

1305 Church, Mission and Ministry Week 7: Ministry and Spirituality

Introduction: Some major contemporary issues

In Ministry

Activism leading to burnout; performance/success orientation; competitiveness; fear of losing control; individualism; denial of weakness/mortality/failures. Dualism: division of spirituality from the everyday affairs of life, the common place.

Need to observe what God is doing in the life situations around us and participate in that. Cf. "The beauty in Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural *use* of it." Simone Weil. A "world affirming" spirituality.

In Society

Openness to a broad range of self- chosen spiritualities, people seeking to "find themselves" e.g. New Age; tends to be "baby – boomers", very resistant to any structure and "Christianity".

A. WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

a) How I relate to God. Spirit in the Bible is breath, life. The opposite of spirit is death. "It's about my "desire", how I pray (the very best index of who I really am)." (R. Croucher).

b) 'the sphere in and over which the Holy Spirit has direct influence' (John Owen). - indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit.

c) Every human born in this world has (or is) a spirit, self, soul. A person has (or is) a spirit because he/she is made in the image of God. Spirituality has to do with the "inner person" not the externals of religious exercises or religious language for even base persons can learn these.

Spirituality is not external to us but what happens within the furnace of our soul. It is not a set of exterior disciplines although these may lead us into heightened spirituality.

Spirituality is the stretching of our soul, self, spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19 reflects the heart of spirituality.

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches in glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:14-19RSV).

When we commune with God, our spirits commune with God's Spirit. In the Christian tradition spirituality is to be open to God's Spirit, to be centred in

- truth and be more aware of what transcends us and what is within us. Spirituality also happens within the context of community. (D. McCarty).

d) 'Spirituality is the response to a deep and mysterious human yearning for self-transcendence and surrender. This yearning results from having been created in such a fashion that we are incomplete when we are self-encapsulated'

(D. Bennner).

e) 'It is the particular way (which as a baptised believer I choose) of conceiving the goal and aim of the Christian life; and also, the particular way (I choose) of practically working and moving towards this goal and aim Spirituality is the way in which I respond to this (Holy Spirit) action upon my spirit.'

(P. Toon).

f) 'Spiritual' is used in the New Testament for that which is the result of the Holy Spirit's action-spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1); truths (1 Cor. 2:13; 9:11; Col. 1:9); songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); blessings (Eph. 1:3); sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5)-and baptized believers (1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1; 12:1; 14:37).

B. SPIRITUAL FORMATION - THE GOAL

a) 'the process whereby the Word of God is applied by the Spirit of God to the heart of the child of God, so that he or she becomes more and more like the Son of God.' (Eph. 3:16 - 'growing firm in power with regard to your inner self'). (R. Croucher).

b) The goal of our spirituality is not to become God but to become more fully human - the person God would have us be. God has not called us into the Godhead but to fulfill the image of God. Our struggle is not to disdain our humanity but to fulfill what God intended humanity to be. (D. McCarty).

c) 'That vision, ideal, aim and goal is nothing less than perfect, holy and loving union with the Lord God, who is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' (P. Toon).

d) *understanding ourselves in the light of God's revelation

*growth is the life of faith and prayer

* allowing God to be himself for us.

e) passing through stages of spiritual development.

C. STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Bernard of Clairvaux

('On Loving God' 15.39)

1. Man loves himself for his own sake - earthbound, no appetite for heaven. Realises he cannot cope alone, i.e. begins to love God.

2. Loves God only for his own sake, not for God's sake.

- Gradually becomes acquainted with God, discovers the delight of God. Moves onto the third degree.

3. Loves God for God's sake.

A long period, the fourth degree may be unattainable on earth

4. 'Loves himself for God's sake.

Oblivious of himself, totally taken up with God.

B. Francois Fenelon

('Christian Perfection')

1. Move beyond outward and superficial i.e. human achievement fails to motivate. Still deeply self-centred with own destiny. 'It is a wise self-love which wants to get out of the intoxication of outside things'.

2. Centred in our fear of God.

'Still wrapped in self'. We fear not - fearing. Longing for humility, defeat of sin, obedience. (cf 1 Ti. 1:15)

'Sincerity is a virtue below simplicity.'

Self-conscious spirituality. Deep commitment. cf. Heb 4 - rest.

3. Love devoid of self-interest.

Simplicity, conscious of God. 'purity of heart'

Un-self-conscious cf. 2 Cor.11:24-29; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:10.

C. M. Scott Peck ('The Different Drum')

1. Chaotic, antisocial. Individualistic, manipulative, self-serving.

Recognition of chaos leads to submission to an institution.

2.' Formal, institutional.

God as external, punitive. Focus on stability. Governed by institution. Conservative.

3. Skeptical, individualistic.

Social concern, search for truth, principled.

4. Mystic, communal.

Sense of the unity and connectedness of all reality.

D. M. Guyon

('Spiritual Torrents' ch. 8)

Job as a mirror of the spiritual life.

1. God strips him of his goods i.e. gifts and graces.

2. God strips him of his children i.e. faculties or good works, which are our dearest children.

3. God takes his health i.e. loss of virtues.

4. God makes him an object of horror and contempt i.e. accused by friends for being at fault e.g. for being resigned to God's will cf. sin; judged as guilty.

5. God gives him back everything.

'It is the same after the resurrection ...'

Rom. 6:5 i.e. can receive from God without attaching oneself to things; lack of self-conscious virtue, true liberty (John 8:36).

E. The New Testament I John 2: 12-14

1. 'Little children' - spiritual beginnings Knowledge of God's forgiveness and Fatherhood.

Danger: - self-concern.

2. 'Young men' - spiritual adolescence.

Strength in the scriptures and victory in spiritual conflict.

Danger: pre-occupation with ministry.

3. 'Fathers' - spiritual maturity

True God-centredness: Abiding insight and stability of relationship with God.

Acceptance of God's sovereignty over life. Recognition that God can only give himself.

D. WHY A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?

a) The Third Chapter of 1 Samuel contains the beautiful story of the old priest, Eli, and the young boy, Samuel. The Lord called out, "Samuel, Samuel" and the boy thought it was Eli who called. Eli perceived the Lord was calling to Samuel and told Samuel to answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." A spiritual director helps another to hear and respond to the voice of The Lord. The spiritual director does not speak for the Lord but sensitizes and helps another to listen for the voice of God.

A spiritual director who is wise and has had a long pilgrimage with God can be very helpful to another Christian pilgrim. Whether wise or experienced, a spiritual director will help us if he/she keeps asking questions that drive us deeper into our inner self where we meet God. Without such a person we may avoid the struggle of looking so deeply within ourselves. (D. McCarty).

b) we are all blind to the realities of our own inner life.

c) we need to be helped to see beyond ourselves.

d) we need to be stripped of theological propositions that shield us from God.

e) we need help to notice the reality and validity of our own experience of God.

f) we need to be freed from fears associated with our experience or lack of it.

Illustration: medieval astronomy in China and Europe.

E. WHAT A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR IS NOT

a) a judge

b) a professional

c) a counsellor, confessor, healer, problem solver or answer giver.

F. WHAT A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR DOES

a) allies him/herself with God's indwelling Spirit to assist your spiritual growth. b)

discerns and diagnoses the work of God, a 'spiritual physician'

helps provide an environment where God's work can be facilitated

d) forms a genuine relationship with the directee, for that person's sake e) helps bring clarity concerning the purposes of God.

'The pastoral guidance of souls by counselling and prayer through the illumination, grace, and power of the Holy Spirit'. (Goodacre)

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

G. QUALITIES OF A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

- a) experience of grace - the 'forgiven sinner' and 'wounded healer'
- b) lack of a need for personal affirmation or vindication and so - (i) co-dependency (ii) caretaking (iii) control/manipulation
- c) able to 'discern spirits' i.e. the movement of God in the human spirit
- d) affirming - recognition of the image of God and the life of Christ in the directee
- e) patient - willing to allow God to be God in the life of the directee
- f) unshockable - unafraid of the dark side of life (because focussed on forgiveness)
- g) possessed of a deep faith in God - and so faith in God in the directee h) open to change in themselves.

These qualities will be experienced in a genuine love for people:

- (i) commitment
- (ii) effort to understand
- (iii) spontaneity - prophetic revelation.

H. VALID EXPECTATIONS OF A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

- a) that the directee is genuinely desiring to grow as a Christian
- b) that the directee is willing to spend time with God
- c) that the directee is willing to allow God to be God in their lives
- d) that the directee is willing to be honest and open concerning -
 - i) their spiritual journey
 - ii) their feelings and attitudes towards the director.

I. THE TASK OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

A. WAYS OF DIRECTION

These could fall under basic headings such as: meditation, contemplation, reflection, "conversions" and so on. Another approach is to appropriate the tasks listed below by Doran McCarty.

- a) Covenant - The spiritual director and directee need to begin with a covenant about their relationship and expectations. This helps the directee to examine what he/she needs to struggle with
- b) Pilgrimage - Both persons can share their pilgrimages. Ask each other questions which will cause reflection. Find out what the person learned from and felt about events.
- c) What is Your Covenant with God - Each person has a covenant with God whether that covenant has ever been spoken aloud or brought to the surface of consciousness. For

example, some made covenants with God that if God got them out of a difficult situation (let them live, escape getting caught), they would be ministers, missionaries, etc.

d) What is your Calling - Does the person see the Christian life as a calling or only a ministerial profession? What is the relation of their calling to their spiritual inner life?

e) Silence - In an activist and auditory world so few times people reflect with long periods of silence. An hour of silence together and a discussion about what happened may be reflective.

f) Prayer - You will want to share prayer time together. Examine what prayer means to the person - but avoid preaching. Find out their philosophy and habit of prayer. Let them discover whatever needs to be discovered.

g) Doubts - Can they honestly acknowledge the shadows we call doubt? What is its meaning? Do they feel guilty about doubts?

h) View of God - Ask them to state their views of God in every day language rather than theological language. Ask if they have experienced God the way they describe God.

i) Blessing - What blessings have they experienced in life? Which persons blessed them? Whom have they blessed?

j) Scriptures they identify with - This is not necessarily their favourite scriptures but the ones which describe the struggles they have gone through or are going through.

k) Lifestyle - Have them describe their lifestyle. Are they conscious of what they choose to reveal? Are they conscious of the sources of their lifestyle?

l) Guilt - What do they feel guilty about since guilt blocks spiritual development?

m) Confession - You may use a session as a time of confession. The invitation to confession may help purge the soul. You will want to end the session with a reminder of God's forgiveness.

n) Emotional Life - How do they see anger, hate, love in their souls? Do they see anger, hate, love in their souls? Do they experience emotional confusion?

o) Stages of Faith - If they are not aware of the work being done by James Fowler on Stages of Faith, they may want to read Life Maps by James and Sam Keen so they can identify what stage they are in. (Also see Laurence O'Connell's article in Pastoral Hermeneutics and Ministry Beisswenger and McCarty, editors.)

p) Journal - The daily journal is one of the best ways to get in touch with inner self. Several good books on journal keeping are available. (See Morton Kelsey's Adventure Inward or Kelsey's article in Pastoral Hermeneutics and Ministry Beisswenger and McCarty, ed.)

q) Dreams - Dreams often code our inner conditions. Our hidden fears, frustrations and desires are expressed in dreams. The place of dreams in the Bible is not incidental.

r) Sharing Scriptures - Take a passage of scripture and both share what the scripture means to you. There is a place for analysis of scripture but this is an exercise in how it touches your inner self.

s) Autobiographies - Biographies and autobiographies (especially the latter) give insight into ourselves. How do we identify with the struggles, failures and victories in the life of the one in the book?

B. OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The spiritual director, from their own experience, will be familiar with the struggle between flesh and Spirit (Gal. 5:16 if). Consequently they will be able to discern resistance in the directee. Some basic issues are:

- a) spiritual dryness - God's call in the wilderness to a deeper level of relationship.
 - expression of a lack of feeling towards God as a sign of repressed emotions
 - e.g. anger, disappointment
- b) signs of resistance - stuck without growth
 - repeating patterns
 - “super-spirituality”
 - boredom with God/indifference
 - discouragement
- c) fear of falling into chaos - losing control
- d) fear of losing the God we're familiar with
- e) fear of being overcome/overwhelmed by God.

J. RESPONSES TO SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

- a) check all direction by: scripture, conscience, Christian tradition, common sense, circumstances
- b) discern prayerfully personal issues of transference and projection onto the spiritual director e.g. intense anger, dependence
- c) consider prayerfully and in dialogue with spiritual director issues of counter-transference arising from the director, e.g. his/her anger with you

K. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

- a) coherence with previous and certain experiences of God
- b) foster ongoing dialogue with God
- c) produce fruit of the Spirit - these grow together e.g. washing dishes
- d) a sense of God's sovereignty viz can't be controlled
- e) leads one into the image of Christ.

N.B: These are processes rather than states.

L. FINDING A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

- a) read and pray for clarity concerning the general issues of spiritual direction e.g. personal willingness, need, call.
 - b) pray and seek for someone who will meet the criteria of suitability
 - c) make contact.
- ‘if you cannot listen to your brother, you cannot listen to the Holy Spirit’ (R. Foster).