer, Bible study and group dynamics.

## **7 REASONS FOR THE RENEWED IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

The re-emergence today of spiritual direction as an important resource for a wide spectrum of people reflects a number of human needs emerging from recent history. Three of these are particularly significant.

The first is the need for personal help in the growing collapse of a shared world-view within the Church (Edwards 1980:99), and outside cultural support for a Christian "way of life." Everyone is on his/her own to choose between the endless, sometimes contradictory options the Church and society offer for a way of life.

In this widespread situation, it can become lonely. People need someone who can help them sort out the many options and to discern the subtle threads of the Holy Spirit's working in their lives. Such structured opportunities and resources are particularly rare in Protestant situations, though concern is growing. In congregations, Shawchuck and Heuser have remarked that "there is no place in the congregation's structure and rhythm where a serious discussion concerning the state of one's soul is expected" (Shawchuck & Heuser 1993:38).

A second need calling for more weight on personal spiritual guidance today comes from the sense of limitation in educational and professional therapeutic relationships (Peterson 1993:46). Helping a person with the appropriation of the truth is left to "practical" people, especially pastoral clergy.

Unfortunately, many ministers are unable to translate their theological training into the nitty-gritty of the personal crises and developmental help asked of them by people adequately. There is also the lack of perceived spiritual concern on the part of many people wanting help, ("Just help get me through the crisis and everything will be

all right – I don't want to be converted"). People usually turn to the empirical sciences for assistance.

In terms of practical human guidance, this has bred clinical pastoral education and the pastoral counsellor. Such a person theoretically brings a theological background and his or her own faith to human situations. Many pastoral counsellors have been disappointed by a rigid fundamentalism, which they have thrown off as false, or by a bland and domesticated spirituality that seems dead. Counsellors even find that their intellectual theological education was not transferable in the midst of the people's crises and development (Hands & Fehr 1993:108). There are often also few tools or ongoing personal spiritual discipline on hand to help.

One source of difficulty here is the lack of "spiritual theology" in theological education. This bridging discipline has always been inadequately present, if present at all because of the historic polarisation within theology (Farley 1983). One result of neglecting this area has been to leave the leadership of the Church almost totally dependent on secular models of human growth (Packer & Wilkinson 1992:245). The theoretical base of these models often implicitly denies any reality, value or even awareness of classical Christian ascetical/ mystical experience or goals.

Historically the Church has always utilised the current psychology of its culture. However, what it has borrowed, it has modified and transformed in the light of its own tradition. But as Morton Kelsey whose work values the contribution of psychology observes, if there is no deep awareness of the developmental anthropology of the tradition, then there is no real mutation, just a graft (Kelsey 1983:40-41). If the graft takes, it tends to take over. When the graft fails, there often is a fundamentalist reaction, a sense of an alien body to be thrown off, a rigid "sticking to the Bible" as all the guidance we need. Anything else is seen as being of the devil. According to him resisting the psychological takeover of pastoral care needs not translate into a return to a first naïvete. Rather it is important to have as thorough an understanding as can be acquired of the best of the human sciences so that they can be used as aids to spiritual direction (Kelsey 1983:40).

Thirdly, spiritual direction is receiving special attention because of the reawakening to the neglect of a careful oral tradition of spiritual guidance in the Church (Johnson 1988: 89). Spiritual direction is an oral tradition that engages the individual in a one-to-one personal encounter, unlike preaching. There is something in oral exchange

that other forms of communication cannot replace. Edwards points out the special need that such a process fills. He states:

Today Christians are almost totally dependent on books and scholarship to remind them of the depths and nuances of human interior development that have been known in Christian experience. We have been largely missing the careful, chastened, long-term, faith-grounded, tested and intuitive person-to person conveyance of the heart of Christian awareness (Edwards 1980:101).

Perhaps, certain parents, faithful in their child-rearing practices come close to this. However, little of this type of faith nurture seems left in this emotionally and materially distracted and often broken family setting that increasingly dominate our culture.

The crucial question is, can spiritual direction be carried out in the modern church context? The fact that the modern church tends to model itself after the giant business corporation hinders its ability to undertake spiritual direction (Chan 1998:231). Even if the megachurch is broken down into cell groups, its tightly controlled structure does not leave room for the freedom that individual spiritual direction needs. In spiritual direction personal knowledge of the one being directed is essential if the director is to lead the directee effectively to spiritual maturity. Such knowledge does not come from the mass production factory of the church.

For spiritual direction to be possible, Chan suggests that a radical reworking of the church is needed (1998: 236). Such attempts have been made from time to time. Late seventeenth-century pietists conceived the idea of a small church within a large church (Holt 1993:108). This became the basis of Wesley's "class meetings," a development that accounted for the success of the early Methodist movement.

Perhaps the most explicit link to be found between spiritual direction and church renewal is the remnant idea proposed by Thornton (1984:76). If the church is to be the alternative nucleus that witnesses effectively to the world, the pastor will have to seek out a remnant within the church for spiritual direction. It is one way to ensure that the church is led by mature Christians who understand the spiritual nature and mission of the church and are capable of dis-

cerning God's will, and have within them the spiritual resources to carry out God's will in the church and in the world.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

Over the centuries the practice of spiritual direction has always existed in the life of Christian communities. Not always central to its spirituality but always essential to the spiritual formation of some, spiritual direction has a long and noble history of practise in the development of spirituality in the lives of people.

In our churches the need for community will only arise when believers realise that their own personhood remains impoverished as long as they remain individualistic in inner motives. Only as persons-in-relationships, recognising that life is both ultimately and immediately relational, can they give hope to an alienated society. To listen to the hurts of others, to place a premium on the uniqueness of each person, to see their identity in the heart of Christ and not simply in their own grasping hands; these are some of the radically contrasted ways in which believers can stand against the world.

Seen from this perspective spiritual direction ceases to be something extraordinary and certainly not as the territory of the spiritual elite, but always as an important and regular part of pastoral ministry.

This article tries to show that the quiet work of spiritual direction offers a renewed pathway to explore deep questions about the meaning and purpose of life. This is especially needed at a time when increasingly more people are searching for some kind of guidance.



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