

Spiritual Authority

A Christian Perspective

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One could define spiritual authority as the power to support the opening of the entire universe—and especially of the life of human beings—toward union with the redeeming ultimate reality. Christian tradition knows several holders of this power: God, Jesus Christ, the angels, the saints and priests, spiritual guides, and last but not least each and every Christian and person of goodwill. They all are spiritual authorities and together create a field of liberating power with many interdependent centers. One can conceive of spiritual authority in Christianity as a complex interplay between these various forces. The manifestation of spiritual power through them does not take place for its own sake, or to celebrate the holder of spiritual authority, but to empower other centers. Thus, spiritual power is not private property. It is only real insofar as it is passed on to others. In the field of human spiritual authority, tensions and struggles arise if the flow of authority is blocked by a particular center attempting to monopolize spiritual power for the establishment of an illusionary self-identity.

Rather than going into an analysis of the entire field, I would like to take a closer look at one of its facets: “spiritual guides,” those who are acknowledged specialists in helping others to a life in the presence of God. Of course, other centers of spiritual authority will sooner or later also come into the picture, because in the field of spiritual power one authority cannot be understood without the others. Fields of other forms of power and their centers of authority (scriptural authority, political authority, etc.) also influence and partially permeate the field of spiritual authority, but that is a subject for another enquiry.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

A central socioreligious form of spiritual authority manifests itself within relationships of spiritual guidance, or (to use the common Christian phrase) within spiritual direction. The remaining part of this paper deals with concepts of spiritual direction and ways of understanding the authority of the director in his or her relationship to

the directee within Christian spiritual life. Before looking into the current situation, I will highlight some milestones in the history of Christian spiritual guidance.

From late antiquity onward, spiritual authority was accepted within Christian communities as a specific form of authority, quite different from other forms and especially different from the authority of the clergy to lead the Church.

The earliest context in which this difference appeared coincides with the beginning of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction in Christianity originated as a monastic concept.¹ “Historically it was from the movement of desert monasticism that we received the idea of spiritual direction within the framework of Christian practice.”² As *abba* (“father”) and *amma* (“mother”) ascetics, holy men or women, like the hermits of the Egyptian desert who lived on the periphery of the socioreligious zone controlled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, functioned as independent spiritual authorities for their fellow monks and nuns as well as for people from further afield who visited the desert to ask for spiritual advice. As one can imagine, the relationship between the two forms of authority was complex, and one can observe tensions and attempts at reconciliation between the authority of the charismatic ascetics and the authority of the bishops, as well as between ascetical ideals taken from monasticism and the pastoral care for lay Christians from the fourth to the sixth century.³

The *Decretum Gelasianum*, an official document dating back to the beginning of the sixth century, assessed that the *vitae patrum*—the books containing narratives of the lives and the spiritual teachings of the desert fathers—were to be accepted by the Church as valid teaching with all honor (*cum omni honore suscipimus*). The use of the term “father” in this text indirectly confirms that no ordination was necessary to receive this honorary title and the ministry connected to it. Most of the fathers acknowledged by the *Decretum Gelasianum* have never been ordained priests.

When the desert tradition was superseded by organized monasticism, the charismatic authority of the *abba* or *amma* became institutionalized in the form of monastery rules, which functioned as a form of communal guidelines. Individual spiritual guidance, however, fell to the abbot, the abess, or gifted elders.⁴ As an institutionalized spiritual authority the abbot had to “direct the souls” (*animas regere*) by means of doctrinal exhortations and advice. As the one who “holds the place” (*agere vices*) of Christ, he functions as the spiritual leader of every member of the monastery. The influence of clerical authority increased to a certain extent after the Council of Chalcedon (451) put the monks and nuns under the surveillance of the bishop (*monachos { . . . } per unamquamque civitatem aut regionem subiectos esse episcopo*).

While a sacramental ordination was not required to be elected abbot, the local bishop is called upon to oversee the electoral process, to interfere in case of conspiracy, and, eventually, to install a new abbot. This increased the dependence of the abbot upon the authority of office and somewhat curtailed the freedom which is essential to the function of the spiritual father and which the early Desert Fathers sought to safeguard.⁵

From the late medieval period onward in Western Europe, monastic spirituality—and with it the art of spiritual guidance—spilled out beyond cloister walls. Spiritual

guidance ceased to be a privilege of the monastics and a few interested members of the nobility. It spread within a number of lay- and semi-lay movements and through translations of monastic literature into various vernaculars.

Particularly since the Catholic Reformation in the sixteenth century and during the time of the Counter-Reformation, when the reform of Catholicism became institutionalized, spiritual direction of the laity was organized in the context of confession. The confessors took over the task of spiritual guidance. From the seventeenth century onward handbooks on ascetical and mystical theology were published to deliver the necessary knowledge for this task. It was largely forgotten that spiritual direction was not a prerogative of the ordained ministry and that, as shown above, from the time of the early Church onward a nonsacramental tradition of spiritual authority existed that was significantly different and quite independent from the official Episcopal authority.⁶

With the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (developed between 1522 and 1540) a new school of spiritual guidance emerged. The directors of the exercises (usually Jesuit priests) underwent special training, and their task was to lead the directee (who could be a member of the clergy, a monk or nun, or a lay Christian) through a series of meditations during a retreat lasting up to four weeks. The Ignatian method of meditation consists of visualizations of biblical scenes combined with the arousal of certain emotions, mental reflections, and prayers, which altogether should lead to a savoring of the Divine and positive changes in the practitioner's behavior. The declared aims of the exercises are liberation from inordinate attachments and the regulation of one's life by renewing ones relationship to Christ and God. The role of the director is to help the directee to find out by herself or himself what best serves God. In a cautious, flexible, and moderate way the director should help the directee to increase his or her inner freedom, and should avoid imposing his own ideas on the directee.⁷

The question of how much space should be given to forms of meditation that transcend words and images, and how the spiritual director should deal with mystical experiences, visions, states of ecstasy and the like, has been heavily debated since the late Middle Ages. After the condemnation of the doctrines of Quietism at the end of the seventeenth century, methods of meditation focusing on the calming of the mind, the experience of inner silence, and the divine presence became almost heretical in Catholic spiritual direction. This contributed to the increasingly moralistic and ideological nature of spiritual guidance. "Concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy and suspicious of religious enthusiasms that might take the directees outside the boundaries of orthodox teaching and practice, the new spiritual guide became a director of conscience schooled to root out heresy and avert spiritually 'unorthodox' practices."⁸ Spiritual authority ceased to be charismatic and became largely limited to the cleric confessor teaching approved forms of prayer and evaluating spiritual practices and experiences in order to avoid "dubious forms of mysticism and heretical ideas."⁹

Surrender to the primacy of clerical authority was always considered a characteristic of a "proper" spiritual director in Catholicism. Difficulties arose whenever spiritual movements such as the Quietists held the relationship to their spiritual father

as more important than the reference to ecclesiastical authorities. A second danger concerning spiritual direction that the Church officials feared—as it could undermine their power—was the possibility that the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit would gain more importance than the external Magisterium. In his letter to Cardinal Gibbons known as *Testem Benevolentiae* (22 January 1899), Pope Leo XIII warns “against those who oppose docility to the Holy Spirit to docility to the counsel of the spiritual father.”¹⁰ The term “spiritual father” here refers to the clerical confessor as representative of the ordained ministry and ecclesiastical Magisterium.

In the Protestant traditions, spiritual direction never gained as much importance as it did in Catholicism and in the Orthodox churches. Although Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all practiced spiritual guidance by word of mouth and by means of letters, the suspicion and doubts concerning spiritual direction and the claim of spiritual authority increased over time. There were several reasons for this development: a negative attitude toward the monastic heritage, the fear of a religious authority enforcing a repressive submission, the emphatic affirmation of Christ as the only mediator of salvation and the priesthood of all believers, and the role of preaching as the most important means of spiritual growth.¹¹ The negative attitude toward spiritual direction and spiritual authority can be partially understood as a critical reaction to the problematic developments within the Catholic Church previously described.

In Orthodox Christianity there are no formal monastic rules (*regulae*) as spiritual guidelines as in the West. Three ways of monastic life are known: eremitic (life of a hermit), cenobitic (life in a larger monastery), and skete, which pertains to life in a very small community where two or three monks live under the guidance of an elder. Especially in the last form of monastic life, intensive spiritual direction takes place and the elder possesses a strong spiritual authority. As in the West, the abbot or abbess assumed the role of the spiritual director within cenobitic monastic communities. In the parishes, parish priests usually undertook (and still undertake) the task of spiritual guidance, but it was never stipulated that this ministry should be restricted to them alone.¹² Conflicts of authority eventually arise if members of a parish should choose a spiritual director other than the priest, and one whose way of direction contradicts that of the priest. The Orthodox churches differentiate between confessor and spiritual director. Ordination as a priest does not automatically imply the authorization to hear confessions. Only a minority of the clergy are confessors. As specially qualified and ordained people, the priest-confessors are prepared to offer personal spiritual guidance. If the spiritual director is a priest-confessor he may also serve as confessor, if the directee so chooses, but both functions are not necessarily connected.

As a heritage from Egyptian desert monasticism, the charismatic figure of the spiritual father always was and continues to be of great significance for the Orthodox Church. In Greek this spiritual authority is called *gerōn* and in Russian *starets* (both of which mean “the old” or “the elder”). A spiritual father or mother could be an older, experienced clergyman, a nonordained monk or nun, or a laywoman or layman. The real *starsy* are said to be extremely rare nowadays. Their authority is based on the current opinion that they live a saintly life and have found a deep inward peace

combined with the gift to guide others on the Way. They cannot be appointed by a Church authority but are chosen by the community of believers through the simple fact of their popularity as spiritual guides and the belief that the Holy Spirit acts through them. It is not unusual for the *startsy* to hear confessions despite not having the ordination for this ministry.

The given overview shows that the function of spiritual authority developed in manifold ways throughout the history of Christianity. Some Christian traditions and forms of living, especially monastic ones, possess especially strong spiritual authorities. In others, however, spiritual authority is more loosely defined and a somewhat informal institution. Until today, at least in Western Christianity, no systematically elaborated theology of spiritual direction and spiritual authority has been developed, “and official documents have not dealt explicitly with this question.”¹³

HOW MUCH AUTHORITY SHOULD A SPIRITUAL GUIDE HAVE ACCORDING TO THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION?

There is no clear answer to this question. If we look only at the descriptions of the relationships between spiritual father or mother and their followers in desert monasticism we find a number of different views. As Kenneth Leech points out, “The Desert Fathers emphasized silence and example, rejected domineering and leadership.”¹⁴ On the other hand, Catherine Cornille states: “Radical obedience to and imitation of the spiritual father was expected from the disciple.”¹⁵ It could well be that both are correct. Already in these early days the relationship between director and directee seems to have differed greatly, in accordance with the parties involved. The descriptions of the ideal role of the director assume different levels of authority. We find a spectrum of possibilities between strict hierarchy and obedience on the one hand and an almost mutual relationship with a flat hierarchical order on the other.

In Western as well as in Eastern Christian monasticism, voluntary obedience is one of the primary principles. For example, the very influential Benedictine rule stresses the importance of strict submission to the abbot. As soon as something is commanded by him the monks should “waste no time in executing it as if it were divinely commanded.”¹⁶ Regarding those who obey promptly, Rule 5.12 says:

That is why they do not wish to live by their own lights, obeying their own desires and wants. Rather they prefer to walk according to the judgment and command of another [*ambulantes alieno iudicio et imperio*], enobitic community with an abbot over them. Doubtless, people such as these imitate the Lord, who said: “I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.”¹⁷

The exercise of surrender to the authority of the superior was understood as a discipline that develops the virtue of humility and the imitation of Jesus Christ. “Obedience to the abbot may be as *to* Christ, and *as* Christ to the Father.”¹⁸ Representing Christ, the authority of the abbot or abbess was on the other hand relativized by the teaching and lived example of Jesus that the highest of all should be the humblest.

The exercise of authority should therefore be in service of others rather than in having power over them.¹⁹ Nevertheless, until the second half of the twentieth century in many Catholic orders unquestioning obedience was considered to be more important than basic human rights such as individual freedom.

To quote an example from the Orthodox tradition, the fourteenth-century monks Callistos and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, like many other Orthodox theologians, underline the necessity of a competent teacher for someone who wants to be initiated in the depth of the hesychastic prayer of the heart:

Having found such a man cleave him with body and spirit like a devoted son to his father and from then onwards obey all his commands implicitly, accord with him in everything, and see him not as a mere man, but as Christ himself [. . .] Is it therefore possible to think that a man leads a Divine life, in accordance with the Word of God, if he lives without a guide, pandering to himself and obeying his own self-will? Naturally not.²⁰

The monastic ideal of obedience was transferred from monastic into lay spirituality. Here the clerical confessor superseded the abbot or abbess. In the chapter on spiritual direction in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*—written primarily for lay people—Francis de Sales praises Teresa of Avila as an example for all, as she not only obeyed her superiors but also vowed a special obedience to the priest who served as her spiritual guide. He also commends the “devout princess, St. Elizabeth” because she submitted herself in absolute obedience to Master Conrad, the priest who was her confessor.²¹ De Sales is of the opinion that one should not put one’s trust in the spiritual guide and his human knowledge but in God, who will speak through this man. “Always look upon this guide as an angel, that is, once you find him do not consider him as an ordinary man. [. . .] You should listen to him as to an angel come down from heaven to take you there.”²² An absolute obedience that treats a human spiritual authority as an angel or Christ himself is one extreme of spiritual authority in Christianity. The counterpoint is marked with the term “spiritual friendship or companionship.”²³ According to a long-standing Christian tradition, such a friendship is in some ways the essence of spiritual direction. This view refers to several biblical texts. In John 15:14–15 Jesus says: “You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master’s business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.” Matt. 23:9–10 denies that a human being could be called a father or a master compared with the spiritual authority of God and Jesus Christ: “You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only the one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called masters, for you have only one Master, the Christ.”

The treatises *De magistro* (“On the teacher”) of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas combine these biblical texts with John 1:9—where it is said that God as Divine Word enlightens every human being—and interpret them in the light of a platonic epistemology. Thomas says: “We hesitate to call a human being teacher or master, because we do not award the human being to be a teacher in the basic sense of the word which applies to God. Otherwise the impression might occur, that we set our

hope on human wisdom instead of consulting the truth of God about whatever we hear from human beings.”²⁴ He explicates that humans can be called teachers only insofar as they are capable of supporting the inner light of truth that already shines in the depth of human mind. Human teachers are not the cause of this light. The light of reason is infused by God, and is identical with Christ as Divine Word. God is therefore the only real master, the master who enlightens every human mind from within and not through outer teaching. According to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the teaching of human teachers (including spiritual authorities) is effective only because of this divine inner light and its source, God as the inner teacher. This thought relativizes the power of human spiritual authorities, strengthens intellectual and spiritual autonomy, and tends to flatten the hierarchy between master and student.

The Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx interprets in his classic *De spiritali amicitia* (On spiritual friendship, written around 1160) Cicero’s philosophy of friendship and biblical traditions in the light of his Cistercian monastic experience of brotherly love. For Aelred mutual friendship is the most suitable aid for uplifting the mind to the love and knowledge of God.

The same Francis de Sales mentioned previously as an advocate of strict obedience quotes Sirach 6:14,16: “A faithful friend is a strong defense: whoever has found one has found a treasure. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and of immortality: those who fear the Lord will find one.” According to his theory of spiritual direction, the power differential between director and directee should be counterbalanced by a bond of love and friendship between them, very much like in a parent-child relationship. One could say that, according to de Sales, the spiritual director should be a friendly guide and a guiding friend. This manner of spiritual relationship bears close resemblance to the concept of *kalyāṇamitta* in Buddhism.²⁵

In addition to spiritual direction he recommends fully mutual spiritual friendship as a form of relationship, which also contributes to spiritual growth. According to him, in such a relationship, God pours out his blessing and eternal life. “I speak of the spiritual friendship by which two or three persons communicate among themselves their devotion, their spiritual affection, and become one in spirit. With good reason such happy souls can sing: ‘How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together’” (Ps. 133:1).²⁶

To summarize: traditionally spiritual direction and spiritual friendship are not the same, but are two different relationships wherein spiritual power is able to unfold. According to the Salesian tradition and others, however, spiritual direction should integrate elements of mutual spiritual friendship. Before I treat the question of authority in contemporary spiritual direction we should take a glance at the changes that have taken place in this field during the last few decades.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TODAY

From the 1960s onward, the innovations of the Second Vatican Council and an increasing interest in spirituality brought about a dramatic change in Roman Catholic training programs for spiritual directors. “Lay people had discovered the ministry,

and started coming to be trained. Progressive Catholics encouraged a ministry open to the laity, and the ranks of the training programs began to swell.”²⁷ The authority to give spiritual direction thus ceased to be a prerogative of the clergy or members of religious orders. Specific sacramental, liturgical, and theological traditions and the question of orthodoxy became less important, whereas the significance of psychological theories and contemplation increased. Spiritual direction was professionalized along the lines of the model of helping professions that experienced a newfound success in postindustrial society.

In addition to this, during the past twenty-five years a marked shift in the Protestant attitude has also taken place, and today we have a wave of interest in spiritual direction across denominational barriers. “Protestant Christians, who had sought direction from Catholic spiritual guides, came themselves to be trained [. . .] it soon became a commonplace to have Catholics and Protestants learning the art of spiritual guidance side by side.”²⁸ Today the field of spiritual direction is an ecumenical phenomenon, and non-Christian religions gain in importance and relevance. The theory and practice of interfaith spiritual guidance is an increasingly important field as people with very different religious backgrounds now ask advice of Christian spiritual directors. Orthodox Christians, unchurched Christians, those who call themselves spiritual but not religious, Jews, and sometimes Buddhists seek training in spiritual direction.²⁹

What appearance does Christian spiritual direction take today? Director and directee meet regularly for an hour on a fortnightly or monthly basis. The aim of the meetings is to help the person to become more open to God. This consists of finding and evolving the right forms of prayer and meditation, self-knowledge concerning aids and obstacles in one’s personal spiritual life, and making sense of daily life by finding a place for the Divine in day-to-day-struggles.³⁰

“There has [. . .] been a shift in prayer patterns from a predominance of sacramental use and devotional practice toward less formalized and more quiet, interior ways of prayer.”³¹ The recovering of the contemplative and mystical aspects of prayer is a result of spiritual encounter with Buddhism and other Eastern traditions, and it has changed the nature of spiritual direction. Contemporary spiritual direction is oriented toward experience and awareness. “The *focus* of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience, i.e. any experience of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each one of us. Spiritual direction has always aimed ultimately at fostering union with God [. . .].”³² Moon and Benner emphasize:

Cultivation and awareness of God’s transforming presence as foundational for spiritual direction is a common theme in the literature of devotional theology. In the words of Richard Rohr, “My starting point [for prayer as part of spiritual guidance] is that we’re already there. We cannot attain the presence of God. We’re already totally in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness.”³³

The directors nowadays are usually familiar with and trained in different forms of meditation practice. The whole process of spiritual direction is understood as a meditative discipline for both the director and the directee. The descriptions of the

attitude that a spiritual director should cultivate within the meetings have at times a distinctly Buddhist flavor. Gerald G. May is an example of this, saying:

Awareness is clear and awake to everything, yet focused on nothing special [. . .] and one knows and feels immediately, without any need for inference or thought, that God is vitally and comprehensively present. [. . .] It does not ideally focus on God to the exclusion of oneself or the directee. Instead, one is careful to remain open and to ensure that attention to oneself or the directee or anything else does not eclipse this larger openness towards God. This is what it means to me to “be prayerful” in spiritual direction. From a practical standpoint, it involves assuming exactly the same mind-set and attitude in spiritual direction as one assumes in quiet prayer.³⁴

As with traditional spiritual direction, the wisdom of discrimination, the so-called “discernment of the spirits,” is very important. Becoming aware of God’s all-pervading hidden presence leads to the task of learning how to stay with it. The task is to discriminate between the kind of actions, emotions, and decisions that are in tune with it and those that are not. The director, by way of training and gift, should have a strong intuitive discernment that helps the directee to develop his or her own power of awareness of what is beneficial and what is not.

AUTHORITY IN CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Some theoreticians of spiritual direction contrast the traditional and contemporary form of spiritual direction. Anderson and Reese differentiate between the two in the following manner:³⁵

| Traditional Spiritual Guidance | Contemporary Spiritual Guidance |
|---|--|
| Structured/formal | Informal |
| Hierarchical and unidirectional (top-down) | Mutual |
| Authoritarian (tended to be “directive”) “Official” and clerical | Suggestive and evocative rather than directive Unofficial, more lay than clergy |
| Individualistic and private | Small group settings as well as individualized guidance |

Of course, this is an oversimplification of the matter. The question of the director’s dominance, and the range of mutuality between director and directee, has been discussed over and over again in recent times. For Len Sperry and others, the relationship in spiritual guidance is “primarily a mutual relationship.”³⁶ Most contemporary writers on the subject, however, admit that there is and should be a certain asymmetry in the relationship between a spiritual guide and the person seeking guidance. Benner remarks: “Spiritual Direction is more structured and less mutual than spiritual friendship.”³⁷

One aspect of the asymmetry in the director–directee relationship is that it focuses

“upon the relationship between God and the person seeking guidance, upon that person’s life and prayer rather than the life of the guide.”³⁸ Furthermore, the spiritual director is assumed to have greater authority and wisdom since he serves as a guide to others. However, this authority is understood as a kind of “regressive” authority, as it should intend to make itself superfluous by empowering the directee’s spiritual competence. The authority of the spiritual director is thus of a temporal nature, relating only to a very particular time in one’s life.

Janet K. Rufing points out a danger that may arise if mutuality is propagated in a one-sided fashion: “Spiritual directors,” she says, “who advocate a spiritual friendship model of direction may dramatically underestimate the level of responsibility a spiritual director assumes in this sacred relationship.”³⁹ Simon Chan adds:

Although there is an element of friendship in spiritual direction, the main focus is on helping another person to grow. Although the director and the directee are fellow pilgrims, spiritual direction presupposes that one of them has traveled farther along the road and can serve as a guide to the newcomer. This is why a spiritual director must have certain qualifications, training (formal and informal) and experience.⁴⁰

The limitations of spiritual authority are addressed, in much clearer fashion than in former times: “The role of the spiritual director does not permit her to intrude in the life of another person, answer their questions for them or give them prescriptions for behavior.”⁴¹

Another open question concerning the authority of the spiritual director is to what degree it is or should be based on professional skills that one learns in training programs, and how much it depends on charisma and is a divine gift. Evidently, none are of the opinion that charisma does not play an important role. But some authors question heavily the importance of trained skills. This is often connected with criticism of the professionalization that has taken place in the field of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction should not be a job, they argue, but exclusively a divine ministry. One should become a spiritual director not through training, but because the community of believers is attracted by his or her charisma.

It would be naïve to believe that the professionalization of spiritual authority can be reversed. It follows a mainstream trend in contemporary society, and it has its advantages. High-quality training programs, of course, make sense. What is needed is a balance between training and charisma. In accordance with this point of view is Shaun McCarty, who argues that spiritual help should be given, “by persons *called, gifted and skilled*. As a ministry, spiritual direction presupposes that it is practiced in response to an urging of grace and employs those gifts of grace granted for doing the ministry. [. . .] Yet, so that the gifts might be more fruitfully activated and utilized, there is a responsibility to seek appropriate training and supervision.”⁴²

One of the numerous positive aspects of professionalisation is the spreading of psychotherapeutical insights and skills that are usually taught in current spiritual direction training programs. A good example for this would be the application of

concepts such as transference and countertransference. In psychoanalysis, one speaks of transference when the patient unconsciously invests the therapist with qualities and attributes that he or she originally experienced in relation to his or her mother, father, or some other person of childhood significance. Countertransference is a transference with which the therapist reacts to his or her patient, often in response to the patient's transference.

Whereas in psychoanalysis the phenomena of transference and countertransference are the focus of analysis and insight into the therapeutic relationship, in spiritual direction the main topic is the directee's relationship with God, and transference is usually not engaged in directly.⁴³ But it is part of the ethical responsibility of the spiritual director to train the ability to recognize the transliminal communication with the directee and to understand the mechanisms of transference and countertransference. "Through supervision and psychological consultation, spiritual directors can learn to manage the transference and use information derived from it in ways appropriate to spiritual direction and their own individual levels of professional training."⁴⁴ This approach minimizes the danger of spiritual authority being abused.

The increasing importance of professionalization is connected not only with the rising standards of training in help-related professions, but also with the general economic situation: "Most of us today must work more than one job to make ends meet," says American spiritual director John R. Mabry,

and those of us, who feel a true calling to the ministry of spiritual guidance, this endeavor must contribute to our financial survival or we cannot responsibly devote such a large part of our time to it. It is not a hobby for most of us, it is a ministry. And [. . .] ministry is a profession that requires hard work, rigorous (and expensive) training, and strict standards of professional conduct.⁴⁵

In conclusion, the changes in the understanding of spiritual authority in contemporary Christian spiritual direction can be summarized in the following six points:

1. Though charismatic authority still forms the basis, professional authority has gained in importance.
2. A shift has taken place, from an authoritarian top-down authority to a more dialogical and mutual practice of authority with a strong element of spiritual friendship but without total abolishment of the power differential.
3. After a time in which clerical and spiritual authority were thought of as being almost identical in the framework of the Catholic Church, spiritual authority has now gained an impressive degree of independence, and is being increasingly practiced by specially trained lay people.
4. Christian spiritual authority today is only loosely related to specific Christian confessions and has become an ecumenical phenomenon.
5. In the contemporary field of spiritual power, different religions meet. Inter-religious spiritual competence and transreligious guidance have therefore become a part of spiritual authority. As the word "spirituality" today is increasingly used as a synonym for forms of religious life that are not or only loosely connected to certain religious communities or churches, it is entirely

likely that the profile of spiritual direction and spiritual authority in general will also become increasingly unspecific, not related to one religion only.

6. The influence of psychological models to understand the relationship between director and directee increases and offers skillful means to avoid wanton abuse of spiritual authority.

NOTES

1. Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation and What Is Contemplation?* (Wheatampstead, UK: Anthony Clarke, 1975), 13.

2. Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World* (Harrisburg, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2001), 84.

3. See George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

4. See Wendy M. Wright, "Salesian Spiritual Direction," *Studies in Spirituality* 6 (1996): 194–219, 197.

5. Catherine Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism: Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation?* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press 1991), 65–66.

6. See *ibid.*, 55.

7. See Philip Sheldrake, "St. Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Direction," in Lavinia Byrne, ed., *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 99–116.

8. See Wright, "Salesian Spiritual Direction," 198.

9. Wendy M. Wright, *Francis de Sales: 'Introduction to the Devout Life' and 'Treatise on the Love of God'* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 53.

10. In *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, t. 31 (1898–1899), 474–476, in Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, 59.

11. For the problems Protestants can have with the notion of spiritual direction, see Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992 [1982]), 5; Leech, *Soul Friend*, 80–81; and David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 87–90.

12. For the Orthodox tradition of spiritual authority see Irene Hausherr, SL, *Direction Spirituelle en Orient d'Autrefois*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 144 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1955); Irene Hausherr, SL, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990); Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 95–98.

13. Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, 58.

14. Leech, *Soul Friend*, 95.

15. Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, 57.

16. Rule of Benedict, 5.4. English translation quoted according to Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule. A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 103.

17. English translation quoted according to Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 103–104.

18. Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, 67.

19. Helen Doohan, "Authority," in Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 73–74: 74.

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