SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND COUNSELLING:

SOME REFLECTIONS

By PETER CANTWELL

ONE OF THE most enriching and encouraging dimensions of our contemporary Church is the increasing number of opportunities for laity, clergy, and religious to broaden and deepen their capacity to be of help to others through programmes of spiritual direction, ranging from short courses to university doctorates. People who have participated in these courses find that they are able to offer their own experience and skills across a spectrum of professional and semi-professional areas: within the local parish community, in houses of prayer, in formation of religious and laity, in positions of leadership in the Church, in providing continuing spiritual direction, or in offering directed retreats of varying lengths. Such a movement requires every encouragement, since it is meeting a need long felt and now being expressed by the ordinary Christian. Thus a ministry once regarded as the proper domain of the clergy alone (often offered with reluctance and lack of expertise), is now being enriched by religious and laity with specific training who are often better equipped for the task than the clergy.

Our purpose here is to reflect on this blossoming movement of spiritual direction. I come to this field, not from a specialist theological background but from the study of the behavioural sciences, and more specifically from full-time engagement in counselling, both at the theoretical and practical levels. My belief is that contemporary psychological research in the areas of helping relationships and the dynamics of human growth has a very specific contribution to make to the apostolic mission of spiritual direction; and further, that if spiritual direction wishes to continue to be a valid ministry, it has no option but to continue to learn from the findings of the behavioural sciences.

To aid my reflections, I have selected three questions which touch on some of the practical dilemmas of those engaged in spiritual direction, and which can sometimes be the source of confusions that occur, say, in giving directed retreats. They are questions that often

arise in a group of seven of us, meeting each month for prayer, mutual enrichment and professional support. They are:

1. The use of models in the spiritual direction relationship.
2. The relationship of the human and the spiritual in the total growth of the person.
3. The contribution of the contemporary behavioural sciences to the process and skills of the spiritual direction relationship.

The use of models in general

Any model at its best can be no more than a tool. It is a way of systematizing data into a coherent whole, of showing how the parts fit together and what progression is implied. A helping model can provide a very useful map or guide for the helper to discover where he is and how and where he should proceed.

However, the danger inherent in the use of any model is that the model becomes an end itself rather than a tool. The truly wise man is one who owns the model but is not owned by it. He can 'feel' when it is appropriate to deviate even quite radically from the model, and possibly even to discard it for the time being. He can be flexible in its application and avoids making the literal adherence to the map the primary goal of the journey. He is also continually open to adapting the model to the results of continuing research and the emergence of new schools of thought. Within the counselling discipline, the most effective therapist is the one who is in touch with the greatest number of schools of thought, and who therefore has the richest variety of skills to offer.[1]

Any model, then, has a value and a use as a tool, and not as an end in itself. For no individual person ever exactly fits into any model. The moment a person sits before me to share with me his life-experiences, the clinical precision of psychological diagnostic categories and the polished neatness of any helping model immediately become blurred before the mysterious uniqueness of *this* person. The more precise our skill, the deeper our knowledge, the more we may be able to help: but only to the extent that our knowledge and skills take second place to the attitude of wonder, and the respect for *this* person.

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[1] Cf Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper* (California, 1975), pp 50-53, for some excellent principles to be applied in the use of any model. Also David L. Fleming, S.J., 'Models of Spiritual Direction', in *Review for Religious*, 34, 3 (May 1975), pp 351-57, for a discussion of the advantages of multiple models of direction.

Models and spiritual direction

The same principle applies in the spiritual direction relationship. The broader the director's knowledge and the wider his preparation, the more he is able to help. Like most therapists, the director probably has a basic orientation to his work learnt in a particular school, but it does not have to stop there, and in fact it must not. Though my basic orientation in direction favours Francis's fairly unstructured approach to the spiritual life, I occasionally find that the insights of an Ignatius or a Teresa can be very helpful, especially when dealing with people who come from differing spiritual traditions. On the basis of this principle, courses that favour a broad approach to spiritual traditions and methodologies would tend to produce the most effective helpers.

It does not seem out of place to emphasize the importance of this principle of the use of models for those who are currently on the 'directed retreat circuit'. There can be a tendency in some directors to offer the directed retreat experience as a sort of pre-packaged deal, with too much rigidity in its application. There is no special magic about praying for a particular length of time each day, or using only scripture, or using one method of prayer, be it franciscan, ignatian, carmelite, and so on. The director may well have found that these practices often help many people, but that is by the way. They may not help *this* person, and the basic principle is that we should start with the person, not the model.

There is another reason for not proceeding in too directive a way in a directed retreat programme: out of all the renewal opportunities in the contemporary Church, the directed retreat is certainly one of the most individually oriented, and thus provides the ideal opportunity for the experience to be constructed around and focused on the needs, hopes and aspirations of *this* person before his God. Within this context, then, the challenge for the directee in the early part of the retreat experience is to get in touch with 'Where am I now as a total person as I stand before my God, and whither I am being called?' Such a challenge may take some considerable time, more time in fact than the director feels comfortable with. But unless the programme begins with and continues to touch the reality of the person's life, while it might be a 'good experience', it cannot last and will be sloughed off once the programme ends. Of course, such an approach assumes that the director spends a lot of time early in the retreat doing some accurate listening.

My reason for emphasizing this principle derives from my work as a counsellor, where I often come across people who have made directed retreats. Many times they have had a quite profound experience, and as a result of having been with a sensitive director, have discovered some knot or blockage on the human level that they would like to explore. But not infrequently this does not happen, and the consequences can be unfortunate. A programme was imposed which no way touched the person's needs, the director was fairly heavy-handed, and when 'nothing happened' (and I am not too sure what *is* supposed to happen!), he increased penances and prayer time, and this led to deeper frustration, and a more crippling sense of guilt, so that the last state was worse than the first!

Beginning with the person and not the model, then, has several important consequences. First, it helps to prevent such disasters, and it may even happen that both people agree that the time is not ripe for an intense experience of solitude such as the directed retreat offers. Secondly, it conveys to the directee very clearly that *he* has to assume primary responsibility for his growth, that no one else can do this, that the director is a guide and companion to help in any way he can, but that it is not his task to assume primary responsibility for the other's growth and life-decisions.

One of my deepest concerns about some contemporary spiritual direction is that the way some directors practise their art tends to foster an over-dependence on the director: one that is counter-productive to true growth. A comparison with the counselling relationship might be of help. When a person comes for counselling, he is usually feeling powerless and unable to cope with himself, and for some time may be fairly dependent on the counsellor for help. The good counsellor, in one sense, should be the poorest one, because he is continually doing himself out of a job: he is not needed any more once the person can stand on his own two feet. Obviously the comparison limps, because the person coming for spiritual direction may not have any specific problem; whilst, at the other end, we can never say that our conversion is complete. But the process should head in the same direction: namely, the person's taking more and more responsibility for his own life, developing deeper insights which enable him to challenge himself in his own lived experience.

It is generally agreed today that the weakness of older styles of formation and spiritual direction is that they were over-directive, authoritarian, and tended to foster dependence and conformity rather than initiative. Though we hear the process of direction talked about

today with more modern labels, it is fairly easy for some of these older attitudes to slip into contemporary spiritual direction models and repeat the weaknesses of their predecessors.

The relationship of the human and the spiritual in the overall growth of the person

The above title may seem to imply that the human and the spiritual can be separated. The only point we wish to make here is that they cannot. Eugene Kennedy makes this amply clear when speaking about prayer:

> Prayer resembles other similar human responses — such as believing and loving — which function within the overall scheme of personal development. . . . The moment of prayer is one in which the intensity of our presence with the truth of ourselves to the truths of life draws our personality more fittingly together. We are integrated, more ourselves. That is the kind of wholeness that underlies the true meaning of holiness. . . . The old models that divided the person made us inhabit a body that was a burden for our spirits. . . . With that model, prayer could only be an exercise of the spiritual side of the person; its direction could only be toward a world well beyond this one. This blurred any appreciation and understanding of prayer as a fundamental and deeply significant human activity. Persons are made to pray; we only make it difficult when we insist that it be done according to a faulty understanding of personality which emphasised the exaltation of the spiritual over the bodily, the intellect over the emotions, the supernatural over the natural.[2]

Prayer, then, as my most radical response to the truth of my life, is a function of who I am in my deepest reality. Thomas Merton describes prayer as simply being myself before God. The spiritual director naturally focuses on the prayer-life of the other as one of the touchstones of his faith commitment. But if prayer is very much a reflection of who I am now before my God, it must ebb and flow in response to all the ups and downs of living.

This is simply to say that I am one person and one person only. My call to growth sometimes demands that I look at the more specifically human knots of my life, at other times that I look at my faith-commitment. But any movement on one side usually has a corresponding effect on the other. How often have we seen it happen

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[2] Eugene Kennedy, *A Contemporary Meditation on Prayer* (Chicago, 1975), pp 30-32.

that a person who has entered into a significant growth experience on the human side (for example, a deeper openness to others), has had to rethink his prayer relationship to God; so that a deeper openness to the Lord has carried over in a readiness to take more risks with fellow humans.

The 'miraculous' versus the 'natural'

A corollary of this principle that the human and the spiritual usually work in a non-separable way is that we should be loath to label something as a specifically supernatural intervention in our lives or the lives of others unless this is clearly indicated. Some movements in the contemporary Church are over-hasty in identifying events as 'miraculous', and such conclusions can lead to an unreal piety, as well as making religion a source of ridicule for those who rightly demand more serious evidence. After all, it does seem rather pointless for the Lord to create an order of nature and then spend his time working outside of it! This is not to say that he cannot, and our faith demands that we be open to the possibility. But elements in the Church have sometimes been too ready to identify events as miraculous, which later came to be accounted for adequately in strictly scientific or psychological categories. So we should tend rather to support the principle that 'unless the miraculous is occurring in unequivocal terms, everything has an explanation which is strictly within the confines of human potentiality'.[3]

Some contemporary psychological research is tending to demythologize the explicitly miraculous character of events that were often thought to be such. One such event occurred in the life of Francis of Assisi: his reception of the stigmata. Modern psychological research at least provides sufficient evidence to question the necessarily miraculous character of such a phenomenon. But that is scarcely the point of the total experience. The only significant question is the motivation that occasioned it. This was the 'miracle' for Francis: the depth of his identification with the crucified Lord and the way he lived out that identification.[4] Similarly, many of the experiences of

[3] Jack Dominian, *Cycles of Affirmation* (London, 1975), p 111.

[4] The science of psychosomatics, which investigates the extent to which the mind influences and can produce changes in the body (and vice versa), is very much in its infancy. But there is already compelling evidence to show the effects that some psychological states can have on the skin and accompanying vascular systems. Discussion of the *physical* dimension of the stigmata must come within this field, so that our piety is anchored in the best of scientific

(*continued overleaf*)

the mystics can be satisfactorily described within the context of modern psychological terminology. But, just as in the case of Francis, this in no way lessens the 'miracle of faith' which gave rise to them. So we should be slow to impute the specifically miraculous to spiritual experiences, but rather tend to agree that 'we cannot do any justice to our spiritual experiences unless we understand as much as we can about the nature of our humanity'.[5] For whatever is to be said about the miraculous, 'one thing is clear: that the higher states of the mystical life are very ordinary. There is no ecstasy, no rapture, no flash of light, no bells, no incense. I am now my true self'.[6]

That true self is man fully alive, which, as Irenaeus reminds us, is the glory of God. We may at times need to draw distinctions between the more specifically human and the more specifically spiritual, but when we separate these realities too much we do so to the detriment of both. The deepest and most real response to the Lord is one that is rooted in and grounded on the grit of ordinary living, and flows back into the domain of the ordinary, to make us more aware of the presence of the Lord in that very ordinariness. The challenge of faith, then, is not so much to produce miraculous interventions that

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research. A recent textbook on Francis and his writings discusses the stigmata with due caution: 'Modern research has demonstrated that mental and emotional causes can have visible effects on the skin. . . . Actually, even the Church's foremost experts on this complex subject which involves medicine, psychiatry, and mystical theology are not in agreement on the basic nature of the stigmata. . . . Professor Paul Siwek, S.J., insists that 'there are no convincing reasons to hold that stigmatization, considered in itself, necessarily surpasses all the powers of nature or is strictly miraculous'. . . . The late Fr Herbert Thurston, S.J., who studied numerous case histories of 'surprising mystics', claimed that 'there are visionaries who have . . . genuine stigmata, but who for all that are by no means saints', and who were 'suffering from pronounced and often extravagant hysterical neuroses'. The editor of this work on Francis rightly concludes that the irresolution of the psychosomatic problem is not terribly significant because 'we would certainly fail to understand . . . the whole attitude of the Middle Ages toward the Poverello if we did not grasp the fact that his Stigmata were generally looked upon as the ultimate certification by God of his unparalleled conformity with Christ, as far as is possible to a mere creature'. Cfr Marian A. Habig, *St Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Bibliographies* (Chicago, 1972), pp 1505-06. For a brief psychological discussion of stigmata and such phenomena, cf George W. Kisker, *The Disorganised Personality* (New York, 1964), pp 31 ff.

[5] Cf *Cycles of affirmation*, p 110 and 82.

[6] William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* (London, 1978), p 134. The word 'ordinary' as used by Johnston would be misinterpreted if it were read as unchallenging, undemanding. He uses it within the context of those mystical traditions which see deepening mysticism as a 'passage to the ordinary' (*ibid.*, p 37). The deepest experience of Zen mysticism is being in touch with 'your ordinary everyday mind' (*ibid*). The attainment of such ordinariness carries with it the whole challenge of the Paschal mystery, of purification, of dying to oneself and living to God. It is the ordinariness of Mary's great *Magnificat* prayer where she can rest in peace before the truth of herself and her life before her God.

change the way things are, but it is rather to realize that in my present giftedness and limitations, poverty and richness, in the present frustrating and perhaps painful experiences of life, I am called by name, branded on the palm of his hand, and that I must find his care and love *already present*. After all, that is what we see happening in the life of Jesus: he had to struggle with the painful realization that his preaching was not going to be received as he had hoped it would, he had to struggle to find his Father's will in a mid-course change of direction, and his humanity wanted to be freed of it right to the very end. . . . But there was no clap of thunder, no army of angels, just a slow death on a cross.

Prayer growth and spiritual direction

The present emphasis in church life on the deepening of individual prayer through spiritual direction and directed retreats is very much needed and long overdue. It is appropriate that the director in such situations is primarily interested in and concerned about faith-commitment, and not counselling human growth problems. But one of my own concerns at this moment is that some religious seem to be developing a prayer life that is fairly detached from the reality of their humanness. It often sounds ethereal, rather 'precious', sometimes over-pious, does not reverberate with the throb of real life, and seems to by-pass excessively the ups and downs of psychological dynamics. By contrast, the prayer of Jesus in the gospels is always his first and most radical response to the simplicity and complexity of events and people around him, and his own internal coping with these people and events. It would seem essential for the director to keep a similar principle in mind when assisting another to a deeper prayer commitment, and to be wary of reinforcing a prayer style which avoids the light and shade of ordinary emotional life, or which seems to survive in a self-sealed compartment of life: one which is floating above rather than anchored in the down-to-earthness of daily living. When the director suspects that a person's prayer life might be heading in such an out-of-touch direction, he might well see the need to de-emphasize the specifically spiritual for the time being, and advise the person to participate in some kind of human growth programme. For one of the dangers in the directed retreat movement today is that a person might progress from the older version of compulsory silence to the newer version of voluntary and growth-orientated silence, without having had the opportunity to get into touch with some of that humanity which was repressed for a long time under older authority structures.

Counselling within directed retreats

To summarise: we cannot separate the human and the spiritual in our lives. They are the warp and woof of our overall growth; and separation is more often the sign of incipient psychological malaise than of positive growth. It would seem unreal then to imagine that, in a programme such as a directed retreat, where the person is forced to take a reasonably intensive look at his own life, human as well as spiritual questions will not come up for attention.

One reason for this is the very nature of the programme. For it is one which demands a real experience of solitude through encouragement to deep stillness and silence. That is quite a healthy demand. Most of the therapy of the East is based on meditation and silence, the theory being that when I am still and silent with myself, whatever is unresolved in my life has space and time to come up for recognition. One of my own practices in counselling is to invite the counsellee, whether christian or not, to spend some time each day just being still with himself, so that the process of self-awareness and self-owning and integration can quietly go on. As the silence of the directed retreat situation is much deeper than that, we can and should expect that deeply human as well as spiritual knots will make their presence felt. What is the director going to do?

In recent times seminars have been held in our country where diametrically opposed views on the place of counselling in directed retreats have been equally vehemently upheld: counselling should be part of the situation, counselling should never be indulged in. My own opinion is that they are the wrong kind of questions. In any helping relationship the only valid questions are: What kind of help is really best for this person now? Do my skills allow me to provide such help?

Such questions give rise to a variety of possible options for the director. First, let us consider the case of the director who feels able and competent to handle the particular counselling question. There are two possibilities: within the overall context that a directed retreat is not primarily for counselling, he judges that the person can quite comfortably cope with waiting until after the retreat; and both he and the directee feel content to continue the prayer experience. After the retreat he helps the person with a referral, or he himself makes a specific counselling contract. On the other hand, it may be that what has suddenly emerged in the silence of the retreat is too large a blockage to be put aside, and needs to be dealt with now. In that case he might considerably redirect the overall experience of the week,

being careful to be very explicit with the other as to what he is doing and where they are going.

Let us take the case of the director who feels incompetent to deal with what has emerged. If both judge that it can be comfortably put aside, the case is the same as before. But if it is really blocking, necessary action should be taken, even to the extent of stopping the retreat and making an immediate referral. Team meetings can be very helpful in assisting the director in the course of action to be followed.

One of the most obvious conclusions from the above discussion is that any director who professionally commits himself to giving more intensive programmes, such as the directed retreat, has a responsibility to have as one of his tools of trade sufficient psychological knowledge to be able to recognize when a referral is appropriate, and how to make a referral. My experience indicates that when such knowledge is not present, one of several equally unhelpful consequences may follow. Either the director may not recognize that any problem is present and may continue with the programme, blithely unaware of what is happening; or else he may try to cure a human problem by quite inappropriate spiritual remedies. For example, certain types of depression are not at all helped by reading and re-reading the hope passages of Isaiah; nor are scruples necessarily alleviated by reading Luke (12, 22-31) on not worrying. Nor is someone who is showing signs of manic excitement helped by heavier doses of the mystical. The most disastrous cases in my own experience are those in which a person with a quite recognizable psychological difficulty has been 'exorcised', a practice which caused the person to regress further and which showed an almost complete absence of professional responsibility on the part of the director.[7]

In fine, the best principles of truly integrated growth show that we cannot compartmentalize the human and the spiritual in the conversion process. They work together in an harmonious and complementary way. The director should expect that the journey of life will sometimes have a heavier human emphasis and sometimes a deeper spiritual significance. He does not need to be able to help in all situations, but professional responsibility demands that he know the

[7] Any contemporary textbook on abnormal psychology usually deals with the way that ancient man often ascribed to devils and evil spirits what today can be accounted for in terms of psychological dynamics. For example, cf Curtis L. Barrett, *et al.*, *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* (Del Mar, Cal., 1972), pp 4-18; or George W. Kisker, *The Disorganised Personality* (New York, 1964), pp 36-74. Those involved in the current charismatic emphasis on possession and exorcism would do well to be aware of these facts.

limits of his skills, and that he can and does refer when that is appropriate. There cannot be any absolutes about the presence or absence of counselling in spiritual direction, because the growth categories themselves are rather blurred. But the director should know *what* he is doing and *why* he is doing it. If he is giving direction, it is because that is what is most needed, and not because he is unaware of what is happening or afraid to refer; and if he changes to counselling (*if* the process can be seen as clearly as that) he does so because that is where the call is now. The only ultimate principle is to be as present as possible to this person with whatever skills I may have, to accompany him wherever the movement and call seem to be, confident that the Lord is in the whole process and that he does not demarcate the areas too specifically.

The contribution of the contemporary behavioural sciences to the process and skills of the spiritual direction relationship

One of the areas of fastest growth in the behavioural sciences today concerns that of the attitudes and skills which are fundamental to and necessary for any helping relationship, and much research has emerged over the past ten years to specify and verify these attitudes.[8]

It is an obvious fact that whatever other nuances might be added by way of definition to spiritual direction, it is a helping relationship. As such it must take cognizance of and be enriched and modified by what responsible researchers are saying. This fact was stated very clearly some time ago by Ernest Larkin: 'Unless spiritual direction is updated with the insights of the behavioural sciences and modern conditions, it does not deserve to stay in competition as a helping relationship'.[9]

Mention is made of this principle because one sometimes hears of directors who, in outlining their approach to direction, say in as many words: 'I am not here to do a Carl Rogers listening thing with you. I am here basically to teach and you are here basically to listen'. Whatever one may think of Carl Rogers' monopoly on the human art of listening, the above is a fairly bald statement of an approach to direction. While others may not state it so bluntly, a watered-down version of that same approach seems at times to be sufficiently present in the way some directors *in fact* practise their art.

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[8] Cf Gerard Egan, *op. cit.* Also: Charles B. Truax and Robert P. Carkhuff, *Towards Effective Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Chicago, 1967).

[9] Ernest E. Larkin, O. Carm., 'Spiritual Direction Today', in *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 161, 3 (Septemher 1969), p 207.

Helping attitudes

The clearest and most universally accepted results of research into helping relationships is this: no matter what school of thought one may follow, the *sine qua non* condition for the creation of a growth-facilitating atmosphere is the quality of the relationship which develops between the helper and the other person. It is only on the foundation of such a trust relationship that skills, knowledge, and the like are of any avail. Research into conditions that facilitate therapeutic growth indicates that, in some situations, unskilled psychiatric nurses who could relate to the patients achieved more positive results than highly skilled psychiatrists and psychologists, who lacked the corresponding relational qualities.

The attitudes we are speaking of are so well known that they have almost descended to the level of jargon in professional circles; while the challenge of acquiring them in lived experience seems to lag behind:

> *the capacity to listen:* to try to understand the world from the frame of reference of the other person, to taste life as the other does, to walk a mile in his shoes, to be able to jump inside his skin and see the world as he sees it.
> *an attitude of respect:* which says that I value you and accept you and respect you in a non-judgmental way, for no other reason than that you are the person that you are, here and now.
> *the willingness to be real:* that I try not to hide behind a professional facade, to be non-defensive, to be reasonably role-free, to reveal myself more or less as the person I am now.
> *concern for the concrete:* an ability to be down-to-earth, practical, without resorting to theretical abstractions: but to respond from the framework of lived experience, with my feet on the ground.

Helping attitudes and spiritual direction

As we said earlier, if spiritual direction wishes to classify itself as a helping art, as it surely does, it must be willing to subject its method and process to these findings. When it does, some consequences follow for the director.

First, he must be willing and able to be present as a real faith-sharing person, who operates reasonably comfortably from a role-free standpoint. This implies that he is sufficiently at home with the skills side of direction that they flow fairly spontaneously from his natural way of doing things. This takes time, practice and supervision.

Experience would verify that the shorter the training course — and some today can be very short — the more self-conscious and unspontaneous and model-rigid (and therefore unhelpful) are the director's skills. This is not to say that any course, no matter if only for one day, cannot deepen a person's capacity to be more of a helping person. Rather, it is to imply that the professional limitations of such training should be spelled out more clearly than at times they are. This would prevent trainees from operating beyond their limits and causing discouragement to themselves and confusion to others.

Secondly, these attitudes imply that the primary challenge to the director is to be willing to spend enough time simply to get into step with and to begin to appreciate and touch the world of the other before any more directive skills (if appropriate) be used: that is, listening.[10] This is such a simple statement to make, and yet how demanding in practice! The hardest lesson for counsellors-in-training to learn (and the same must apply to directors-in-training) is to spend enough time patiently, gently, and non-judgmentally to get in tune with another. We tend to want others to come at our pace, to push, to pry unnecessarily, to ask too many questions, a leaving the other with the overall feeling of being rushed at and misunderstood. And having devoted insufficient time to listening, we come out with a superficial and usually inapplicable solution.

One of my own convictions is that spiritual direction training programmes have taken too little notice of some of the emerging results of research into the skills and process of a therapeutically helpful relationship, and if one examines some of the better contemporary statements of that process, they overlap, and similarity becomes starkly clear.[11] That is not to say that the *goal* of spiritual direction — our faith-commitment to Jesus Christ — is not qualitatively different from that of counselling. But it is to acknowledge that this faith-goal can be more effectively reached if the director is as aware as possible of the *process* and *skills* of any helping relationship.

To emphasise these helping skills is not to say anything particularly new. If we wish to see contemporary helping attitudes and skills at their best, we have only to observe in action the Jesus of the gospels.

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[10] Cf Peter W. Cantwell, *Counselling Today's Youth* (Melbourne, 1973): 'Creative Listening', pp 5-15.

[11] Cf *The Skilled Helper*. I find it a quite fascinating and exciting experience to compare Egan's model of the *process* of a helping relationship with the *process* that seems to characterize good spiritual direction. It seems to me that if spiritual direction is to be 'helping', and if Egan's model is a good one, the processes should coincide.

The compelling integrity of his own truth is combined with an extraordinarily acute ability to hear the deepest feelings of pain, hurt, sorrow of each person he meets. Who else could have 'heard' the sorrow and shame of the adulterous woman and by the sheer power of his presence turned the tables on the hypercritical Pharisees? Who else would have left the important surrounding people as he entered Naim to heal the tears of the lonely widow? Who else would have 'heard' the repentance of a Magdalen, a Zaccheus, or a thief on the cross?

Conclusion

It seems appropriate to conclude these reflections on spiritual direction with the person of Jesus, the director *par excellence*, who lives out the best answers to the three questions we have been examining.

He never approached anyone with preconceived and un-thought-through models of helping. He placed heavy demands on people and challenged them deeply, but it was always a profound personal challenge and no pre-packaged deal.

Secondly, he never saw man as a reality divided into separate compartments, but one who was profoundly and totally God's work of art.[12] So he worked to liberate and free the whole person, from psychological oppression, from physical infirmity, from spiritual malaise. And liberation on each level had its flow-over to the others. As a psychotic man from the tombs could praise God after his psychological liberation, so a Magdalen who could not look her God in the face was able, when forgiven, to express her feminine talents in a true spirit of caring.

Finally, if we want to see an almost textbook example of the skills and process of helping relationships in action, we need look no further than the way Jesus dealt with each person who needed him.

It is our hope then, that our faith-reflection on the Jesus of the gospels will complement our readiness continually to update our helping skills and knowledge, so that the modern movement of spiritual direction in the Church will come to its full stature.

[12] Cf Eph 2, 10.