

A PLEA FOR DIRECTION

By HUGH KAY AND JAMES WALSH

How can I understand without someone to show me?' Reading these words in the Epistle one day during Easter week has given me the courage to sit down and write this letter to you, not so much as a friend, but as a priest of Christ.¹ I feel a desperate need of the sort of *personal* guidance which Philip gave. It is not that I am being morbidly introspective; nor have I any illusions that I am someone 'special', who needs instruction in the higher flights of prayer. I want you to take me seriously, to treat me as a person to whom the 'Question Box' type of answer may not apply. For whenever I raise any problem with you, you always give me the stock 'bromides' (and I can detect the note of irritation in your voice): 'Oh, I shouldn't worry too much', you'll say. 'It's just a phase we all go through some time or other. You are still going frequently to communion, aren't you? When you're married and have a family to occupy your mind, these doubts and scruples will be the least of your worries. Try to be a little more simple, obedient and trusting. There is an element of pride in all this, you know.' Quite honestly, Father, when you speak like this, you fill me with gloom. The trouble goes on for all your simple devotion therapy. The doubts still rage. The temptations get worse. My attempts at prayer become increasingly futile. The whole spiritual life sometimes seems so utterly unreal and irrelevant. At work, the climate is one of scepticism and contempt for religion. Stories are told of all the real work being done by humanists, while the Church argues about vernacular in the liturgy. You say that a hundred difficulties don't make a doubt. Does this really mean a thing? How can one honestly make an act of faith when racked with fundamental suspicion? One goes to the Communion rail stifling the questions and kidding oneself about the dark night of the soul. Would it not be truer to say that, if the Blessed Sacrament really is what the Catholic believes it to be, it is sheer blasphemy and sacrilege to receive it doubting? Isn't this eating and drinking

¹ In this imaginary exchange of letters between two friends, one of them a priest, Mr. Hugh Kay and Fr. Walsh discuss some of the questions which the term 'Spiritual Direction' may raise in the layman's mind.

unworthily? Every day one more lump of catechism seems to be ridiculed by scientific and philosophical progress. I get so miserable that I find myself grasping at anything that makes me stop thinking.

What I am clutching for, I suppose, is sheer anaesthesia. I know that this may sound impertinent, but I sometimes suspect that you are unable to answer my intellectual problems. When someone like Professor Ayer says that contingency and causality have no meaning, and that, therefore, the traditional proofs for God's existence are worthless, you reply by saying that we must fall back on our common sense. What on earth is that really supposed to mean?

I am very far from being alone in this plight. I can detect the same sort of thing breaking the hearts of many of my friends. Some of them are less articulate than I, so let me speak for them too. It is all very well saying that, basically, we do not want to face the hardships of the spiritual life and abandon our sins and shortcomings. This is not altogether true. We may be quailing at the storm, but, speaking for myself, I really do want to know and love Our Lord. I want him to become real for me. I want to feel that I can turn to him naturally and easily, not as in a day-dream, but with the conviction of his presence. I want the strength to do what he is asking of me. If I could only convince myself of the faith and attain intellectual tranquillity, I would gladly ask to be nailed with him to the Cross. (I know, of course, there is a danger here. So often, when we thought about these things in school retreats, we pictured ourselves hanging on a cross by his side, like the good thief, sustained by the tangible certainty of his presence.) But if being on the cross means we have to share the dereliction of the three hours on Calvary, the sense of abandonment and loneliness, how do we keep ourselves going, and how do we prevent self-pity from blocking the flow of the grace generously imparted to us in the sacraments?

What all this comes down to is that very large numbers of Catholics, and not just the chosen few in religious life, need more than can be done in the few moments available in the confessional. There is, as I see it, a sharp difference between confession and direction. The one is a matter of judging and forgiving sin, and giving a few directions on tactics. The other is a process of positive building up, training the soul in prayer, in sacrifice, in resolution for action, in detailed methods of the day to day apostolate. While the confessor protects and purifies us, the director is needed to form us, not as static Christians in a condition of righteousness, but as active participants in Christ's task of incarnating himself in the whole of

society. I know that much can be done, and always has been done, in the Confessional. I know that there have always been confessors in the Church who, by the grace of their orders and the training and experience that has come their way, have anticipated the modern science of analysis. But this is not everything. For, in addition to diagnosing, and even helping to cure, psychological disorders, it seems to me that the priest has to bring nature into a relationship with the supernatural and perfect it. It is the establishment of this mysterious point of contact between grace and nature that seems to me to be the whole purpose of the priestly life. Yet what, in fact, happens?

Most priests are unable to give the time needed for all this. It must mean frequent and sometimes fairly lengthy discussions with the individual. The confessional is necessarily anonymous. The priest has to deal with a disembodied voice, usually in the dark. If he is to *direct*, however, he must really *know* the soul and its background, the hundred and one nuances of personality that reveal the true nature of the problem and the capacity of that soul for the infusion of grace. But those who can summon up the courage even to call at the presbytery – and it is a worrying fact that courage really is needed to ring that bell – will usually find themselves in a parlour with a breathless priest rushed to death with administrative duty, who looks at his watch and says he must be at the hospital in twenty minutes, and gets quite flustered if you ask whether it would be possible to call for a longer session at another time. Sometimes, Father, I get the feeling that priests simply shirk the task of directing souls, perhaps – may I say it in all love and reverence – because they do not know how to do it, have not been trained for it, and possibly have not received direction themselves. Yet you know better than anyone that the greatest successes in conversion and the work of forming souls have mostly derived from personal contact with a priest who was prepared to let the grace of the orders flow, prepared just to be himself for long patient hours, letting his own spirituality permeate the distraught soul seeking comfort from the Christ-life radiating from those anointed hands. In this context, I have heard of priests who were almost certainly at the bottom of their classes in the seminary, yet whose touch was enough to give new heart, new hope, and new life to their spiritual children. But the plain fact is that I have met so few priests like this, and, when I did, they usually seemed to be so inundated with penitents that I never had the heart to bother them.

On the simple question of availability, I sometimes wonder whether the whole structure of modern parish life requires fundamental alteration. If the priest is to solve the individual's problems of prayer and faith, and guide him in his task of helping to form a vocational order of society and of working in partnership with the clergy in the apostolate, the priest must be constantly in touch with the individual. For most of us, our share in the apostolate has to be worked out in terms of our individual contribution to our immediate environment. This calls for personal, as opposed to group, direction by the priest, who must act as a catalyst for action as truly as he acts as a channel of grace. Today, the working and social life of a local community is no longer congruent with the geographical locality. House-to-house visitation has been made more difficult by more and more mothers going out to work, and the tendency to look a bit put out if the priest knocks on the door during 'Rawhide' or 'Emergency Ward 10'. The father of the family may be out on a trade union job or a social commitment far away from the parish confines.

The parish guild or sodality has, for this reason, become something of an anachronism. Yet, even here, opportunities are lost. Whenever you get a handful of keen Catholics together, there is always scope for the chaplain to talk about the faith at greater depth than he normally considers necessary. You would be surprised if you knew how keen even uneducated lay people are to learn more about the Mass, the Mystical Body, the relation between Mass and work. Sometimes, too, at these meetings, a man will venture to point out that so much that is said to him by priests, in well worn catechism phraseology, seems to have little relevance to the actual problems he meets at work, and seems to fail him when he comes into direct contact with a person who needs his spiritual help. The result is usually a little titter round the room, and the priest smilingly brushes the question off as much as to say: 'You're trying to go in at the deep end before you're ready for it'. Or worse: 'You'll never be fit for the deep end at all'. But the truth is that we are all in at the deep end, whether we like it or not; and something must be done to help us swim. What I am getting at is that the spiritual life and the lay apostolate cannot be lived in terms of rules of thumb. We all need knowledge and judgement, and the ability to apply them to unexpected situations. We are fed on generalisations. But our problems, both personal and apostolic, are particular.

But, getting back to the overall problem of the modern parish,

I can only say that, if the contact between priest and parishioner can no longer be what it was in the days when nearly all parishes could be run like rural units, then that contact must be established on a different level altogether. I have read of various parochial experiments on the continent which try to tackle this conundrum; but surely the basic answer is that the priest must find his parishioners individually, wherever he best can in the circumstances, and be ready to deal with them one by one all the more readily, since he can no longer easily work on them as a group. Nor must one forget those who need very special personal attention, the socially maladjusted, and (ghastly word) the over-institutionalised. There are thousands of them who simply cannot cope with the routine of ordinary living, not so much for lack of intellect as for reasons of temperament. Their need is for friendship and guidance from one who is prepared to listen for long hours to aggravating, aggressive meanderings, to be called on at all sorts of inconvenient times, to learn the secret of forgiving lapse after lapse in one who means well but has no real staying power at all. If such a soul cannot turn to his priest, to whom shall he go?

Whatever the nature of the soul seeking help, certain governing needs will always operate. What we all stand in urgent need of is a personal introduction to God – God the three persons – not God the System. This is best achieved in conversations with priests on the deepest implications of our theology – the nature of the Blessed Trinity and the way that the life of the Trinity must be patterned in personal and social living here on earth; the nature of the Mystical Body of Christ; the two faces of love; the action of Providence in history; the functioning of the Communion of Saints; the relation between the Mass, the workbench, the meal table, and the cross; our duty to society at home and abroad; the way in which grace builds on nature and the relation of natural and supernatural virtue; the lesson of Peter Claver and Benedict Joseph Labre. In some simple way, the thought of men like Fr. Teilhard de Chardin must be made to mean something to each of us. It is true that the modern crisis of faith must be met, that the director must be prepared to show the young intellectual how to grapple with the modern philosopher *on the latter's own terms* and show him the way through to the truth at which his line of reasoning stops short. It is true that individual souls must be taught how to lead the scientist, through his science, to the point where he must admit that the next question in his process of reasoning can be answered only by recourse to a different

discipline of knowledge. It is true that each of us must be taught not to despise the shattering experiences of the unbeliever who has to plumb the depths to answer questions whose answers we have taken too much for granted; taught also to make use of that experience to reassess and deepen our own premisses, to make a synthesis of Christian, non-Christian and even unbelieving thought. But none of this can add up to a light unless it be a natural overspill from our contemplation and prayer in and to the One who is truth itself.

I want to be shown, for instance, how to pray wordlessly, how to wrap all my prayerful activity up in a cry of adoring wonderment and praise, how to petition for nothing without *meaning* the qualification *fiat voluntas tua*. I want help in those dreadful moments when one stands face to face with the fact of one's basic impenitence, utterly derelict, scraping on the ground, groping for the will to want to be sorry. And if I cannot even get that far, I need someone to chase me with all the ruthlessness of the Hound of Heaven. I think I know who I am: someone pretty rotten with a pretty dismal record, but someone for whom Christ died, desperate to find some way of turning my act of contrition – too often dependent on the embarrassment I feel in confession – into a *Gloria*. Before you shut me out again (unwittingly, I know), please pause to think that the Agony in the Garden was just that much worse because of me, and help me to find the motive, through praying my work, my family life, my reading the *Times*, and even my doubts about faith, to go into the Garden with him, and this time to stay awake.

Well, there it all is. You know me better than to think I speak in irreverence or ingratitude, either towards the priesthood in general or towards you who have been so good a family friend. But there are a lot of us stumbling about blindly in a horribly dark night, lost in the desert, often terrified by the blank hopelessness of it all. We are not all able to put it into words. Some of us would be afraid even to try. But underneath the calm tense or bored faces, as the case may be, looking up at you as you stand in the pulpit, there will often be a maelstrom of dereliction. And without you, we have no hope.

Yours in our Lord,
H. K.

I was delighted to hear from you; but I must confess that I was surprised by the panic-stricken note of your letter. You must forgive me for not having taken you seriously. Put it down to my lack of

discernment (the essential quality of a spiritual director, by the way!) that I have so often failed to pick up the drift of your questions. The normal treatment for the occasional bout of temptation, 'spiritual nerves' or irrational doubt is, of course, the sedative, the 'bromide'. I was completely unaware that you had any chronic complaint, much less that you wanted regular spiritual direction. No priest (unless he receives a special light from the Holy Spirit, and knows that this is genuine) ever offers spontaneously to be someone's Spiritual Father. And besides, there is a large difference between a man with 'problems' and one who wants spiritual direction. But more of that later. I would like to make one point straightaway which arises out of my failure to realise that your problems were personal rather than academic. I do not think, in all honesty, that it is entirely my fault. It happens very rarely that a Catholic is completely himself or herself with a priest. Almost unconsciously they try to be, externally, anyway, what they imagine the priest would like them to be or expect them to be. The result is that the priest is often, in desperation, forced to generalise, precisely because the individual is so carefully concealing his real self.

The bromides (I would prefer the more modern 'tranquillisers') are not intended as final solutions or complete answers. There is often a latent idea in the troubled mind that a priest's advice ought to be able to remove temptations – if the priest is worth his salt, that is. Which is nonsense when you stop to consider the divine purpose in temptation. Only the Lord can remove temptation; our tranquillisers are just to help you to go on facing the storm, no matter how hard your knees may be knocking. You would agree that to love Christ and to live at one with him must mean, in practice, always choosing with him. Temptation should make you aware that you are really *alive*! How often have you said to me: 'It's all very well for you priests and religious. You've only got to do what you're told conscientiously and with enthusiasm, and you *know* that you're in union with the Lord's will. But what about us poor layfolk? You tell us that holiness consists in seeking and finding the Lord's will in everything. But how can we know what to choose and how to choose?' Temptation, particularly violent and protracted temptation, clears the issue for you beautifully. You know exactly what to choose and how to choose. And what is more – it indicates the reliance the Lord places in you. He trusts you! That is why trust is the first and final answer to temptation. 'Though the Lord should slay me, yet will I trust him.' You remember the story of Susanna

(it was read that Saturday in Lent when you were here for the week-end and were serving my Mass. You said that the Epistle was too long for a Saturday morning, and that anyway you didn't think it was really a very edifying story!): 'she wept; but she looked up to heaven, for her heart had confidence in God.' If you refuse to consider what real trust means, and what its implications are, then of course you will dismiss the exhortation as a bromide. I ought not to have to remind an *aficionado* of the English mystics of what Julian of Norwich has to say about trust and 'doubtful dread'. Our trouble is that we do not really believe that God loves us: 'For some of us believe that God is almighty and may do all; and that he is all-wisdom and can do all; but that he is all-love and will do all — there we fail'. It is worth remembering, also, that the priest is ordained to preach the *Word*. Much of what a priest says will be an echo of what Christ says. And we *could* dismiss many of the Gospel sayings as platitudes or bromides, unless we constantly recalled that 'God's word to us is something alive, full of energy; it can penetrate deeper than any two-edged sword'. When you ask him, as a priest, for help in difficulty, you cannot expect to make sense of his answer unless you think about it and meditate on it as you would on the words of Scripture.

It would be very remarkable if pride were not involved in the question of fleshly temptations. The Lord has given you a genuine desire to love him as you love no-one else. This involves trying to see the intense malice and filth of sin. Partly from temperament, partly from a rather puritanical upbringing, your idea of the filth of sin is almost entirely associated with the sixth Commandment. Subconsciously you are slightly outraged that *you* should feel the drag downwards into the filth. If you would only clamour to the Lord to let you see the filth of envy, jealousy, the contempt you have of people you dislike or who (you feel) have done you or others a dirty trick, you would not be half so bothered.

Intellectual difficulties and doubts against faith: Has it ever struck you that when Paul was directing Timothy on the matter of new things to come in the world of learning, it never occurred to him to say 'You must make sure that you have an answer for these people.' He merely said 'Watch, accept every hardship, get on with preaching the Gospel, do what you have to do as a priest.' I must confess that my answer about using common sense contained too much weariness and irritation, and ought to have been developed. I thought that these 'intellectual' questions of yours were partly

curiosity, partly the desire to have a slick answer ready when you were being 'got at'. As I say, I didn't consider it as your personal problem. Is it common sense for a Catholic to take the logical positivist seriously on the subject of the traditional proofs for the existence of God when he rejects what common sense vindicates – the distinction between matter and spirit? (I suspect that many people are impressed by Ayer because he is obviously good as well as able, photogenic and talks well on T.V. Often enough we need say no more than 'Yes, but Fr. Copleston or Fr. D'Arcy were more than a match for him', or 'But have you seen Archbishop Heenan or Bishop Fulton Sheen on T.V.?') In any case, I'm tired of leaning over backwards saying 'Yes' to the question 'Is religion reasonable?' – except to catechumens who still feel that the faith is too good to be true. Humanly speaking, the faith is the reverse of reasonable – Christianity is subversive propaganda or irrational nonsense: 'What we preach is Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Gentiles foolish nonsense.' If I may anticipate a little, you say 'the director must be prepared to show the young intellectual how to grapple with the modern philosopher *on the latter's own terms*' (your italics!). Now listen to St. Paul reminding his Corinthians how he grappled with them: 'my teaching and message were not put in plausible philosophical language, but they were attended with convincing spiritual power, so that your faith might rest, not on human philosophy, but on the power of God'. We have become mesmerised with apologetics and with the fallacy that there is some sort of equality between faith and reason. If faith is the submission of the whole man – mind and will, how is it possible to demand 'intellectual tranquillity' before we consent to cry 'I believe Lord, help my unbelief', before we ask to be nailed with Christ to the Cross. It would be like saying 'Give me a rational demonstration of three-in-one and I'll believe!' or 'You come down and then I'll get up there with you!' Here, I would say, is the blasphemy, rather than the discomfort of being racked with doubts whilst receiving the Lord – but still receiving him because you know your doubting soul needs his encouragement and strength.

There may be many people who feel as you do, who want intellectual assurance and a guarantee that they are adopting a reasonable attitude before they begin to lead the interior life in earnest. But so many, I find, really need simple instruction first; children of broken homes, pagan environments, mixed marriages, poorly instructed in Catholic schools. What constantly amazes me

is that intelligent people – university graduates, professional men, who have had to work, intellectually, very hard to acquire their own skills, should be surprised that they have doubts and difficulties about the faith; as adults most of them know nothing about it; they have never studied it. Common sense ought to tell them, when the desire for the Lord and his teaching comes home to them, 'read; and when you need help, then ask someone who is competent'. Intelligent people can usually find out what they want to know without going near a presbytery. Let the young intellectuals and university graduates study the philosophers and their arguments, learn how to meet their difficulties, respect their intelligence and be grateful for their contribution to human knowledge. But for the Catholic intellectual to conclude, because he cannot see how such and such an assertion is to be answered in the context of revealed truth, that there is something amiss with the Catholic faith, is the reverse of intelligent.

Another point: I can see that the intellectually retarded will be emotionally immature, and will therefore find self-control very difficult indeed. But it is hard to get used to emotional immaturity in the intelligent, and the constant failure of the intelligent adult to apply his talents to the problems of Christian living. Take your own case. As near as makes no difference you are pledged to marriage; and yet your immediate reaction to a pressing problem is to rush out and behave as if you had no obligations at all. This is sheer childishness; it is what the priest is faced with over and over again. Do you wonder why you are given what in your calmer and more lucid moments appear to you as childish answers? What is the use of treating a person as an adult when he insists on behaving like a spoilt child?

No-one *gladly* asks to be nailed with Christ to the Cross unless he is passionately in love with our Lord; unless he sees that it means a resolute turning of one's back on *all* the world's values (including many of the so-called intellectual ones), and accepting the values of Christ who was blackguarded and an outcast. No-one 'basically wants to face the hardships of the spiritual life' until, finally, the Lord lets him see that there is nothing else life has to offer, nothing more marvellous that it could offer. And the real cross is not what I want or believe it to be; it consists precisely in shouldering the difficulties of the moment – particularly my miserable self; this is the cross the Lord sends. The dereliction I am to share with him is this temptation, this doubt, this feeling of unreality.

You say that large numbers of Catholics need more than the few moments available to them in the Confessional. If you are right (and I hope you are) that all these have a really efficacious desire (and not merely a vague conditional wish) to give themselves wholly to the Lord, what they need first, besides the instruction spoken about above, is a genuine interest in the things of God. What do they know about the real life of the Church, apart from odds and ends picked up by glancing through the popular Catholic Press? What do they know about the practical day to day honest-to-goodness love and kindness with which the Church abounds. I am suspicious of those who claim an interest in Christ who have no effective love of his Body, and who cannot distinguish between this love and the 'do good' approach of the humanists. Further, a person who is bothered by the temptations you mention needs the Confessional more than anything else: encouragement, consolation, and Christ's healing and strengthening grace. It is possible that some priests – and many penitents – look on the Confessional as though it were a slot-machine, dispensing forgiveness and grace, when you put in a shilling's worth of sin. But I have no doubt at all that the average confessor, when asked 'Father, will you help me?', will respond as Christ would have him respond. As for the darkness and disembodiment – this is for the penitent's protection, and precisely to save him from that guilty embarrassment which he so often mistakes for sorrow. May I ask you a simple question? How many of these Catholics have ever set about finding a confessor that suits them and confessing to him regularly? In a big city there are always Churches administered by religious for whom this sort of confessional work is an important part of their ministry.

You say that spiritual direction is 'a process of positive building up, training the soul in prayer, in sacrifice, in resolutions for action, in detailed methods of the day to day apostolate'. Now this is a reasonable description, not of spiritual direction, but of the Church's pastoral care as a whole. The Church is not a collection of individuals; she is the Body of Christ. It is as a whole, at any given moment, that she is trained and educated – 'until we all realise our common unity through faith in the Son of God. So shall we reach perfect manhood, that maturity which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ'. Up to a certain point God's people must be trained as a whole, principally by the preaching of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist – as Christ himself taught the people and his Apostles and disciples. Personal spiritual direc-

tion becomes useful and necessary only when the individual who is living the life of the Christian community to its fullest possible extent becomes aware of God's *special* call to perfection. (I'm not speaking of the religious or priestly vocation, though the call will often take that form). If you will read the beginning of St. John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*, you will be a little surprised, I think, at what he considers to be the dispositions required of a soul who wishes to *begin* the journey to perfection. Individual spiritual direction has for its end the total transformation of the human will into the divine will. If a person is not ready to submit to the radical mortification, the 'death to the self', which this implies, and still thinks he needs a spiritual director, he is deceiving himself. What he is really looking for is a partner in crime.

You can see, then, why many priests do not consider individual spiritual direction to be part of their normal work. To them it means to be entrusted with a soul destined by the Lord for the heights of sanctity; and such a charge demands special training. The priest knows that there are sure to be a number of these 'chosen souls' in his parish: the incipient priestly or religious vocation, older people (not infrequently the father or mother of a large family) whose lives of love and self-sacrifice have disposed them to contemplative prayer. And he will be ready to recommend these souls to priests specially trained in the art of direction. But he is also aware that the perfection of the individual, normally speaking, depends on the vigour of the sacramental life of the parish, and is to be achieved within the parish unit. We could argue for ever about the ideal structure of the unit in any given time or place; and it is true that we need a good deal more elasticity. What we need *first* (perhaps more than a great increase of available priests) is the awareness that the community and all its members exist for one main purpose – the celebration of the Eucharist. The prayer of Christ to his Father for the perfection of his Church, and of any community within the Church, is in the context of the Holy Eucharist – 'that while thou art in me, I may be in them, and so they may be perfectly made one'. This unity in divine Charity, the participation in the life of the Trinity, is to spring from the common celebration of the Eucharist, and is to lead to a more and more perfect liturgical celebration. This is why the Church is insisting so much on dialogue and participation. Dialogue is effective only in terms of the life and reciprocal love of the members of Christ's community. What the average priest goes for, first of all,

is to get his people to Mass on Sunday; and the faithful feel that it is Sunday Mass which makes them 'practising' Catholics. But this is very often almost instinctive. The priest is so often concerned with the sheer survival of his flock that he ceases to think in terms of community growth and perfection. And for so many Catholics Mass is not much more than the fulfilment of an arbitrarily imposed obligation. There is hardly any awareness that here is the source of the unity and vitality of Christ's Body, and that the holiness of the individual should normally reflect the holiness of the community. All parish activity, even money-raising, is to be holy and apostolic: directed, that is, to the more effective celebration of the Eucharist. Any purely personal apostolate is missionary activity. And those who are called to that must recognise that they have received the sort of special call to which I referred above.

This said, and if I have made myself clear about the nature of spiritual direction, we can agree that the priest often fails in his duty as a shepherd. It belongs to the mystery of the Church that there are lazy priests, pleasure-loving priests, impatient and irritable priests, priests who must talk and cannot listen. God forgive us; it takes us a long time to learn the lesson that what he wants us to do is to leave the ninety-nine members of the Blessed Sacrament Guild at their monthly meeting, and go off after the one who is sick or in prison, or just coming out of prison. It is equally true that if the priest fails to be what Christ calls him to be, then God help the sheep! At the same time, however, the corporal or even the spiritual works of mercy are for us all. Much of what you have called direction – listening sympathetically, a readiness to be inconvenienced at all hours, forgiving seventy times seven and so on – are privileges granted to all Christ's members. Of course any man should be able to turn to his priest; but he should more often than not find what he wants from the nearest Christ. 'Who is my neighbour?'

As for your own final *cri du coeur*. When you find yourself face to face with your own basic impenitence and refuse to turn hastily away, when the desire to be pursued by the Lord is honestly genuine, when you feel the need for prayer so much that it becomes an ache; well, what you need is Spiritual Direction!

Come round one evening next week and we'll talk about it.

Yours in our Lord,

J. W.