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Spiritual direction and evangelicals : exploring its growth

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SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND EVANGELICALS: EXPLORING ITS GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

During the last thirty years interest in the ministry of spiritual direction has grown rapidly within evangelical circles. This paper explores the conditions that have nurtured this change. Specifically, this dissertation defines and describes spiritual direction, sets forth its biblical and historical context, and then explores a variety of factors that help explain its increase in popularity among evangelicals. In the final chapter, the dissertation turns to a consideration of how best to prepare the growing number of evangelical spiritual directors and proposes an outline of a curriculum for a spiritual direction equipping program.

The paper is divided into three basic sections: *what* evangelical spiritual direction is; *why* spiritual direction has become so popular among evangelicals; and *how* best to equip the next generation of evangelical spiritual directors.

The "*what*" of evangelical spiritual direction is covered in the first two chapters. The first chapter speaks to the increased attention that the ministry of spiritual direction has received in recent years and briefly outlines the balance of the dissertation. In chapter two, the ministry of spiritual direction is more clearly defined. The chapter contrasts spiritual direction with other related but different ministries. It also continues to develop the understanding of spiritual direction by setting the ministry in both its biblical and historical settings.

Answering "*why*" we have witnessed such an increased interest in spiritual direction among evangelicals is the central work of this dissertation. Chapter three explores the social, philosophical and economic trends of the last thirty years that have lent themselves to the growing interest in spiritual direction. Chapter four looks at theological shifts in evangelicalism over the same time period that have created a more hospitable environment for this ministry. Chapter five traces the catalytic influence of Henri Nouwen and Eugene Peterson in opening the door to the acceptance of spiritual direction among evangelicals.

Given this increasing interest in the ministry, the last chapter explores "*how*" evangelical spiritual directors should be equipped. The paper concludes by integrating the insights from the earlier chapters and developing the outline of a curriculum for a spiritual direction training program.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I am a spiritual director and have worked in this ministry for over 20 years. While my sense of calling to this work emerged slowly, today it is the primary way I express my desire to help others experience God's loving presence. My sense of calling to spiritual direction grew, in part, out of healing work that God was doing in my life. It was nourished by a few well placed individuals and the discovery of a trove of letters and writings of spiritual directors from the past.

But it also developed, at least at the outset, in isolation and loneliness. I am an evangelical Protestant.[1] When I began to explore my calling I found that there was very little support and very few "devotees" of spiritual direction to be found within my tradition. While I found much wisdom and help both from historical practices and from the active practice of spiritual direction in Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, among evangelicals I felt very much alone.

Twenty years later the world of spiritual direction looks quite different. Now I regularly turn away evangelical Christians seeking a spiritual director because I "am full." Thankfully, there are now many more directors from this faith tradition and referrals are relatively easy. I can also find evangelically-oriented spiritual direction journals, a plethora of spiritual direction books authored by evangelicals and an ever-growing number of training programs designed to equip and accredit a host of new Protestants being called into this ministry.

[1] In chapter four I will more fully discuss definitions and parameters around the term, "evangelical Protestant."

In some ways, my experience is a microcosm of a broader set of changes in the church. Twenty-five years ago there was little knowledge of, or appetite for, spiritual direction among evangelicals. Now there is a great hunger for it.

This paper seeks to explore why this change has occurred. What has caused a little known discipline among evangelicals to become in a few short years not only an accepted part of a Christian's life but an increasingly popular vocation? And what are the implications for the practice of spiritual direction in an evangelical context?

To answer these questions I will trace a number of trends both in the church and in the broader society. Changes in the sociological, philosophical and theological arenas have all helped to create a more receptive environment for this discipline. I will also raise up the work of two key pioneers whose writings began to open up this field around the same time as I began my explorations. But first, let me share in a bit more detail my process of discovering this calling.

My Introduction to Spiritual Direction

In a devotional book, Roman Catholics Jacqueline Bergen and Marie Schwan explore the biblical image of God as "potter" and the reader as "clay pot".[2] In typical Ignatian fashion, the reader is invited to imagine being a pot, but not just any pot. The reader is invited to imagine being a pot with a hairline crack that renders the pot imperfect and then to listen for the feelings that this evokes. Of course, the exercise doesn't stop there. Next the readers explore their feelings in the presence of their Maker.

[2] Jacqueline Syrup Bergen and S. Marie Schwan, *Love: A Guide for Prayer* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 1985), 69.

I have spent lots of time with this image. As I contemplate myself as a cracked pot invariably my initial reaction is one of panic. It is largely because of my "panic" in the face of imperfection that I have been drawn to the ministry of spiritual direction.

I made a conscious effort to follow Christ in high school. I read my New Testament, had regular quiet times, and participated in church worship services and youth group activities. I was a regular participant and occasional leader of small group bible studies. Looking back, I realize that I wanted to be the kind of Christian that would make Christ love me. If you had asked me, I would have been able to quote the bible verses about Christ's unconditional love and care, and I would be able to honestly assure you that I believed them. After all, I did believe them. However for me at this time, belief was an intellectual concept; it involved truths that were to be grasped and accepted. Belief was not, as it has later become, a life of nurturing trust in Christ's unconditional loving presence that was with me and in me.[3]

I would often panic when I thought I didn't measure up. My life reflected a fear of rejection and the need to win Christ's approval. There were good reasons why trusting in God's unconditional love was so difficult. It wasn't until years later that I finally recognized that my response to Christ was a lot more complicated and messier than a simple intellectual statement of belief.

There were connections between my lack of trust in Christ's love for me and my fears of rejection from childhood. My childhood fears stemmed in part from my father's death before I was two. My mom was in her early thirties when my dad passed away and was left with the overwhelming responsibility of caring for her two young children, her

[3] Chuck Conniry, *Soaring in the Spirit* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 68, speaks to this notion of belief.

own recently widowed mother, and her only sibling who required regular visits to a mental hospital. Because my dad had been an only child, my mother also ended up being responsible for the care of my dad's then-recently widowed mother. As a consequence, I was physically very well cared for, but there just wasn't an abundance of emotional support to go around. I had figured out that to win others' approval and love, I needed to achieve. And achieve I did. The problem was that the stakes were so high for me, that I got physically sick whenever I was confronted with an achievement or performance challenge. In my panic I threw up before spelling tests, swimming tests, piano recitals, anything that had to do with performance or achievement. While I developed some coping mechanisms as I got older, my performance anxiety remained very strong. So when I became I Christian, I lived as if Christ was one more important person whose love and approval I needed to win over.

While in my twenties, I began to notice the dissonance between what I intellectually believed and what my feelings and "gut reactions" were telling me. For example, I gave intellectual assent to the notion that God was a loving father, but I didn't live as if it were true. As a staff worker for a parachurch organization that worked with college students, I observed how the content of the Christian faith could be intellectually accepted by all of the students, but how they tended to internalize that same truth in very different ways. I began to realize that simply teaching the content of the Christian faith was not enough to bring about a deep understanding of God's loving grace through Christ. It wasn't enough for me and it wasn't enough for the students with whom I was working. I longed for that deeper knowledge for myself and for those to whom I was ministering.

While at seminary, I had a profound experience of God's grace largely facilitated through the priest of the small inner-city charismatic Episcopal church that my husband and I attended. Without my having said a word to him, this priest had noticed that I appeared depressed even when my life as a seminary student was thriving. He asked if we could get together. Through a process of prayer and asking good questions, it became clear that I was living under the heavy burden of needing to stay at the top of my seminary class. It turned out that my academic success in my early classes had not had the desired effect of increasing my confidence. Rather it had simply raised the standard that I had convinced myself that I needed to live up to.

The priest asked more questions about my sense of God as my father, especially after he heard some of my family background. He helped me to see the connection between my performance anxiety and my deep-seated fear of rejection that started with my father's death. I "saw" that I feared God's rejection if I wasn't good enough. My priest prayed with me, suggested some prayer exercises, and emphasized God's unconditional love for me. It was a perspective changing moment. It was a time when God's grace penetrated past my intellectual knowing. Looking back, I realize that this was my first experience of what I would later call spiritual direction. At the time however, I didn't have a name for it.

During this same time period I was greatly affected by Henri Nouwen, a professor whose gentle presence and guided contemplative prayer times also left me with a greater sense of God's love. After seminary I read anything of his that I could get my hands on. At the same time, I began working with college students with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a parachurch ministry reaching out to college students. It was there that I was

introduced to an author, Eugene Peterson, whose writings also evoked a grace-filled picture of the Christian life. Soon I was reading all of his books as well. Both these men spoke of a loving God in a tone that was more nurturing than harsh. Both of these men began speaking about "spiritual direction" in their writings.

I wasn't exactly sure what spiritual direction was, but I thought if these two men thought it was a good idea, then I should explore it myself. Being part of a Protestant evangelical Christian community, I began asking various Christian leaders I knew if they would be my spiritual director or at least help me find one. This was in the mid-nineteen eighties and my queries met with blank stares and puzzled looks. Nobody knew what I was talking about.

In the meantime, I read more about spiritual direction. I discovered that most of the material I could find was written either from a Roman Catholic or Anglican/Episcopal perspective.[4] I began reading more about the history of Christian spirituality. This in turn led me to writings of spiritual directors from the past. If I couldn't find a personal spiritual director, I could at least learn from the directors of old. Even if some of the writings of these ancient spiritual directors seemed a bit too passionate for my Danish sensibilities, they were onto something that mattered deeply to me. They seemed to understand the longings I had to truly know more of God's love.

Finally, in the late eighties a friend of mine told me about a newly started Roman Catholic prayer retreat program in Seattle called the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius for Everyday Life (SEEL). It offered a structured nine month program where I would meet with a spiritual director once every two weeks. I signed on and had my first official

[4] I also discovered some writings from an Orthodox perspective, but the majority of writings were from the other two traditions.

experience of spiritual direction. I loved it. More importantly, I left the experience having a greater heart-felt sense of the love of God for me through Christ. It was not just intellectual truth anymore. I found that the panic I experienced at my own brokenness started to lessen. I was more aware of God's love for me in the midst of my cracks.

I continued to meet with a spiritual director and had a sense that this ministry was what I had been looking for while in seminary and on staff with InterVarsity – I just didn't know it existed. I wanted somehow to be involved in a ministry of spiritual direction. Yet again, the ministry was largely unknown in my faith circles, so I simply began to pray that if this was something God wanted me to pursue, then God would have to help make it happen. I realized early on that this wasn't a vocation that would get started by hanging out a shingle, printing a brochure and handing out business cards. I started to get phone calls from a variety of people, asking if I'd be willing to meet with them to process their relationships with God. Initially, most of these people never used the term spiritual director. Most of them had never even heard of that term. Yet, they seemed to recognize that something was happening in our times together that was helpful for their own faith journeys. People kept calling.

During this time I felt quite inadequate and alone. I knew I needed to have some accountability in my work, but I could not find a spiritual directors' supervision group in my area with any Protestants, let alone evangelical Protestants. So, I did the next best thing. I became involved in a Catholic spiritual directors' supervision group.

These individuals were very helpful and supporting. They provided me with a setting to process what I was discovering in my newly forming ministry. They were very wise. They had been at this for some time and were a good source of accountability. But

still, there were times when I felt like the lonely evangelical Protestant, not quite fitting in. There were a few times when our theological differences created some limitations in understanding. For example, I remember being surprised by a nun saying that if someone didn't want to have anything to do with Christ or the Christian community but "felt" more at home just pursuing God on his or her own terms, she saw no issue with that. I, on the other hand, understood that Christian spiritual direction needed to be Christ-centered. Others were more theologically conservative but much of their sense of "truth" came from their understanding of Roman Catholic Church tradition. They often had a minimal understanding of Scripture and their lack of integration of Scripture with spiritual direction troubled me. Of course, these were minor reservations played out against an overall supportive and enriching experience, but there were enough of them that they left me feeling a bit self-conscious in my differences.

At that time our church got a new pastor who not only understood what spiritual direction was but who also encouraged me as a spiritual director. He helped me process some of my questions about how evangelicalism and spiritual direction fit together. He also helped me believe my ministry was to be shared with our local congregation. My ministry was not a "private practice" as a spiritual director. For the first time, I felt like I was being invited to use my gifts for the building up of my local congregation. This was, and continues to be, important to me.

Since my initial requests for spiritual direction over twenty years ago, there has been an increased awareness and appreciation for this ministry in Protestant evangelical circles. I now have a good number of friends and colleagues who are evangelical spiritual directors, something non-existent twenty years ago. As Dr. Siang-Yang Tan, pastor of a

large evangelical church and Fuller professor writes, "Literature on spiritual direction itself has mushroomed especially in recent years."[5] His lists include many books written by evangelical authors.[6] Looking at my bookshelves, I can confirm this trend. I now have many books written on spiritual direction from a Protestant evangelical perspective. Most have been published in the last ten to fifteen years. My Visa bill will attest to the fact that the rate at which new books are being published has not abated.

In addition, new programs for understanding and training directors are springing up in evangelical educational institutions. "The field of spiritual direction has grown significantly in recent years…with new training programs at the certificate, master's and even doctoral levels being offered at various seminaries and universities."[7] As a recent article in *Christianity Today* puts it, "Whatever the reason, programs in spiritual direction are popping up at many evangelical colleges."[8] Most of this dissertation will focus on trying to answer the question implicitly raised by *Christianity Today's* "whatever the reason." This dissertation seeks to identify the reason – or more accurately, the reasons – that the acceptance and popularity of spiritual direction has grown so quickly in evangelical Protestant circles over the last thirty years.

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[5] Siang-Yang Tan, "Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy: Ethical Issues," in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*, ed. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 187.

[6] Ibid., 188.

[7] Ibid., 197. See also James R Beck, "Self and Soul: Exploring the Boundary Between Psychotherapy and Spiritual Formation," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no.1 (2003): 24, where he states, "Spiritual direction has not been a major interest of evangelical piety until recently."

[8] Agnieszka Tennant, "A Shrink Gets Stretched," *Christianity Today*, May 1, 2003, 54.

What Lies Ahead …

In answering this question, I will take the following path: First, for purposes of clarity I will outline what is and is not the ministry of spiritual direction. In particular in the next chapter, I will provide an understanding of spiritual direction that grows out of my own experience and then contrast this understanding with various other closely-related but distinct Christian ministries. I will then step back to set the ministry of spiritual direction in a historical context. When speaking about spiritual direction, Eugene Peterson notes, "[R]esponding to God is not sheer guesswork: The Christian community has acquired wisdom through the centuries that provides guidance."[9] I hope that by focusing on certain historical movements and individuals within these movements, I will broaden the understanding of what this discipline is and has been. It is also my intent, notwithstanding Peterson's emphasis on the continuity of the discipline through time, to highlight how spiritual direction has changed with the times. It has never been a static "discipline" handed down in the same form from generation to generation. It has always been subtly shaped and molded by changing historical and theological forces.

> Spiritualities are always contextual. Before we continue to explore spiritualities and spiritual direction, it is important to understand that spiritualities are always contextual. They reflect theological, philosophical, cultural and historical biases.[10]

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[9] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing company, 1987), 104.

[10]Gene Barrett, "Spiritual Direction in the Roman Catholic Tradition," in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls,* ed. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner *(*Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 59. Although Barrett is addressing spiritual direction in the Roman Catholic tradition, his comments also apply to spiritual direction in the evangelical tradition and the thesis of this paper.

This insight leads into the third, fourth, and fifth chapters of this dissertation. Having laid a foundation as to what spiritual direction looks like, both in a contemporary and historical context, I will turn to my central question: Why has this ministry, so long neglected by Protestant evangelicals, suddenly become so popular? What are the cultural, sociological and theological trends that have nurtured this change in acceptance and attitude?

In the third chapter, I will look at cultural trends including philosophical, sociological and economic trends that have occurred in the last half of the twentieth century. Specifically, I will address these trends and the shifts they reflect from within the overarching context of postmodern thought. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the impact that these changes have had on spiritual direction and its accessibility to evangelicals.

In the fourth chapter I examine two significant theological trends that also occurred at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century: "postconservative evangelicalism"[11] and "practical theology." After tracing the development of these movements, the chapter will end with a discussion of how these theological trends have helped give permission for Protestant evangelicals to participate in the ministry of spiritual direction.

In the fifth chapter, I will discuss in some detail the impact of two key Christian leaders, Henri Nouwen and Eugene Peterson, on the growing interest in spiritual direction among evangelicals. While the cultural and theological shifts were critical to creating a more hospitable environment for this discipline, I argue that it took the lives and writings

[11] Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," *Christian Century* 112, no. 15 (May 3, 1995), 480-483.

of Nouwen and Peterson to catalyze the changes we have now observed. They taught in ways that were acceptable to evangelicals. They were Christ-centered and respectful of Scripture, but they also taught in ways that were particularly accessible to a postmodern mindset. From this stance, they highlighted and called forth the ministry of spiritual direction in a way that has caused many evangelicals to open up to its possibilities.

Finally, having laid a foundation by describing what spiritual direction looks like in chapter two, and having identified factors influencing its growth among evangelicals in chapters three, four and five, I turn to one final question: Given the increasing number of evangelicals seeking spiritual direction, how can evangelical spiritual directors be trained and equipped to participate in this ministry? In the final chapter I seek to answer this question by setting forth an outline for a curriculum for training evangelicals called to enter into this ministry.

The current literature around training in spiritual direction brings an eclectic mixture that borrows from historical tradition as well as from more recent psychotherapeutic helps. In many cases, however, it lacks a needed theological framework and fails to identify important practice distinctives.[12] What should spiritual direction training include given the unique vantage point of evangelicalism in this postmodern world? Training programs for spiritual direction within evangelical circles have begun to emerge while many are still trying to figure out what they should look like.[13] I have had the opportunity to help supervise students in two programs in the

[12] There have been attempts at explaining various definitions and perspectives (see Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 174-177) but various distinctives of theology and practice tend not to be discussed.

[13] In the last ten years here in Seattle, two such programs started, lasted a few years, and then folded. The reasons they did so are varied, but a lack of both clarity and experience of spiritual direction

Seattle area and my experience leads me to believe that there is still much work that needs to be done. Hopefully the last chapter of this dissertation will make a positive contribution to this on-going work.

among the leaders was certainly a factor. See also Siang-Yang Tan, "Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy: Ethical Issues," 197, where Tan addresses the growth of interest in spiritual direction found in evangelical higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

A Personal Perspective

One Christmas dinner many years ago, the grown-ups at the table struggled to find a conversation topic that would engage the teenagers but would still be of interest to the rest of us. To much laughter, we began discussing various idiosyncrasies of the adults at the table. My husband's nervous mannerism of patting and rubbing his stomach when having a tense phone conversation was confirmed by his boys. A friend's habit of rocking back and forth on his heels when speaking was also mentioned. When "my turn" came up, there was a pause and then an adult friend said, "That's easy, Margie always asks the question, 'Where is God in that?'" With more adolescent moaning than laughter, there was agreement around the table about this habit of mine. I wondered how my kids responded to this, and a few days later I learned that at least one of my sons didn't forget it. When I was nagging him to clean his room yet again, he turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and said, "Mom, where is God in this?" I immediately responded that God had given me the authority to command such a work and God expected him to obey me. Well, this wasn't my finest moment either as a parent or as a spiritual director, but the others were right. This is my question. And in my experience it is the question that is at the heart of spiritual direction: "Where is God in this?"

Spiritual direction is a spiritual discipline that involves spending time with another and prayerfully assisting her[1] (the "directee") to look for God's activity in her life. The assumption at the heart of spiritual direction is that God is always present and active. As Eugene Peterson says, "God is always doing something: an active grace is shaping this life into a mature salvation."[2] In spiritual direction, the director hopes to assist the directee to notice, to pay attention to the movements of God in her life. This "paying attention" involves helping the directee to notice how she interprets her experiences, thoughts, and feelings about God and her relationship with God. It also invites the directee to consider how these experiences, thoughts and feelings shape her relationships with others.[3] It is a time of "affirming the presence of God at the very heart of life, sharing a search for light through a dark passage in the pilgrimage, guiding the formation of a self-understanding that is biblically spiritual instead of merely psychological or sociological."[4]

A lot goes on in a spiritual direction session to help this happen. Spiritual direction involves a process of multi-faceted listening. At its heart it is prayerful listening. As a spiritual director, it is my job to be prayerfully attentive to the person in front of me and to God. I also think it is important to be listening to what is going on inside of me as I am prayerfully with another person. For example, if I find I am getting a

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[1] In this section I will be using the female pronoun rather than switching back and forth between the genders. I could just as easily have chosen to use a male pronoun. Historically, many men have been involved in the ministry of spiritual direction and this remains true in evangelical circles today. For clarity, however, it was easier to maintain a constant gender throughout this discussion.

[2] Peterson, *Working the Angles,* 104.

[3] Jeannette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 18.

[4] Peterson, *Working the Angles,* 104.

stomach ache as I am listening, I need to recognize that fact and bring it to God. I also need to pay attention when I have a compulsive urge to speak – I need to notice it so I can keep my mouth shut.

During direction sessions, I am continually giving over the time to God, inviting the Holy Spirit to work and move. I want to provide as much spaciousness as possible to give ample opportunity for the directee to hear God herself. This may mean after a pause in our conversation that I'll ask if the directee is comfortable taking what we were talking about to silent prayer and inviting God to shed light on the subject. Whatever happens, it is always with the hope of helping the directee listen to God, see God, know God, and discern God' presence in her life.

As I listen to a directee, I listen for the longings and desires that are stirring within her. I listen for what helps and hurts her capacity to be aware of God's presence. I listen.

In this process I also live with questions. Some I keep to myself. Where is God in this person's life? What is God's invitation for this person? What is happening here? What is missing? What am I noticing as she speaks? I may ask questions - both questions for clarification and questions to help the directee process what is going on in her life with God. These questions tend to be inviting, wondering kinds of questions more than directed "why" questions. For example, I might ask, "As you reflect back on that conversation you had with your co-worker, what's your sense of God in that time?" Hopefully this helps open up the directee to God's presence in the conversation. Compare that to the question, "Why do you think you were so angry?" which could both put her on the defensive and puts the focus on her anger and not on God's presence in the midst of

her anger. Again, my questions are intended to be nonintrusive and open enough to simply invite the directee to "notice and consider possibilities" about her relationship with God.[5]

Spiritual direction is a ministry of hospitality. As Margaret Guenther says, "At its simplest, hospitality is a gift of space, both physical and spiritual, and like the gift of attentive listening, it is not to be taken lightly."[6] This means that I am to do all that I can to welcome the person when she comes. I invite her in. I offer her water or tea. I want to offer her a place set apart from her ordinary life, free of agenda-driven tasks, goals and objectives.

I usually open the time in prayer, and after some initial prayerful silence, ask God to guide the time and commit the time into God's care. Sometimes I light a candle to help remind us of God's presence with us. Typically I will invite new directees to begin by prayerfully reflecting about their lives – considering their times of prayer, their life circumstances, and their thought life. In most cases, however, directees already have some topic or situation that they want to process with me and they will take the lead in establishing the content for our time together.

I want to offer a sense of holy space. The room we meet in is set up for the purpose of spiritual direction. It is a physical space that is meant to be welcoming, inviting and safe. There are large windows to allow for lots of outside light. It is quite small but hopefully warm. There are only two chairs. The rug on the floor looks a bit like a stained glass window, warn and dirty with wear. The prints on the wall are sketched by

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[5] Bakke, 25.

[6] Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992), 14.

a friend but copies of Van Gogh paintings replicated from Don Postema's book, *Space for God*. The candle is on a table sitting next to a small cross. I have a few of my favorite spiritual formation books on a couple of small shelves. As I welcome directees into this room, I do all that I can do to make them feel welcomed and safe.

Spiritual direction is a ministry that is founded on a trust of God. More specifically, it is a trust that God is at work in the directee, loving and providing for her. It is trusting that God will do the guiding and will "show up" for the directee. As Bakke says, "The faithfulness of God is at the core of spiritual direction."[7] It is also a ministry that requires trust between the director and the directee. As Margaret Guenther states, "To be asked by someone to serve as a spiritual director is an expression of great trust and my immediate reaction is almost always, 'Am I up to this? What makes this person think that I am worthy of his trust?'"[8] As a spiritual director I hold all that happens in a session in confidence, honoring the trust given to me as a spiritual director.

To help provide an understanding of what spiritual direction looks like, here is a snippet from a hypothetical conversation between a spiritual director and directee:[9]

> Directee: The flickering candlelight drew me to be quiet. I just sat for a while, thanking God for the solitude. I settled more deeply into the quiet prayer that drew me. I noticed a spring-like artificial flower arrangement on the windowsill, next to the candle. The beauty of the candlelight and the flowers drew me, and then I noticed in my prayer I was addressing God as "Beauty of the Trinity."
>
> Director: What was that like?

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[7] Bakke, 21.

[8] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 5.

[9] This is slighted adapted and condensed from a conversation in Bakke's, *Holy Invitations*, 61-62.

Directee: Really gentle. And, as a matter of fact, it was a great relief.

Director: What do you mean?

Directee: You may remember I told you how uneasy I was because I felt like I had lost Jesus. Suddenly, it was like I connected with him again, and he was inviting me to pay attention to being in relationship with the Trinity. Scripture came to mind, and the place in John 17 where Jesus prays to the Father that believers will be one as "we are one." It says that those who follow Jesus will be drawn into a relationship with the Trinity that is similar to the way members of the Trinity are related to each other and that Jesus wants his followers to have the same kind of interdependent relationship with God and each other. This sounds pretty heady, but it really wasn't at the time. It was more like enjoying God's company in a new way, something about the largeness of God's love and presence.

Director: What have you noticed since then?

Directee: I'm not so nervous about losing Jesus like I was, and I have a sense that this is the beginning of something new, maybe a new chapter with God.

Director: Any idea what the title of the new chapter might be?

Directee: It's too early to guess.

Director: Are you doing anything different or differently in your prayer time since this experience?

Although this example is brief, it does give an indication of a typical spiritual direction conversation. The focus is on the directee's relationship with God; the director seeks to draw out what God is doing in her life.

To reiterate, God is doing the guiding and is the real spiritual director in the whole spiritual direction process.[10] Margaret Guenther uses the imagery of a midwife when referring to a human spiritual director.[11] This image is useful as it highlights the role of

[10] I've always found the term "spiritual director" a bit awkward, yet it's a term that has been used for hundreds of years in the Church and alternative titles can be just as awkward in their own ways. In spiritual direction God is the One who is to provide the direction – not me.

[11] Guenther, *Holy Listening,* 82-108.

the spiritual director as "facilitator." A midwife doesn't cause the birth to happen; she merely facilitates the process. There is new life that wants to emerge and the midwife pays attention to the various stages and signs of labor, helping the birthing process along. So, too, the human spiritual director merely assists and facilitates what the God who is present is already doing.

What Spiritual Direction is Not

To understand what spiritual direction is, it is also useful to understand what it is not. Spiritual direction is not Christian psychotherapy. Therapy focuses on the horizontal relationships in our lives and seeks to provide healing and wholeness in these places. Psychotherapists seek to "understand the inner world and relieve the impediments to further growth in those they seek to help."[12] In contrast, spiritual direction doesn't try to fix things. The question in spiritual direction would be how does this relationship or circumstance influence the directee's picture of God? As Benner and Moon state,

> Thus, the focus of spiritual direction should never be simply one's self and one's conflicts. The focus should always be on one's experience of God and one's relationships with God, others and the world as well as oneself.[13]

Again, the question would be "Where is God in the midst of this?" The circumstance becomes the medium through which the directee ends up getting to know God more intimately. For example, over the years I've met with folks with eating

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[12] Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, "Spiritual Direction and Christian Soul Care" in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*, ed. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 24.

[13] Ibid.

disorders. One of the tendencies that usually exists in this disorder is what I call an all-or-nothing approach to life. "I've eaten one cookie – I've blown it so I may as well binge." A question to be explored in during spiritual direction could be: "How does this all-or-nothing thinking influence your picture of God?" In asking that question, the focus is on the directee's experience/picture of God in the midst of the disorder. It is not on trying to change the eating behavior.

Spiritual direction is also not giving advice or offering wisdom based on experience – that is the role of a mentor, not a spiritual director. The term mentor comes from Mentor, in Greek mythology, the wise teacher of Ulysses' son. Mentor taught his son while Ulysses was away at war.[14] A mentor is usually older and wiser with some experience or professional wisdom to impart. A "spiritual mentor" may be an older and wiser person who is willing to spend time with a younger person open to learn from this person's spiritual wisdom and experience. For example, Paul sometimes functioned as a "mentor." He refers to himself as a "father" in Christ to the Corinthian church (I Corinth. 4:15) and he exhorts the congregation to "be imitators of me" (I Corinth. 4:16).

Spiritual mentoring is a wonderful ministry. It is not, however, spiritual direction. The focus of spiritual direction is on what God is doing in the directee, not on the wisdom or experience the director may have to impart. There may be a time when the director does offer something from his or her own personal experience, but it is always to be done prayerfully and cautiously, with the directee having the freedom to process if it is helpful or not.

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[14] Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 35. (Unfortunately, this book has contributed to the confusion between mentoring and spiritual direction in its use of the term spiritual mentoring.)

Spiritual direction is also not discipling. Because the ministry of discipleship/discipling is so important in evangelical circles, it is especially important to highlight this distinction. My charge as an InterVarsity staff worker was to help "make disciples" of the students I was privileged to work with. I led lots of bible studies, gave lots of talks, and spent lots of time meeting one-on-one with students, imparting lots of Christian content. I was a teacher of what it looked like to follow Christ. As Bakke says,

> Disciplers help disciples become familiar with the information, struggle with it, understand it, and then assimilate and integrate what they have learned. Discipling includes significant intellectual endeavor that shapes the disciples' interpretations of experience - with other people and with God.[15]

A discipler has an idea of what the disciples need to hear and imparts that knowledge to them, usually in a very rational, intellectual manner. And, more often then not, the discipler does far more talking than the discipled, precisely because of the need to impart this knowledge.

By contrast, in spiritual direction, the content of the time is driven by the directee. The spiritual director comes to the time wondering what the topic of discussion will be. Spiritual directors "invite the Holy Spirit to choose the topics, guide the discussion, and teach. Specific topics arise as the director and directee talk, and this material become the focus for prayer and reflection."[16] Again, discipleship ministry plays a needed role in the Church. We need to know what we believe. It is just not the ministry of spiritual direction.

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[15] Bakke, 32.

[16] Ibid.

Finally, spiritual direction is not Christian coaching. Coaching is generally more action-oriented rather than oriented to a change in perspective. Usually it is associated with a task at hand. For example, I was told by someone who spent time with a Christian coach that their particular coach's purpose was to help the participants in his program to raise up leaders within their organizations. The coach's task was to give the participants ways to help make this happen.

There are different approaches and philosophies when it comes to spiritual direction, but hopefully this discussion helps clarify what I'm referring to when I reference this spiritual discipline. This understanding is also generally consistent with how other evangelical spiritual directors describe their ministry.

Spiritual Direction in a Historic Context

These have been my observations from many decades of work with this ministry. But of course, spiritual direction has a much older and richer pedigree. As another way of highlighting what spiritual direction is and is not, I want to turn to history. What follows is a brief, thirty-thousand foot survey of the history of spiritual direction down through the centuries. Of course, this overview is by no means comprehensive. There are whole schools of spiritual direction that have been influential in the Church in the past but that are not elaborated on here.[17] I have selected specific Church leaders or schools of thought

[17] It was difficult to choose what to include and what to leave out. For example, I have not included the Spanish Carmelite influence of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross and their influence on spiritual direction. This is by no means to minimize their influence. In addressing that general time period, I chose instead to speak of the Ignatian School of thought, given my judgment that the latter school has had (and will most likely continue to have) more influence on evangelical spiritual direction than has the Carmelite school of thought.

based on my assessment of their influence and possible contribution to evangelical practice.

New Testament Perspectives

The prophetic and wisdom literature of the Old Testament often refers to God as a good shepherd, one who guides and nurtures his flock.[18] We then read in the Gospel of John that Jesus refers to himself as the "Good Shepherd" (John Ch. 10). Jesus as shepherd guides and nurtures his disciples in what it means to follow Him.

His approach to guidance reflects the best of what a spiritual director does. For example, his encounter with Peter in John 21 is a powerful illustration of Jesus as a spiritual director. After Peter's betrayal of Jesus, Jesus meets him on the beach and offers him breakfast. In doing so, he embodies hospitality. He then asks Peter if Peter loves him. Jesus asks him three times, knowing that Peter needs healing from his three statements of betrayal. Jesus asks good questions. And he talks to Peter about the new life ahead. The future for Peter will be very hard, but Jesus invites Peter into this new life. Jesus plays the role of midwife here, offering a new beginning, a new birth for Peter. Offering hospitality, asking good questions, and facilitating the process of a new birth for deeper intimacy with God, is what spiritual direction is all about.[19] Jesus models this.

Paul also functions as a spiritual guide as we see in his letters to both churches and individuals. Perhaps one of the best examples of Paul as spiritual director is in his

[18] Psalm 23 is an example in Wisdom literature where God is referred to as a shepherd and Ezek. Ch.30 is an example in prophetic literature where both God and David are mentioned as good shepherds.

[19] See Guenther, *Holy Listening,* for these characteristics of a spiritual director.

first letter to the Thessalonians where he speaks of being “gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children” (I Thess. 2:7). Again, we see the image of a gentle guide, encouraging those under his care to remember who they are in Christ. In this letter we see that out of his deep love for both Christ and for the Thessalonians, Paul begins by letting them know that he prays on their behalf, thanking God for their love for Christ and for their faithful service (I Thess. 1:2ff). He also encourages them to remember what God has already shown them and to live out of that place (I Thess. 4:9ff). Paul has been praying for them, paying attention to what God has been doing in the lives of these people, and is encouraging them to continue to be open to God’s work in their lives. Again, these are all components of what it means to be a caring spiritual director.

Early Church

In the fourth century, Constantine’s rule and his decision to decriminalize Christianity led to a number of changes with implications for spiritual direction. In particular, Constantine’s decision led to a significant division in the church between the “laity” and those Christians who chose the monastic lifestyle. Although there are many factors that went into this divide, one of them was the desire of monastics to find ways to distinguish their brand of discipleship from the less pure expressions that characterized many of the more secularized Christians who flocked to the church after Constantine opened the door. They removed themselves from the world to live in monastic communities. The monastics believed that their lives could be more devoted to Christ if

they lived set apart from typical church communities. These two systems of devotion – lay and monastic – led to two different types of spiritual direction.

> The first, focusing on the lay community and directed by the clergy, emphasized doctrinal instruction, the distribution of charity, and the celebration of the sacraments. In contrast, the second, which was developed in a monastic setting, took a more personal and interactive approach through the spiritual father/spiritual disciple relationship…[20]

Although there are many examples of both types of spiritual guidance, I will discuss only two Christian leaders from this time period: Augustine and Cassian. Augustine primarily addressed how the laity were to be spiritually guided and Cassian was associated with spiritual direction in the monastic setting. Since Augustine has had a profound influence on Western Christianity and Protestantism,[21] the influence of his views of spiritual direction may still be present. Cassian's writings about the desert spirituality and monastic spiritual direction have shaped monastic spiritual direction for centuries.[22] Together Cassian and Augustine give us a good glimpse into notions of spiritual direction prevailing at this time.

[20] Demacopoulos, George E., *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 3.

[21] Holt, Bradley P., *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 70-73.

[22] Ibid., 65.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine has been quoted in *Soul Friend* and *Spiritual Mentoring*, two books on spiritual guidance, as saying "no one can walk without a guide."[23] Although it is clear Augustine believed that all Christians needed spiritual guidance, his guidance stressed the intellectual truths of the Christian faith far more than the personal nurturing or shepherding of Christians in their walks with God. Augustine lived in the late forth and early fifth century. As a theologian living in this time when heresy was common, Augustine emphasized doctrinal truth.[24] What also comes across in his writings is an inclination to equate sound intellectual capacity and acumen with spiritual health and development.[25] Augustine's neo-platonic tendencies led to an emphasis on the intellectual side of the Christian faith.[26]

His influence on the evangelical church is evident here. This focus on what one believes - getting the doctrine correct – and the focus on rationality are both features that have characterized the evangelical church, especially before postmodernity. However, not

[23] Anderson and Reese, 25 and Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World (*Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishers, 2001), 41.

[24] Demacopoulos, 94. In referring to letters of spiritual direction that Augustine wrote to laity, Demacopoulos notes Augustine's "penchant for instructing his readers in orthodox doctrine."

[25]Ibid. Demacopoulos states that Augustine "evaluated spiritual development in a register of intellectual capacity." See also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California, 1969), 142, where Brown quotes Augustine speaking on Psalm 18, "We should understand what this Psalm means. Sing it with human reason…we should know and see...with a clear mind."

[26] Brown, 278 -279. Yet Brown also notes shifts in Augustine's later life, when Augustine expresses limitations to the human mind. Nonetheless, Augustine's earlier influence still stands.

all Christians during this time period embraced Augustine's approach. For example, Cassian publically disagreed with him.[27]

John Cassian

Cassian's view of spiritual guidance is important for a number of reasons. A contemporary of Augustine, he is credited by scholars as having been responsible for carrying Eastern monastic thought to Western monasticism. Even though he doesn't specifically mention the Egyptian monk, Evagrius of Pontus, one can find the thoughts of Evagrius throughout Cassian's writings.[28] Moreover, Western monasticism was highly influenced by Cassian as a result of his influence on Benedict of Nursia. Benedict later took Cassian's writings and used them for his own Rule. He recommended that others also read Cassian's writings.[29] Benedict, of course, is seen as the father of the Western monastic movement.[30]

Unlike Augustine's emphasis on intellectual truth in spiritual guidance, Cassian speaks of the need to encourage humility and obedience through specific individually customized spiritual guidance.[31] The role of the spiritual father with the monk was that of a shepherd. His authority came only through his own obedience and discernment. He

[27] Demacopoulos, 109.

[28] Holt, 64-65.

[29] Demacopoulos, 110.

[30] It is because of his influence on Benedictine Monasticism (and space limitations) that I will forgo later specifically addressing the influence of Benedictine Monasticism on spiritual guidance.

[31] Demacopoulos, 115.

was to live out of his own love of God and his desire for his monk to grow in this love of God, or, as Cassian referred to it, a "love of the divine."[32] Cassian's emphasis is on growing in the experience of the love of God rather than on growing in a deeper intellectual understanding of the truth about that love.

Cassian also stressed the need to look inward to discern God's perspective. Whereas others of the desert monastic tradition spoke only in terms of outside demonic forces, Cassian recognized the need for reflection on what was going on internally within the directee. In his view, the origin of one's sin comes from within the individual and it is the individual's responsibility.[33] It is the role of the spiritual father/director to help the individual discern what is going on inside, and to offer guidance for the individual in responding to or dealing with these internal forces. This meant that the spiritual father/director needed to be quite discerning and attentive to the specifics of whom he was meeting with. It was not enough simply to label the sin and the demonic force that brought it on.

Cassian, whose teaching was set in a monastic setting, spoke often of the importance of Christian community in living lives faithful to God. Although he certainly valued the contemplative life, he emphasized the need for the monk to help his fellow monk and taught that one needed to balance contemplation and service, with caring for the less experienced taking priority over being alone with God.[34] God's loving perspective was made manifest in the communal setting.

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[32] Ibid., 111.

[33] Ibid., 119.

[34] Ibid., 123.

The model of spiritual guidance reflected in Cassian's writings demonstrates not only love and customized care for the individual but also how guidance occurs within a communal context. Cassian's approach of combining individual and corporate spiritual guidance, though originally applied in a monastic setting, has elements that are readily applicable to the laity today, including lay evangelicals. Whereas Augustine's intellectual model has been more widely emphasized in evangelical settings - especially among evangelicals of a modernist mindset - an adaptation of Cassian's individual/communal experiential model may well have much to offer to postmodern evangelicals.

Aelred of Rievaulx

A Cistercian monk living in England in the 12th century, Aelred is known for his writing on spiritual friendship. He used as his template the writing on friendship by Cicero, modifying the content to refer to what it meant for two persons to be friends when Christ is the bond between them.[35] Whereas before his writings, intimate relationships among monks tended to be discouraged, Aelred opened the door to validating friendship between monks that was of a different character from the more general bond shared by the whole community.[36]

> Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.[37]

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[35] Aelred of Rievaulx, translated by Mary Eugenia Laker, Spiritual *Friendship* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1977), 51.

[36] Ibid.,16.

[37] Ibid., 51.

> For what more sublime can be said of friendship, what more true, what more profitable, than that it ought to, and is proved to, begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ?[38]

For Aelred, spiritual friendship was a means to grow in one's relationship with Christ. What is worthy of note is that he began writing on spiritual friendship after he was an abbot of a monastery.[39] Rather than writing about the traditional hierarchy of abbot to monk, he instead wrote about a mutuality, a friendship where both parties benefited in their enjoyment of each other and in their relationship with Christ. Even as an abbot, Aelred prays, "You know, Lord, my intention is not so much to be their superior as to lovingly help them and humbly serve them, to be, at their side, one of them."[40] Yet, even with this humility and sense of mutuality, he was perceived by others as a spiritual director, having a ministry of spiritual direction.[41] His idea that spiritual friendship could be understood as a form of spiritual direction is a unique contribution to the history of spiritual guidance.

After the thirteenth century, this kind of spiritual friendship within the monastic community was once again seen as suspicious and unhealthy. It wasn't until the twentieth century that Aelred's work returned to favor.[42] His idea that spiritual guidance comes in the form of friends loving each other in Christ fits well with the less hierarchical notions of spiritual guidance that have developed recently. Also, Aelred's sense of the immediacy

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[38] Ibid.,53

[39] Ibid., 10.

[40] Leech, 53.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Aelred, 40.

of the love of Jesus and his love of Scripture resonate well with evangelical thought. As he says, "For now nothing which had not been sweetened by the honey of the most sweet name of Jesus, nothing which had not been seasoned with the salt of Sacred Scripture, drew my affection so entirely to itself."[43] His desire to have his thoughts on friendship be fully supported by Scripture should be reassuring to evangelicals; his thoughts on spiritual guidance through spiritual friendship are grounded in God's written Word. Aelred's insights have much to contribute to the growing conversation about spiritual friendship found in the writings of a number of evangelical authors during the last twenty years.[44]

The Dominicans and Catherine of Siena

The Dominican Order that was established contemporaneously with Aelred's writings, is worthy of singling out among the mendicant orders of the Middle Ages because of the Dominicans' perspective on spiritual direction. As articulated by Dominican Paul of Hungary in 1120, a spiritual director should

> [B]e inclined to correct kindly and to bear the weight himself. He must be gentle and affectionate, merciful to the faults of others…He is to help him by calming his fears, consoling him, giving him back hope, and, if need, be, by reproving him. Let him show compassion in his words and teach by his deeds.[45]

[43] Ibid., 46.

[44] Larry Crabb is one such author as is David G. Benner.

[45] Leech, 55.

This tone of gentleness and compassion, along with the ability to reprove where needed, was wonderfully adopted by the Dominican spiritual guide, Catherine of Siena. Catherine lived in the fourteenth century and ministered during a period when the Dominicans had assigned more of the responsibility for spiritual direction to the women connected with their order.[46] She became the most well known of these female spiritual directors.

Both men and women sought out Catherine for spiritual guidance. When she was only in her twenties, highly educated men came to her for spiritual guidance, referring to her as "Dearest Mama."[47] Her giftedness was recognized even though she broke with a number of the conventions of her day. While she frequently encountered adverse reactions from other women, many men recognized Catherine's gifts of discernment and treated her as their equal.[48] She was so well-respected, in fact, that she was largely responsible for the end of the papal court at Avignon. Because of her urging, Gregory IX, the pope at the time, left France and returned the papacy to Rome.[49]

Consistent with the Dominican teaching, Catherine modeled a complex combination of tenderness and firmness. She showed how one could be compassionate, and at the same time, discerning and directive. She didn't seem concerned that speaking

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Patricia Mary Vinje, *Praying with Catherine of Siena* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 1990), 21.

[48] Ibid., 21.

[49] She writes "I am begging you" and "I am telling you" to the pope. She even reprimanded a later pope on his temper, "For the love of Christ crucified, restrain a little those hasty movements of your nature!" Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 123 and 125.

the truth might seem harsh or lack compassion. Reproof and compassion were intimately connected.[50]

Catherine also had a great passion for the church and believed that Christ was continually in her. She maintained this view even though she lived through one of the most corrupt periods in church history. She carried the weight of the church and saw herself as a mother to those to whom she ministered.[51] As a spiritual guide, her confidence as to her identity in Christ, her loving service towards others, and her hope for the church, exemplified qualities that are likely to be admired and applicable in postmodern evangelicalism.

After Protestant Reformation

Notwithstanding Catherine's faithfulness, the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church continued. Facing this corruption in the sixteenth century, many left the church altogether giving rise to events that we now refer to as the Protestant Reformation. But the corruption also led to a fresh renewal within the Roman Catholic Church. Nowhere was this more evident than in the life and work of Ignatius of Loyola.

Ignatius of Loyola was a contemporary of Martin Luther who lived in sixteenth century Spain. He and the Jesuits, the order he founded, were at the heart of the Roman Catholic renewal.[52]

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[50]Ibid., 125-126.

[51] Ibid., 126.

[52] Holt, 77-78.

Although raised Catholic, in his early years Ignatius was more of a romantic dreamer, who loved imagining himself as a knight in shining armor rescuing a damsel in distress.[53] But he was wounded in battle and confined for a period of months. During his time of convalescence he ended up reading the only literature available to him – *The Bible, The Lives of the Saints* and other classics of spirituality.[54] While this was not exactly the romantic literature he had craved, he read what he had. But in so doing, he put his daydreaming tendencies to work and found himself imagining being with Christ, putting himself in the Gospel scenes, pondering his own reactions within these settings. He discovered this use of his imagination was far more life-giving than his previous dreams of the heroic knight.[55] It was during this time that he experienced a deep conversion.[56]

This period of physical and spiritual healing shaped how he experienced God's presence. It also was reflected in his later instructions to his followers. His tendency to daydream was used by God to discover and to explore creative ways of praying and reading Scripture. This is especially evident in his manual for spiritual directors, the *Spiritual Exercises.* The *Exercises* were designed to lead participants in a four week/month long guided prayer retreat.[57] During the retreat the participants would meet

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[53] Margaret Silf. *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1998), 10.

[54] Silf, 10 and Gerald L. Sittser. *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 261.

[55] Silf, 11.

[56] Ibid., 12.

[57] Holt, 77. However, Holt immediately then says Ignatius "encouraged the director to adapt this program to individual needs." (See also *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* translated by Anthony Mottola, (New York: Image Books, 1964), #19, 42.) As an example of an adaptation, I participated in a "retreat" that adapted the 4 weeks to 9 months. This adaptation was necessary because, using the words of

daily with a spiritual director, prayerfully meditate on Gospel passages, spend other time in prayer and silence, and attend Mass.[58] The purpose of these prayer retreats was to help the participants discern God's presence and direction in their lives [59] with the hope that each participant would "grow in an inner freedom to respond to God's call and demands."[60]

The *Spiritual Exercises* were to serve as a guide in this process but were surprisingly non-prescriptive in character.[61] Ignatius advised the director to "permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord."[62] Ignatius demonstrated a confidence and trust in God's unique relationship with each individual. He reminded the director that the primary relationship was to be the one between the directee and God. Moreover, the director was "not to be severe or harsh with him (retreatant) but rather gentle and kind."[63] Ignatius prescribed a tone of acceptance and openness. Harshness was unnecessary. God could be trusted to act faithfully in the life of the directee during the discernment process. In many ways Ignatius was like the Apostle Paul, wanting to be flexible in ministry in order to share the good news of

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Ignatius in annotation #19, I was "a person engaged in public affairs or necessary business" that didn't allow for a month away for a retreat.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Philip Sheldrake, "St Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Direction" in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, ed. Lavinia Byrne (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 114.

[61] John O'Malley, "Early Jesuit Spirituality: Spain and Italy" in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Depre and Don E Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 6.

[62] Ibid. O'Malley is quoting from *The Spiritual Exercises* in the "Directions for Acquiring an Understanding of the Spiritual Exercises, #15. (See also *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* translated by Anthony Mottola, (New York: Image Books, 1964), 40-41.) These opening "directions" provide a helpful understanding of the role of the spiritual director.

[63] Anthony Mottola, trans., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 39.

Christ.[64] He deliberately stayed away from strict daily offices normally used in a monastic setting in order to provide the flexibility needed in service.[65]

The actual "spiritual exercises" to be assigned to the directee, were a wonderful combination of reading Scripture with both head and heart and engaging in reflection through the spiritual discipline/exercise of the prayer of examen.[66] Holt sums up the qualities of the *Spiritual Exercises* in this way,

> The paradoxical feature of the *Exercises* is their appeal to the affections or emotions to accomplish their purpose, while remaining very rational. The retreatant's imagination is especially employed to reconstruct biblical scenes, in which the retreatants participate and feel the motions of their hearts. The program is designed to give individual freedom within a rather clear and fixed pathway, leading to a clear decision about how to follow Jesus. The daily examen (examination of conscience) is an important discipline described in the Exercises. It is an exercise in surrender to God and discernment of God's leading.[67]

These exercises, used wisely by a director, combine a variety of characteristics for the ministry of spiritual direction that may be important today. While not ignoring the intellect, they encourage a reading of Scripture that is prayerful and experiential, with the goal of greater intimacy with Christ. They encourage a self-awareness, helping the directee to pay attention to the inner workings of his or her life and discover the deep desires within. These desires, in turn, ultimately point the way toward a greater intimacy with Christ.[68] Practical helps are provided in how to discern God's movement.[69] There is

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[64] Holt, 78.

[65] O'Malley, "Early Jesuit Spirituality: Spain and Italy," 6-7.

[66] This prayer of examen invited the retreatant to reflect upon his life, looking for where he was both aware and not aware of God in his life. It was also a time to reflect on when he departed from God's will and confess accordingly.

[67] Holt, 77.

[68] Silf, 14.

the recognition in these exercises that God is present in all of life and that the director's role is simply to help the directee notice how God is working in his or her particular world.[70]

Finally, it should be noted that the *Spiritual Exercises* pointed outwards as well. The focus of the exercises was not just on the individual's internal relationship with Christ. Rather it taught that this union should lead to the service of others.[71] Today, the Jesuits are known for their service although it is sometimes forgotten that their service is to be an outgrowth of their union with Christ. The purpose of life, according to Ignatius, was to live "to the greater glory of God."[72]

Ignatian spirituality has much to offer evangelical spiritual direction. The grounding in the person and work of Christ and the focus on a relationship with Christ easily fit with evangelical piety. Ignatius' attention to Scripture maintains the evangelical emphasis on the primacy of God's Word. But his emphasis on imagination and experience should fit well in a postmodern context. Combined with his focus on outward service, his holistic emphasis that contemplates a unique person-by-person customization is also likewise likely to be appealing to post conservative evangelicals living in a postmodern milieu.

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[69] See section in *Spiritual Exercises* on the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," 129-134.

[70] Ignatius, in his instructions to the Jesuits in *Constitutions,* exhorts them to "find God in all things"; O'Malley, 7.

[71] O'Malley, "Early Jesuit Spirituality: Spain and Italy," 6-7.

[72] Morris Dirks, "Recovering Spiritual Direction in the Protestant Tradition" (D.Min. diss., George Fox University, 2007), 57. See also chapters 5 -6 for a helpful discussion of important themes in Ignatian spirituality only briefly highlighted here.

French Catholic Spirituality of the Seventeenth Century

In the generation following Ignatius of Loyola there was a growth in the ministry of Roman Catholic spiritual direction in France. Two leaders of this movement were Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. It has been said that de Sales, taught in the Ignatian tradition, took that tradition and built upon it.[73] His ministry as a Catholic bishop and writer was a ministry directed primarily to the laity – "people who live in crowded cities within their families, in the midst of domestic cares or the press of public affairs…"[74] His book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, is still in print and continues to be a devotional resource to many.[75]

We also get insight into his approach in the letters of spiritual direction that he wrote his directees. Many of these letters have now been collected and published.[76] His friendship and correspondence with Jane de Chantel, who was a spiritual guide and leader in her own right, also gives us an insight into her ministry of spiritual direction.[77] Together, de Sales and de Chantal both reflect a spirituality of their time that emphasized an intimate and experiential love of God towards humankind. This love was especially expressed in the language of the heart; the crucified heart of Jesus served as the mediator

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[73] Wendy Wright in introduction to *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction* trans. by Peronne Marie Thibert, ed. John Farina *(*New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 40.

[74] Richard J. Woods, *Christian Spirituality: God's Presence through the Ages* (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1989), 217.

[75] Holt, 90.

[76] *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction,* trans. by Peronne Marie Thibert, ed. John Farina *(*New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

[77] We see this not only in their published letters but also in Wendy Wright's book, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal and Francois de Sales* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

between the divine heart and human hearts.[78] The reason for living was to "receive and carry the gentle Jesus: on our tongue by proclaiming him; in our arms by doing good works….Happy are those who carry him gently and with constancy."[79]

Directees were pointed towards a gentle, humble, and patient God whose love is unconditional and who never gives up. In a letter de Sales speaks of this love, "See the divine lover at the gate. He does not simply knock once. He continues to knock."[80] Their letters of spiritual direction frequently began with the phrase, "Live Jesus,"[81] and it was always the loving, gentle Jesus of Matthew 11:28-29 that was being referenced. This Jesus was to be loved and followed. His disciples were to love as he loved.

In spiritual direction, this love of Jesus and living for Jesus meant that the "point is not to instruct but to appeal to the whole person through their vital center, to make Jesus live by winning the heart through persuasion and gentle encouragement."[82] De Sales encouraged others to "pray for a director who is after the heart of God."[83] This meant that the spiritual director was to be a gentle guide, never harsh, living in "unforced

[78] Philip Sheldrake, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 559.

[79] Wright, *Bond of Perfection*, 98, quoting a letter by de Sales to de Chantal.

[80] De Sales and de Chantal, *Letters*, 35.

[81] Ibid., 9.

[82] Ibid., 59.

[83]Ibid.

rhythms of grace."[84] De Sales noted, "Everything must be done with love, nothing with force; it is more important to love obedience than to fear disobedience."[85]

Not only was the director to exhibit patience with directees, the director was to encourage directees to be patient with their shortcomings. There is to be a patient acceptance for what is, not an incessant longing for what one wishes could be. De Chantal writes, "When you find yourself committing some fault or other, just humble yourself quietly before God by a simple acknowledgment of the fault, and think no more about it."[86]

Even though a director may suggest a particular course of action, the letters of de Sales and de Chantal urge that the director defer to the directee who alone must decide what he or she needs. From his writings de Sales suggests a particular prayer exercise to his directee. "But, I say, use it only if you really prefer it, for in everything and at all times I want you to have a holy liberty of spirit…"[87] Patience, humility, and gentleness are constantly exhibited in their letters of spiritual direction. Their desire to communicate and encourage knowing and loving this "gentle Jesus" can serve as a helpful corrective for evangelicals today, many of whom come out of a tradition that has often been characterized by harsh and judgmental logic and rhetoric.

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[84] This is a phrase from Matt 11:28-29, taken from Eugene Peterson's, *The Message, (*Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 1766.

[85] Wright, 62.

[86] De Sales, de Chantal, 194.

[87] Ibid., 125.

Post Reformation Protestant Spirituality

Martin Luther was adamant in his belief that Christians are justified by faith alone. Their salvation is nothing of their own doing.[88] Although he still carried with him some of the asceticism and mysticism from his days as a monk, as a spiritual leader he wanted to make sure others did not see any need for Christians to practice spiritual disciplines as a means of securing God's loving acceptance.[89] Acceptance was an act of unmerited grace. Indeed, Luther was so fearful of a return to a works-based faith that he avoided much discussion of sanctification or right living. For example, in speaking of the discipline of fasting he said, "Your service to God must be only faith in Christ and love to your neighbor….The only purpose of fasting is to discipline the body by outwardly cutting off both lust and the opportunity for lust, the same thing that faith does inwardly in the heart."[90] Thus the purpose of a discipline was only to keep the body in check, rather than as a means to grow in God's love. The truth of salvation by faith alone took precedence over any means of growth through the process of sanctification.

When someone was struggling with a sense of not doing enough for God or being enough for God, spiritual direction might be useful as a remedy for this over-scrupulosity but in general it was not something he encouraged.[91] The central message was that God's work and God's work alone was all that was needed for our salvation and that salvation

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[88] Frank C. Senn, "Lutheran Spirituality," in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions,* ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 17.

[89] Ibid., 13-16.

[90] Ibid., 15.

[91] Ibid., 16. Although Senn doesn't directly make the connection between Luther, over-scrupulosity, and spiritual direction, he makes a connection indirectly.

was of overwhelming importance. Hence, spiritual direction was not a significant focus of Luther's teaching.

Calvinist Puritans

In contrast to Luther, however, sixteenth century reformer John Calvin did place more emphasis on the process of sanctification.[92] He cared more about how Christians governed themselves during their lifetimes. Consequently there was more of a place for spiritual guidance as a means of helping believers live as faithful disciples.

Perhaps the best examples of Calvin's spiritual progeny were the Anglo-Saxon Puritans of the seventeenth century.[93] The Puritans, who flourished in England and the North American colonies, gave greater importance to one's experiences during a life of faith than Luther did.[94] In many ways the Puritans were to Protestantism what contemplatives and ascetics were to the Roman Catholic Church.[95] They used passionate love language when speaking of their intense experiences of God paralleling to some extent the earlier use of Song of Songs by Bernard of Clairvaux to reflect upon the love relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church.[96] Union with Christ, a central

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[92] Howard G. Hageman, "Reformed Spirituality," in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 62.

[93] Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality, Vol. III: Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality*. (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1968), 134. In fact Bouyer states these Puritans (from what is now the United Kingdom) were the "most direct spiritual descendants" of John Calvin and even more so than "the Dutch theologians such as Gomar, and the Dordrecht synod."

[94] Alistair E. McGrath. *Christian Spirituality*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 96.

[95] E. Glenn Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality" in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 165.

[96] Holt, 85.

theme for Calvin himself, was also a dominant theme in Puritan spirituality.[97] Although they were united with each other in covenantal community,[98] their faith expressions were nonetheless deeply personal.[99] In part, due to their desire to be reassured that they were part of God's elect, the Puritans engaged in a constant self-reflective scrutiny.[100] This led to the writing of many journals, diaries, and poetry, some of which were saved for future readers' spiritual encouragement.[101] There was also a commitment to daily devotional life that is not unlike the Benedictine Rule. Called to a "universal daily service," Puritans were given guidelines in the form of devotional manuals, for a rhythm of prayer, Scripture reading and work that was to be lived out in their daily lives.[102]

Being part of the covenantal community, they also relied on others for assistance in growing ever more in their understanding of what it meant to live out of a union with Christ.

> "Private conferences" – sessions with a mentor or spiritual director- were an expression of the membership of each believer in the covenant…Ministers engaged in spiritual counseling as part of their calling, but they also encouraged everyone to find a "spiritual friend" other than a minister with whom to confide and pray, Although one most often sought such a relationship in times of spiritual struggle, crisis, or

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[97] Sheldrake, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 519.

[98] See Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality,"169, and Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "Puritan Spirituality in America" in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern,* ed. Louis Depre and Don E Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 339-340, for two discussions of the covenant being the center of a Puritan's life.

[99] Holt, 85.

[100] Sheldrake, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 519.

[101] Hambrick-Stowe, "Puritan Spirituality in America," 350-352.

[102] Richard C. Lovelace, "Puritan Spirituality: The Search for a Rightly Reformed Church," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern,* ed. Louis Depre and Don E Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 306-307.

> melancholy, diary entries also attest to high spiritual attainment resulting from intimate sharing and guidance.[103]

Spiritual direction was part of the Puritan life of faith and often was done amongst the laity themselves. It was one of a number of spiritual practices that were encouraged as a means of right living.

Puritans are among the ancestors of evangelicals. The Puritans' emphasis on Scripture reading, their need for personal awareness and reassurance of their own salvation, and their commitment to daily devotional practices can find echoes among modern-day evangelicalism. Perhaps the Puritans understanding of the role of spiritual direction in the context of covenant communities may find resonance with evangelicals as well.

Quaker Spirituality

Quaker spirituality born in the seventeenth century, "harks back by way of Puritanism to the contemplative tradition of the Middle Ages."[104] Like their Puritan heritage, they carried a deep concern for the spiritual nurture of their brothers and sisters in Christ.[105] The creative combination of contemplative prayer with concern for spiritual nurture brought forth a corporate model of discernment that depended on being together in silence and trusting the Holy Spirit to work in their lives during this time together.[106]

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[103] Hambrick-Stowe, "Puritan Spirituality in America," 347.

[104] E. Glenn Hinson, "Baptist and Quaker Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Depre and Don E Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 324.

[105] Ibid., 330.

[106] Ibid.

E. Glenn Hinson notes that "more than any other group, Quakers bear witness to the conviction that spiritual development depends on God and not human contrivances."[107] Their contemplative posture, their comfort with silence, and their trust that God will act both in the individual and in the group as a whole, provides a helpful corrective to an evangelicalism that can sometimes be a bit too "word" focused.

Wesleyan Spirituality

When looking at spiritual direction from an evangelical perspective, one needs to address the spirituality of John Wesley. Evangelicalism found expression in the Methodist movement that emerged from his leadership in the eighteenth century.[108] Although there are various interpretations as to how his faith expression evolved,[109] his Anglican background with a focus on holiness[110] combined with an emphasis on personal conversion and experiential assurance of salvation, led to what later became Methodism. Wesley's adaptations of the Moravian small group fellowships or

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Holt, 87.

[109] There seems to be some disagreement among scholars as to how much Puritanism and/or Lutheran Piety, (via the Moravians), influenced his thought. For an argument giving Puritan spirituality more influence, see David Lowes Watson's essay, "Methodist Spirituality" in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 220-222. For an argument giving Lutheran piety expressed in the Moravians more influence see Justo L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century, Vol. 111* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1975), 306-316. See also Holt, 86-87, for a brief explanation of Lutheran pietism of the seventeenth century.

[110] David Trickett, "Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Movement," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Depre and Don E Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 354.

"bands"[111] to encourage spiritual growth for Christians in various stages of the Christian life, demonstrated his awareness of the individual's need for the help from others in spiritual development.[112] His small group model of discipleship and accountability is a model often used in evangelical settings today.[113] The more structured and "directed nature" of these discipleship groups – places where "members encouraged each other, confessed their shortcomings, heard what others thought of their spiritual progress and prayed together"[114] – is the main small group model many contemporary evangelicals have experienced. When introducing spiritual direction to evangelicals, it is important to be aware of this connection as the Wesleyan model of a small discipleship group may strongly shape their understanding of what group spiritual direction should look like.

Anglican/Episcopal Spiritual Direction

The spiritual founders of Anglicanism in the sixteenth century helped this tradition find a "middle way" when it comes to the ministry of spiritual direction, by "charting a careful course between the extremes (as they saw it) of Roman dogma and contemporary continental Protestantism."[115] The ministry of spiritual direction received

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[111] David Lowes Watson, "Methodist Spirituality" in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 226-227.

[112] Trickett, "Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Movement," 365.

[113] Evangelical churches often advocate members being part of a small group fellowship and parachurch evangelical organizations such as Young Life and Intervarsity Christian fellowship see small "discipleship" groups as essential to Christian growth.

[114] Sheldrake, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 439.

[115] Gorden Mursell, "The Anglican Spirit," *in The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two thousand years from East to West*, ed. Gorden Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 246.

lots of attention in the seventeenth century, most notably in the ministry of Anglican priest and poet, George Herbert.[116]

Another Anglican spiritual director of note is Evelyn Underhill, a lay woman who lived in the first half of the twentieth century. Her written works that had been out of print for a number of years have been re-published in the last twenty-five years,[117] and it is because of her recent popularity that she is particularly deserving of attention. She not only re-introduced writers of medieval and Catholic spirituality to a Protestant Christian audience,[118] she also spoke of the Christian life in very practical, down-to-earth language for the every day Christian. Her ministry came out of her own conversion experience as an adult combined with her self-study of Christian mystics.[119] Here are her words from a BBC radio address in 1936,

> …when we lift our eyes from the crowded by-pass to the eternal hills, then, how much the personal and practical things we have to deal with are enriched. What meaning and coherence come into our scattered lives. We mostly spend those lives conjugating three verbs: to Want, to Have, and to Do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, and intellectual-even on the religious-plane, we are kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in, the fundamental verb, to Be: and that Being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of a spiritual life…I mean an acceptance and living out of the actual, in its homeliest details and its utmost demands, in light of the eternal, and with that sense of ultimate security which only a hold on the eternal brings.[120]

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[116] Leech, 78.

[117] Evelyn Underhill, *The Ways of the Spirit,* ed. Grace Adolphesen Brame (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 11.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Paul V. Marshall, "Anglican Spirituality" in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions,* ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 155.

[120] Bernard Bangley, ed. *Radiance: A spiritual memoir of Evelyn Underhill* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004), 172-173.

She provided a practical perspective in her writing, speaking and leading prayer retreats. She also maintained an active ministry of spiritual direction from her home.[121]

Underhill's own personal conversion experience, her emphasis on ministry to the laity, her understanding of God's love and grace is not unlike what evangelicals have seen in the ministry of the late Henri Nouwen.[122] Underhill's similarities to Nouwen indicate her wisdom could be understood and appreciated by evangelicals interested in the ministry of spiritual direction.

Conclusion

Any quick historical survey will obviously leave out important contributors to the ministry of spiritual direction. I have tried to include those who already have connections with evangelical piety - hence the inclusion of biblical models of spiritual direction, Augustine, the brief mention of Luther, the more elaborate discussion of the Calvinist Puritans, and the discussion of Wesleyan spirituality. The other contributors were mentioned because of their potential positive influences on spiritual direction in the evangelical world. John Cassian and the later Roman Catholic contributors have been mentioned because of what I believe they each could add in their own distinct ways. Anglican Evelyn Underhill's "middle way" perspective approaches spiritual direction with a practicality that is not unlike American evangelicals in outlook. The mention of

[121] Holt, 112.

[122] Henri Nouwen's book, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, tenth anniversary edition, 1992), speaks quite directly to the same theme as the earlier quote by Underhill.

the Quakers reminds the evangelical that words aren't always necessary and a reliance on the Holy Spirit for discernment is. Finally, in each and every instance of spiritual direction mentioned, it is always assumed that spiritual direction occurs within the context of Christian community. There is no precedent for spiritual direction to occur only between the directee and some spiritual director removed from any larger Christian community. The insights provided from these historical practices can help guide and shape spiritual direction among evangelicals.

With this background understanding of *what* spiritual direction looks like from both contemporary and historical perspectives, it is now time to turn to the central question of this dissertation: *why* has it grown in popularity and interest among evangelicals?

CHAPTER THREE

CULTURAL SHIFTS

In this chapter I will explore certain social and cultural shifts in the United States that may help explain the growing interest in spiritual direction among evangelicals. In keeping with my overall thesis, I am primarily interested in changes that have occurred during the last half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Although it is difficult to compartmentalize different aspects of social life because of the intermingling of influences, for the sake of clarity, I will discuss these shifts under three broad headings: changes in philosophical thought, changes in economics, and changes in social conditions. After discussing each of these areas, I will then explore how these various changes may help account for the growing interest in, and acceptance of, the ministry of spiritual direction.

Philosophical Shifts

When I went to college at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1970's, a popular dorm room poster was an abstract drawing of a human head with the quote from Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." [1] In a university setting, it seemed quite appropriate. Little did I realize, however, the irony of that poster. I was going to college at precisely the time when a major shift was happening in philosophical thought. The modernist

[1] Descartes actually borrowed this quote from Augustine but this historical copyright violation was lost on me during my freshman year. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 64.

mindset well embodied by the Descartes quote was being replaced by what has since come to be called "postmodernism."[2] Not only that, but one of the major contributors to this philosophical discourse, Michel Foucault, was spending time in the Bay Area and at Berkeley roughly during this same time period.[3] Indeed, my college years (1973-1976) correspond closely to this central shift in intellectual thought. Modernism's preeminence was giving way to postmodernism.[4]

Modernism

Modernism is associated with the Enlightenment, which has also been called the "Age of Reason." This "Age of Reason" roughly spanned a period of time between the end of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century.[5] During this time human intellectual and moral capacities were increasingly celebrated and the importance of divine revelation was correspondingly diminished.[6] With new discoveries in scientific method exemplified by Galileo's quantifiable scientific approach, what was "real" was measurable or otherwise quantifiably verifiable.[7] Across a wide variety of disciplines, truth needed to be objectively measured. Truth was logical, provable, and rational.

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[2] Walter Truett Anderson, ed., *The Truth About The Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 7.

[3] Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta, ed., http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/foucault/ (accessed July 29, 2011).

[4] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 5.

[5] Ibid., 60.

[6] Ibid., 62.

[7] Ibid., 66.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Age of Reason was extended to morality. Immanuel Kant famously connected rationality and morality.[8] To be a moral person, one must be a rational person. Fundamental first order moral principles – so called "categorical imperatives" - were derived from reason without appeal to divine sanction.[9] Kant also elevated the role of the individual. His rational, thinking self was the self that created meaning for his world.[10] This rational self was primary.

The Industrial Revolution added fuel to the fire, intensifying the already optimistic view of humankind and of what humankind could accomplish. Progress was evident. Humanity was making life better and better.[11] Indeed humanity itself was becoming better and better. As Stanley Grenz summarizes,

> This modern, post-Enlightenment mind assumes that knowledge is certain, objective, and good. It presupposes that the rational, dispassionate self can obtain such knowledge. It presupposes that the knowing self peers at the mechanistic world as a neutral observer armed with the scientific method. The modern knower engages in the knowing process believing that knowledge inevitably leads to progress and that science coupled with education will free humankind from our vulnerability to nature and all forms of social bondage.[12]

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, there were some early indications that modernism was past its prime. This was evident first among some turn-of-the-century European philosophers, but later more clearly in twentieth century American

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[8] Ibid.,77-78.

[9] Ibid., 78.

[10] Ibid., 79.

[11] Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth*, 4.

[12] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 81.

philosophical thought.[13] Alternative ways of thinking were beginning to take root. Postmodernism was coming into its own. [14]

Postmodernism

Although criticism of modernist philosophical thought was first successfully argued to a wide audience in Europe by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900),[15] in the United States it wasn't until late in the twentieth century that postmodernism became the dominant school of philosophical thought.[16] To try to explain the underlying worldview of postmodernism, however, is much more difficult than it is for modernism precisely because postmodernity claims that there is no such thing as a single worldview.[17] Rather, each of us constructs our own worldview based on the context we live in and the social influences we encounter. There is no isolated individual discovering a universally applicable knowledge or reality. Rather, the individual interprets experiences to determine his or her reality.[18]

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[13] Ibid., 84.

[14] The term "postmodern" was probably first used in the 1930's, Grenz, 15, referring to Craig Van Gelder's "Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview," *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (November 1991): 412.

[15] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 5.

[16] Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth*, 7.

[17] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*,40.

[18] Steinar Kvale, "Themes of Postmodernity", in *The Truth About The Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 19-21.

Because we all are making meaning or "constructing reality," there are many realities, many "truths" in this world.[19] There is no longer one objective true reality. Yet, even though there is no longer a truth that unites us, we all still live in local communities and share commonalities in a local context, or, using postmodern terminology, we share local *narratives*.[20] Because postmodern thinkers see life in these terms, "their major concerns revolve around the process of fabricating stories that can define personal identity and give purpose and shape to social existence."[21] There is no rational, provable truth but "useful fictions" to help construct one's reality.[22] Because of this, one no longer asks, "Is the proposition correct?" but rather, "What is its outcome?"[23] Pragmatism replaces a search for truth with a capital "T".

Postmodernism also rejects many of the other characteristics of modernism. Postmoderns are gripped by a "gnawing pessimism."[24] They no longer think that humanity has the potential to fix all problems that comes its way. [25] Life is not full of positive progress. Instead, life is fragile.[26] Certainly historical events in recent times have undergirded this philosophical viewpoint. World-wide terrorism and the on going wars in

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[19] Ibid., 20-21.

[20] Ibid., 20.

[21] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 46, referencing Walter Truett Anderson's *Reality Isn't What It used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 49.

[22] Ibid., 46.

[23] Ibid., 43.

[24] Ibid., 13.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

the Middle East, the collapse of large financial institutions, growing unemployment, global warming along with other environmental concerns, and the recognition that there are global economic factors impacting our lives that are beyond our control, all reinforce our pessimism and the sense that life is fragile.

The model of the rational, objective thinking individual is now replaced with non-rational ways of knowing, alternative ways of knowing that can contribute to one's becoming a "whole person." [27] We no longer turn only to our intellectual capacities. We are now paying more attention to our emotions and our bodies. This also coincides with a growing interest in Eastern philosophical and religious thought where the subjective experience of the individual is celebrated.[28] Postmoderns listen not only with their minds, but also with all other parts of themselves as well. We want to be balanced, well rounded people.

And as suggested earlier, the individual ceases to be the center of attention. The individual's central role is replaced by "individual in the context of local community." An individual is always in a local context, always part of a community setting that helps shape his or her experience of truth or meaning. We are individuals, but individuals that are shaped by the community around us more than by our own autonomous intellectual thought.

Finally, the rejection of one scientifically verifiable, rational truth leads to a celebration of diversity not only of thought, but of life itself. With this comes an

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[27] Ibid., 14.

[28] Some connect this growing interest in Eastern thought with the 1965 Services Act which made it easier for Asian immigration into the United States. See Phyllis Tickle's, *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 96.

increased comfort with a "mixing of beliefs."[29] Moreover, pluralism is evident not only in our varied approaches to truth but also in an increased eclecticism of interests and ways of living.[30] Musical genres are no longer easily categorized. Hip hop can be combined with classical. Nor is fashion easily categorized. One now wears jeans with a sport coat. Again, the only test is pragmatism. Does it work?

Summary

Modernist thought - objective rationality, optimism, a sense of progress, and a focus on the individual - has been replaced largely by a view of truth that is contextualized within a community. Truth can be non-rational and is confirmed primarily in pragmatic terms – what works. Life is fragile but along the way we embrace its diversity across multiple dimensions of existence. Descartes' "I think therefore I am" has been replaced by "I exist as a social being in a constructed reality; therefore I have a narrative to contribute."

[29] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 15.

[30] Connected with this pluralism is a postmodern theme that there is a "universal" or "interconnectedness" among all things. This re-enforces this mixing together of what earlier would have been kept separate. See David Ray Griffin's *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3.

Economic Shifts

Since 1970s, the American economy has been going through a significant period of readjustment.[31] Manufacturing, the workhorse of the industrial economy, is being replaced by the rapid growth of information technologies.[32] Making physical things has in many cases given way to providing rapid access to information and communication.[33] With this has come a change in how American works. As Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration states,

> With the shift toward a more dynamic and innovative economy have come changes in how work is organized and rewarded, and these changes are altering our personal lives.[34]

People are working longer hours. At the beginning of this century, the average middle-income married couple was working the equivalent of seven weeks more per year than it had been working only ten years earlier.[35] Although this trend can be partially attributed to more women in the work force, men in professional jobs are also working longer hours.[36] The number of professionals (both men and women) who work more than 50 hours per week has grown by around 30% during the shift from a manufacturing

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[31] Robert B. Reich, *The Future of Success: Working and Living in the New Economy* (New York: Random House, 2000), 106.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.,107.

[35] Ibid., 111-112.

[36] Ibid.,112.

economy to information-based economy.[37] In addition to longer work hours, commute times and long-distance travel requirements have increased dramatically.[38]

This new economy is also more fluid. Businesses come and go with increased rapidity.[39] With rapidly changing businesses, jobs come and go. What was once a guaranteed paycheck until retirement has been replaced by a series of jobs and the corresponding economic uncertainty. All the more reason one needs to work harder to keep a job. With the current high levels of unemployment, those who do have jobs are simply grateful to be employed and disinclined to complain about the heavier work load they are carrying in the wake of downsized workforces.

This means that non-work time is shrinking. People are busier than ever. It used to be when you asked a person, "How are you?" the normal response was "fine." Now, often the same question elicits the response, "busy." "Free time" has become a precious commodity.

Time is also moving faster, literally. According to social critic Jeremy Rifkin,

> The computer brings with it a time frame in which the nanosecond is the primary temporal measurement, and though it is possible to conceive theoretically of a nanosecond…it is not possible to experience it. Never before has time been organized at a speed beyond the realm of consciousness.[40]

Technology has brought with it a new sense of time - and it is fast and furious. Expectations of how much can be accomplished in a limited amount of time have grown

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 118.

[39] Ibid.,98.

[40] Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 22-23.

exponentially. Multi-tasking, a term hardly used 40 years ago, is a standard part of our vocabulary. We need to get more done in a shorter period of time. [41]

Gone are the days of the "company man." The idea of working one's way to the top, being loyal to the company, promoted from within, and working at the same place for years and years, is simply no longer the dominant economic model.[42] In today's working environment, there is an emphasis on "community" and being part of a working "team" but these communities and teams are local and transient, often determined by a specific project rather than by loyalty to a common employer.[43] Loyalty to the company is no longer necessary or prudent because the company may not be in existence next year. Moreover, even if the company continues to exist, its loyalty to its workforce is increasingly only co-terminus with its needs. When it doesn't need employees' services, lay-offs and dismissals are increasingly the norm.

As a result, workers are loyal to themselves instead of the company. In a way, employees are being replaced, whether in technical legal terms or not, with independent contractors who must continually "sell" themselves.[44] Now it is up to each individual to make sure that he or she has a job. In light of this reality, career advice often includes

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[41] One mildly amusing example of this is a story recounted to me by a friend. She worked with a visiting nurse who was reprimanded by her boss when she refused to use driving time to do her phone work. Her job demanded lots of freeway driving and she thought it would be dangerous to try to talk on her cell phone and drive at the same time. Her boss told her that other visiting nurses do it and that she should too. Soon it came out in the conversation that one of these examples of driving and phoning was in the hospital as a result of a car accident caused by her lack of attention to the road while distracted by her phone. When the visiting nurse tried to point out this irony to her boss, her boss didn't "get it". Multi-tasking was the norm. There is too much to do with too little time.

[42] Reich, 132-133.

[43] John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000), 152-153.

[44] Reich, 133.

having a healthy network of contacts, spreading one's net wide, and making sure that one is known and known positively.[45] One needs to be skilled at what one does and also to have a personality that is catching, that sells. As Reich says, "In the new economy, you get ahead not by being well-liked but by being well-marketed."[46] And he adds, "When the personality is for sale, all relationships turn into potential business deals."[47] In Martin Buber terminology, relationships can become "I-it" rather than "I-thou."[48] Relationships are commodities to be used, not people to be enjoyed.

With more work demands, less time, increased employment anxiety and the commoditization of relationships, how is one to be nurtured or cared for? One might think that on-line social networks could be part of the answer. However, studies have shown that the more people spend time online in social chat groups, the lonelier they are.[49] People crave real human contact. So, now we pay for it. Or at least those of us who can afford to, do so. The number of personal coaches has doubled each year in the 1990's.[50] In the last few years there has also been an explosion of growth in the use of personal counselors, therapists, spiritual advisors, and spiritual guides.[51] These people

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 154.

[47] Ibid., 156.

[48] "I-It" refers to treating a person as a thing, not a person in a loving, "I-Thou" relationship. See Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (London: T&T Clark Ltd., 1937), for a further explanation of this phrase.

[49] Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organization* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 199.

[50] Reich, 184.

[51] Ibid.,184-185.

offer friendship at a monetary cost without requiring the reciprocal caring and concern that typifies true friendships.[52]

To summarize this discussion, the shift from an industrial economy to a technology/information economy has resulted in longer work hours, fragile employment, a hurried sense of time, and the constant need to sell oneself. Free time and time for genuine friendships is shrinking. Commercial substitutes are on the rise.

Sociological Shifts

In 2001, Harvard professor, Robert D. Putnam published his much cited book, *Bowling Alone*. In this extensive work Putnam cites statistic after statistic demonstrating that the United States is losing what he refers to as its "social capital."[53] Briefly stated, he argues that as a nation, we are no longer as connected to each other as we once were. As a result, people no longer have a reserve of trust built up with others. In the past, this trust provided a social safety net but, according to Putnam, this net is now frayed or in some cases missing altogether. He identifies a number of factors that help explain this loss: less time, more money, the isolation of suburbia, the inward focus of watching television and working on computers, and the loosening of family bonds.[54] But whatever its causes, this loss of social capital expresses itself in a significant decline in civic

[52] It needs to be noted here that these services are for people who can afford it. Ironically, many of the people who provide such service don't live in the same communities their "clients" do, because often they can't afford the same level of lifestyle. Again, see Reich, 189-191.

[53] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[54] Ibid., 283-284.

involvement. Since the first part of the twentieth century, there has been a steady shrinking of club memberships, church attendance, civic activism, and volunteering.[55] As a nation, increasingly we truly are bowling alone.

A potential bright spot in this picture – potentially even a countervailing trend – is the small group movement. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow identifies growth in many different types of small groups including church-related small groups, book groups, weight loss groups, AA, and other self help groups.[56] Members in these groups report support and care from other members.[57]

These two trends are not as much at odds, however, as might first appear. What sets these small groups apart from earlier comparable forms of community is that they tend to be communities of convenience rather than commitment. The small groups are typically not as tightly connected to a larger social institution nor are they held in place by a sense of commitment. Instead, the groups represent gatherings around common interests or needs – but only for so long as each participant benefits from the gathering. As Putnam argues, the social reciprocity of care that often characterized earlier groups – "since I've been helped, I'll help others" - is on the decline. Now, "I'm in the group for what I get out of it. When I cease to get anything out of it, I'm out of the group." So long

[55] According to the 2010 Edition of the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, membership in mainline Protestant denominations has continued to decline. Churches reporting the highest membership losses during the past year were the Presbyterian Church (USA), down 3.28 percent; American Baptist Churches in the USA, down 2 percent; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, down 1.92 percent. Eileen W. Linder, ed., Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2010 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010) as reported in News from the National Council of Churches, "Catholics, Mormons, Assemblies of God growing; Mainline churches report a continuing decline." http://www.ncccusa.org/news/100204yearbook2010.html (accessed October 13, 2011).

[56] Ibid., 148-149.

[57] Ibid., 152.

as the individual believes the group is meeting his or her needs, they'll continue to show up. Once the group no longer "works" participants can leave quietly. [58]

In some ways, these groups are not unlike a communal version of personal coaches – the focus remains on the individual. If the individual cares for another in the group, that is simply the cost of ensuring the continued existence of a beneficial association. These groups gather and disperse according to each individual's needs. Thus, they are less stable and reflect a far thinner notion of community than their predecessors.

Another social reality that has defined us for years, and particularly in more recent decades, is our consumerism. With increased speed and access to media, we are bombarded with far more advertisements than ever before. Today the average adult potentially sees over 600 ads every day.[59] Over and over, we are told what to buy, what will satisfy us, what we need.[60] Frequently the ads aren't subtle. Consider this ad for an item of expensive jewelry: "There's that old familiar feeling again: insatiable want."[61] In our culture we have desires that are unmet, and we are regularly reminded that these "insatiable wants" will only be met when we consume the latest thing.

Of course, consumerism directly links to how we spend our money. But it has a deeper effect on us as well. It also redirects our deeper, more foundational desires such as the desire for friendship, the desire to belong, the desire for love, and the desire for

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[58] Putnam, 152.

[59] From Advertising Industry Research Essentials, "How Many Advertisements is a person exposed to in a day?" ams.aaaa.org/eweb/upload/faqs/adexposures.pdf, (accessed Nov, 6, 2010).

[60] I realize this could just as easily be under the earlier discussion on economic influences, but because of the widespread social consequences of consumerism, especially as it pertains to the "consumption" of religion, I chose to discuss it here.

[61] An ad reprinted in Judith B. Schor's *The Overspent American*, 65.

meaning. Vincent Miller speaks of how our consumer culture constructs desire. He argues that advertising both seduces and misdirects our desire.[62] He notes that advertising "associates commodities with needs, desires, and values that are not directly related to the given product" - a practice known in advertising circles as "associative advertising." [63] Whereas some argue that our culture's mindset substitutes the satisfaction of material needs for the satisfaction of more foundational non-monetary desires,[64] Miller argues that there is no such substitution. Rather he claims that the non-monetary desires are *misdirected.* We buy things in the hopes that a non-monetary desire will be fulfilled. Miller states that "seduction spurs consumption by prolonging desire and channeling its inevitable disappointments into further desires."[65] When we buy the stuff, the desire still remains, so we try to salve this longing by buying something else. This misdirection of desire is perpetual since in this consumer culture we are "endlessly encouraged to desire everything all at once." [66] And, given that these foundational desires are not satisfied by what is purchased, consumers buy even more stuff in the hopes that more possessions might finally fill the emptiness. This creates an endless cycle of longing. The restlessness never ends. We are always seeking.

Summarizing this discussion, sociologically speaking, we are a culture that forms communities of convenience to meet our individual needs. As consumers, we are seduced

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[62] Vincent J Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 109.

[63] Ibid.

[64] See, for example, John F. Kavanaugh's *Following Christ in a Consumer Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981) for a discussion of this perspective.

[65] Miller, 109.

[66] Ibid., 110.

and misdirected to believe that our deepest longings and desires can be met by some product that we buy.

Connections with Spiritual Direction

In my role as a spiritual director over the last 20 years, I have heard story after story of people who want to grow in their knowledge of God but who have found their church's teaching and discipleship largely unsatisfying. I've heard others say that they have been assured that they will grow to be more Christ-like if only they can intellectually grasp the truth and maintain a strong enough faith or at least a strong enough self-discipline. And yet, their experience seems to the contrary. There is a disconnect between what they know intellectually and what their hearts are telling them. They perceive a gap between what has been promised and what their lives reflects.

These longings tap easily into the postmodern narrative that truth is experienced rather than thought. Many times these directees have reached the point where they are no longer satisfied with an intellectual, rational knowledge of God. Instead, they are hungry for an experience, an experience of God. In particular, they want to experience the love of God, not just know that it exists. Congruent with postmodern thought, they want a faith that is fully integrated with all of their life, not just their heads. And they want to have a sense that their faith "works" in the day to day parts of their lives – not just during their morning devotionals. Many times these men and women have been drawn to seek a spiritual director in the hopes that something will change.

The wholistic emphasis in spiritual direction easily speaks to these concerns and again aligns nicely with a comparable instinct in postmodern thinking. There may be different models of spiritual direction, but the central goal of all direction is to help a directee see how God is present in the whole of his or her life. For example, both the classic Ignatian model of spiritual direction and the more Quaker discernment model taught by the Shalem Institute,[67] seek to help directees pay attention not just to their thoughts but to other parts of their bodies as well. Both suggest that this enhanced level of wholistic attentiveness may help them see how God might be trying to get their attention. For example, if a directee seeks help with a relational issue or a feeling of resentment toward another, an Ignatian director might ask, "What is your felt sense of God in this relationship?" A Shalem director might ask, "Why don't you bring that sense of resentment before God quietly, in silence, and see what, if anything comes up for you?" Both are models working with affective responses to life's circumstances, seeking God's presence and perspective in the circumstance with the directee. Spiritual direction assumes that God is present in the directee's life and at work with more than his or her intellect. When addressing spiritual direction in a postmodern context, spiritual director Carolyn Gratton concludes that "any spiritual guidance that people will trust will eventually have to be in harmony with the dynamics flowing from life as a whole, not from just one layer of life."[68] Where intellectual truths were once seen to be enough for

[67] The Shalem Institute is a contemporary ecumenical organization located in Washington D.C. that provides training for spiritual directors. The contemplative model it teaches is not unlike Quaker practices of discernment. Spiritual direction authors Tilden Edwards, Gerald May and Rose Mary Dougherty have played major roles in the Institute.

[68] Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 13.

evangelicals, now there is a growing awareness that knowing God requires more than that.

The postmodern emphasis on a contexualized and pragmatic truth for an individual within community also fits neatly with the ministry of spiritual direction. The question always assumed and often asked in spiritual direction, "Where is God *in this*?" speaks to this postmodern viewpoint. God's truth is contextual and practical and is discovered by directees in their particular life contexts. By definition, spiritual direction is communal. Directees come to spiritual directors precisely because they recognize and affirm that they can't know this truth solely on their own. They need the help of another. As the postmodern mindset takes root among evangelicals, it is opening the door for the ministry of spiritual direction.

The openness to explore other ways of knowing is also an outcome of the increased pluralism of postmodernism. Christians are now more open to practices from other faith traditions. They are increasingly willing to explore how these other traditions might mix well with their Christian faith. For example, the mind/body connection taught and practiced more in non-Western religions is now having a significant influence on Western Christians. Christians in the West are discovering new prayer practices. They are also discovering and are much more open to the prayer and discernment practices of Christian spiritual directors-mystics from the past.[69] And, spiritual direction is often a safe place where these practices can be explored.

[69] Spiritual director Tilden Edwards is an example of a Christian spiritual director that integrates components of Buddhism in his practice. Spiritual directors of old that emphasized this mind/body connection can be seen in the desert fathers, well portrayed by the life of St Antony, later in the Rule of St Benedict and Celtic spirituality, and later still in the Friends group guidance model of discernment and in Jonathan Edwards' religious affections - to name just a few.

An example of this can be found in the growing acceptance of the Enneagram as a resource for helping people to connect with God. As individuals discover their "number" they discover more of who they are and how that influences their relationship with God. As Richard Rohr states,

> The goal of all spiritual direction is to bring the true person before the true God…The Enneagram…has the ability to open up both sides of that relationship. Not only does the Enneagram show you who you truly are, but it can also help open up the experience of God as God really is.[70]

The possible origin of the Enneagram stemming from Islamic/Sufi mysticism[71] does not seem to be a problem. Ideas from many sources can be expressed and utilized by a thoughtful spiritual director as an encouragement towards an authentic relationship with God and for many evangelicals in this postmodern era that is enough.

Of course, this pluralism also makes life more complicated than it was in the past. Spiritual director Tilden Edwards attributes this plurality as contributing to the growth of spiritual direction because there is a "growing need for help in making spiritually authentic choices amidst the myriad cultural and psychic pressures and shifting, pluralistic values of contemporary life."[72] In this shifting culture, people are looking for ways to make sense of their lives.

As discussed above, the postmodern ethos lives in the fragility of life. This too connects with spiritual direction. When life feels more out of control, the need for God

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[70] Richard Rohr, *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998), 9.

[71] Although this is the general consensus, Ebert contends that it can be traced back, in part, to Christian monk Evagrius Ponticus. See Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert's *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2009), ix.

[72] Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2001), 21.

seems stronger. Increasingly evangelicals desire more of a sense of relationship and comfort with God as the other parts of their lives seem too frail and fleeting to provide such comfort and security.

Recent church statistics establish that while many churches are declining in numbers, membership is growing in churches that provide answers to life's hard questions.[73] People are seeking answers in difficult times. Directees often come to spiritual direction with questions surrounding the fragility of life. The growth in spiritual direction during this time could be connected to the need to know and experience God's presence and perspective in a painful and uncertain world.

As noted earlier, it is quite common in our society today to "pay for attention." Whereas in the past spiritual counsel might have been available from more stable church and family communities, in our current culture, these communities are less available and people are less willing or able to commit to them. Instead, just as people are paying for personal coaches, massage therapists, and counselors, people are now paying for spiritual guidance.[74] And in the current cultural milieu, all of this is much more acceptable than it was in previous years.

Spiritual direction offers the chance to process one's relationship with God without the need to reciprocate. Unlike a mutual spiritual friendship where there are shared concerns and guidance, the director-directee relationship doesn't require

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[73] Eileen W. Linder, ed., *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2010* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 12.

[74] There is still much discussion around paying for services for spiritual direction. Many spiritual directors don't charge, but there is growing acceptance of seeing it as another professional service where payment is expected. The challenge here would be to make sure there are spiritual directors available for those who desire it, regardless of financial need, and for spiritual directors to see themselves as gifted ministers more than professionals, regardless of how the directee initially perceives the relationship.

reciprocity in time and care. The challenge for spiritual directors in this setting is to make sure they themselves don't model this "communities of convenience" paradigm but are themselves committed to a larger Christian community and see their ministry as intimately connected to this community. However, within this context, spiritual direction can then be available as long as the directee wants it.

American postmoderns realize that they are not autonomous individuals capable of experiencing "truth" alone. Yet, in a life of ever shrinking time where even existing relational demands often seem out of control, a visit to a spiritual director allows one to attend to his or her spiritual life without adding the burden of additional relational commitments typically associated with a true friendship. A spiritual director may give "homework" and certainly may have some expectations of the relationship, but these expectations are all geared towards the good of the directee and his or her relationship with God. There is no need for the directee to be concerned in the slightest with the spiritual director's "needs."

Finally, the continual promise of advertising that our desires and longings will be met by the purchase of some new product or service does at least have the ancillary beneficial effect of keeping a spotlight on these longings and desires. While consumerism seeks to seduce us to adopt the wrong solutions, it does at least highlight the true nature of the problem; we have deep longings that often go unmet. When consumerism is appropriately challenged, we are not led to deny these desires; we are led instead to look for their satisfaction in other places.

Christian mystics often emphasize that God's desire and longing for us comes first. This desire, in turn, awakens our desire for God. Stated differently, for these mystics

our longings and desires actually originate in God's desire for us.[75] Mystics like Augustine, Mechthild, Ignatius and Bernard teach that "our desires, our wants, our longings, our outward and inward searching – *when uncovered, expressed, and recognized* – all lead to the Divine Beloved at the core."[76] Thus consumerism may inadvertently contribute to our spiritual well-being to the extent that it helps uncover and give expression to these deep desires. Consumerism urges us to feed these desires through purchases but some may use this "awakening" instead as an occasion to draw closer to God.

And when people become restless for God, the conditions are ripe for spiritual direction. After all, one of the roles of spiritual direction is to assist in discovering authentic desires.[77] Thus, in an odd way, the increase in associative advertising could actually be contributing to a growing interest in spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction in the Christian tradition has often been the place where our desires are "uncovered, expressed, and recognized." And when these desires are voiced,

> The dialogue with Jesus or God can influence, correct, or illumine the misunderstood desire. Praying in such a way that we allow ourselves to be affected by God opens us to influence, to discovery, and to change. We keep on expressing our real desires until they are fulfilled, until they are changed, or until we are convinced God is responding to us.[78]

The growing interest in spiritual direction, then, could be understood at least in part as a response to the incessant advertising and consumerism of our day.

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[75] Janet K. Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 11.

[76] Ibid., (emphasis added).

[77] Ibid., 22.

[78] Ibid., 18.

Conclusion

There are a number of connections between shifts of cultural thought and expression and an increased interest in spiritual direction. Postmodern thought has brought with it the recognition that we need to be "whole" people of faith, not just thinking people of faith. This has allowed evangelical Christians to grow more interested in a wholistic and integrated faith which is the very "bread and butter" of spiritual direction. The pluralism of postmodernism also opens up evangelicals to exploring other non-Western avenues of prayer and growth. Again these alternate approaches have been tools long used in spiritual direction. Living with constant change and shifting values heightens our sense of the fragility of life. It painfully reminds us that life is not in our control. At its best, this acknowledgment of fragility beyond our control can cultivate a desire to draw closer to God in community. But, given the economic trends that demand longer working hours and the decline in "social capital," there is not much time or capacity to pursue this relationship with God in a more traditional community context. Therefore, just as others are entering into communities of convenience or paying for relational attention that comes with no expectations of reciprocity, a spiritual seeker may now look to spiritual direction. Finally, the consumer culture heightens awareness of desires and longings without fulfilling them. This can lead people to turn to spiritual direction as a means of addressing these needs. In short, it appears that shifts in philosophical, economic, and social trends have opened a number of pathways for evangelical Christians that may help account for their increasing interest in relationships of spiritual direction.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

In this chapter I will explore two theological trends that connect with the increased interest in spiritual direction among evangelicals. The first is the trend within evangelical theology that has been referred to as "postconservative evangelicalism"[1] The second is the theological approach of "practical theology." Both of these trends have emerged in the last twenty-five years and their ascendancy appears to parallel the increasing openness to spiritual direction among evangelicals. As I will discuss below, this is not a coincidence. Many of the characteristics of postconservative evangelicalism and practical theology are particularly hospitable to the ministry of spiritual direction. Whereas in chapter three I argued that certain cultural and sociological trends have created a sense of need for and openness towards spiritual direction, in this chapter I will consider how postconservative evangelicalism and practical theology have helped to give theological permission for Protestant evangelicals to participate in the ministry of spiritual direction.

Postconservative evangelical theology

Roots of movement

Postconservative evangelicalism assumes a prior conservative evangelicalism. Although defining and explaining American "conservative" evangelicalism could be a

[1] Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 480-483.

dissertation all in itself, a brief explanation of the movement is necessary in order to understand the shifts occurring with the "postconservative" movement. While American evangelicalism claims to trace its roots all the way back to the New Testament church and the Protestant Reformation, its origins can perhaps more fairly be linked to the American Great Awakenings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] The first Great Awakening was a series of religious revivals with a Calvinist flavor. These took place primarily in the original colonies. The second Great Awakening, on the other hand, was more Wesleyan[3] in nature and found expression as the American frontier revival movement.[4] Even with these different theological emphases, however, the two great awakenings shared a number of common characteristics that crossed denominational and theological boundaries. Whether one had Wesleyan pietistic leanings or Calvinist reformed tendencies was not determinative in identifying evangelicals. Identity for evangelicals was tied up in certain key beliefs: the centrality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for personal salvation and the authority of Scripture in the life of a Christian. These beliefs were far more important than any denominational identity.[5]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, these beliefs came under challenge. Evangelicals were confronted by the growth of liberal Protestantism that was spreading

[2] Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 16-17.

[3] A very simple explanation of the theological difference between Calvin and Wesley would be the emphases they'd place on the statement, "God initiates and we respond." Calvin would emphasize the "God initiates" while Wesley would highlight the "We respond." Both men believed the whole statement was true. Their theology just tended to emphasize one part more than the other.

[4] Erickson, 17.

[5] Ibid., 18.

across the churches in America.[6] This liberal Protestantism embraced what came to be known as the modernist viewpoint of humankind discussed in chapter three. For example, the rationalism of modernism, in the form of biblical criticism, left no room for miracles. Therefore, much of the content of the Bible was deemed not really historically true. These portions of the Scriptures simply contained stories or myths created and told to communicate certain spiritual truths. Evangelicals worried that this more liberal viewpoint was undercutting the authority of Scripture and the historicity of Christ's resurrection as well as other more miraculous manifestations of Christianity. In reaction to this liberalism, a group of more theologically conservative Christians got together in the late part of the nineteenth century and compiled a list of what they perceived to be the "fundamentals" of Christianity.[7] These included a belief in "biblical inerrancy" and in the bodily resurrection of Christ.[8] Christian fundamentalism was born and began to be viewed synonymously with "evangelicals."[9]

In the middle of the twentieth century, there was a growing sense among some of this group that all was not well. Some were concerned that good biblical scholarship was suffering in fundamentalists' reactive response to the biblical criticism emerging from liberal Christian seminaries. Some also considered the defensive posture towards the secular culture in the fundamentalist movement as too extreme. There was also a growing

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[6] Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 26.

[7] A list of these fundamentals was drawn up at the Niagara conference which took place in 1895. See Erickson, 18.

[8] Dorrien, 15.

[9] This form of evangelicalism was most prominent in the first part of the twentieth century. See Erickson, 18-19.

sense by some that theological issues seen as secondary in earlier times, were now taking on primary significance. Conflict began to emerge within the movement as to what should be included in the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith.[10]

Consistent with the Protestant tradition of splitting in the face of virtually any conflict, a new group split off from the fundamentalist movement and ended up being called the "new evangelicals."[11] Theologian Carl Henry and evangelist Billy Graham were two of the leaders of this movement. In 1955, to combat the perceived liberal theology embraced by the *Christian Century*, this group began to publish *Christianity Today*. It was to represent this new evangelicalism. Henry and Graham both had leadership roles in the magazine.[12]

This "new evangelicalism" established soon after WWII, was not so new at the end of the twentieth century. As time went on, it has instead been referred to as "classical evangelicalism."[13] This classical evangelicalism allowed more theological, doctrinal and social freedom than the fundamentalists. The essentials continued to be the authority of Scripture as inspired by God and the centrality of Christ's work on the cross for personal salvation.[14]

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[10] Dorrien, 17-19.

[11] David F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4-6. See also Erickson, 19-25 for a brief discussion of these ideas as well.

[12] Dorrien, 104-105.

[13] Wells, 4.

[14] Ibid., 7.

However, this movement also was heavily influenced by the modern mindset previously discussed in chapter three.[15] Christianity needed to be portrayed as a reasonable, rational faith. Henry, for example, once said, "Were the doctrines of the Trinity, of divine election and human responsibility, of the two natures of Christ *logically contradictory doctrines*, no evangelical Christian could or should accept and believe them."[16] The biblical text, according to Henry, though not entirely declarative in nature, was as a whole "emphatically propositional."[17] Truth was seen as objective and propositional. Although not all evangelicals were as emphatic as Henry, this rationalistic approach to Scripture became a characteristic of classical evangelicalism.

Not only was Scripture rational and reasonable, but for Henry human reason was not corrupted by the Fall. Human will was fallen and unregenerate but not human reason. One may have "valid" or "invalid" thinking, but reason was not tainted by sin. Henry states, "The forms of reason and the laws of logic as a creation-endowment survive the Fall. Apart from them, no intelligible communication, divine or human, would be possible."[18] If the rational mind were tainted, then no rational argument could be made

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[15] For a discussion on evangelicalism and modernity, see Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 65-70.

[16] Dorrien, 111, quoting from Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3: *God Who Speaks and Shows.* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), 283, italicized here for emphasis. Although there were a variety of voices in the new evangelical movement, given Carl Henry's broad influence, I have chosen to feature his viewpoints in my description of the key characteristics of this movement.

[17] Ibid, 114.

[18] Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows (Preliminary Considerations)* vol. 1. (Waco: Word Books, 1976), 228.

for or against anything.[19] But rational arguments for the truth of Scripture could and must be made. These arguments came from "the divine gift" of human reason.[20]

Henry also made the argument that there was no room for paradox, mystery, or imagination in understanding the Word.[21] Liturgical and symbolic interpretations of Scripture were also not acceptable from this point of view.[22] These non-rational approaches to Scripture would make the truth of the faith both private and subjective, two characteristics outside of the rationalistic framework of modernity. According to Henry, truth claims of Christianity are to be critiqued using the same rationalistic framework as one would use to critique astronomy, botany and geology.[23] An appeal to experience or "inner history" is irrational and therefore not true. He goes so far as to say an "appeal to anything in human experience" is not an acceptable way to approach the truth of Scripture. According to Dorrien, Henry believed such viewpoints "consign(ed) theology to a ghetto of religious feeling."[24] Therefore, divine revelation in the Scriptures could never be "non propositional" or "personal truth."[25] The notion that truth could be

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[19] Dorrien, 108.

[20] Henry, 227. The full quote is this: "That man's reason is a divine gift for recognizing God's truth is a main tenant of the Christian faith. Human reason was a divine endowment enabling man to have a knowledge of God and his purposes in the universe." Henry goes on to say, "Reason is a divinely gifted instrument enabling man to recognize revelation or truth. He can do this because by creation he bears the image of God…" Henry, 228.

[21]Dorrien, 113. Henry argued that there is "no logical support" for the notion that "the biblical writers provide us with poetic and symbolic images to be grasped by the imagination." Instead, he argues that these images are to be grasped by "intellectual propositions to be rationally appropriated." See Henry's *God Who Speaks and Shows (Fifteen Theses, part 3) vol. IV*. (Waco: Word Books, 1979), 107.

[22] Dorrien, 113.

[23] Henry, 229.

[24] Dorrien, 109.

[25] Ibid., 113.

experienced in any other way than through the mind was unacceptable within much of this "new" or "classical" evangelical Christianity.[26]

This strongly rational viewpoint of evangelical theologians that had developed in the middle of the twentieth century began to meet with resistance within its own ranks towards the end of the twentieth century. There was a recognition that the main leaders of classical evangelicalism had:

> "…sought to defend their tradition from modernist criticism by adopting modernist tests of belief. The propositional character of evangelical belief was heightened to satisfy modernist tests of rationality, objectivity and universalizability….In a cultural context in which the objectivizing consciousness of modernity no longer commands authority, however, some evangelical theologians have begun to consider what evangelicalism might be without its previously defining objectivism and individualism. What should evangelicalism be if it is no longer forced to fight off or accommodate a culturally triumphant modernism?[27]

The cultural and intellectual move away from modernism that gave rise to postmodernism also opened the door to some fresh theological thinking among evangelicals.

Postmodern Trends

This new theological thinking came to be known as "postconservative" evangelicalism. It came with alternative approaches to discerning truth in Scripture and an alternative understanding of how one could come to know truth about God. At the

[26] This is not to say there were no Wesleyan evangelical theologians who, by reason of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, did have a place for personal experience in evangelical theology. Harold Kuhn and William Arnett are two such examples. However, the scholarship during this time period in evangelicalism did seem to lean towards more Reformed thought and thinkers like Henry.

[27] Dorrien, 188.

same time, it was marked by a desire to hold on to the classic evangelical core beliefs about the authority of Scripture as inspired by God and about the centrality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for personal salvation. As in classical evangelicalism, there were a number of voices speaking for the postconservative evangelicals, but I will focus primarily on the writings of two theologians who have been leaders of this movement: Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson.[28]

In his 1995 essay, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," Olson briefly summarized a number of the theological perspectives of this new breed of evangelicals.[29] His article has generated considerable discussion ever since and has emerged as a defining marker for the movement. The phrase "postconservative evangelicalism" that comes from this article has seemed to stick.[30] Although Olson highlights fifteen different theological ideas that define this movement, I want to focus on the ideas that differ from classical evangelicalism and the ideas that may connect with spiritual direction.

According to Olson, the whole view of reading the Bible for propositional truth is to be replaced with a less "wooden" approach.[31] Scripture is to be read holistically, not

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[28] There is debate around what exactly is postconservative evangelicalism. Olson, the author of the term, at least once denied that it is a "movement" even though he recognizes others refer to it as such, (and he speaks of it as a movement in *Christian Century* essay already referred to). He claims it is a "mood" that is deeply evangelical. See Roger E. Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 201-204. Even with his "mood" language, given he also has spoken of it as a "movement," it seems reasonable to call it such.

[29] Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 480-483.

[30] This term is used in the works already cited by Erikson and Dorrien. It is also used in *Renewing the Center* by Stanley J. Grenz (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000) and in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).

[31] Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 481.

as bits and pieces of divine truth. Olson speaks of a canonical reading of Scripture where the Bible is approached as the church's "divinely authored narrative of God's surprising work in creating a community and its thought world."[32] The emphasis here is now on a narrative whole - not on propositions. The focus is on how the Bible fits within the context of the Church community, not just on how a given individual might read and interpret it.

The idea that one could not discover divine truth from any place other than the Bible was replaced with a broader source for theology. Olson gets this idea largely from the writings of Stanley Grenz. Grenz calls this "revisioning evangelical theology."[33] The essence of theology, according to Grenz, is not propositional truth but a "narrative-shaped experience" which draws on sources such as the tradition of Christian thought, culture, the arts, and the experience of God in community. Rather than narrowing one's focus just to Scripture, these are all legitimate sources to help know and shape the truth of God.[34] Grenz reassures us that the largest source or "norm" for theology is Scripture, and the other sources need to submit to this norm,[35] but nonetheless, the theological playing field is clearly much broader than it was with Carl Henry's anti-experience, anti-subjective mode of knowing divine truth.

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[32] Ibid. This canonical approach to Scripture was taught and promoted by biblical scholar Brevard Childs at Yale Divinity School in the late twentieth century. The authority of Scripture was given to it by the church, but the church submitted herself to the authority of Scripture. There is a shift in how exactly the Bible gets its authority. This moves away from the more "God breathed from on high" perspective.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 93.

[35] Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 481.

Olson also makes the argument that any form of evangelical theology is influenced by the social context of the theologian.[36] This contextual approach to understanding represented a significant repudiation of the white male-dominated evangelical theology of the previous generation, which, though heavily contextualized, was ignorant that such a contextualization even existed. Theologians such as Soong-Chan Rah call evangelicals away from the "Western, white captivity of theology."[37] As an evangelical theologian, speaking to an evangelical readership, Rah quotes Edward Said, "It is a pretentious illusion that there is something pure and objective about the way theology has been done in the Western church, as if it were handed down directly by the Almighty to the theologians of the correct methodology."[38] With these new evangelical theologians, there is a desire to hear the voices of women, people of color, and majority world theologians. They bring a perspective of God's truth that a white male may not. [39]

Postconservative evangelicalism also comes with an increased openness to learning from Christian traditions beyond Protestant boundaries. This willingness to engage with theological viewpoints outside of the evangelical framework lends itself to more cross-tradition discussions. It opens up the possibility of seeking truth from the pre-Reformation church. Robert Webber, an early evangelical advocate of such interaction argued:

> Therefore, if evangelicalism as a movement is going to be more representative of the historic faith it must become more conscious not only

[36]Ibid., 480-481.

[37] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 78.

[38] Rah, 78, quoting from Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 3.

[39] Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 480-481.

> of the cultural shape of its own faith, but also by way of contrast, to the aspects of the historic Christian faith which it has forgotten.[40]

With this has come openness to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic perspectives. This openness is seen in the new evangelical discussions on nature and creation. For example, among postconservative evangelicals there is now greater openness to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic viewpoint that nature, though impacted from the Fall, is still God's creation filled with God's grace. Perhaps nature/creation isn't as depraved as evangelicals once thought. This new openness has led to new theological discussions in evangelical circles regarding what it means to be "co-creators with God" as we seek to nurture all of God's creation.[41] This opportunity for evangelicals to experience the presence and grace of God in creation is just one of a number of ways that postconservative evangelicals were now opening to perspectives of other church traditions in ways that earlier classical evangelicals would never have acknowledged.

Within this movement there is also less interest in having the "right" or "correct" interpretation of the Bible. Rather, there is more focus on the process or development of theological systems or motifs, rather than on coming up with an absolute timeless set of propositional truths.[42] In bringing up this point, Olson notes that "William Abraham spoke for many postconservatives when, after writing that Carl F. H. Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority* is 'the monument of a generations' work,' he added: 'yet given

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[40] Dorrien, 170, quoting Robert E. Webber in *The Orthodox Evangelicals: Who They Are and What they Are Saying*, ed. Robert E. Webber and Donald Bloeshe (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 11.

[41] Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," 482.

[42] Ibid.

its barren orthodoxy and turgid character, it can at best inspire mediocrity.'"[43] Abraham's blunt criticism of Henry highlights the contrast between Henry's strict propositional truth framework and a more fluid on-going process of discovery of theological truth. Indeed this shift may be at the heart postconservative evangelicalism.

In contrast to Henry's rational and propositional theology, Grenz speaks of a theological motif that centers on community, specifically the community of Christ's disciples.[44] Since theology is "faith seeking understanding"[45] theology must arise from the faith community. Theology exists for this Christian community and doesn't need "elaborate foundation-setting, certainty-gaining prolegomenon."[46] Instead, Grenz goes on to say that theology

> "arises out of the life of the discipleship community, persons who are joined together by the Spirit and who join together in living out the mandate they share. Therefore, presence within the Christian community itself leads to the theological task. And the existence of this community provides the only rationale necessary for launching into the process of delineating and determining the shared Christian belief-mosaic, or explicating its interpretive framework.[47]

Among postconservative theologians, fluid processing to determine a "shared Christian belief-mosaic" is the counter-point to propositional truths.

All these shifts in postconservative evangelical theological circles reflect and link to a postmodern mindset. There is much debate among evangelical theologians as to the

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[43] Ibid., 482-483.

[44] Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 214.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

legitimacy of some of these shifts. Many see them as straying dangerously away from their evangelical roots.[48] Still, even given the on-going questions and dissent, the movement has had enough momentum to impact the theological perspectives of a significant number of evangelical Christians. Whether all evangelical Christians agree with these thoughts, or whether they are "right," isn't important for the purposes of this paper. What is important is that these viewpoints are now showing up in evangelical seminaries and churches and have caused shifts in how evangelicals come to know truth and speak of God's presence.

Summary

The newer approach to Scripture is less propositional in emphasis. It views Scripture through the lens of narrative/story. Subjective experience is affirmed as a way of knowing God's truth and there is more openness to the church traditions that predate the Protestant Reformation or otherwise come from perspectives outside earlier evangelical boundaries. There is also a shift regarding the nature of the authority of Scripture, stemming, in part, from an increased emphasis on the church community over the individual. The church community has more authority to assist and direct the individual's interpretation of Scripture. The proper interpretation of Scripture does not rest on the individual alone. Finally, there is a growing awareness that theologians do bring their own social and historical context to their theologies. Postconservative

[48] An example of this is seen in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, ed. *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times.* This book is a response and reaction to postconservative evangelicalism, arguing the movement has moved too far from its roots and been too captivated by postmodern thought.

evangelicals are listening to many more voices than just those of the white males who had been so influential in classical evangelicalism.

Spiritual Direction and Postconservative Evangelicalism

All of these attributes of postconservative evangelicalism provide more room for the ministry of spiritual direction than would have been found in classical evangelicalism. The emphases on narrative, community, multi-cultural voices, experiential approaches to truth, and openness to other traditions provide a far more hospitable context for spiritual direction and may account, at least in part, for its growing acceptance among evangelicals.

Spiritual direction is a ministry that seeks to help the directee discover God's presence within his or her life in a manner that engages in ways that go well-beyond just intellectual assent. It seeks to foster a knowledge of God's love and activity that speaks to the whole person. This "knowing" is deeply personal. It connects to the directee's experience of life and of God, in each case within his or her own unique context. The same "teaching" can be experienced differently by different individuals based on differences in their life contexts. Spiritual direction acknowledges this. An evangelical theology that also accepts God's truth as more than the sum of universally applicable propositions creates more room for this ministry.

The highly individualistic emphasis of classical evangelicalism - "God and me and the Bible"[49] – meant that a Christian didn't need anyone else to understand Scripture. Now with the shift in emphasis toward an understanding of Scripture in the context of a church, a spiritual director has more permission to speak into a directee's reading and interpretation of Scripture. The directee is generally more open to receive input from the Christian community and the spiritual director speaks as a part of that community. Biblical interpretation and application is less private and spiritual direction seems less threateningly authoritative.

Just as evangelical theologians affirm process over propositional truth, this attitude has also influenced directees' perspectives on their faith. Spiritual direction is about how God is working in a directee's life in the process of sanctification. The focus is on noticing God in the ups and downs of life and on growing to know and love God in this process. Whereas classical evangelicalism emphasized the *results* of knowing the truth of God, postconservative evangelicalism emphasizes the *process* of coming to know the truth. The latter fits well with the ministry of spiritual direction.

Evangelicals were ignorant of the history of spiritual direction for many years as it was a history that predated the Reformation and was carried forward outside the Protestant traditions. Now that there is an increased openness towards other Christian traditions, learning and receiving from these traditions is more acceptable. There are fewer stigmas connected to things coming out of a Roman Catholic or Orthodox tradition. Spiritual direction is now being discovered or rediscovered and happily so.

[49] Martin Luther was once reputed to have said "The Bible is the only spiritual director I'll ever need." The source of this quote is unknown, but it speaks to this mentality. If this truly was said by Martin Luther, the great irony is that he met with and was helped along his spiritual journey by directors.

The new openness to leadership from persons other than white males has also helped open the doors for spiritual direction. Although men are involved in this ministry, at least within most evangelical circles, spiritual directors are much more likely to be women than men. With the new openness to listening for God in the voices of women, women in the ministry of spiritual direction are finding it easier to be heard and validated.[50]

Thus, the growing acceptance of postconservative evangelicalism during the last twenty years coincides with a new interest in the ministry of spiritual direction within the evangelical church. The specific changes in theological thought at the center of postconservatism align well with the ministry of spiritual direction. And, as these theological shifts continue to take root, it stands to reason that that the ministry of spiritual direction is likely to flourish as one of its fruits.

Practical Theology

Although one could easily argue that practical theology has always been a part of the Christian church, as a formal discipline it has tended to come and go. It appears to be first spoken of as an academic discipline around the time of Aquinas. To Aquinas it meant the "application of the first principles of reason to experience."[51] The Christian

[50] In the few training programs for spiritual directors and the many peer supervision sessions I've been involved with in the past twenty years, in every case there were significantly more women involved than men. According to an email received from Paula Mitchell on October 4, 2011, for the eight years of the program, the participants in the spiritual direction program CFDM in the Northwest included only four men among thirty-two women. See Margaret Guenther's *Holy Listening (*Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992) 110-119 for a discussion on some reasons why this may be the case.

[51]James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1985), 10.

would come to know a rational truth. This truth would then be connected with the Christian's will and he or she would choose to act in accordance with the known truth.[52] True theological propositions were the frame on which experiences were to be hung and through which they were to be understood.

At the time of the Enlightenment, this pattern shifted. Theological truth was demoted and modern empirical sciences - particularly the physical sciences - were elevated. The focus turned towards making sense of experience through the lens of science. No longer was the meaning of experience primarily mediated through abstract theological truths. Thus, at least as Aquinas imagined it, practical theology was virtually abandoned as an academic discipline.[53]

It remerged briefly in the early nineteenth century in the writings of Friedrich Schliermacher, who defined practical theology as a "theology of the subject."[54] A student of Schliermacher, C.I. Nitzsch, further refined the understanding of the discipline; "practical theology" was the "theory of the church's practice of Christianity."[55] A contemporary of Nitzsch, Philip Marheineke, also focused on practical theology highlighting the distinction between a theoretical theology which only *saw the possibility of a relationship* between theological belief and action, and practical theology which was to be based on *actual connections* between belief and action.[56] Then for most of the

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 24.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

twentieth century discussion of practical theology seemed to go underground. The emphasis moved to pastoral care theology which focused primarily on the role of the pastor in the setting of the church.[57]

Late in the twentieth century, another shift occurred. Practical theology was back and now involved much more than the theology of pastoral care.[58] Particularly in the last thirty years, the discipline of practical theology has grown tremendously[59] and has found expression within evangelical scholarship. It is now being taught as a theological discipline in the evangelical academy and evangelical theologians are contributing to the scholarship in the field.[60]

Of course, just as the term "evangelical" can mean a variety of things, so too, this new version of "practical theology" can be defined in a variety of ways, depending on the setting. There are at least three major categories of theologians that use this term.[61]

Liberation theologians use the term "practical theology" to refer to the importance of praxis for contemporary theology.[62] This school of thought, consistent with

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[57] Anderson, 25.

[58] Anderson, 25.

[59] All of the publications on Practical Theology that I've researched and read are all post 1980.

[60] For example, Ray S. Anderson, a professor at Fuller Seminary, is an example of an evangelical practical theologian whose text on the subject was used in a class taught by Chuck Conniry, at the George Fox Seminary's Leadership and Spiritual Formation D.Min. program in the Fall of 2009. In the Fall of 2010, the evangelical Seattle Pacific University's Masters of Divinity program also offered a course in Practical Theology.

[61] I am aware of theologians in this discipline that don't neatly fit into the following three categories. For example, Ray Anderson and Richard R. Osmer are two contemporary practical theologians that draw on the categories but have their own slant. For purposes of simplicity, the following broader categories will be named with this awareness in mind.

[62] James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1985), 29.

postmodern perspectives of truth, especially emphasizes that all theology is "contextualized." All theology comes from a historical context and therefore there is no one "correct" expression of the Christian faith. All expressions are necessarily filtered through a particular culture or community.[63] These particularized expressions are the "praxis" of theology and liberation theologians are most interested in giving voice to the expressions of people on the margins of a majority culture. In this context, then, practical theology is primarily making sure that the faith expressions of the marginalized are heard and validated.

Other theologians use the term to refer to the working out of the variety of perspectives on Christian ethics within secular society.[64] A main spokesperson for this understanding of practical theology is Don Browning. For Browning, practical theology involves "developing an ethics of discourse that can address secular society and 'establish this ongoing level of religio-moral sensibility and culture.'"[65] Although this category of practical theology can be obscure and is certainly much more complex than this summary might suggest, for my purposes, it is sufficient to note that theologians like Browning want to ensure that the integration of theology and Christian practice will have an impact on the larger community, not just the church. For example, a book setting forth a Christian theology of business would be considered a work in practical theology.[66] No

[63] Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church's Ministry," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, (2005): 82.

[64]Poling and Miller, 29.

[65] Cahalan, "Three Approaches," 71.

[66] A book written by Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God (and What Still Needs to be Fixed*) (Downer's Grove: IVP Press Academic, 2010) was listed in the publisher's catalogue under the "Practical Theology" category.

doubt over simplifying this approach to practical theology, it might be said that from this vantage point any discussion of Christian ethics involves a discussion of practical theology.

The third approach carries with it the focus on Christian "practices."[67] The specific practices described by theologians adopting this third approach vary, depending on the author, but often tend to gravitate towards a traditional list of spiritual disciplines (both individual and corporate) that have been practiced down through the centuries across a number of church traditions. According to Dykstra and Bass, two theologians who figure prominently in this approach, practices are "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[68] In contrast to a discussion of a particular social ethic, a focus on "practices" in practical theology easily draws on wisdom from the past.[69] For example, the Rule of St Benedict would be considered a "practice" by theologians who approach practical theology in this fashion.[70]

Although these three approaches to practical theology differ considerably one from another, they are held together by certain commonalities. First, each reflects a postmodern sensibility. In each, the approach seeks to find alternative grounds for Christian knowing and recognizes that with respect to Christian truth, one size does not

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[67] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 3.

[68] Cahalan, "Three Approaches," 75.

[69] Ibid., 76.

[70] Sarah Coakley, "Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 87.

fit all.[71] Second, each of these approaches is inherently "practical." They try to make sense of every day life from a faith perspective. Twenty-first century practical theologians of any stripe are not particularly interested in addressing obscure, ethereal theological arguments that have been the bread and butter of earlier theologians.[72] Third, each of these three approaches acknowledges the foundational role of a communal setting for determining how to authentically live out the faith.[73] Faith is not shaped and formed just as an individual before God, but as an individual participating in a local community. For this reason, all theology is local for modern day practical theologians.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, all three of these different expressions of practical theology speak in terms of an iterative interaction between theology and practice. One simply cannot separate that which is lived out, one's practice, and that which one believes, one's theology. Theology shapes practice; practice shapes theology. Neither is more important than the other. Theology does not give definition to practice. Practice does not trump theology. The back and forth fluid interactions between the two work synergistically.

Spiritual Direction and Practical Theology

When looking at the common features of modern-day practical theology it is easy to see how the growing acceptance of these approaches has paralleled the growing

[71] Cahalan, "Three Approaches," 86.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 87.

acceptance of the ministry of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is about discovering the truth of who God is and how God is present is *in the particular context* of the directee's life. The spiritual director is aware that there is not a single way to discern God's presence that is appropriate for everyone. People come with their own set of experiences that mold and shape their knowledge of God. The spiritual director is constantly aware of this and seeks to help the directees know God's truth in their particular contexts.

Spiritual direction also acknowledges the need for the directee to have others' input when seeking to discover God's guidance. The words of Jesus, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:19), is a basic tenet of spiritual direction. Whether in one-on-one spiritual direction or in group spiritual direction, a spiritual director relies on the assurance that God speaks through community.

Finally, the ministry of spiritual direction recognizes the back and forth of theology and practice that can't be easily separated. Direction is inherently an iterative process. For example, a directee experiences God's love and that further shapes his or her theology of God. The directee's theology then shapes the next experience of God's love, and the process continues. The spiritual director acts to help the directee trace the outlines of this work of God in the directee's life.

Beyond these commonalities, the practical theologians who focus on "practices" provide further connections with spiritual direction. They do so in two primary ways. First they give primacy to the specific Christian practice of discernment which is at the heart of spiritual direction ministries. Second, they connect practices and mystical theology in a manner similar to the approach of many directors.

In addressing Christian practices, theologian Nancy Bedford speaks of discernment as a "necessary component of all practices."[74] Kathryn Tanner also arrives at this conclusion by noting that Christian practices are "constituted in great part by a slippery give-and-take with non-Christian practices: indeed, they are mostly non-Christian practices – eating, meeting, greeting – done differently, born again, to unpredictable effect."[75] In effect, Tanner defines all of what a Christian does as a Christian practice, precisely because it is done as a Christian. In so doing, she acknowledges that the messiness creates the need for reflection:

> The ambiguities, inconsistencies, and open-endedness of Christian practice are, however, the very things that establish an essential place for theological reflection in everyday Christian lives…In order to figure out how to go on, one must, with some measure of *reflective exertion, figure out the meaning of what one has been doing, why one does it, and what it implies – in particular, how it hangs together (or fails to hang together) with the rest of what one believes and does.* Because of their ambiguities, inconsistencies, and open-endedness, practices, in short, do not run by automatic or mechanical routine but through at least *quasi-reflective or deliberative efforts to figure out what to do next, how to proceed*.[76] (Emphasis added)

In other words, discernment is needed to provide meaning to all of what one does as a Christian. Discernment is *the* overarching "practice" needed to make meaning of every other practice of a Christian. Discernment is also the work of the spiritual director.

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[74] Nancy E. Bedford, "Little Moves Against Destructiveness: Theology and the Practice of Discernment," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 159.

[75] Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 230.

[76] Ibid., 232.

Even though Tanner is speaking about discernment in an essay on practical theology, her comments could just as readily be applied to what happens during the process of spiritual direction. In spiritual direction one reflects and seeks to figure out the meaning of what one is doing in life and how what one believes fits with how one acts. A specific example of this emphasis on discernment can be found in the Ignatian practice known as the "Prayer of Examen" regularly used by spiritual directors. This prayer of examination of consciousness specifically invites the pray-er to review the day, looking for God's presence and activity in the midst of all that was experienced.

Another spiritual direction practice of Ignatian discernment involves paying attention to one's response to life's circumstances. Is there a sense of peace or consolation? Or, is there a sense of agitation or desolation? Noticing these internal movements when interacting with life's circumstances helps the directee notice where God is guiding and or not guiding. In short, this branch of practical theology pays great attention to "practices" and within the array of practices, gives the practice of discernment preeminence. So do spiritual directors.

Practical theologians also see a connection between their discipline and ascetical or mystical theology.[77] As a Christian seeks to be faithful through the years in the "entangled" mix of beliefs and practices, a "deepening" of practices influences a

[77] See Sarah Coakley's essay, "Deepening Practices," 78-93. For a brief discussion of mystical theology see editor Philip Sheldrake's *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2005), 455-456. For a brief explanation of ascetical theology see Simon Chan's *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19. Chan continues in this discussion to use the term "spiritual theology" to describe the *experiential reality* of a Christian's faith, not unlike mystical or aesthetical theology. He goes on to make a connection between practical theology and spiritual theology – "In practical theology the doctrine that God is love may provide the motive for loving others…in spiritual theology, the doctrine that God is love is felt as an experiential reality" (19). He goes on to say that without spiritual theology, practical theology could be reduced to "mere activism," (20). Coakley's essay also addresses this needed connection.

"deepening" of belief.[78] However, to keep this process from looking like, or turning into, a works-oriented righteousness, one can draw on the experiences of Christian mystics from the past to find examples of "cooperative grace through practices."[79] Past stories bring to light the deepening sense of God that comes out of the "long haul of repeated practices of faithfulness."[80] For example, theologian Sarah Coakley looks to the prayer and service "practices" of Carmelite Teresa of Avila and Anglican W.H. Vanstone as examples of how practical theology could be lived out today.[81]

Whether looking at the belief and practices of Carmelite Teresa of Avila or a more recent Anglican W.H. Vanstone, one can find mundane daily acts of Christian practices continued along side a growing receptivity to God's grace. This growing receptivity to God's grace is manifested in a posture of givenness to God, a growing and simultaneous surrendering of self to God and to God's world. This surrender to God manifests itself in the prayerful practice of contemplation. Yet there is irony in calling it a practice, because the work is done by God in the believer, while the believer is simply "being" in a posture of openness to God.[82] Central to this mystical theology is the connection between daily faithful Christian practices over the "long haul" and givenness to God in contemplation. Here, too, we find the back and forth process between deepening belief and deepening practices. Knowing God more deeply only comes

[78] Coakley, "Deepening Practices," 78. Coakley connects the practices of practical theology as the means to further union with God, which is at the heart of mystical theology.

[79] Ibid., 81.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 78-93.

[82] Ibid., 82-83, 89-91.

through continual faithfulness with a posture of openness to what God offers. One is to live a life of both Mary and Martha in a way that leads to greater intimacy with God and greater faithful service in the world.

The life of Christian faithfulness over time – "a long obedience in the same direction"[83] – while simultaneously seeking to grow in intimacy with God is also at the heart of spiritual direction. The tension or paradox of practices and grace inherent in practical and mystical theology is also a tension that lies at the heart of the ministry of spiritual direction. Directees are encouraged to faithful Christian practices along with the hope that ultimately they will become so aware of God's love that they'll become more surrendered before God and experience God's love in ever deeper ways. Continued practices become more and more an expression of God's graceful work in the surrendered believer.

Even in a single session where a directee meets with a director, one finds a back and forth oscillation between discussions of Christian practices and silent times of prayer where the directee and director wait together for the movement of the Spirit. The focus is always on wanting to receive what God is offering specifically to the directee during the particular appointment. Just as theologian Coakley used the Carmelite Teresa and Anglican Vanstone as examples of Christian mystics living faithfully in their worlds, the spiritual director seeks to help the directees be so aware of God's love that they too are more able to surrender to God and live faithfully in their worlds.

Whether looking at practical theology as a whole or simply looking at the branch of this theology that focuses on Christian practices, one finds many connections between

[83] This term is used by Eugene Peterson in his book titled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1980).

this theological discipline and spiritual direction. As practical theology is taught more and more in evangelical academies, it is opening the door for an increased interest in spiritual direction. These connections are already evident.[84]

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how many in the evangelical community have embraced postconservative evangelicalism and practical theology. I have also attempted to connect these changes with an increased interest among evangelicals in the ministry of spiritual direction. Both postconservative evangelicalism and practical theology involve beliefs and practices similar to those used in the ministry of spiritual direction and both have helped open the door for evangelicals to pursue this ministry.

[84] See also Julie Lunn's "Paying Attention: The Task of Attending in Spiritual Direction and Practical Theology" *Practical Theology* 2, no. 2, (2009):219-229. Lunn speaks directly to the connection between spiritual direction and practical theology.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOUWEN AND PETERSON

In the previous chapters, I have discussed various social, economic, philosophical and theological factors that helped to create a hospitable environment for an increased interest in spiritual direction among postmodern, postconservative evangelicals. These factors alone, however, might not have resulted in the significant changes that we have seen. Dry tinder does not by itself create a fire. It needs a match. And while various trends can help make a shift in certain practices more likely, it is very often the emergence of one or two key leaders that ignites the change.

> The human factor in history is very distinct and very often plays an exclusive and important role. The role of individuals …is the first and immediate element.[1]

This chapter will discuss the lives and influence of two late twentieth-century Christians, Henri Nouwen and Eugene Peterson. Together, these two have been highly influential in bringing spiritual direction into the evangelical mainstream. While one could argue that other Christians also contributed to the increased interest of evangelicals in spiritual formation generally - Richard Foster, Kathleen Norris, and Dallas Willard, for example – as it relates specifically to spiritual direction, the influence of Nouwen and Peterson stands out.[2] This chapter will provide brief biographies of these two men and

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[1] See L.E. Grinin, "The Role of the Individual in History," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 78, no. 1 (2008): 64, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1527394 (accessed March 14, 2011). What used to be known as "The Great Man Theory" of leadership is now re-emerging in leadership theory, as this article suggests. This chapter will argue that Nouwen and Peterson are two such leaders who play important roles in the field of evangelical spiritual direction.

[2] In Bradley Holt's second edition of *Thirsty for God*, Holt specifically highlights Nouwen's contribution to spiritual direction (found on page 155) and also highlights Eugene Peterson's influence as

then discuss the ways in which they have helped make spiritual direction palatable and even desirable to today's postmodern evangelicals.

Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen was born in 1932, the oldest child of four children in an educated, well-to-do Dutch Roman Catholic family.[3] He was raised in the Netherlands and from a very young age exhibited an interest in becoming a priest.[4] His mother had a seamstress sew priestly vestments to fit him as a child and a carpenter build him a child-sized altar.[5] Using his persuasive skills Nouwen frequently secured the cooperation of his friends and younger brother as parishioners as he "played priest".[6] By age eight, he had converted the house attic into a chapel where he would say the Mass and give sermons to any friends or family members who would listen.[7]

Not surprisingly given his early interests, after secondary school Nouwen went to seminary. For seven years he studied and was known as a leader among his fellow students, recognized for his oral and written communication skills, his theological insights,[8] his kindness and his approachability.[9] In 1957 he was ordained a priest in the

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an author "perhaps most widely published in the twenty-first century" in the area of spirituality and Scripture (found on page 143).

[3] Jurjen Beumer, *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1997), 13-19.

[4] Ibid., 19.

[5] Michael Ford, Wounded *Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J. M. Nouwen*. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 73.

[6] Beumer, 19.

[7] Ford, 73.

[8] Ibid., 81

archdiocese of Utrecht and remained a priest of this archdiocese his whole life, regardless of where he actually lived.[10] The ordination was a very significant moment for Nouwen. He said his first opportunity to celebrate the Mass was

> an intimate and mystical experience. The presence of Jesus was more real for me than the presence of any friend could possibly be. Afterwards I knelt for a long time and was overwhelmed by the grace of my priesthood.[11]

As a newly ordained priest, Nouwen was assigned to go to the Gregorian University in Rome for more theology training.[12] However, in a manner that would become characteristic for Nouwen, he proposed a special arrangement as an alternative. Rather than study theology in Rome, he suggested that he study psychology at Nijmegen. The archbishop agreed.[13] Thus began approximately seven years of doctoral research in clinical psychology.[14]

During his studies, Nouwen was introduced to the ideas of Harvard psychology professor Gordon Allport.[15] Allport was interested in religious and pastoral psychology – a very unusual combination for psychology professors in the 1960's.[16] Nouwen managed to get an opportunity to meet Gordon Allport through an introductory letter written by Cardinal Cushing of Boston. In this meeting, Allport encouraged Nouwen to

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[9] Ibid., 79

[10] Ibid., 83.

[11] Ibid., 83.

[12] Beumer, 23.

[13] Ibid., 23-24.

[14] Ford, 87.

[15] Beumer, 27.

[16] Ibid., 27.

finish his program at Nijmegen but then to enroll in the religion and psychiatry program at the Menninger Institute in Kansas. Nouwen heeded this advice.[17]

At the Menninger Institute Nouwen saw first-hand what the integration of theology and psychology could look like.[18] Karl Menninger, the founder of the institute, was a devout Presbyterian who thought deeply about the integration of his faith with his psychoanalysis practice.[19] Not only was this a place for Nouwen to explore the integration of theology and psychology, he later described it as the place where "he became spiritually adult."[20] There was a nurturing presence at the institute that encouraged him to explore who he was, what he believed, and how to think of himself from a more wholistic perspective.[21] It was a place of profound spiritual formation for Nouwen.

His plan initially was to take back to Holland what he had learned at the Institute. At that time in Holland, the idea of such an integration of theology and psychology simply didn't exist [22] and Nouwen hoped to play a role in bringing about a more helpful integrative co-existence of these two disciplines in the religious education of the Dutch Roman Catholic Church.[23] However, these plans changed when he was offered a position at Notre Dame to teach in the start-up of their new psychology department, led by his

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 28. Under Menninger's leadership, the institute played a crucial role in the development of Clinical Pastoral Education programs that are now often required of seminary students. Ibid., 27.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ford, 90.

[23] Beumer, 28.

friend John Santos.[24] Nouwen taught there for two years. During that time his teaching moved from courses in general psychology to courses with an emphasis on pastoral care.[25] One outcome of his teaching was a series of articles that he wrote and which later formed the makings of his first book, *Intimacy: Essays in Pastoral Psychology.*[26] His experience at Notre Dame helped him develop "a fine integration of psychology and practical theology, with special attention to the spirituality of the pastor."[27]

He was well received as a teacher and a priest at Notre Dame and known for his ability to connect with students.[28] As Father Don McNeill recalled watching Nouwen prepare for Mass during Nouwen's time at Notre Dame,

> His hair was all over the place and he was running around making sure the cruets for the wine and the bread were taken care of before the Mass began. I didn't know who he was. I even wondered if he was someone who was able to celebrate the Eucharist. But when he began to preach, there was an immediate magnetism - all of us were awe-struck by his passion and insights. As he continued the Mass, his reverence and emanation of light released us from our stereotypical expectations of the priesthood.[29]

Father McNeill also speaks of Nouwen's teaching,

> I also participated in a course he was teaching on pastoral care and counseling. It was magnificent…Henri's dynamism was so captivating that I had to rethink my approach to theology and what I was going to be doing as a priest. Henri used experimental learning and helped us develop journals and case studies, based on our ministries. Students and others in need became sources for our theological reflection. It was a whole new

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[24] Ibid., 29-30.

[25] Ibid., 30.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ford, 98.

[29] Ibid., 97.

> way of doing theology…He had a way of integrating psychology and theology, and bringing it to life in exciting terms with our contemporary experience of the 1960's and beyond.[30]

Nouwen's gifts as a teacher priest who made theology practical and applicable were beginning to be recognized.

Once these two years were over at Notre Dame, he did return to Holland. He taught at the Amsterdam Joint Pastoral Institute and then later at the Catholic Theological Institute of Utrecht (KTHU) where he was the head of the department of behavioral sciences.[31] During these years he wrote two more books: *With Open Hands* and *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic*.[32] It was clear to him that he wasn't strictly interested in psychology. He wanted to integrate psychology and theology as he had done at Notre Dame. He wanted to teach pastoral psychology, but for him to do so in Holland meant that he would need even more theology training. So once again, he went back to school.[33]

Once he passed his doctoral exams, he tried to recast his work in psychology from the Menninger and Notre Dame years as a doctoral thesis in theology. It didn't work.[34] His theological interests, just like his psychological interests, were located in the practical, not theoretical domains. He never did complete a dissertation and only secured an honorary doctorate years later.[35] However, all was not lost because the rejected thesis

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Beumer, 30.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 30-31.

[34] Ford, 100.

[35] Ibid.

became his next book, *Creative Ministry*.[36] He was also gaining a reputation as an author, teacher and speaker, especially in the United States.[37]

This growing reputation came to the attention of Colin Williams, then dean of Yale Divinity School. Williams sought Nouwen out and asked him to visit the school.[38] Shortly thereafter, he was offered a position at the school in the field of pastoral theology.[39] Nouwen agreed to come but only under very specific and highly irregular conditions. He requested that he not have to complete a PhD dissertation nor be responsible for any academic writing or publishing. He required a permanent tenured appointment within 3 years and status as a full professor within 5 years.[40] That such demands were made by Nouwen reflects how little interest he had in traditional academic research. That Yale Divinity School would agree to such demands indicates how much they wanted him. From 1971-1981, Henri taught at Yale.

Nouwen understood teaching as a work of spiritual formation more than a work aimed at intellectual learning. He was attentive to his students in a variety of ways. He worked to create a sense of "inviting space" in his classes. He paid particular attention to the physical environment, desiring to "create a space in which obedience to the truth is practiced."[41] Prayer was a regular part of the classroom experience.[42] Classes started with

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[36] Beumer, 30.

[37] Ford, 100.

[38] Beumer, 32.

[39] Ford, 102.

[40] Beumer, 32.

[41] Ford, 105.

[42] Ibid.

Scripture readings, sometimes Taize songs were sung, intercessory prayers were offered and silence was observed.[43] The entire classroom experience was planned for the student's spiritual formation. As John Mogabgab recalled,

> Henri was able to use such daily experiences as loneliness, anger, joy, friendship and business to instruct his students in the ways of the Spirit, and to persuade them of the essential relation between spirituality and ministry. Henri himself most often described this effort as an attempt to see the connections between their own life stories and the one great story of God's redemption of the world in and through Jesus Christ. The many pastoral examples, personal anecdotes, psychological observations and theological analyses that went into building the floor, walls and ceiling of Henri's lectures were aimed at helping students gain a new vision of their vocation as Christians.[44]

He was seen not only as a teacher, but as a spiritual guide. In one of his last years at YDS he taught a class on group spiritual direction and one of his students noted:

> We learned about spiritual direction primarily because Henri modeled it for us. He showed us how to be the spiritual friend, the sacred companion. He offered us the space and time to be companions to one another.[45]

Nouwen also spent time with students outside of the classroom, having regular prayer and communion services where he practiced an "open" table, i.e. offering the Eucharist to non-Roman Catholics.[46] He was well-loved and a significant reason why many students came to YDS in the ten years that he taught there[47]

Nouwen's years at Yale were also highly productive from a literary perspective. *Reaching Out, The Way of the Heart,* and *Out of Solitude*, were a few of the books

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 106.

[45] Will Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen and Soul Care* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 47.

[46] Ford, 111. I also attended YDS while Nouwen was there and participated in these gatherings.

[47] Ibid., 105.

published during his ten years at the school.[48] During his tenure at Yale, he also wrote of a sabbatical experience at a Trappist monastery in the book *The Genesee Diary*.[49] His books sought to provide his readers the same experience of spiritual formation that he offered to his students. Like his students, readers were drawn to what he had to say often because they were drawn to who he was.[50]

After his time at Yale, Nouwen's restless personality triggered a five year period of discernment that ultimately led him to his ministry at L'Arche. Immediately after Yale he went back to the Trappist monastery to discern if he was being called to minister to the poor in Latin America.[51] Then he went to Latin America. After spending some time there and being exposed to the rampant poverty and injustice, it became clear to him, and especially to others that knew him, that he could do more for the poor by not living with them.[52] He followed up his time in Latin America with a brief stint teaching at Harvard Divinity School, hoping to communicate his message of God's care for the poor while there.[53] This proved to be a poor fit too. His Christ-centeredness didn't sit as well with Harvard as it did with Yale[54] and Nouwen came to realize that Harvard was not the place for him. In his own seminary days, he was part of the John Henry "Newman" club,[55] and

[48] Ibid.

[49] Beumer, 41.

[50] Hernandez, 71.

[51] Ford, 124.

[52] Beumer, 53.

[53] Ibid., 54.

[54] Ford, 135-136.

[55] Ibid., 80.

one wonders if a reason for leaving could also have been that he was following in his mentor's footsteps; leaving the prestigious academia to a pursue a life of downward mobility.[56] In his book *The Road to Daybreak*, Nouwen describes the spiritual journey that led to him finally coming "home" to Daybreak, the L'Arche community in Canada - a community that included mentally and physically disabled people and their caregivers. In 1986, Henri became a caregiver and a pastor to the community, all the while continuing his writing, speaking, teaching, and spiritual guidance ministries worldwide.[57] He was officially a part of that community until he died ten years later of a heart attack.

Daybreak was a safe place where Nouwen was able to face his own woundedness and brokenness, themes he had often taught and written about but was only now facing in himself in deeper ways.[58] He encountered his own vulnerability as never before and ended up needing to spend considerable time away from the community for healing.[59] As his counselor at that time states,

> Henri was courageous and I admired him- but it was very, very dark indeed. He couldn't work out the despair in his life. This was not just a dark night of the soul; it was a dark night of everything, of the spirit, at the point of faith, at the point of his own being, desires, longings and sexuality. It was a dark night at the point of his own calling, work, and writing. But he did not lose his faith.[60]

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[56] Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 224. Here Peterson tells of Newman's own journey from teaching at prestigious Oxford to teaching poor students under harsh conditions in Birmingham.

[57] Beumer, 57-60 and Ford, 163.

[58] Ford, 166.

[59] Ibid., 166-167.

[60] Ibid., 167

His personal journal during this time from darkness to hope was published in the book *The Inner Voice of Love*, ironically released the day of his burial.[61] It was also after this time of personal trial that Nouwen wrote several of his most profound and widely read books including, *Return of the Prodigal Son, Life of the Beloved, Can You Drink this Cup, In The Name of Jesus, Adam,* and *Sabbatical Journey*, all in one way or another highlighting the love of God encountered in the midst of brokenness.

Nouwen wrote out of his life experience and out of his own brokenness. From this vantage point he continued to point to the love of Christ. His own insecurities and his need for approval and affection were often combined with his genuine pastoral care for others and left him living at a frenetic pace that ultimately his body couldn't sustain. Despite repeated warnings that he needed to slow down, Nouwen did not. He died of a heart attack at age 64.[62] As he states in the book published on the day of his burial,

> I often wondered if God is real or just a product of my imagination. I now know that while I felt completely abandoned, God didn't leave me alone. Many friends and family members have died during the past eight years, and my own death is not so far away. But I have heard the inner voice of love, deeper and stronger than ever. I want to keep trusting in that voice and be led by it beyond the boundaries of my short life, to where God is all in all.[63]

Nouwen did much through his life and writings to communicate what it means to trust this "inner voice of love," to go "where God is all in all."

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[61] Beumer, 176.

[62] Ibid., 171-174.

[63] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 118, quoted in Beumer, 176.

Eugene Peterson

Eugene Peterson was also born in 1932,[64] and like Nouwen also the eldest child.[65] Unlike Henri Nouwen, who grew up in a wealthy European Roman Catholic family, Peterson's family lived in a small town in rural Montana, and they were Pentecostal Protestants.[66] His mom was a Pentecostal preacher, preaching to "congregations" of working men from logging and mining camps[67] while his dad supplied the family with income as a butcher from his butcher shop.[68] Like Nouwen, Peterson "played" at a profession. When Peterson was as young as 5 years old, his mother sewed him a white apron made out of four sacks to match his father's apron.[69] Although quite different from Nouwen's childhood vestments, Peterson's aprons took on a priestly character. Early on he accompanied his father to the shop; he has since spoken of this shop as a "holy place."[70] Growing up on the bible stories, Peterson identified his white apron with the priestly robe of the prophet Samuel, whose mother also made him a new robe every year to fit his growing body.[71]

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[64] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 10.

[65] Ibid., 53.

[66] Ibid., 213

[67] Ibid., 28

[68] Ibid., 35.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Eugene Peterson interviewed by Guy Raz in "All Things Considered," on National Public Radio, March 6, 2011.

[71] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 35.

> I knew exactly what that robe, that ephod, looked like-didn't I wear it ever time I worked with my father? Didn't I get a new one every time I had grown another inch or two? I might have been the only person in our town who knew what an ephod actually looked like…Shiloh couldn't have been that much different from my father's meat market. The three-year-old bull that was slaughtered at Samuel's dedication at Shiloh would become the hamburgers and sirloin steaks at my father's market and provided continuity between the shrine and the meat market. I had no idea, of course, that I was acquiring a biblical imagination, finding myself in the biblical story, identifying myself as a priest.[72]

Peterson learned from his dad what it looked like to greet people by name, to be gracious to all, and to treat all with dignity, including the prostitutes that came into the shop from the brothel down the street.[73] By observing his dad wearing a matching robe Peterson began to learn what it meant to be a priest.[74]

Peterson was also learning the art of story telling. He listened intently to the stories told by his Pentecostal preacher mom. For example, Peterson learned early on the complexities and ambiguities of life through the story of his Uncle Sven. His mother told him the story of her favorite brother, Sven, and how wonderful he was, "always laughing, always playful" and how "everybody loved him."[75] This uncle was later killed by his new wife and a newspaper clipping portrayed a very different picture of his uncle. According to the paper, tales of his violent and drunken behavior were numerous.[76] As an adolescent, Peterson pondered how to put these two pictures of the same man together.

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[72] Ibid., 36.

[73] Ibid., 39.

[74] Ibid., 40.

[75] Ibid., 57.

[76] Ibid., 57-58.

He even thought of writing a novel about this man.[77] The novel was never written but this example "inoculated me against one answer systems of spiritual care: 'For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong' is the warning posted by H.L. Mencken."[78]

Although his family didn't have the educational resources that Nouwen's family had, Peterson did his learning at the Carnegie library in his town. He would frequently ride his bike there after school and spend his afternoons immersing himself in the world of books.[79] He wasn't very excited about his formal education but at the library, Peterson states, he "learned to love learning for its own sake."[80] He did go on to college at Seattle Pacific in Seattle and then to seminary at New York Theological Seminary,[81] but it wasn't until he entered post-seminary graduate work in Semitic Studies at Johns Hopkins that he felt he was back on territory close to the love of learning he had experienced at the public library.[82]

At Johns Hopkins, Peterson was heavily influenced by Dr. William Albright, a well-known scholar in this field of study.[83] It was not only his intellect and expertise that struck Peterson, but his humility.[84] Albright was open with his graduate students. He was

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[77] Ibid., 58-59.

[78] Ibid., 59.

[79] Ibid., 62.

[80] Ibid., 82.

[81] http://www.christiancollegesanduniversities.com/blog/2010/famous-christian-college-alumni/ties (accessed April 18, 2011).

[82] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 62-63.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., 63-64.

quick to acknowledge that he did not know everything even though he clearly could have bluffed his way through any question.[85] In this small program, whether he was sitting in lecture or discussing the Hebrew Scriptures, Peterson says he "began to inhabit a world I never knew existed, a world of learning, embodied, vibrant with energy. This was the Carnegie plus."[86] This was the world that Peterson thought he would live in for the rest of his life, the world of a professor, a scholar, a writer. But like Nouwen, his plans also changed.[87]

While in his doctorate program at Johns Hopkins, Peterson met his future wife, Jan. Jan had always wanted to be a pastor's wife. Nonetheless she agreed to marry Peterson with the expectation of being a wife of a professor.[88] Of course, Peterson did have one foot in the church. During his earlier time in seminary, Peterson had worked in a Presbyterian church.[89] He did so largely because he felt so welcomed, and because he was encouraged by the senior pastor with whom he was working at the time. Peterson decided to become a Presbyterian and go through the ordination process. Even as he did so, however, he continued to believe that he was destined to be a professor, not a pastor.[90]

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 64.

[87] Ibid., 96.

[88] Ibid., 96-97.

[89] Ibid., 90-91.

[90] Ibid., 91.

After getting married and while continuing with his doctoral work, Peterson continued to work part-time both as an associate pastor and as an assistant professor.[91] After a few years of both marriage and the doctorate program, Peterson completed his doctoral academic work. Like Nouwen, the only thing between him and his doctoral degree was writing his dissertation.

At that point Dr. Albright retired and arranged for Peterson to complete his program under Dr. Brevard Childs of Yale.[92] Yet around this time Peterson was beginning to wonder if, perhaps, he was called to be a pastor, not a professor after all. After a discernment process of discussion, prayer and reflection, he and Jan decided he was, in fact, called to the pastorate. Like Nouwen, he never completed his doctoral dissertation. He says he has "never, even for a moment, regretted that decision."[93] As he puts it,

> It was the conjunction of the classroom, congregation, and marriage that did it, set off a chain reaction that produced pastor and pastor's wife. The world of the classroom, the world of congregation, and the world of marriage interacted at a level below consciousness. Interaction is too tame a work. The conjunction was catalytic….The gestation took most of three years. But at some point along the way the waters broke and there we were- pastor and pastor's wife.[94]

Now in his late twenties, during the early 1960's, Peterson went on to be a pastor of a church start-up in the suburbs of Baltimore.[95] He is the first to say his fledgling

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[91] Ibid., 18.

[92] Ibid., 18-19.

[93] Ibid., 19.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 102.

congregation was not what he had dreamed it would be. Their lack of interest in God surprised him. As Peterson reflects,

> My imagination had been schooled in the company of Moses and David; my congregation kept emotional and mental company with television celebrities and star athletes. I was reading Karl Barth and John Calvin; they were reading Ann Landers and People magazine.[96]

What Peterson decided to do about this laid the foundation of his role as a pastor for the rest of his life. He saw that his role as a pastor was to help get his congregation to understand Scripture. What better way to begin, he thought, than to introduce them to the book of Acts. This book tells the story of the beginnings of the early Church in all its ups and downs. He wanted his congregation to see that what happened in Acts was a story that also included them, a story that they were invited to participate in as they were also a church with start-up struggles and joys.[97] As Peterson explains it, as his congregation immersed themselves in the Lukan portrayal of the early church beginnings,

> The story had its way with us. It became more and more clear that when God forms a church, he starts with the nobodies…We were learning how to submit ourselves to the Spirit's formation of the congregation out of this mixed bag of humanity that was us - broken, hobbling, crippled, sexually abused and spiritually abused, emotionally unstable, passive and passive-aggressive, neurotic men and women.[98]

This then became the mark of Peterson's ministry: teaching out of Scripture, telling the story it tells, and making concrete connections to the story of the lives of the people in his congregation. These would become his greatest gifts. Moreover, he staked out the opposite end of the spectrum from Nouwen. Whereas Nouwen's life seemed to

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[96] Ibid., 104.

[97] Ibid., 117.

[98] Ibid., 127,128.

embody a constant restlessness, a constant searching, Peterson became an anchor of stability and contentment. He stayed with his church for 29 years and regularly encouraged other pastors to forego frequent moves.[99]

Throughout his long tenure with his congregation, Peterson continued to connect the stories of his parishioners with the stories of Scripture through the exercise of imagination. He also used this time to speak to broader audiences by writing books showing connections between Christians today and the stories told in Revelation, Galatians, and Jeremiah, among others.[100]

It was also during this pastorate that he had his first experience of going through a church building campaign. He discovered that it was relatively easy to get people to rally around a building program. They were supporting something very concrete and tangible, a goal they could measure and accomplish.[101] But when the church building project was over, the church went through a period that lasted six years, a period that Peterson would later call "The Badlands."[102]

Every year Peterson and his family would make the trek from suburban Baltimore to rural Montana for a month's visit in the place of Peterson's childhood. To get there they always drove through the Badlands of North Dakota, known primarily for two things

[99] Not only does he speak to this sense of stability through his own life, I've spoken to a number of pastors who have shared that their conversations with Peterson also reflect this bias.

[100] His books, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, *Traveling Light: Reflections on the Free Life*, and *Run with the Horses: The Quest for Life at It's Best* are the names of the three books highlighted here.

[101] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 200-201.

[102] Ibid., 203.

"a seeming featureless aridity" with no color[103] and Wall Drug, a souvenir store that advertises itself on billboards hundreds of miles before one arrives.[104]

After his building campaign, Peterson knew that he would have to learn how to live in the "badlands." He would have to learn to live in the Wall Drug atmosphere of American consumerism. He would have to learn to live in the arid places of his congregation's life, remembering that living in desert-like places was part of the mature Christian life. Rather than start another building project, move to another church that appeared more alive, find a consultant to come in and figure out what "program" the church should start – in short, all the things that other pastors around him were doing - he decided that,

> I would stay with these people for as long as necessary to acquire an imagination and develop a faith to follow Christ right here, in this congregation, in this place, with this family, in this workplace. Didn't I know by now that growth, any growth- but especially character growth, spiritual growth, church growth, body-of Christ growth, soul growth - had periods of dormancy? Did I want to be a non-pastor who by diversions and novelties and distractions – "challenges"-perpetuated a kind of sub-Christian adolescence?[105]

He later recalled that this six-year period was a time of no special programs, just "each thing we did led to something else"[106] and at the end of this time there was a sense of a "whole, integrated, joyful obedient life" that emerged.[107]

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[103] Ibid., 206.

[104] Ibid., 205.

[105] Ibid., 207.

[106] Eugene Peterson interviewed by Guy Raz in "All Things Considered," National Public Radio, March 6, 2011.

[107] Ibid.

This strong counter-cultural resistance - saying "no" to flashy church growth programs and consumer and commodity oriented church life and embracing instead the slow work of the Spirit in ordinary life - became a steady characteristic of Eugene Peterson and his writings. Two of his early books, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* and *Earth and Altar: The Community of Prayer in a Self-Bound Society* spoke directly against American self-indulgent consumerism. Both books encouraged the use of the Psalms as a tool for prayer, a way of re-orienting one's perspective away from the American culture and moving towards a steady, faithful life of obedience to Christ in the ordinary. He reflects that he was writing

> to explore and discover what I didn't know. Writing as a way of paying attention. Writing as an act of prayer...drawing me into mysteries, training me imaginatively to enter the language world of scripture in which God 'spoke and it came to be' in which 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' And, it became a way of writing in which I was entering into the language world of my congregation, their crises and small talk, their questions and doubts, listening for and discerning the lived quality of the gospel in their lives.[108]

Peterson lived what he preached. He stayed at this church for 29 years, watching God work in his congregant's messy ordinariness and helping his congregation see "the lived quality of the gospel" in their lives.

During his time as a pastor, he and his wife found many literary guides. They rediscovered the joy of honoring the Sabbath, using Abraham Heschel's book, *The Sabbath* as a guide.[109] In his reading Peterson also discovered earlier saints in the Christian life, including Baron Friedrich von Hugel and John Henry Newman, who was

[108] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 239.

[109] Ibid., 220-221.

also a favorite of Nouwen's.[110] Both these men were Catholics. Both were humble men. Both were willing to go against the cultural tide in their faithfulness. Newman left Oxford for Birmingham. Von Hugel used his life of privilege to study and write on the spiritual life of the laity and to be available to others in the ministry of spiritual direction.[111] It was also in this time period that Peterson met and developed a friendship with a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Genevieve, prioress of a Carmelite monastery.[112] Through her influence he began reading and appreciating Carmelites Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.[113] As he put it,

> Teresa and John treated the soul and praying rightly with the same disciplined care as Luther and Calvin took with the scriptures and believing rightly…Teresa and John were theologians every bit as "theological" as Luther and Calvin. But they used a very different language. Teresa told stories; John wrote poems. They were saturated in the same scriptures as their contemporaries a thousand or so miles to the north, and as theologically astute… [They] were trying to deal honestly and discerningly with the experience of God when it wasn't plain, insisting that there were necessary obscurities and shadows to be embraced if we were to grow into mature holiness. [114]

Understanding life with the rhythm of Sabbath keeping, understanding the value of dormant time, contemplative prayer and spiritual direction, helped Peterson resist the "frenetic busy pastor" temptation – the very temptation that unfortunately hastened the death of Nouwen. Instead Peterson was a pastor who was not in a hurry. He told his church elders he wanted to be an "unbusy pastor" and they gave him the freedom and

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[110] Ibid., 224.

[111] Ibid., 224-226.

[112] Ibid., 228.

[113] Ibid., 229.

[114] Ibid., 230-231.

help to do so.[115] He wrote of what it looks like to be the unbusy pastor in his books on pastoring, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, and *Under the Unpredictable Plant, An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. He spoke to the need for pastors to observe a life of prayer, a life shaped by the Word, and a life given to spiritual direction. None of these necessary ingredients of pastoring, however, would be available to the one who remained too busy planning new programs and running building campaigns.

After 29 years of pastoring the Baltimore congregation, Eugene and Jan sensed that it was time for them to move on, but they weren't sure what would be next.[116] It turns out that Peterson's next chapter was written on the foundation of the first. What had begun as simply trying to bring Scripture alive to his congregation now became something much bigger than that. In 1990, the year before he left his church, Peterson was asked by NavPress to translate the Bible in much the same way as he had translated Galatians in his book, *Traveling Light.*[117] After a period of discernment, Peterson said "yes" to this project.[118] The next ten years were devoted to what became *The Message.*[119] While different parts of this work were published gradually, by 2002 the complete translation of the Bible was available.[120]

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[115] Ibid., 278-279.

[116] Ibid., 296.

[117] Ibid., 300-301.

[118] Ibid., 302.

[119] Ibid.

[120] See Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible In Contemporary Language.* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2002).

As he worked on *The Message*, Peterson remained as grounded as he had been while working at his church. Peterson was once interviewed at a writers' symposium where the interviewer reminded him that Bono, of U2 fame, after reading some portion of *The Message*, asked Peterson if he would accompany the band as a chaplain while they were on tour. Determined to hold to his sense of call to the work of translation, Peterson turned down the offer. When the interviewer said to Peterson, "Yes, but Bono!!???" Peterson replied, "Yes, but Isaiah!!"[121]

After he had completed translating The New Testament and The Psalms, he was also was appointed to teach spiritual theology at Regent College and did so for five and a half years.[122] An outgrowth of this teaching and his years of pastoring has been his most recent five volume work in spiritual theology, beginning with *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. The content of each of these five volumes[123] all start with the narrative of Scripture, pointing to what God is saying through the Word, and reminding the readers of how God is speaking into their ordinary lives.

These last books were written back in Montana where Peterson now lives. He and Jan live in a house that his father built with a little help from his son.[124] This "sacred

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[121] Eugene Peterson interviewed by Dean Nelson at the Writers Symposium by the Sea, Feb. 23, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaaIui7cESs (accessed Feb. 26, 2011).

[122] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 308.

[123] The names of these books are *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A conversation in spiritual theology, The Jesus Way: A conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way, Tell it Slant: A conversation on the language of Jesus in his stories and prayers, Eat This Book: A conversation in the art of spiritual reading* and *Practicing Resurrection: A conversation on growing up in Christ.* They were published starting in 2005 and ending in 2010 in Grand Rapids by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

[124] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 9-10.

space" of Montana[125] has provided Peterson "a stable location in space and time to give prayerful, meditative, discerning attention to the ways in which [his] life is being written into the comprehensive salvation story."[126] Again, in a different setting we find the same themes emerging: the intersecting narratives of Scripture and our daily lives, the use of imagination to access these stories, the role of prayer and the solid grounding of stability, a long obedience in the same direction.

Contributions to Evangelical Spiritual Direction

Nouwen and Peterson have both been very influential in bringing the ministry of spiritual direction to a contemporary, postconservative evangelical audience. In their lives and writings they have reflected a positive understanding of the importance and role of spiritual direction in the life of the Christian. They were not, of course, the only ones to do this. But they were particularly influential because their teaching and writing came wrapped in characteristics that made them widely accessible to postmodern evangelicals. Peterson's writings have been very popular among evangelicals.[127] Nouwen, too, has been widely received in the Protestant evangelical world. In a survey taken in the mid 1990's, 3,400 U.S. Protestant church leaders named Nouwen as their "second greatest influence, ahead of Billy Graham."[128]

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[125] Ibid., 12

[126] Ibid., 14.

[127] See Randal Herbert Balmer's *Encyclopedia of Evangelicals.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 448.

[128] Ford, 35.

Both Peterson's and Nouwen's theology is highly Christ-centered and Trinitarian in orientation. Both respect the authority of the biblical text. And for both, their work responds to many postmodern sensibilities including the importance of integration, imagination, narrative, community and diverse authorities.

Affirmation of Spiritual Direction

Both Peterson and Nouwen taught, modeled and encouraged the discipline of spiritual direction. Peterson spoke freely about spiritual direction being a crucial component of pastoral ministry. He describes spiritual direction as one of three acts of attention required of a pastor. Prayer is an act in which we bring ourselves to attention before God; reading Scripture is the act of attending to God in "his speech and action across two millennia in Israel and Christ" and spiritual direction is the act of "giving attention to what God is doing in the person who happens to be before me."[129] Evangelicals are in obvious agreement around the importance of prayer and Scripture. By treating spiritual direction as being on par with prayer and reading Scripture, however, Peterson significantly elevates the status of this discipline.

In *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, he speaks boldly against what he calls managerial and messianic modes of pastoring. Pastors trying to fix people's problems fall embody this messianic model. Finding people who are gifted in your congregation and

[129] Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 2.

recruiting, organizing and motivating them is part of managerial pastoring.[130] Peterson says these approaches can easily interfere with the important role of spiritual direction,

> But no excuses: being a spiritual director is far more essential and important than being messianic and managerial, even though we cannot function outside these contexts. Spiritual direction is the act of paying attention to God, calling attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstances or situation. A prerequisite is standing back, doing nothing. It opens a quite eye of adoration. It releases the energetic wonder of faith. It notices the Invisibilities in and beneath and around the Visibilities. It listens for the Silences between the spoken Sounds.[131]

He affirms the necessary role of spiritual direction in the life of the Christian. He identifies the "long, rich, and deepening precedents in all parts of the church, East and West, ancient and modern" of spiritual direction.[132] In his writings and in his life as a pastor, he was one of the first evangelical-friendly Protestants in the late twentieth century to highlight this otherwise forgotten ministry.[133]

Nouwen also brought this ministry to the attention of evangelicals. As they read his work, they were introduced to this form of spiritual guidance. In discussing how to draw closer to God, Nouwen says,

> Therefore, we need a guide, a director, a counselor who helps us to distinguish between the voice of God and all the other voices coming from our own confusion or from dark powers far beyond our control…Thus, the Bible, silence and a spiritual director are three important guides in our search for our most personal way to enter into an intimate relationship with God.[134]

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[130] Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 180.

[131] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 181.

[132] Ibid., 188.

[133] In the past twenty-five years, I have spoken with numerous pastors who have sought out Peterson for his spiritual direction and he has graciously met regularly with them in this capacity. Not only did he provide spiritual direction for his congregation, he assisted other pastors as well.

[134]Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, Image Books Doubleday, 1986, (first ed. Doubleday, 1975)), 137-138.

Nouwen's three categories - Scripture, silence, and spiritual direction - parallel closely Petersons three "angles" of Scripture, prayer and spiritual direction. Nouwen also speaks of his own experiences in spiritual direction, most notably in *The Genesee Diary*, where his time at a Trappist monastery involved regular meetings with his spiritual director, John Eudes.[135]

Nouwen himself met with many folks in the role of spiritual director.[136] One directee speaks of Nouwen's helping her to "trust God" and "trust her unique experience of God." She speaks of having more security and rest "knowing God is in control and she is not."[137] As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Nouwen taught classes at Yale Divinity School on group spiritual direction.[138] In promoting the importance of spiritual direction, in modeling it, teaching it, as well as receiving it, Nouwen positively introduced this practice to his audience, an audience that included many evangelicals. What Nouwen said and practiced looked very much like what Peterson was talking about also helped to promote a unified picture of spiritual direction, even though these two men had very different personalities and were very different in their styles of ministry.

Nouwen and Peterson consistently reflected a spirituality that taught and modeled the importance of direction. But they might not have had so much influence had their work not otherwise been particularly accessible to postmodern evangelicals. Put

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[135]Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (Garden City: Image Books, Doubleday, 1981, (first ed. 1976)).

[136] See Hernandez, chapter three, 34-47, where there are quotes from various directees of Nouwen.

[137] Hernandez, 46.

[138] Hernandez, 47.

differently, if evangelicals had had problems with the theology or spirituality of Peterson or Nouwen, it would have been harder for them to respect their emphasis on the importance of direction. Thankfully this was not the case.

Christ-Centered Theology; A Trinitarian Understanding of God and Respect for Scripture

Evangelicals have been marked by their emphasis on a Christ-centered life, a Trinitarian understanding of God and an abiding respect for the authority of Scripture as truth that can be known and lived out. Both Nouwen and Peterson appealed to these sensibilities.

Evangelicals, in particular, could appreciate Nouwen's Christ-centered spirituality. For example in his book, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, Nouwen essentially preaches a long sermon on the biblical story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. He uses this Jesus story to teach about Christian leadership.[139] In his book, *Letters to Marc About Jesus*, he writes to his nephew,

> In every phase of my search I've discovered also that Jesus Christ stands at the center of my seeking. If you were to ask me point-blank, "what does it mean to you to live spiritually?" I would have to reply, "Living with Jesus at the center."[140]

Nouwen's picture of God was always Christ-centered. When speaking of being God's beloved, he used Jesus' life as the model for his own. According to Nouwen, we are called to live out of God's love, affirming our being chosen by God. We are called to

[139] See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

[140] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Letters to Marc About Jesus* Trans. Hubert Hoskins. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 2008), 7.

lives that follow Christ and to affirm not only our "chosenness", but also our willingness to be "broken" and "given" for others.[141] Nouwen's focus on Christ also meant that much of his writing came out of the Gospels. Eight of his books have an obvious connection to the Gospels.[142]

Nouwen was Christ-centered but also very Trinitarian in his spirituality. He spoke of the "radical transformation in our lives [that] is the work of the Holy Spirit."[143] He spoke of how our lives are to reflect the love of the Holy Trinity,

> When the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and dwells with them, their lives are transformed into Christ-like lives, lives shaped by the same love that exists between the Father and the Son. The spiritual life is indeed a life in which we are shaped by the same love that exists between the Father and the son…[144]

Nouwen's description of his own relational encounters with Jesus, his focus on Christ within the context of the Gospel narratives and his orthodox Trinitarian faith, made him theologically comfortable to evangelicals.

Peterson has also proven very accessible to evangelicals, even though, like Nouwen, one would have to look long and hard to find any references to "evangelicals" in his writings. The closest thing he comes to self-identification as an evangelical Christian would be his self-reference as a "Presbycostal".[145] Not one to use labels or terms others might identify as "evangelical," he nonetheless appeals to evangelical

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[141] These themes are discussed in Nouwen's book *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

[142] Beumer, 154.

[143] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981), 53.

[144] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 54.

[145] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 215.

sensibilities with his own Christ-centered faith, Trinitarian spirituality, and, most significantly, his respect for the authority of Scripture. He maintains throughout his writings that God's self has been revealed through the written Word.[146] Starting with his very first book, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work,*[147] his books consistently point to Christ as Peterson "preaches" out of such biblical texts as Jeremiah, Psalms, Luke, Galatians, Revelation, and Jonah.[148] Throughout his teaching he reflects the practicality and authority of Scripture. He connects his Pentecostal background to his firm belief that

> …everything, absolutely everything, in the scriptures is livable. Not just true, but livable. Not just as idea or a cause, but livable in real life. Everything that is revealed in Jesus and the scriptures, the gospel, is there to be lived by ordinary Christians in ordinary times.[149]

Peterson does not downplay his belief that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the core of our salvation. He writes,

> Salvation turns out in practice…to be the attention and response we give the God-revealing Jesus. The text trains us in this attention and response. Line after line, page after page – Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. None of us provides the content for our own salvation; it is given to us. Jesus gives it to us. The text allows for no exceptions.[150]

Peterson also embraces the Trinitarian nature of the Christian faith in the context of Christian spiritual formation,

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[146] In my reading of his books, all start with some biblical text and go from there – with the possible exception of two books on pastoring (*The Contemplative Pastor*, *Working the Angles)* and his memoir – yet they too speak to the central place of Scripture in the life of a pastor.

[147] The "stones" were Old Testament writings.

[148] See footnote 99. Jonah is discussed in *Under the Unpredictable Plant.*

[149] Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 214.

[150] Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: a conversation in spiritual theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 183.

> Learning how to live as the community of Christ is largely a matter of becoming familiar with and disciplined to the means by which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work formationally among us; namely, by the Holy Spirit from God's side and prayerful obedience from ours.[151]

Like Nouwen, Peterson fits well with evangelical sensibilities in his use of Scripture, his Trinitarian faith and his focus on the central role of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Postmodern sympathies

But Peterson and Nouwen do not just link to traditional characteristics of evangelicals. They do so in ways that fit well with the postmodern conditions of the late twentieth century. This sensibility to their time, whether they were conscious of it or not, has increased their accessibility to postmodern evangelicals.

Nouwen lived many of the postmodern themes discussed in chapters three and four. His desire to integrate various academic fields and ways of knowing fits well with a postmodern mindset. As Hernandez reflects,

> True to postmodern form, the coherence of spirituality with psychology, ministry, and theology that Henri Nouwen espoused is reckoned by many as a welcome epistemological advance.[152]

Nouwen lived this integration as he sought to grow in his understanding of what it looked like for each unique individual to live faithfully in their call as a Christian.

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[151] Ibid., 299.

[152] Hernandez, 2.

Not only was he open to multiple ways of knowing, he also was more concerned about how to make this knowledge practical. The postmodern perspective is concerned with ideas that "work." This was part of Nouwen's teaching and writing early on.

For example, he would only agree to teach at Yale if he would be under no pressure to engage in academic research and publish in academic journals. He didn't care about theoretical ideas. Instead he cared about a practical spirituality that helped his students. His classes were highly interactive and used all kinds of ways to help his students experience God. His approach was fundamentally pragmatic.

Nouwen also embodied the truth that life is fragile and vulnerable. He was honest and "authentic" in his writings about his own struggles, as is especially evident in *Inner Voice of Love*. Hernandez speaks to this,

> As a restless seeker, a wounded healer, and a perennial struggler, Nouwen embodied imperfection. The same kind of imperfection is looked upon today as part of postmodern realism-the kind that unabashedly recognizes human finitude, even incorporating certain elements of ambiguity and uncertainty. Ironically in Nouwen, integration and imperfection coexist together. The so-called integrated journey is at the same time an imperfect journey.[153]

Nouwen's struggling journey also reflected the postmodern idea that the process is more important than the results. The journey matters more than the destination. There was certainly the desire on Nouwen's part to grow and more fully live out of what it meant to "be God's beloved," and he deeply desired this for others as well. But he was fully aware that this is a process, a journey, and that Christians can grow more and more into this reality only as they fumble along. They never arrive in this life but the journey is central.

[153] Hernandez, 3-4.

Nouwen also taught about the importance of Christian community in a believer's life while he ironically spent much of his own life looking for his community. He finally found it in L'Arche.[154] His years of restlessness, however, never stopped him from writing about the importance of it. Nouwen's firm belief in the importance of community "found manifold expressions in the integrated way he conducted his multifaceted ministry of soul care and spiritual formation."[155] Nouwen rejected the modernist individualistic mindset and deeply recognized the Christian need for community. Here he made common cause with many postmoderns.

Finally, Nouwen communicated God's truth through the power of story – his own story in the vulnerability of his writings and the Gospel story through his writings about Jesus. Often the two were combined. Nowhere is this combination more powerfully told than in his *Return of the Prodigal Son*, where he tells the parable through his own insights as he reflected on Rembrandt's painting of the homecoming, the Gospel story itself, and his own life.[156] Nouwen often wrote in a manner that reached the postmodern community by relying more on narrative than didactic propositional teaching.

Peterson also appeals to postmodern sensibilities, though his writing style is not nearly as personally transparent and vulnerable as Nouwen's. Instead, from his time in the Carnegie library as a child until today, he read and reads the stories and poetry of others. He has always been gifted in being able to make connections between those

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[154] This theme of coming home is discussed in the most recently published book, Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Home Tonight: Further Reflections on The Parable of the Prodigal Son*, ed. Sue Mosteller, C.S.J. (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

[155] Hernandez, 4.

[156] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

stories and the biblical story. He writes in the language of story. Here his comments on the need to make our stories fit with the story of Jesus,

> Am I working out of the Jesus story, the Jesus methods, the Jesus way? Am I sacrificing relationship, personal attention, personal relationship for a shortcut, a program so I can get stuff done? You can't do Jesus' work in a non-Jesus way and get by with it—although you can be very "successful."[157]

When speaking of faith he says,

> Among Scripture-taught people of God, 'our father Abraham'…is the dictionary in which we look up the meaning and get a feel for what is involved in the life of faith. What we get, it turns out, is not a definition but a story, a story in which traveling, journeying, walking, running, coming and going on roads and paths under the commands and promises of God, life on the way, permeates the narrative.[158]

For Peterson as for many postmoderns the Bible is not a set of propositional truths, but rather a narrative, a story. We learn about faith by listening and entering into the biblical story.

He worries that there are still many in the church who are looking for information experts; scientific or theological experts who will provide concrete, definable, easily categorized truths.[159] Instead of this more "modern" paradigm, he argues that we need to view our lives in the context of story – our story and the biblical story,

> But we don't live our lives by information; we live in relationships, family-of-faith relationships in the context of a community of men and women, each one an intricate bundle of experience and motive and desire, and in the presence of a personal God who has designs on us for justice and salvation…Telling a story, on the other hand, is the primary verbal

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[157] Eugene Peterson quoted by Wordpress.com blog, http://jeremyberg.wordpress.com/2010/12/09/eugene-peterson-leading-others-the-jesus-way/ (accessed February 26, 2011).

[158] Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 46.

[159] Ibid., 73.

> way of accounting for life in the way we live it in actual day-by-day reality. There are no (or few) abstractions in a story - story is immediate, concrete, plotted, relational, personal. And so when we lose touch with our lives, our souls - our moral, bodily, spiritual, God-personal lives - *story is the best verbal way of getting us back in touch again. That is why God's word is so prodigal in its storytelling.* [160]

Whether speaking about how to follow Jesus or defining faith using theological terms, Peterson always comes back to "story" as the means by which we "get back in touch again" with who we are as God's people.

We link to story through imagination.[161] This use of imagination lends itself to the spiritual direction process. Peterson himself connects the two in his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant.* Peterson makes connection between the use of the imagination and the pastor as a spiritual director. After addressing Jonah's "stunted imagination," Peterson says,

> Imagination is the capacity to make connections between the visible and the invisible, between heaven and earth, between present and past, between present and future. For Christians, whose largest investment is in the invisible, the imagination is indispensable, for it is only by means of the imagination that we can see reality whole, in context.[162]

After addressing both Jonah's lack of imagination and the crucial role of imagination in a Christian's life, Peterson then addresses the need of the paradigm shift from the pastor as program director to pastor as spiritual director.[163] It is precisely this

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[160] Ibid., emphasis added.

[161] In many ways, Peterson is re-introducing what St Ignatius of Loyola practiced and taught in the sixteenth century. As touched upon in chapter two, St Ignatius found himself, "in imagination, present in the scenes, conversations, and stories of the Gospels… [that] was the start, for him, of an adventure into imaginative prayer that was to become a most powerful catalyst for the growth of his personal relationship with God" See Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999), 11. Also, as discussed in chapter two, Ignatius later used imagination in his ministry of spiritual direction.

[162] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 171-172.

[163] Ibid., 174-177.

capacity for imagination that helps the pastor as spiritual director "pay attention to God in a person or circumstance or situation."[164] Peterson's picture of a pastor spiritual director has nothing to do with having the "right answer" to offer one in need. It has to do with using the imagination prayerfully in order to pay attention to what God is doing in the person in front of him or her. Using one's imagination in this way fits well with the postmodern perspective of how one can discover God's "truth."

This is not the result of Peterson consciously trying to be on top of the current sociological trends. His life reflects quite the contrary. He doesn't seem to care very much about that at all. What he does care about is the truth of the biblical narrative being known and lived. He spent years and years translating the Bible into a language he thought contemporary readers would find more accessible in *The Message*. Making the biblical story more alive and real is what he cares about. When reading *The Message*, it is clear we are reading the work of a gifted story teller.

Peterson also lives and writes as one who not only believes in Christian community but also that all community is local.

> One thing that I think is characteristic of me is I stay local. I'm rooted in a pastoral life, which is an ordinary life. So while all this glitter and image of spirituality is going around, I feel quite indifferent to it, to tell you the truth. And I'm somewhat suspicious of it because it seems to be uprooted, not grounded in local conditions, which are the only conditions in which you can live a Christian life[165]

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[164] Ibid., 181.

[165] Eugene Peterson quoted in Wordpress.com blog, (http://jeremyberg.wordpress.com/2010/12/09/eugene-peterson-leading-others-the-jesus-way/ (accessed February 26, 2011).

His "rooted" "local" life also fits well with the postmodern notion that "all theology is local."[166]

Both Nouwen and Peterson also connected with postmodern thinking by drawing on a variety of Christian traditions. Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest who appealed to evangelicals. Simply being Roman Catholic, and at the same time being loved by evangelicals, opened the door for these same evangelicals to venture outside of their traditional Protestant boundaries. He spoke about visiting monasteries.[167] He wrote about praying more contemplatively, praying in silence[168] or praying with icons.[169] As such he wrote about old ways of praying but ways that were new to the ears of many evangelicals. Simply being who he was as a Roman Catholic priest, he introduced evangelicals to Roman Catholic practices that would prove helpful in the spiritual formation process. Trusting Nouwen's orthodox faith, they listened and learned.

Peterson, too, exhibited an appreciation of Christian thought from outside of the Protestant tradition. His writings reveal the influence that many Roman Catholics had on him and his views of spiritual formation. For example, in his small book on pastoral vocation, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, he makes reference to the Benedictine Rule[170]and the Liturgy of the Hours,[171] as well as quoting Roman Catholics von Hugel[172]

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[166] It is not surprising that Peterson is a Wendell Berry fan and recommends his writings. See *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 341.

[167] See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (Garden City: Image Books, 1981, with special arrangements from Doubleday, 1976).

[168] See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981).

[169] See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1987).

[170] Peterson, *Under the Predictable Plant*, 18.

and Teilhard de Chardin.[173] In his book, *Tell It Slant*, not only does he incorporate ideas from these Roman Catholics but he also adds in ideas and quotes from de Sales, de Chantal, St Teresa of Avila, de Caussade, John of the Cross.[174] He seamlessly interweaves thoughts from these saints with thoughts from Anglicans, Presbyterians, Orthodox, or anyone else who he thinks will support the point he is making. By doing so, he subtly invites his readers to consider how the ideas of these more "foreign" Christians have much to offer evangelicals. Indeed, he was even one of the first to introduce Henri Nouwen to evangelical audiences, quoting from one of Nouwen's first books, *Reaching Out*, in his own first book, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work.*[175]

Nouwen and Peterson were born in the same year. Both grew up in strong Christian homes. Both lived their lives as leaders and teachers of spiritual formation within the Christian church and both were clear about the importance of spiritual direction within the spiritual formation process. Both spoke to sensibilities of postmodernism that resonate with postconservative evangelicalism. And yet they are very different men. Nouwen spoke with intensity using hands, arms, and facial expressions that never quit. His restlessness was always apparent. He "relaxed" by earnestly playing the piano.[176] Peterson speaks with a quiet raspy voice, communicating being very

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[171] Ibid., 95.

[172] Ibid., 108.

[173] Ibid., 137.

[174] Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell it Slant: a conversation on the language of Jesus in his stories and prayers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 273,273,209,252-253, 98 respectively.

[175] Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 177.

[176]Nouwen sometimes played a piano in a common room at YDS while he and I were part of the school.

comfortable in his own skin. He loves his Montana home and he enjoys playing the banjo.[177] That the ministry of spiritual direction would be largely introduced to evangelicals by such different men speaks to the breadth and variety of who God may call to this ministry. What would help equip these unique individuals in the ministry of spiritual direction is the subject of the following chapter.

[177] This is based on my own impressions of talking with him and observing him with others. His banjo playing is spoken of in Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, 264.

CHAPTER SIX

EQUIPPING SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

As many more postmodern/postconservative evangelicals are interested in spiritual direction, it is important that there be spiritual directors well equipped to help them along the way. My hope for this chapter is to use the information from the previous chapters to provide focus and direction for this equipping process. In this last chapter I want to answer three questions: First, what should a training program for spiritual directors hope to accomplish, i.e. what are the appropriate outcomes and learning objectives? Second, what are the attributes of a training program for potential evangelical spiritual directors that are likely to make it effective? Third, in light of the answers to the first two questions, what might an appropriate curriculum for such a training program look like?

Outcomes and Learning Objectives

Recognition of Giftedness

It is clear from the history of spiritual direction that there has never been "an office or order of spiritual director within the church."[1] Although many directors have held ordained offices in their respective church traditions, their appointments, offices and titles did not come as a result of their giftedness as spiritual directors. Some of the best

[1] William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 121.

known spiritual directors, e.g. Catherine of Siena and Ignatius of Loyola, either never held an official church office, or, if they did have such an office, did much of their spiritual direction before being appointed to such an office.[2] Until only very recently, spiritual directors were not qualified as a result of training programs. Rather spiritual directors have been people "discovered" by their Christian community.[3] Their giftedness as spiritual directors has been recognized by others; they have not unilaterally put out shingles and announced their availability.

This historical pattern remains important for a direction training program. There needs to be a recognition within the body of Christ of a prospective director's giftedness. A program for equipping spiritual directors needs to begin with a process of discernment that will help clarify whether the person interested in this ministry has been called out or "discovered" for this work.

Theological Grounding

As explained in chapter two, there can be some confusion as to the nature of the unique work of spiritual direction. Some of this confusion often arises, at least in part, from a lack of an articulated theology on the nature of God or from an inadequate understanding of how God works in a Christian's life. A knowledge of the basic orthodox Christian teachings on who God is and how God's presence is known in this world, along with an understanding of the perspectives of different Christian traditions'

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

on these topics, are needed to undergird the work of a spiritual director. While holding this theology in the "background," the spiritual director will be better able to help assist the directee in recognizing and affirming God's movement in his or her life. Or, as Anglican Martin Thornton puts it, this background provides, "tools for competent guidance."[4]

Theological clarity is essential to provide some basic boundaries that circumscribe the spiritual director's work. Without these parameters, there is the danger that spiritual direction will drift into a self-absorbed, "whatever-the- directee-is -feeling-must -be-from-God" exercise. Martin Thornton even goes so far as to say there is now a "disastrous notion that you can become a competent director by lapping up the devotional literature without bothering with theology."[5] In my experience, some Christian directors have either become detached from basic Christian theological grounding or seem to see no connection between Christian truths and their work in listening to God together with their directee. Consequently, they frequently end up erroneously encouraging directees to interpret almost any thought or feeling as being from God. To have an "intelligent grasp" of theology, says Barry and Connolly, will help the spiritual director assist his or her directees in letting "the *real* God relate to them." [6] In other words, theological clarity on a spiritual director's part helps keep the conversation focused on "paying attention to God."

[4] Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge: Cowley Publishing Company, 1984), 72.

[5] Ibid., 50.

[6] Barry and Connolly, 132.

Effective, Competent Spiritual Directors

Although it probably goes without saying, any training and equipping program for spiritual directors must seek to assist the student to be competent in the work of this ministry. The desire to inculcate competence should be a central feature of any training program.

I would be the first to say that one grows as a spiritual director through experience. I have certainly witnessed the growing effectiveness of my own work as a director over the years. Of course, the same is true in many other professions. Doctors, pastors and accountants all typically improve with maturity. But there also needs to be a certain minimal level of effectiveness before one sets out. One of the objectives of a training program should be to provide the foundation necessary to equip the novice spiritual director with the ability to be aware of God in a spiritual direction session, and the means of accessing certain helpful "tools" he or she can use when meeting with others.

Keeping Spiritual Direction Within the Church Setting

Some recent models of spiritual direction seem to suggest that spiritual direction is more like the private practice of a psychotherapist. [7] In this model, spiritual direction

[7] One spiritual director I met with (as the directee) actually had an office in a building that housed offices primarily for psychotherapists. This clinical setting communicated that the spiritual director was a professional in a secular setting, rather than someone connected to a church ministry. Even if true spiritual direction happens in the session, the atmosphere communicated an understanding that spiritual direction is a profession that can be practiced outside of the church rather than a gift to be used as part of the church. It also indirectly communicated to me, as the directee, that being connected to a church is not necessary for spiritual formation.

consists simply of the relationship between the director and the directee. The church is not involved. Keeping in mind both the danger of "communities of convenience" addressed in chapter three and the historical precedence of spiritual direction always happening within the church context discussed in chapter two, an effective training program needs to ensure that students of spiritual direction are connected to a Christian community and have the blessing of that community to practice spiritual direction. This does not mean the spiritual director needs to be an official staff member of a church. It simply means that the practice of spiritual direction needs to be connected to the life of a local congregation. For the benefit of both the director and potential directees, this connection provides support and accountability outside their one-on-one session.

However, it should never be a "requirement" that the directees be part of a local Christian community. Almost invariably such connections would be beneficial for directees in their search for God's activity in their daily lives. If the director can model such a communal connection, this will often encourage directees to move in this direction as well. In any event, setting spiritual direction in the context of the church will help directees avoid approaching their times with the director as simply a spiritualized psychotherapy session. Therefore, one key objective of the training program must be to articulate a model of spiritual direction that will be connected with the church and will assist the students in developing their ministry in connection with a local church. As I noted earlier in the second chapter, throughout the history of spiritual direction, one can find no precedent for a ministry that occurs only between the directee and director. In each case the ministry was grounded in a local church body.

Nurture Necessary Postures

Hear the words of Henri Nouwen on characteristics of a Christian leader: "I leave you with the image of the leader with *outstretched hands*, who chooses a *life of downward mobility*. It is the image of the *praying* leader, the *vulnerable* leader, and the *trusting* leader…"[8]

These five qualities - humility, hospitality, prayer, vulnerability and trust – all play a critical role in the ministry of spiritual direction. These are qualities that should be emphasized and cultivated in any training program.

I've found that there is sometimes a temptation among spiritual directors to need to prove their expertise. But spiritual direction is a ministry that can only be effective when directors put aside any need to prove anything. Effective direction requires an open presence to the directee and to God without a personal agenda. Spiritual directors are not to distract from this listening process by drawing attention to themselves. Humility is essential.

As I also mentioned in chapter two, spiritual direction is all about hospitality. Spiritual direction is a ministry of the "outstretched hands" of Jesus. There can be a tendency in current models of spiritual direction to so "professionalize" the process, that the spiritual director becomes distant and clinical rather than warm and inviting. To be effective, the director needs to offer a presence that makes the directee feel welcomed and safe.

[8] Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1989), 73, emphasis added.

Ultimately, spiritual direction is all about paying attention to God and this means a posture of prayer is critical. Anyone who is interested in this ministry must be a person who prays. Potential directors must know and experience prayer as much more than bringing a laundry list of requests to God or reciting certain liturgical words. A prayerful or contemplative posture towards life – one that is aware that God is always present, always involved, and that our part is to "cooperate with what God already wants to do and has already begun to do"[9] - is critically important for a spiritual director.

Rather than seeking to be in control, spiritual directors are continually called upon to trust God. Specifically, they are called to trust that it is God who is doing the directing. They are to be open, attentive, and to notice what they can. But ultimately it is all about trusting God.

When meeting with others, a spiritual director must be authentic and honest. Directors can only be who they are. This is not a time to pretend to be someone else or to pretend to knows what one doesn't know. For example, although I believe the attention of the time is to be directed towards listening to the person and listening to what God may be doing, there are times when I sense that it might be helpful to share my own struggles. There is always a grave danger that my directees will think that I am more spiritual than I really am. Transference can play an unhealthy role in spiritual direction. To be vulnerable and open and to let directees see who I really am is sometimes important if I am going to help them find the freedom to be themselves. It can also be important as a way of reminding them that this time is about what God is doing, not about a visit with a miracle worker. Students of spiritual direction often need to be reminded that spiritual directors

[9] Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2009), 23. The quote is from a section called "Prayer-practicing Heaven now."

are not called to be spiritual superstars. Rather they are called to be nothing more and nothing less than individuals who are seeking to be open to what God has for the people with whom they are meeting.

There is of course a corresponding danger. Sometimes emphasizing vulnerability as a key posture can lead inexperienced spiritual directors to erroneously end up thinking that spiritual direction is a time to share all about their own experiences and areas of brokenness. Personal sharing must be done sparingly. This is where the need for the other postures comes into play. When a spiritual director prayerfully reflects, asking God if what he or she is about to say is hospitable, humble and coming from a place of trust, the appropriateness of whether to personally share or not is often clarified. Any program for equipping spiritual directors should cultivate and nurture these postures in its students.

Attributes of a Training Program

In light of the characteristics that I have outlined in previous chapters, I believe that the pedagogical approach best suited for a spiritual direction equipping program would have the following key characteristics: It would allow students to learn in the context of a community. It would attend to their openness to, and interest in, a range of alternative traditions and practices. It would need to be heavily oriented towards experiential – not just intellectual – learning, and it would need to be taught by teachers whose lives are congruent with what they teach.

A Communal, Cohort Program

Chapter four highlighted the postmodern evangelical inclination towards community and the awareness that this community must be rooted in local experience, not in theological abstractions. The training program should be designed with this in mind. It should be offered as a cohort program and cultivate a sense of community among the participants. It should limit itself to participants who live within close proximity of one another and should require regular group meetings. In this sense, the program I am designing will differ from other spiritual direction programs that are set up to accommodate folks from other locales, allowing them to fly in for retreats and classes and then head back to church communities located at great distances from each other.[10] Given the priority of local community for postmodern evangelicals, this training program would keep participants local - regardless of the limitations that may accompany this requirement.

Drawing on Various Traditions

Also, given the new openness to various traditions described in chapter four, this program would provide background in various Christian traditions and their perspectives on spiritual direction. It would expose the students to different historical and theological perspectives, highlighting what each of these traditions offers, rather than limiting the teaching to post-Reformation evangelical thought.

[10] For example, this was the model of a program set up in the Seattle area in the early part of the twenty-first century that I taught in as an adjunct instructor.

Experiential Learning

Given the postmodern trends toward experiential learning highlighted in both chapters three and four, this program would be full of opportunities for hands-on learning and practice. While there will be lectures on a number of aspects of the ministry, over time, the up-front instruction will give way to practice sessions. Experiences in various kinds of discernment exercises, listening exercises, group direction sessions, and reviews of verbatim transcripts will be emphasized.

Authentic Teachers

Finally, the instructors must model the Nouwen postures mentioned above. In order to be effective with postmodern students, authenticity and integrity will be essential. Teachers need to not only "know their stuff";[11] they must also be credible exemplars of the ministry to which they are calling their students. This means that the teaching itself must be infused with a spirit of humility.

The teaching must also model hospitality. Instructors need to make sure that they are inviting and that the physical "classroom" is warm and safe. A sterile academic with tables and chairs all facing the teacher simply won't work in this setting. The training needs to take place in a physical space that communicates openness to both God and to the people present. This is where a retreat center is beneficial, but the same atmosphere of

[11] The teachers would be spiritual directors who have both theological and psychological knowledge, along with many years of experience in this ministry. This lends itself to people with seminary degrees, but a seminary degree would not be required to teach.

hospitality can be achieved in a home or in a room in a church facility that is intentionally set up for this purpose. It may be as simple as adding a floor lamp to use instead of the florescent lights overhead, or making sure that there is coffee and tea available. Hospitality needs to be modeled personally and spatially.

In a teaching setting there is a danger that the teacher will come to believe that whatever happens is all his or her responsibility and is under his or her control. Rather than having an attitude of control, however, the teacher must model trust. There is nothing worse than observing facilitators in a spiritual direction program seeking power and control. Given that we are all human and the call to trust God is ongoing, I am not saying that any lack of trust will destroy the program. What I am saying is that students will need to be continually reminded of their need to trust rather than to control, and that these reminders need to come through both word and action. When a teacher forgets this and it impacts the teaching session, the instructor needs to admit error and point out how the controlling behavior has adversely affected the class. Such honesty will also model vulnerability and help remind the students that this ministry isn't about perfection and "getting it exactly right" but about being before God and others in a posture of openness. Openness often requires a willingness to admit mistakes and weaknesses.

In short, the teachers need to model what they are teaching.

Outline for Spiritual Direction Equipping Program

The equipping and training program that I am proposing would run for two "school years" of training from September to May. It would be preceded by a nine month

facilitated discernment process. Completion of the first year of discernment would be a necessary qualification for enrollment in the subsequent two year program.[12] The two year program (i.e. the second and third years) would consist of monthly one day gatherings/teaching times, additional spiritual direction supervision and assigned readings, and reflection papers.

This "once a month model" differs from other spiritual direction programs I am familiar with. As stated earlier in this chapter, this program is designed for local participants. The design assumes that the students would be able to meet with other participants not only during the time of the program but also after the program is over. Hopefully the cohort would remain available to one another for peer support and supervision beyond the classroom years. The local emphasis would also help make sure that the participants were connected and supported by a local church community.
On a more mundane note, the once-a-month model also means there is less expense for the participants. As there are no multiple day retreats, there is no need to pay for lodging and food other than for snacks and lunch. The daily meetings can be held either in a church or in a home. The local focus also means that there is less travel expense involved. As I have talked with potential students interested in this ministry, they frequently mention how the cost of most programs prohibits them from participating. Spiritual directors do not easily recoup the cost of their training programs through their work as

[12] The initial idea for a discernment year came from the web site of the spiritual direction program held at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, CA, previously posted on their web site, http://www.mercy-center.org/ProgramsSD/SpiritualDirection.html (accessed January 2011). As of this writing, the program is currently undergoing change and the year of discernment is no longer mentioned. How I talk about what to do with this year, however, is based on my own ideas and ideas generated in a conversation with Rev. Terry Tripp held March 28, 2011.

spiritual directors.[13] Having a more narrow geographical focus may limit the number of possible participants, but less overhead costs for the program should help offset that financial concern.

The once-a-month format applies to both the second and third years of the program but the focus of these daily meetings will shift, moving from year two to year three. Although the monthly meetings in both years will include teaching times (utilizing traditional academic approaches of lectures and small group work) and practicums, year two will tend to emphasize the traditional academic content and year three will increasingly rely on the practicums. Thus the program will gradually move from more "head knowledge" to more experiential learning.

First Year of Discernment

The goal of this year would be to allow all participants to develop a clear sense of what a spiritual direction ministry would involve and to see evidence in their own lives as to whether they are being called by God to such a ministry. The program would provide a structure to help make this happen. Logistically this would involve a meeting in September of the first year for all possible participants. In this meeting, the program would be outlined and "prerequisites" for the program would be explained.

[13] Although I have no official statistics to document, my observation over the last couple of decades is that some of the people interested in such a program are already in pastoral ministry and therefore can sometimes be subsidized through their churches. However, if there is no subsidy or scholarships available, the programs tend to have more affluent participants; fueling a stereotype I've heard on a number of occasions that non-clergy spiritual directors are often wealthy white women. Cutting down on cost is one way to allow a broader socioeconomic range of folks to participate. Also, using a once a month model rather than a multi-day retreat model could also make it easier for participants to take time off work, especially if these once/month days are on Saturdays.

The prerequisites would include the prospective student's own participation in spiritual direction for at least a year as a directee. It has astounded me how many folks I have talked with who seek to be trained to serve as spiritual directors but who have never experienced being in spiritual direction themselves. One would not be allowed to participate in years two and three without the prior experience of being a directee.

Reading and reflecting on a couple of different books on spiritual direction would also be required. Easy, introductory books on the topic such as *Holy Invitations* by Jeannette A. Bakke and *Spiritual Director Spiritual Companion* by Tilden Edwards should give the discerner a good idea of what spiritual direction looks like. Bakke's book would be especially helpful in putting spiritual direction within an evangelical context. Edward's book would be helpful in introducing the model of spiritual direction taught through the Shalem Institute, an important resource for anybody interested in spiritual direction from a contemporary perspective. The discerners would then be asked to write a short paper on their understanding of spiritual direction and why they think they are being called into this ministry.

Along with the reflection paper, the discerners would also be asked to write short reflection papers on their own faith journey, sharing their perspectives of the Christian faith and of how their lives have been impacted by Christ and the Christian community. This would help confirm that each discerner has a basic theological grounding and the necessary spiritual maturity to pursue this ministry.

To be sure of some level of maturity and wisdom, the program would also have a minimum age requirement. Only prospective students who are at least in their mid thirties

would be admitted.[14] Again, this is based on my own experiences in teaching in several different programs. My observation is that students who are in their early thirties or younger often find it more difficult to adopt the "postures" mentioned earlier. Humility, hospitality and vulnerability tend to be postures that grow and deepen with age and with an on-going and deepening walk with God.

During the course of this year, discerners would meet with teacher/facilitators in the program for a conversation about their personal sense of being called into this ministry. This would also be a time to discuss the discerners' involvement in their local church community contexts and to discuss how their ministry might fit into the local church community. A reference from someone who is also part of a discerner's church community would also be required. It is important to make sure that the community confirms the call so that it is not just the individual's own self assessment.

Again, it has been my experience that often folks seeking some place to belong in ministry are drawn to this ministry. This is often true even though others around them do not see them as gifted in this area. Although God can certainly work through anything and anyone, having participants in a spiritual direction program that don't really "get" what spiritual direction is all about is often a drawback to others in the program. This year of discernment would hopefully help these individuals see more clearly what it is that is drawing them to this ministry and, if it is not a good fit, to help them redirect their energies.[15]

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[14] In order to avoid legalism, there could be exceptions made to this requirement where a younger prospective student already evidences these critical postures.

[15] There may be some cases where this year of discernment is not necessary, but this would be the exception, not the rule. To bypass this year of discernment, there would need to be obvious manifestations of a spiritual direction ministry already happening (e.g. meeting with directees).

To help in this process of discernment, prospective students would also be asked to do some reflecting on their personality temperaments. They would be required to complete a simple Myers Briggs and Enneagram assessment and the results of these exercises would then be discussed in the one-on-one meetings with the facilitators. These meetings would happen after the initial group orientation meeting and ideally before the middle of the first year. This discussion would not be about labeling a particular temperament as a "good" or "bad" fit for spiritual direction. Rather, it would be an initial discussion about some of the issues, both the strengths and weaknesses that might arise in their work as spiritual directors given their particular temperaments. Again, the overarching goal of this work would be to help the discerners process their own sense of call to this ministry.[16]

At the end of the nine-month discernment process, the facilitators of the program would read the two reflection papers and the reference(s) from the church community and have another conversation with the discerner. This would lead to a "final" decision as to whether the discerner would continue on with years two and three. The variety of possible conclusions could include a simple "yes" - this seems like a good fit -, a "not now" - this does not seem like a fit at this time, but perhaps with more experience it could end up being a fit, or a "no" - this doesn't seem like a good fit but there are other options for ministry that would seem to better fit his or her particular personality, giftedness and sense of call.

Because each of these "discerners" would need to be involved in a church community, the facilitators of the program would not be the only ones helping with the

[16] More teaching on this topic of personality types and spiritual direction would be covered in the following years.

discernment process. The discerners would be strongly encouraged to go back to their church communities and to their spiritual directors to continue to explore their giftedness and sense of calling.

The Second and Third Years

The second and third years will consist of four key components: (1) Content-oriented teaching, (2) practicums, (3) prayer and worship, and (4) homework.

Content

Theology

Creation. As I have mentioned earlier, there is some basic Christian theology that spiritual directors need to be effective. As Anglican priest and spiritual director, Martin Thornton, explains, for example, why understanding the Christian doctrine of Creation is necessary to the practice of spiritual direction.

> The doctrine is important in practice for without it there will be over-stress on immanence, and consequently an inadequate conception of the transcendence of God. The approach to the incarnation will also suffer from distortion and reduction, and all incarnational prayer will suffer with it. [17]

A full-orbed theology of creation, will point to God's making both the seen and unseen realities in this world. It will focus on the creation not only of dirt and plants and

[17] Thornton, 67.

animals but also of principalities and powers. The potential spiritual director needs to be grounded in a deep understanding of *all* of God's creation. A rich understanding of the "invisible created order" will condition the director to look for God in the mystery, in the silence and in the spaces in between the words. On the other hand, the doctrine of creation is also necessary to keep spiritual direction firmly grounded in the ordinary. It should help the director avoid the temptation to "over-spiritualize" in a way that removes the directee from day-to-day life. Teaching a doctrine of Creation that recognizes the tension of the transcendent and the immanent is necessary to appropriately ground the spiritual director.

Trinity. Understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is also central to the ministry of spiritual direction. According to Thornton, this doctrine is "*key* to the whole (spiritual direction) process"[18] (emphasis mine). He goes on to say this about the Trinity,

> Far from being a metaphysical conundrum of interest only to the academician and of no practical consequence, it is the most down-to-earth spiritual formula that the Church has ever come up with. Neither progress nor spiritual health is possible without it, and it is the director's map and compass: the carpenter's saw, the surgeon's scalpel, the weaver's loom.[19]

As I mentioned in the earlier chapter on theological trends, fleshing out the doctrine of the Trinity has been a significant piece of the theological conversations in postconservative/ postmodern evangelical dialogue. It has been central to the teachings of both Henri Nouwen and Eugene Peterson. In this program, teaching and reflection on the

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

Trinity and how it relates to spiritual direction will occur early on in year two (i.e. the first year after the year of discernment), given its central importance to this ministry.

A good understanding of the Trinity will facilitate healthy spiritual direction for several reasons. For one, the Trinity reminds us that having been created in the image of God, we have been created for relationship. All of spiritual direction must be focused on the relationship between the directee and God. Moreover, this relational emphasis further supports the conviction that spiritual direction is a ministry set in relationship to the body of Christ and not a stand-alone professional activity.

The Trinity also hints at the overflow of love pouring out of the Godhead. It is as if the love between the persons of the Trinity cannot be contained in these relations and necessarily flows out to others. The same is to be true for directees who in spiritual direction encounter the love of God. It is never intended that this be reserved solely for their own enjoyment but rather is also intended to spread out to others.

Finally, a focus on the roles of the different persons in the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is useful. The Father is often associated with a transcendent understanding of God. Christ is often associated with the immanence of God and the Holy Spirit is linked to the indwelling of God. "A large amount of spiritual direction is concerned with the creation and sustenance of this balanced perspective."[20]

A possible reading requirement for the doctrinal discussions on Creation and the Trinity could be Peterson's *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, given it covers both doctrines in the context of Christian spirituality. Parts of Justo L. Gonzales's book, *A*

[20] Ibid., 68

Concise History of Christian Doctrine [21] could also be helpful homework to supplement this teaching.

The role of Scripture in spiritual direction

Scripture and spiritual direction is not a topic that has been widely discussed, especially in the recent literature. To the extent it is discussed, it is usually in the context of how to use Scripture as a tool during a spiritual direction session. This teaching time would talk about using Scripture as such a tool. But it would also explore Scripture to see how it supports the practice of spiritual direction and how it enhances an understanding of the ministry as a whole. It would involve looking at both the big-picture narratives as well as specific texts.[22]

History of Christian spirituality and direction

Given the increased openness to other Christian traditions, the program will draw on a historical perspective of Christian spirituality as it has arisen from a variety of different traditions. This will bring insight into the rich heritage of spiritual formation, and specifically help put spiritual guidance in a broader context of spiritual formation. An overview of the history of Christian spirituality would be taught first. Then content

[21] Justo L. Gonzalez, *A Concise History of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2005).

[22] See Ekman P. C. Tam's, "The Road to Emmaus: A Biblical Rationale for Spiritual Direction," *Presence* 12, no.2 (June 2006): 57-64, for a rare written discussion on how Scripture provides understanding about spiritual direction. See M. Robert Mulholland's *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1985), for a discussion on Scripture and spiritual formation.

similar to the material set forth in chapter two would be developed. The facilitators would lead discussions as to how this information influences the participants' pictures of how God is at work and how this content might influence the contemporary ministry of spiritual direction. Participants would be asked to reflect on the intersection of history and the current practice of direction in a short paper. Books such as Bradley Holt's *Thirsty for God* and Gerald Sittser's *Water from a Deep Well* could be required readings to supplement this teaching.

Self-knowledge and awareness

As spiritual director David Benner states, "Christian spirituality involves a transformation of the self that occurs only when God and self are both deeply known. Both, therefore, have an important place in Christian Spirituality."[23] Whereas the teaching on doctrine emphasizes the knowledge of God, the teaching on self-awareness in Christ places the focus more specifically on the participant. Of course, the two are intimately connected. As Benner also states in writing about the spiritual director, "A shallow knowledge of yourself limits you to a shallow knowledge of God. Similarly, a shallow knowledge of God limits you to a shallow knowledge of self."[24] This section would build on some of the work of the first year of discernment with additional instruction to help participants grow in their self-awareness before God.

[23] David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 20.

[24] David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction (*Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 157.

Specifically, this would mean deeper teaching on the Enneagram and Myers-Briggs temperament paradigms. In contrast to the year of discernment, here the teaching would be designed not only to help the participants grow in their own sense of self-awareness, but also to help them see how these temperaments could impact their interactions with potential directees. Books such as Empereur's *The Enneagram and Spiritual Direction: Nine Paths to Spiritual Guidance* and Michael and Norrisey's *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* could be part of the curriculum.[25]

Teaching on the true and false selves,[26] would not only bring more individual self- awareness, but it would also provide a helpful background for the ministry of spiritual direction. The connection between self-awareness and contemplative prayer would need to be highlighted in this section to make sure that the connection between growing in self-awareness remains intimately linked to one's relationship with God and does not slip into a purely psychoanalytical process. Reading books like Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* and Benner's *The Gift of Being Yourself* could be helpful readings for this section.

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[25] See James Empereur, *The Enneagram and Spiritual Direction: Nine Paths to Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Continuum, 1998) and Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament*: *Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville: The Open Door, 1991).

[26] This language of true or false self is language that is often used in a Christian context of self awareness that is intimately connected with one's identity in Christ. My first encounter with this language was in Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing company, 1961). The true self refers to the self God intends us to be and the false self is the opposite of that. See also Benner's *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 75-108 or Richard Rohr's, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, 154-159, for brief discussions on the concept.

Models of discernment

Time will be spent exploring various models of discernment within the Christian tradition. Although some of this would be briefly touched upon in the history section, this content would build on the history to delve deeper into different approaches to discernment. Catholic models from the Ignatian and Salsian tradition would be covered along with various Protestant models. For example, Jonathan Edward's perspectives on "religious affections" and "reliable signs of true spirituality"[27] would be highlighted as an example of a Reformed model of discernment. Communal models of discernment from the Quaker and Wesleyan tradition would also be covered. The goal of this section would be to show the breadth of ways that the church has sought to seek and understand God's will and to assist the potential director in recognizing different models to use depending on the temperaments, backgrounds and inclinations of his or her directees. Readings such as Silf's *Inner Compass, The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit*, and Farnham et al's *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* would provide a variety of perspectives on discernment and support the classroom teaching on these subjects.[28] These different models would not only be taught, but there would be opportunities for application, either through prayer exercises or reflection assignments, so that the participant could experience these models of discernment and not just learn about them.

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[27] See Gerald R. McDermott's *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1995) for a discussion on Edwards and discernment.

[28] Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999), Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) and Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991).

Listening skills

The three-fold listening of spiritual direction discussed in chapter two is not easy. Learning how to listen to the directee, listen to God, and be aware of what is happening inside of you as a director is a long process. Yet some basic listening skills can be taught. In addition, the kinds of questions that are helpful and the kinds of questions that are not helpful can be learned. The goal here is to help the participant grow in paying attention to the movements of God during a spiritual direction session. A helpful resource for the participant along these lines would be Fryling's *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*.[29]

Psychology and human development

As I have emphasized repeatedly throughout this dissertation, it is important to keep a clear boundary between counseling and spiritual direction. Without such a clear demarcation, there is a serious risk that the goals of the session will get mixed up. This is not, however, to denigrate the way in which a background in counseling and human development can be very helpful for spiritual directors. While many elements of such a background are already embedded in other sections (such as listening skills and self-awareness), the training program should include a unit that focuses on other basic counseling skills and human development theories. The goal, of course, would not be to provide all the training that a future counselor would require but rather to focus on those

[29] See Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 35-64.

particular aspects of these disciplines that are most likely to cross-over to spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction basics, tools and logistics

Here the emphasis is on the practical logistics of spiritual direction. This unit would cover certain basic issues, the "who", "what", "when", "where" and "how" of spiritual direction. The facilitator would discuss what kinds of environments are helpful for spiritual direction. What facilitates prayer? What does prayer look like in spiritual direction? What facilitates hospitality and safety in spiritual direction? How does one prepare for spiritual direction as a director? What spiritual disciplines would be helpful tools in a spiritual direction session? This would also be a time to discuss various possible approaches to the issue of compensation for spiritual direction and a consideration of the kinds and levels of insurance that may be appropriate for spiritual directors. For reading material there are obviously many books on spiritual direction from which to choose. The participants will have already read two in their discernment year. In addition they will be asked to read Guenther's *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Thornton's *Spiritual Direction*, and Barry and Connolly's *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*.[30] In addition, the students would be asked to review Eugene Peterson's section on spiritual direction in *Under the Unpredictable Plant.*[31]

[30] Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* and Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction.*

[31] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 172-197.

Special issues and "red flags" in spiritual direction

There are special ethical issues that arise in spiritual direction. In addition, directors often encounter the same types of challenges as are found in psychotherapeutic relationships. This unit would include teachings on transference, counter-transference, sexual attraction, and other similar concerns. It would also include a discussion of what to be aware of and what signs to look for that should signal to the director that a directee is not a good fit or requires counseling. These would be issues covered in the last year of the program and students would be directed to more advanced readings on spiritual direction such as Ruffing's *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* and Gratton's book *The Art of Spiritual Guidance.*[32]

Guest spiritual directors

The program would also utilize a number of spiritual directors who may not be teachers in the program but who would be willing to come on a one-time basis to share their experiences as spiritual directors and to take questions from the participants. These guest instructors would provide the students with exposure to various people involved in the ministry. It will help the students see the wide variety of styles that God can use in this ministry but at the same time, identify certain qualities that most spiritual directors seem to have in common.

[32] Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000) and Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance: A Contemporary Approach to Growing in the Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

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These teaching units would be woven through the two year program (after the year of discernment). They would not necessarily be taught sequentially but in some cases a unit would be introduced in the first year and then revisited from a deeper or different perspective in year two. Throughout, the content would be complimented by times of practical training.

Practicums

Practicums will be used to provide hands-on training in spiritual direction. They will include group exercises as well as one-on-one training and supervision. In all cases, the goal of the practicums is to help the participants grow in the understanding of their own voice in direction and to gain comfort in the use of their gifts.

Group spiritual direction

Following the year of discernment, students continuing in the program will be placed in spiritual direction groups with approximately 3-4 others in the program. While there will be some teaching on the mechanics of group spiritual direction, these direction groups are intended to get the participants involved with each other and to help them learn from each other almost from the outset of the program. Group spiritual direction would be part of each of the monthly meetings and the structure of these groups would be

based on the model discussed in Dougherty's *Group Spiritual Direction*.[33] Group spiritual direction could also be used to supplement particular "content" times. For example, group spiritual direction might be used in connection with teaching on listening skills and "good questions." Feedback from other group members could be a natural part of the process.

Role play in spiritual direction

The faculty would role play meetings between directors and directees. They would model individual and group spiritual direction sessions. These role plays would take a variety of forms. In some cases they would be used to exaggerate all the things one should NOT do and say as a director in order to bring these issues to light in a humorous way. Other modeling could be more serious and focus on specific issues in spiritual direction. As time goes on, the students would also be given opportunities to participate in these role playing exercises. After observing one of their classmates in the role of spiritual director, the rest of the group could discuss what "worked" and what "didn't work" during the session.

[33] See Rose Mary Dougherty's *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995). Dougherty's approach is also very similar to the model of group spiritual direction that Alice Fryling identifies in her book, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2009).

Practice of listening and question asking skills

Although good listening and question asking is very much a gift, it is also an art that can be developed and deepened. Teaching about these skills would be supplemented by hands on workshop training. Here the participants would have the opportunity to practice and observe helpful listening and questioning practices in the art of spiritual direction.

Ongoing supervision

Once the year of discernment is over, each participant will be connected with an experienced spiritual director who will meet with him or her four times during each of the following two years. The focus of this time would be on the participant's experience as a spiritual director. It would include both times of spiritual direction for the participant as well as times set aside for the participant to ask questions and discuss other issues. This discussion time could also be used by the supervisor to recommend reading or prayer exercises where appropriate. It will be important to clearly delineate the two parts of the time to help the participant recognize the difference between spiritual direction and mentoring.[34]

[34] This idea of supervision being both spiritual direction and mentoring comes from instructions I received when I supervised in the Spiritual Guidance program for CFDM in the Northwest from 2007-2009.

Verbatims

The program would require each participant to serve as a director for at least one or two directees while the program is on-going. If the process of discernment is effective, this should already be occurring. The students would then be asked to write out part of one of their spiritual direction sessions, remembering as best they could what happened. The sessions would not be taped. Not only would they write out the conversation but they would also be asked to describe what they experienced at different times during the session: where they sensed a movement of God; where they felt uncomfortable; what they sensed was authentic; and where the conversation seemed to drag or wander. These homework verbatims would then be used as part of a learning process.

Initially, the verbatims would be used in one-on-one supervision sessions. Each participant would provide his or her verbatim to an assigned faculty member or facilitator in advance of their meeting. This will give the supervisor a time to process the verbatim before the meeting. Then the two would meet to discuss what happened. The supervisor would help facilitate the participant's awareness of what worked well, what might have been more effective, and what was transpiring in the participant during the session.

Once there had been some experience with one-on-one verbatim supervision, verbatims would also be shared in a peer supervision group. In most cases, this group would be the same group that the participant meets with for group spiritual direction. One participant would share his or her verbatim with the whole group and the whole group would process it using the group spiritual direction discernment model. This time the "presenting issue" would be the verbatim itself. The hope is that the participants

would grow sufficiently comfortable with this approach so that when the program is over, they would choose to continue to meet as a peer spiritual direction supervision group.

Prayer and Corporate Worship

A third component of the training program would be the inclusion of regular times of prayer and worship. There is nothing more important than for the participants to realize that this ministry is all about paying attention to God. To help cultivate the contemplative, prayerful posture so crucial to a spiritual director, regular times of drawing towards God and responding to God in worship will be included during the meeting days.

Ever present should be the reminder of the love and grace of the God that is worshipped. This love and grace always extends to the participants as well as to any directees they may spend time with. Just as spiritual direction needs to be a place of hospitality and safety, these qualities must be reflected in the worship of the God whose essence manifests these characteristics. The participants as well as the faculty need this time of worship to be reminded of who God is and who they are.

These worship times would help encourage an experience of the loving presence of God. They would also be structured in such a way as to remind the participants of the mystery inherent in our relationships with God. Given that postmodern/postconservative evangelicals are increasingly comfortable with the mysterious; this should be easily embraced by the participants. Worship should also remind them that they can never

totally figure out all of who God is; they will need to constantly maintain a humble stance before God at all times as spiritual directors.

This program is structured with the assumption that the participants will be connected to a local body of Christ, a worshipping community. There are to be no "lone ranger" spiritual directors. Worshipping with their local congregations and worshipping together as fellow students will hopefully re-enforce the connection between the ministry of spiritual direction and the body of Christ.

There will also be times of prayer together. To cultivate a contemplative posture, a number of prayer exercises will be included in the program. Centering prayer, Lectio Divina, and breath prayers exemplify the different kinds of prayers that are to be explored.

There is always the danger of trying too hard to include too much content into a program like this. Setting aside times to pray can help slow down the process and help all involved be more able to attend to the movements of the Spirit.

Homework

Various aspects of the program's homework have already been described. These include: outside reading, reflection papers, exercises, verbatims, meetings with a spiritual director, and regular times of one-on-one spiritual direction supervision. The homework assignments should help prepare the participants for the monthly gatherings as well as to help them deepen the understanding of the content already presented. It should also provide the participants the opportunity to integrate the material presented into their own

lives as spiritual directors. When applicable, this homework would be assessed by the facilitators and appropriate feedback would be given.

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Teaching units, practicums, corporate worship, prayer and homework make up the building blocks of this training program. Throughout the program, however, the goals, objectives and attributes mentioned in the first part of this chapter will need to be constantly emphasized. The facilitators and faculty need to make sure that *what* is being done as well as *how* it is being done always is done in a way that aligns with the qualities and gifts so necessary for the ministry of spiritual direction: hospitality, humility, prayer, vulnerability, community and trust.

Curriculum Map

The following is a draft of a curriculum map for the two year spiritual direction equipping program that would begin after the year of discernment. Each cell under "Content" and Practicum" is roughly one hour of time. The headings on the chart correspond to the descriptions previously included in this chapter.

YEAR 1		Content				Practicum				
Monthly session	Other	Topic	Topic	Topic	Guest spiritual director	Learning exercises	Group spiritual direction	group spiritual supervisio	Peer group spiritual supervision	Worship & prayer
1	Orientation and opening prayer exercise	Theology - creation	History of Christian spirituality/ direction	Self knowledge and self awareness		Mock exercises	x			
2	Opening prayer exercise	Theology - Trinity	History of Christian spirituality/ direction	Listening skills		Practice of listening and question asking	x			x
3	Opening prayer exercise	Role of Scripture	History of Christian spirituality/ direction	Models of discernment	Guest		x			x
4	Opening prayer exercise	History of Christian spirituality/ direction	Self knowledge and self awareness	Models of discernment		Mock exercises	x			x
5	Opening prayer exercise	Role of Scripture	Listening skills	Models of discernment		Practice of listening and question asking	x			x
6	Opening prayer exercise	Psychology and human development	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics	Self knowledge and self awareness	Guest			x		x
7	Opening prayer exercise	Theology of the church	Self knowledge and self awareness			Mock exercises		x		x
8	Opening prayer exercise	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics			Practice of listening and question asking		x		x
9	Opening prayer exercise	Psychology and human development	Models of discernment		Guest			x		x

YEAR 2		Content				Practicum				
Monthly session	Other	Topic	Topic	Topic	Guest spiritual director	Learning exercises	Group spiritual direction	Peer group spiritual supervision	Peer group spiritual supervision	Worship & prayer
10	Opening prayer exercise	Models of discernment	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics			Mock exercises		x		x
11	Opening prayer exercise	Self knowledge and self awareness	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics			Practice of listening and question asking		x		x
12	Opening prayer exercise	Models of discernment	Psychology and human development		Guest			x		x
13	Opening prayer exercise	S.D.: basics, tools, logistics				Mock exercises		x	x	x
14	Opening prayer exercise	Theology in spiritual direction				Practice of listening and question asking		x	x	x
15	Opening prayer exercise	Models of discernment			Guest			x	x	x
16	Opening prayer exercise	Self knowledge and self awareness				Mock exercises		x	x	x
17	Opening prayer exercise	Special issues; red flags				Practice of listening and question asking		x	x	x
18	Opening prayer exercise	Final questions				Sharing about s.d. within church		x	x	Celebration

A Final Thought

In some ways, the process of writing this dissertation has felt far removed from my calling as a spiritual director. Paraphrasing Gabriel Marcel, as a spiritual director I am typically involved "not with a problem to be solved but a mystery to be explored."[35] But this dissertation has set out to solve a problem – clear up a mystery. Thirty years ago, Protestant evangelicals had little or no knowledge and experience with the ministry of spiritual direction. Today, more and more evangelicals are looking for spiritual directors. Why the change? What happened? In "solving this problem" I have identified philosophical changes, economic changes, sociological changes and theological changes that collectively set the stage for this growth in interest. I identified the writings of Henry Nouwen and Eugene Peterson as factors that helped catalyze this growth.

But in another respect, the process of writing this dissertation has actually paralleled the work I do in spiritual direction. As mentioned earlier, Peterson speaks of spiritual direction as "the act of paying attention to God, calling attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstance or situation."[36] As I explored the various philosophical, economic, sociological and theological trends, I was not just dispassionately observing cultural shifts. I was actually asking, "Where is God in this?" Exploring why interest in spiritual direction has grown has required that I "attend" to God's presence and activity in secular America and in the American Church. It has allowed me to celebrate God's working through the lives and writings of Eugene

[35] Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Carol Stream, Word Publishing, 1989), 72.

[36] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 181.

Peterson and Henri Nouwen. I've tried to "call attention" to these "circumstances" and to God's work in the midst of the trends and changes of the last several decades. I don't think this growth in interest in spiritual direction just happened. I see God's hand in the middle of it all. So maybe writing a dissertation is not *that* different than spiritual direction after all.

My hope is that these thoughts will further the discussion on how the evangelical Christian community can better address what the ministry of spiritual direction should look like. My outline for a training program to equip spiritual directors is, I hope, a small step in this process. Ultimately, however, it is my deepest hope that this dissertation might help continue to focus attention on the question I always think matters most: "Where is God in this?" Where is God at work in the life of a directee meeting for spiritual direction and where has God been at work in the broad historical trends of our time?

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