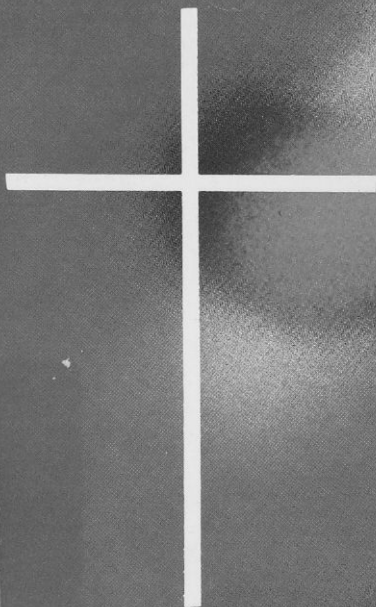


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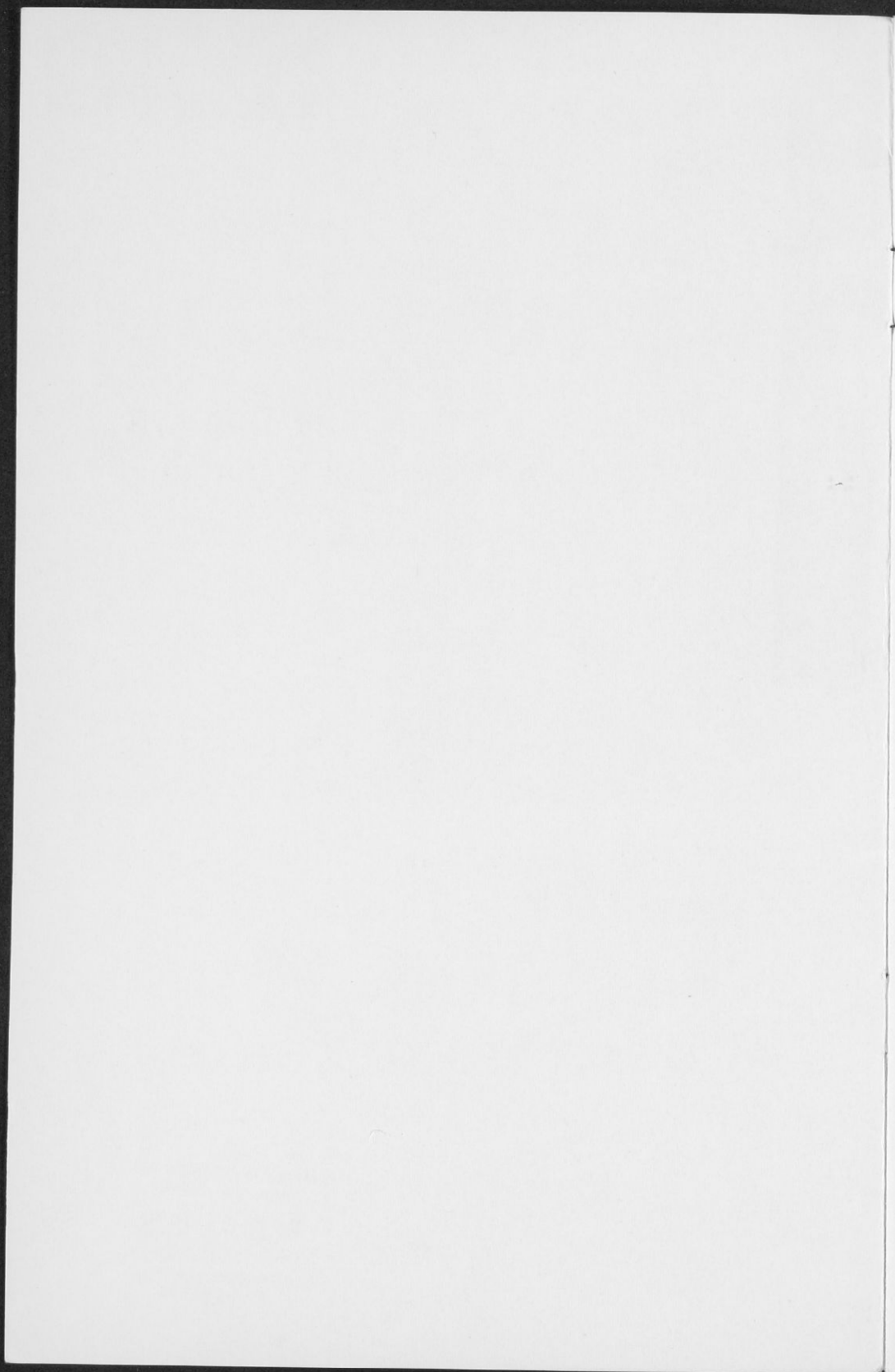


SPIRITUAL DIRECTION  
FOR PRIESTS IN THE U.S.A.  
THE REDISCOVERY OF A RESOURCE

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**SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR PRIESTS  
IN THE USA: THE REDISCOVERY  
OF A RESOURCE**

by

Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

prepared for

THE BISHOPS' COMMITTEE ON PRIESTLY LIFE AND  
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of

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## FOREWORD

The Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry expresses its gratitude to Father Louis J. Cameli for researching and writing this paper and to the members of its Subcommittee on Spiritual Renewal and Continuing Education which was charged with the supervision of its preparations: Bishop John S. Cummins, Chairman, Archbishop Ignatius J. Strecker and Bishop Paul F. Anderson, Msgr. Alexander O. Sigur, Fathers Donald Barga, OMI, Bruce F. Biever, S.J., Daniel E. Danielson, Antonio G. Gonzalez, Paul P. Purta, SS, and Joseph H. Voor.

Thankful acknowledgment is also paid to Msgr. Colin A. MacDonald, Executive Director of the Secretariat on Priestly Life and Ministry, Msgr. Francis J. Lally and Miss Kathleen Barrett who assisted in preparing the paper for publication.

November 1, 1976

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The Editors' Committee on Physics Life and Ministry expresses its gratitude to Father Louis J. Connel for reviewing and writing this paper and to the members of its Subcommittee on Spiritual Renewal and Continuing Education which was charged with the responsibility of its preparation. Bishop John S. Cummings, Chairman, Archbishop Ignace A. Bricker and Bishop Paul J. Anderson, Msgr. Alexander O. Sigm, Father Donald Burger, Carl Bruner, E. Davis, S.J., Daniel E. Davidson, Anthony P. Gonsky, Paul F. Poirer, SS, and Joseph H. Voss.

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November 1, 1978



## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Dying to self and rising with the Lord, therefore, takes place in the myriad interactions between the priest and his world, his people, his friends, and the Lord. There is no way for spirituality to be fostered except in appropriate interactional activity in all these areas of priestly existence. The spiritually mature priest is one who is constantly growing according to the different stages of his life through these interactions.

To speak in a practical fashion, however, other persons are the facilitators of all interactional activity, whether on the outer rim of meeting one's culture or the inner circle of contact with the Lord. Other persons give me the stimulus and the power to participate in life; they are the vehicles of God's grace to me.

For this reason we propose that the spiritual renewal of the American priesthood base itself on the principle of interaction. We are suggesting in an appendix some concrete ways in which this interaction is exemplified.

*Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood*, page 64.

One possible interaction not mentioned in the *Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood* (SRAP) appendix but indicated throughout the text itself is spiritual direction (SD). The present paper takes up the invitation of SRAP to explore new possibilities and reacquaint ourselves with traditional resources, as we search for a deeper and more authentic spirituality for American priests. This paper is addressed mainly to bishops and those with them who are charged with the responsibility of helping priests grow in spiritual life. The paper aims to be a resource sheet. If programs and helps are to be offered to priests, decisions must be made. If decisions are to be made wisely, background information is needed. This paper attempts to be helpful by offering some background on one possible area of help.



## A ministerial spirituality and spiritual direction for priests

Following in the footsteps of Vatican II's *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, SRAP develops a ministerial spirituality for priests. The key feature of any spirituality is the unity of life in God's Spirit. SRAP sees the unity of the priest's life of prayer and ministerial activity in sharing the Paschal Mystery, the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus. The renewal of priestly spirituality centers on sharpening the unity of priestly ministry and life, and also responds to the urgent needs for developing specific means to help priests personally achieve a unifying spirituality.

The need for means enables us to review elements of our tradition: to see a need for prayer experiences, a need for discernment, and a need for reflection on integrating ministry in prayer life. These needs suggest the process of SD as a beneficial resource. For SD draws together a number of dimensions which serve the priest's unity of life. The priest today is also more and more seen as a director and discerner of the spiritual life of his people. The renewal of the sacrament of reconciliation makes this abundantly clear as well as work with charismatic prayer groups and a style of administration which discerns the gifts of the community. Their own experience in the SD process could enhance priests' ministerial work.

The present paper explores ways in which SD might contribute to the ministerial spirituality of priests. It does not claim to be a detailed treatise on the spiritual life or on the process of SD or a full elaboration of a ministerial spirituality. Rather, it introduces SD as a resource for priests personally and for the expanded effectiveness of their ministry.

The sections which follow take up the general notion of SD (part two), which is then applied to priests (part three). Finally, observations are made concerning the practical and, specifically, the programmatic planning aspects of SD for priests (part four).





## PART TWO: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN GENERAL

### Introduction

At times the name "spiritual direction" evokes a negative reaction among people who found it unproductive and unhelpful in their seminary or novitiate experience. The very term "direction" seems to imply a binding of the spirit, a narrowing of another's freedom. A better term more reflective of the reality could well replace SD, but "SD" is the term in use by custom.

Traditionally, SD involves a relationship between two people centering on specifically spiritual matters. Today, dimensions of SD may be found in groups, in counselling, and in theological reflection. The description offered here focuses on the traditional "one-on-one" sense of SD, while not, of course, excluding or minimizing the value of other forms.

### Spiritual Direction in general

When we speak of SD in general, the talk is liable to become very abstract. Different schools of spirituality and different traditions have left their imprints on the way of "doing" SD. For our purpose, it may be best to note a set of contrasts which highlight what is new or newly emphasized in SD today. Even this approach will be somewhat abstract, but it will be supplemented by a specific study of SD for priests.

Contrasts between old and new do not mean opposition nor mutual exclusion. The issue is rather one of nuance, of shading, and of emphasis. So, for example, the purpose of SD as it might have been considered a few years ago was to provide a re-fueling for the individual, a time for seeking support for the application of self to the tasks of life. The task of SD today emerges more clearly in the word "integration." More than re-fueling for work, SD provides the avenue of seeing some *unity* between what happens in one's inner life of prayer and conviction and the pattern of one's outer activities. Thus, two fundamental areas for discussion in SD are prayer and its extension into action, mortification as identification with the Lord and its extension into an asceticism of practice, work, and involvement.

The process of SD in the past accented a didactic approach, perhaps even some sort of pre-set program or agenda. Today,

while the element of teaching ought not to be entirely absent from SD, spiritual directors feel more comfortable with a tone of mutuality. Both director and directee are open to hearing the word of the Lord in the life of this individual. Parenthetically, this renewed appreciation of mutuality underlines the weakness of terms such as "direction," "director," etc. Beyond a tone of mutuality, spiritual dialogue today allows the agenda to set itself, that is, the material for discussion comes not from a pre-set program, but from the ways that the Lord seems to be working in this person's life and at this time and in these ways. Thus the tone of SD today highlights mutuality and existential concerns.

SD in the past has focused on problems and accountability. A spiritual director helped directees to solve problems of prayer, vocation, and community relationships. The director also provided an index of accountability especially with regard to pious exercises. Today, SD does not abandon problem solving nor accountability but accentuates more sharply the positive growth elements of spiritual life.

What can SD offer? It can offer a relationship centered on a dialogue about prayer and life. It can offer an opportunity for growth in spiritual life by freeing the person to love and to serve more generously, more consistently, more integrally. SD—in perhaps elevated but real terms—means movement into the mystery of the Lord who calls us.

## **PART THREE: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR PRIESTS**

### **An example of the process**

The idea of spiritual direction presented above represents a rather general and abstract process. To specify things, we can examine the concrete spiritual direction process of a priest. The example which follows is exactly that—an example. Many approaches are possible. A single illustration, however, can help us to understand the dynamics more clearly.

When Fr. X approaches Fr. Y for spiritual direction, it is very much a meeting of two Christians sharing the same search to dis-

cover the way of the Lord. The first natural and right thing is simply to get to know each other. The directee with help from the director begins to give a sketch of his life, including family circumstances, education, interests, etc. The personal history of the directee then shifts to the more specifically spiritual dimension. Together the director and directee attempt to see how the directee's relationship to the Lord has grown by tracing his developing image of God, an image which is reflected in the type and quality of prayer at different stages of his life. They will also trace—as best as they can—other significant religious developments, for example, growth of moral conscience, stages of vocational decision, devotional practices, influential reading, etc. However much time Frs. X and Y spend on this history, it is time well spent, because it will provide a common understanding of past experience which will set a context for their future dialogue.

In the next phase Frs. X and Y touch on a subtle and important moment of the SD process. Together they try to determine what Fr. X wants, what is the desire, what is the intent that draws him to SD. This clarification of intent has obvious importance for facilitating the SD dialogue by clarifying expectations. More importantly, Frs. X and Y try earnestly to search out the desire and intent, because this dynamism is a way in which the Lord draws us to Himself. The attraction or drawing which we experience will take different shapes—as the multiple experiences of the saints attest. Frs. X and Y surely do not comprehend the entirety of the Lord's design at this time. Some basic indications lay a foundation to which they will periodically return.

The discovery of intent and desire helps Frs. X and Y to see the "direction" which the Lord is giving. At the same time, when Fr. X accepts this direction, he commits himself to growth or moving toward the fulfillment of that desire and intentionality implanted in him by the Lord. The commitment to growth or movement forward immediately raises questions concerning certain obstacles and resistances to growth. It may be at this point that Fr. Y the director who also has some psychological counselling skills, sees certain emotional or relational issues which must be resolved, so that the pursuit of a deeper spirituality can take place. In that case, appropriate help is given either within their relationship but now on a slightly different level or with the assistance of an outside psychological consultant.

Dealing with history, intent, and resistances sets the context for what becomes the basic ongoing pattern of Frs. X and Y's SD process. That pattern has two movements which Frs. X and Y will choose as they judge best: (a) from self to the Gospel; (b) from the Gospel to self.

(a) In the "a" movement (from self to the Gospel), Fr. X speaks of the events, experiences, and relationships in his life both in a ministerial and non-ministerial context. He speaks of his prayer both personal and liturgical. He notes the experiential resonance of that prayer—what it generates, whether it leads to peace, challenge, questioning, joy, pain and purification, etc. Frs. X and Y join in a shared process of discernment, trying to note the patterns, the lines of action and direction. Referring to the Gospel and Fr. X's history, they attempt to clarify and interpret what is happening.

(b) In the "b" movement (from the Gospel to self), Frs. X and Y read Scripture together and pray together. They engage in an intense listening process, trying to hear the challenge of the Gospel, letting its message in-form their ministry and life.

These are two movements which do not go in opposite directions. In the course of a SD meeting, Frs. X and Y may use both.

Frs. X and Y meet on a regular basis. They maintain a flexibility in the format of their dialogue. The regularity insures that their meetings are not simply problem-centered or scheduled when Fr. X feels "down" and needs a lift.

In brief, the relationship between Fr. X and Fr. Y is a fraternal one—two pilgrim brothers walking together, discerning the very way they are to walk.

## **Analysis of the process**

The example cited above provides one picture of the SD process for priests. It may be helpful to summarize some essential "events" which take place in that process and contribute to the priest's spirituality.

1. In SD the priest articulates his inner and outer experience. He puts into words what he sees, feels, perceives to be happening in his life and in his ministry.

2. In a conversation which poses questions and seeks clarification, the priest comes to a clearer vision of himself and how God is at work in his life, among his people, and through his priestly ministry.

3. The perception and the vision of the Lord at work leads to a clarification, a sorting out, a setting of priorities and directions. At times, there may be no clarification but simply an experience of being drawn more deeply into infinite mystery. The appropriate response at that time is silence.

4. When the Lord's "lines of action" emerge in a clarification and a vision of the situation, an enabling freedom allows the priest to act more effectively and responsively to the issues of personal life and public ministry. The immobilizing complexity that seems to afflict so many priests breaks down into manageable possibilities for the future.

5. In the atmosphere of freedom, vision and clarification, some of the needed elements of a priest's life emerge: encouragement, affirmation, demands, and challenge.

6. The SD process seeks throughout the unifying and integrating dimensions of the priest's ministry and life in his relationship with the Lord. As a result the sensed closeness and presence of the Lord and sharing in the Paschal Mystery ought to grow.

## **Benefits of spiritual direction for priests**

Some of the benefits of SD for priests are self-evident in the example and the analysis given above. Here we focus on five benefits, two of which enhance the ministry of the priest to others and three which primarily affect the priest in a personal way. The purpose of listing benefits matches the scope of this paper, that is, to provide bishops and others with background for making practical decisions concerning programs for priests.

1. *An increased communication capacity.* To understand the first benefit, recall that the process of SD involves a personal articulation of the priest's faith experience. This will have its effect in the priest's heightened capacity to speak warmly and personally about faith in the public forum. In one sense, he has undergone spiritual direction as an exercise which will enable him to speak the word of God *to the hearts* of men and women. This capacity stands in contrast to the rather shy approach which is maintained in talking to people about faith, a shyness which often retreats into cold theory or theology or psychology. The need for this sort of warm and personal discourse on faith is evident in the appeal of the charismatic renewal for many people, which has become perhaps our only wide-ranging forum for speaking about personal faith with some feeling.

2. *Development of skills in spiritual direction.* A priest's involvement in SD yields not only self-understanding but an understanding of the process itself and its dynamics. Having experienced SD as a directee, he can transfer many of the same values and dynamics into his own role as director in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, pastoral counselling, etc.

The benefits of an increased communication capacity and development of skills in spiritual direction touch mainly on the ministry of the priest. The following have to do more with the personal enrichment and development of the priest.

3. *A better self-awareness for growth.* Through SD a priest can come to real appreciation of *growth* in his life. He can picture himself more clearly as a pilgrim in a pilgrim Church. The effect of such self-awareness is a lessening of the explosive and destructive guilt which is a present occupational hazard for priests. We reason to ourselves: "I am not perfect. Therefore, I am bad." To recognize honestly and humbly that we must grow spiritually takes the edge off of any practical angelism that may plague us.

4. *Sense of self worth.* As an extension of the self-awareness spoken of above, SD leads to a healthy reappraisal of the particular self-worth of the priest. This is not simply the same as healthy psychological self-esteem. Rather, we are dealing here with a deep recognition that in God's plan I as a priest have a particular role, a special vocation, indeed, a unique destiny and design that belongs to me alone.

5. *Meeting the developmental needs of priests.* SD should not simply be problem-centered; nonetheless, there are some critical moments or phases in the life of a priest when SD can be helpful. Below are cited four critical points in the life of a priest as presented by Msgr. Giovanni Colombo ("La direzione spirituale del clero diocesano," in *Problemi attuali della direzione spirituale*, Rome,<sup>2</sup> 1951, pp. 197-234). These critical points serve as an example of problem issues which could be met very well in an ongoing SD process.

a. newly ordained: this is the critical time of transit from seminary to full priestly ministry. Perhaps the emphasis in the USA on the diaconate as the time of ministerial initiation has made us less aware of the post-ordination period as a critical moment. We presume that the rough edges have been honed away. In fact, they have not.

b. early 30's: the priest who has made the adjustment from seminary to priestly ministry enjoys a true and deep optimism concerning the possibilities for his ministry in the early years. This optimism can quickly vanish as a number of disappointments appear on the scene, as his own personal limitations and the limitations of structures become apparent. Thus, there is a radical shift from optimism to pessimism. There is a need to make a transit from optimism through pessimism to realism.

c. mid 40's: this, too, is a critical period. A number of basic questions arise concerning meaning in and of one's life. For the priest, the question of celibacy is especially urgent at this time—not so much the felt need for intimacy as the need to generate, to experience paternity.

d. late 50's and above: the aging person can move in two directions, and the priest is not exempt from these possibilities. The aging person can grow in wisdom with an accompanying serenity that is born from a life-long experience that knows enough to recognize the relative and to fix one's eyes on what is truly absolute and important. The aging person, on the other hand, can become more and more isolated with an accompanying kind of paranoia and distorted perception of reality. It is when a priest accepts this second possibility that devastating effects occur. It is sad for the aging person, but it also has a demoralizing effect on the younger clergy and the Church community at large. To experience an unwise, unhappy, or jealous priest who looks suspiciously on life and, implicitly, on God and the Church is tragic.

These are some critical developmental periods in the life of the priest. Each phase which involves intensely personal issues can be facilitated through a process of spiritual direction.



## **PART FOUR: PRACTICAL ASPECTS**

### **Introduction**

These reflections tell us that SD is indeed a valuable resource, one which can be worth the effort of development and promotion. A set of reflections such as these can remind us of the usefulness and possibilities of a traditional resource. Yet, at the same time, there are so many possibilities and so many voices calling for attention that an economy of energy investment must prevail, and a selection must be made.

SD ought to be counted among a number of resources that are possible for priests. Its peculiar value is in the individual attention that is given to the priest and the possibilities of posing and raising questions that might never be raised in another forum, such as group discussion or even psychological counseling.

The value of SD for priests implies that those responsible for the ministry and life of priests ought to give consideration to making this asset available to priests. This involves planning and programs. Immediately, a whole set of practical questions arise. These must be addressed, even if a general lack of experience in the area of wide-scale SD for priests permits us only to formulate tentative responses.

There have been a few diocesan-wide programs making SD available to priests. Some basic practical information emerges from those experiences. Significantly, priests react with initial indifference to SD. They do not perceive its value nor its usefulness. Once a few begin to take advantage of this resource, however, SD usually finds wide acceptance. Practically, this means that a bishop ought not to wait for a request from the priests of the diocese for SD. Once it is offered, it will attract many priests.

### **The selection and formation of spiritual directors for priests.**

A truly perplexing question concerns the selection and formation of appropriate directors. Who are the people who can capably exercise the ministry of spiritual direction for priests? Before noting the specific qualities of a spiritual director for priests, four general observations are in order.

- (1) A process of natural selection takes place even now in

those instances when a priest seeks counsel or direction. Those people who are helpful and give evidence of a genuine spiritual life draw others to themselves. Some people are naturally and supernaturally gifted for spiritual direction. This becomes evident, even if at times the gift must be encouraged and perhaps publicized.

(2) At times it may be appropriate and helpful that a person other than a priest be a director for a priest. That person, however, ought to be very much aware of the ministerial dimensions of the priest's life which give shape to the way his spirituality grows (cf. SRAP). The situation comes to mind of St. Teresa of Avila who counselled priests and did so in light of her own extraordinary experience of inner life and outer apostolic activity.

(3) The traditional wisdom of allowing for two forums, one internal and the other external, best translates into the SD situation for priests by not associating the SD with the administration of the diocese. The issue here is not simply confidentiality, which is presumed, but a freedom from institutional agendas, which may prejudice the SD process.

(4) The formation and qualification of a spiritual director need more study and elaboration than is possible here. We are, quite frankly, working with an incomplete theoretical and systematic framework which would describe the exact function of a spiritual director today. It is unwise, however, in the face of that lack to fall prey to a tendency that wants to "mystify" the work of the spiritual director, or to limit the possibility of such work to a very few extraordinary persons. The priest-spiritual director, who has a number of years of theological and personal formation in his background, is fulfilling a part of his ordinary ministry of caring and facilitating growth in faith for others but in a special way and in a special forum.

With these observations noted, three sets of qualities suggest themselves as essential to the task of SD: (1) the personal spiritual experience of the spiritual director; (2) a capacity to listen well; (3) knowledge.

(1) *Spiritual experience.* The spiritual director ought to be a person in touch with the Lord, a person with deep spiritual experience which has been gratefully received, carefully reflected upon, and manifested in a practical wisdom. It is good to remember that great spiritual people of our tradition were deeply rooted in the

real world. Spiritual experience and common sense blend in these people to form persons who are not only close to the Lord but who also can draw others to Him.

(2) *Capacity to listen well.* The spiritual director ought to have the capacity to listen in a non-projective way. The Spirit like the wind blows where it will. Consequently, it is important that the directee be allowed and encouraged to grow in the unique way that is fashioned for him by the Spirit. That requires attentive listening.

(3) *Knowledge.* The knowledge of the spiritual director ought to be primarily a practical wisdom. Specific understanding will also prove necessary at times, especially in the areas of theology-spirituality, ministry, and psychology. The spiritual director's theological-spiritual knowledge ought to include some appreciation of the Christian experience in Scripture and in the history of the Church. A certain "economy" of knowledge is important here. It is, for example, important that a spiritual director for priests be well versed in a contemporary and authentic theology of priesthood and ministry, a theology, which is in dialogue with the richness of the Catholic spiritual tradition. Furthermore, the spiritual director ought to have some practical understanding of priestly ministry and the many forms that it takes. If the spiritual director is to accompany the priest in his search to integrate and to fructify his ministerial experience with his personal inner experience of the Lord, then it becomes clear that the spiritual director cannot be unfamiliar with the meaning of priestly ministry and its many practical implications. Finally, the spiritual director of priests should be in possession of some psychological knowledge. The spiritual director is not a psychologist. An awareness of common patterns of emotional life, of development, and behavior, however, can sensitize the spiritual director to discern the difference between a movement of the Spirit and a movement of the spirit. The relationships between psychology and spirituality—convergence, difference, complementarity, etc.—are yet to be explored in a satisfactory systematic fashion. The exact background in psychology needed for effective SD forms part of the question that must be researched.

### **Questions of programmatic planning**

Finally, the last practical question: how can a bishop begin or initiate a process of SD for his priests? How can he and those

with him who are responsible for helping priests of a diocese offer this resource?

Several avenues of approach are possible. The two major possibilities are: (1) to call in resources from outside the diocese; or, (2) develop resources within the diocese.

Drawing on resources from without the diocese may mean engaging the time and talents of religious priests—a team, for example—to initiate the tradition of offering SD to priests of the diocese. Gradually, over the course of time the work of the religious can be supplemented with priests from the diocese.

Development of resources from within the diocese is, of course, more difficult but certainly possible. Priests who have the esteem of their colleagues and who witness to lives of fruitful and holy service might be asked to serve their fellow priests. Some form of preparation seems advisable. In the future, institutes specifically designed to prepare spiritual directors of priests may be established regionally throughout the country by bishops—perhaps, at a few major seminaries with facilities and faculties available for such a course.

A number of institutes of spirituality and spiritual formation already exist in the United States. If a bishop seeks information on the training programs of these institutes, he may contact the office of the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) at the following address:

NOCERCC  
5562 CLAYTON ROAD  
CONCORD, CALIFORNIA 94521

## CONCLUSION

A bishop faced with many needs in his diocese may find it difficult to respond to a central task which belongs to him—to provide for the spiritual care of his priestly co-workers. It is especially important that he reflect on ways of *providing resources* for his priests. In this way, he exercises his "ministry to the ministers." The present paper on SD for priests has offered some reflections on a potentially fertile agent for helping priests grow in spiritual life and in their capacity to be spiritual leaders. In this context, SD for priests partakes of the *nova et vetera*. It is a tried and proven means of growth in life in the Spirit. It is also new as a resource offered on a wide scale. Thus, this paper which is the result of a number of committee discussions is entitled "The Spiritual Direction of Priests: The Rediscovery of a Resource." It has been offered with the hope of providing a stimulus for reflection and action.





