

A Historical Sketch of the Catholic Tradition of Spiritual Direction by Means of Letters – A Representative Selection

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2.1 Introduction

Throughout the years many Christians while looking at their Christian lives as the way in which they were following Jesus Christ (the “sequela Christi”), understood that this was only possible because of the help of the Holy Spirit within them. They let him be active within them by cooperating with his grace in many ways. One of the most prominent and important among these ways was and still is, spiritual direction. Here, I shall trace spiritual direction by means of letters in the Catholic Tradition. I can say from the outset that this way of imparting spiritual direction was widely spread throughout all the years, throughout all the times of the history of the Catholic Church. Here, I intend to present just a bird’s eye view of the most prominent people of the Catholic Church who imparted spiritual direction by the means of letters.

2.2 Saint Paul

Saint Paul was a preacher of the word, an itinerant missionary in the very early years of Christianity.¹ Nevertheless, Paul felt a continuing responsibility for those whom he had ‘begotten’ or ‘initiated’ into the Christian life, a direct involvement in their subsequent struggles. He applied the maternal image of child-bearing when he wrote to the Galatians: “My children, I am going through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you” (4, 19). As a spiritual parent with paternal and maternal feelings, he went on caring and suffering for them in the long process of development during which Christ was being ‘formed’ within them.²

1. 2 Cor 11, 16-33.

2. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR, *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, viii.

When addressing his audience in letters, Paul discussed the meaning of Christian Initiation. The neophyte has been baptized into Christ, to die and be buried with him so as to be raised from the death with him.³ Death in Christ leads to the new life of the resurrection! There is a future dimension to this eschatological promise: the resurrection of the body and the fullness of eternal life still await the faithful. But there is also a very real present dimension to this Christological union.⁴

Pauline letters share features of the contemporary Greco-Roman and Semitic letters – the opening formula, thanksgiving and the actual message. Reflecting early Christian preaching, which often joined an ethical exhortation to its doctrinal exposé, “the body of the Pauline letter is usually divided into two parts – one *doctrinal*, presenting truths of the Christian message, the other *hortatory*, giving instructions for Christian conduct.”⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmayer, quotes another author, Diesmann, and says:

Deissmann classed Paul’s writings as letters, not literary epistles... Paul’s writings are fundamentally “letters,” composed for an occasion, often produced in haste, and mostly written in complete independence of each other. Philemon is a private letter sent to an individual; Galatians a letter addressed to a group of local churches and imbued with Paul’s personal concern for his converts. Similarly, 1 Co, 1 Th, Ph, despite all the great truths they discuss, are basically “letters” handling concrete issues in the churches addressed.⁶

In so doing, Deissmann reminds us that Paul rarely wrote his letters as a private individual; they are instead the product of him being an apostle, a missionary, and a preacher. His letters were sent to communities and individuals to express his apostolic presence and authority in building up Christian churches. Paul made sure that the use of the letter-form served him to spread his understanding of the Christian gospel and especially of applying it to the concrete problems that arose in areas that he could not then visit personally.⁷ Because his letters are the only New

3. Rm 6, 3-4.

4. 1 Cor 15, 42-57.

5. Ibid., 770.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid. Here Fitzmayer continues that “part of his [Paul’s] genius was to adopt a manageable form of writing for his evangelistic purposes. His writings are then best characterised as ‘apostolic letters.’ Though Paul is often called the first Christian theologian, he did not write with the precision of one presenting systematic theology, conciliar definition, or canonical legislation. More simply, he was casting his apostolic teaching in letter form.”

Testament documents addressed to shepherds or “pastors” of Christian communities and because they deal with church life and practice (i.e., with “pastoral” theology), 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus since the eighteenth century, have been called the “Pastoral Letters”.⁸ All “Pauline” letters are later cited by all those who seek to give spiritual direction to the ones seeking it from them. Paul always remains as a reference point of direction.

In his correspondence to individuals and communities, Paul, as a caring parent, wanted to empathize with the communities’ burdens, making their joys and sorrows his own: ‘If anyone is weak, do I not share his weakness? If anyone is made to stumble, does not my heart blaze with indignation?’ (2 Co 11, 29) As such he helped his “children in Christ”, by becoming one with them, identifying his own life with theirs. This can also be said of the spiritual father at a later date.⁹

2.3 *The Patristic Age*

2.3.1 *The Desert Fathers*

The Desert Fathers in Egypt, Syria and Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries indicate for us the first sign of spiritual direction within the Christian tradition on any sizeable scale. In the spirituality of the Desert Fathers “the first teacher of the monk was God; the second was his cell. Within the cell, the monk had one sure guide and often it was the same guide that began his conversion – the scriptures.”¹⁰ For the desert monk, the scriptures, being his main guide, had the value of a sacrament – an external and visible instrument, this being the book of Scripture, by means of which certain graces – divine invisible gifts - are conferred on those reading and reflecting upon the Scriptures. They are a free gift of God and the bread of life in the wilderness, even for one who was not yet baptized.¹¹ Besides this, the monk was invited to learn from the words of a father, a spiritual father, who for him was

8. ROBERT A. WILD, *The Pastoral Letters*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown - Joseph A. Fitzmayer - Roland E. Murphy, London 1993, 891. There is a very serious discussion on the author of the “pastoral” letters. Most scholars today agree that they were not written by Paul although they reflect his thought.

9. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, viii, ix.

10. BENEDICTA WARD, *Spiritual direction in the desert fathers in Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 8.

11. *Ibid.*, 9.

another channel to salvation. The father or the mother was a charismatic holy man or woman who lived in the wilderness. The words of such people contained the answers to many problems and difficulties that the monks had to face in their daily lives. For this reason, the *abbas* and *ammas*¹² of the desert were the holy men and women from whom disciples would seek the advice and guidance. Disciples would look to them more for holiness and purity of heart rather than for teaching, and the central concept was that of spiritual fatherhood.¹³

Direction of the soul was frequently sought from one monk to another requesting to ‘speak a word to me’. As such they would be asking, as with the scriptures, for a sacrament. The ‘word’ was not to be discussed or analysed or disputed in any way. Many a time, “it was not even understood; but it was to be memorized and absorbed into life, as a sure way towards God.”¹⁴ In such a way, the spiritual director was not simply someone who taught a spiritual technique. He was a father who helped to shape the inner life of his children through his prayer, concern and pastoral care.¹⁵

The Desert Fathers passed on their spiritual thoughts in sayings which could be defined as:

fragments of stories glimpsed through many layers of transmission; sometimes they seem contradictory, sometimes inconclusive, and they should not be given a coherence they do not have . . . some practical ways of learning *metanoia* seem to emerge from the texts, and seem, moreover, to be virtually the same for both the hermits and the cenobites.¹⁶

Their aim was the salvation of one’s soul. So, those who received these sayings had to act – to flee and “go away from what is familiar; then the idea of silence, solitude, aloneness; which is the desert; and the ideal of constant prayer for the whole of life.”¹⁷ The stories of the Desert Fathers abound with illustrations of

12. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul friend*, London² 1994, 37.

13. Ibid.

14. BENEDICTA WARD, *Spiritual direction in the desert fathers* in *Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 9.

15. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul friend*, London² 1994, 37.

16. BENEDICTA WARD, *Spiritual direction in the desert fathers* in *Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 5.

17. Ibid., 6.

ascetics who went to ridiculous extremes, and became spiritual casualties through lack of such discernment.

2.3.2 *Fathers of the East*

In early Christianity, the Fathers of the Church frequently make reference to the need of spiritual guidance, from a person encompassing the teacher's role. Here "the teacher's role, as understood by Saint Pantaenus,¹⁸ Saint Clement¹⁹ and Origen,²⁰ is by no means limited to instruction in the narrow academic sense, to the bare transmission of facts. The teacher was also a spiritual guide to his pupils, a living model and exemplar, providing them not only with information but with an all-embracing personal relationship."²¹ This is certainly a "directive" model. During the second and third centuries of the Church we find various Church Fathers of the East who did their very best to pass on spiritual direction to others by means of letters.

2.3.2.1 *Barsanuphius²² and John of Gaza²³*

In Palestine and in Syria, there were people who experienced monastic life. Those who aspired to perfection were the ones who felt the need to be guided by a director of conscience. The monastic state has been and will go on to be considered the classic type of this tendency. Those who embrace such a way of life would benefit from it only if guided by people who had the necessary gift and experience. These gifts and experience were found only among those who had progressed in the ways of perfection.²⁴ This can be shown by the correspondence of two sixth-century spiritual fathers in Southern Palestine, Barsanuphius and John of Gaza: the questions put to them and their answers survive in a remarkably detailed form.²⁵

18. He was head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria about 180 and was still alive in 193. As he was succeeded by Clement who left Alexandria about 203, the probable date of his death would be about 200.

19. His date of birth is unknown. He died about the year 215.

20. He was born in 185 and died in 232.

21. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, ix.

22. He was an Egyptian by birth. He lived in the sixth century and died in the year of 563.

23. His place of birth is unknown. During an 18 year period up to his death, he lived near the Elder Barsanuphius.

24. IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR, *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 267.

25. *Erotapokriseis*: Greek text, ed. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountains (reissued S. Schoinas, Volos, 1960); critical ed. and Eng. trans. of Letters 1-124 by D.J. Chitty, *Patrologia Orientalis* 31.3 Paris

The letters of direction of these two saints almost always answered specific questions with the same conciseness as if they were giving direction orally. The edition of Saint Barsanuphius and Saint John by Nicodemus the Hagiorite contains 836 letters (questions and answers).²⁶ Many contain only a line or two, even one word, while others run to a maximum of two pages. Those of Barsanuphius are generally a little longer than John's. What is most admirable in them, along with discernment, is the great variety of feelings, beginning with humour,²⁷ and moving through good-heartedness, graciousness, tenderness, to vehemence, even violence – all this always in the service of souls. The spiritual father, through spiritual direction was to show his brotherly love to the ones he directs.

In one of his letters, addressed to Brother Euthymius, Barsanuphius spoke of the need of counsel in one's life and he did so quoting Scripture. He went on admonishing his directee:

When you were not acting with counsel, but from your will, you were not labouring with your mind. For there is none who does not need a counsellor, except only God, who created wisdom. But when you did seek according to God to cut off your own will and to come to humility and to take me your very little brother for your counsellor, you provoked to envy the demon who hates the good and always has envy towards all men.²⁸

Barsanuphius accused Euthymius of pride for going his way after seeking his director's advice. So, directees were not allowed to act freely according to what they feel in their life of prayer, thus when communicating with the Lord. It was a must for a person seeking holiness to seek the useful advice of the director and in return the director was to be obeyed without question.

Barsanuphius was very clear when he dealt with people who asked many

1966); French translation of the whole collection by L. Regnault and P. Lemaire, *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondence* (Solemes, 1972) as quoted in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xxviii.

26. These take up 386 pages in 4 volumes.

27. Letters of Barsanuphius, Letter 534, 277, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 236.

28. *Writings on spiritual direction by great Christian masters*, edited by Jerome M. Neufelder and Mary C. Coelho 1982, New York 164.

exaggerated questions. In Letter 60 and 89, he wrote as such to one who asked so many questions:

One should not ask questions about all the thoughts that are [in your mind]; they are fleeting, but [ask] only about the ones that persist and wage war on man. Take a man who is insulted by a whole crowd of people; he scorns injuries and becomes utterly indifferent. But if some one person attacks him and wages war on him, then he lodges a complaint in the presence of the magistrate. Thus it is with this matter [of thoughts].²⁹

2.3.2.2 Saint John Climacus³⁰ and Saint Symeon the Theologian³¹

The letter of Saint John Climacus, abbot of Sinai, entitled *To the Shepherd (Ad Pastorem)*³² and the first letter of Saint Symeon the New Theologian abbot of Saint Mamas in Constantinople, entitled *On Confession*, deal with the matter of what in principle constitutes the essence of spiritual fatherhood. Neither of the works provides a systematic list of characteristics but still, the spiritual father is described by both authors chiefly in five ways. He is seen as doctor, counsellor, intercessor, mediator, and sponsor.³³

The ‘model’ of doctor or healer (*iatros*) as referring to the spiritual father is highly referred to in Climacus and Symeon and in Eastern Christian literature generally from the fourth century onwards. In his treatise *To the Shepherd* Climacus develops the medical analogy at length. The spiritual father is a ‘doctor’, who cares for the ‘sick man’, using plasters, razors, eye-salves, potions, sponges, remedies against nausea, instruments for blood-letting and cauterization, ointments, sleeping

29. Letter 89, 46 in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 227, 228.

30. He was born doubtlessly in Syria, about 525. He died on Mount Sinai, on 30 March, probably in 606.

31. He was born in 949 and died in 1022.

32. Sometimes treated as the thirty-first step in *The ladder of divine ascent*. In this immortal work the Christian is helped to climb thirty-one metaphorical spiritual steps to reach the heights of supreme spiritual perfection. Here we see how one virtue leads to another. The more the Christians climbs these virtual steps the more he reaches that height where there abides the crown of the virtues, which is called “Christian love”.

33. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xii.

draughts, the knife, bandages.³⁴ Furthermore, Climacus exposes the idea that the ‘penance’ (*epitimion*) that ‘the doctor’ imposes is not a punishment but a healing remedy, a ‘cauterization’ that he administers ‘in a compassionate way as an aid to repentance’.³⁵ Furthermore, “the spiritual doctor can only help if the patient is completely honest, ‘bearing his wound with entire trust’.”³⁶

Symeon, in his letter *On Confession*, uses the same medical language. ‘Seek out a compassionate and merciful doctor’, he enjoined.³⁷ Neither in Climacus nor in Symeon – nor in the Eastern Christian tradition in general – are we to understand the confessor or spiritual father primarily as a judge, passing sentence and imposing penalties.³⁸ Symeon referred to the spiritual father’s power to bind and loose, which may be taken to imply a measure of juridical authority. Both in Symeon and in John Climacus, the main model is therapeutic and not legalistic. According to Climacus, the spiritual child reveals to his father not only his sins but more generally his ‘thoughts’ (*logismoi*), long before they have led to outward acts – even those thoughts that are seemingly harmless and innocent.³⁹

Another model is that of a counsellor (*sumboulos*). Accordingly, Climacus, in the letter *To the Shepherd*, described the spiritual father as a ‘teacher’ (*didaskalos*) who heals through his logos – his word, his advice or counsel.⁴⁰ Symeon likewise spoke of the confessor as a ‘teacher’,⁴¹ and a ‘good counsellor who by his shrewd

34. Ibid.

35. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, NewYork/NY 1982, Step 2, On detachment, 81-84.

36. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, NewYork/NY 1982, Step 1, On renunciation, 73-80; Step 5, On penitence, 121-131 and Step 7, On mourning, 136-145.

37. Epi 5 114, 21-22 in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xii.

38. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xii/xiii.

39. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, NewYork/NY 1982, Step 4, On obedience, 91-120 and Symeon, Ep i. 9 (pg 118, 24); i. 17 (p 127, 13-14) in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xiii.

40. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, NewYork/NY 1982, Step 1, On renunciation, 73-80 and Step 2, On Detachment, 81-84. See also Step 4, On obedience, 91-120.

41. Cap. i. 55 and 59; Cat. VII. 8; Ep. iii. 647-8, in Christophoridis, 29; Ep. IV. 212-14, in Christophoridis, 25 in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xiii.

advice suggests in an appropriate manner ways of repentance'.⁴² While healing by his speech, the spiritual father may also heal by his silence, that is, simply by virtue of his presence.

The spiritual father is also able to heal by his prayers.⁴³ In this way, the spiritual director is also an intercessor (*presbeutēs*). The intercessory prayer of the spiritual father for his children is a master-theme constantly recurring in the answers of Barsanuphius and John; 'night and day I am praying for you unceasingly to God.'⁴⁴ Climacus, always faithful to the Gaza tradition, in the definition he gave of the 'shepherd' states: "A shepherd is pre-eminently one who has the power to seek out the lost spiritual sheep and to set them on the right path by means of his guiltlessness, his zeal and his prayer."⁴⁵ Symeon agreed closely with Climacus.⁴⁶

The spiritual father is described by both Climacus and Symeon as an 'intermediary' or '*mediator*' in such a way that besides praying for his children, through his intercession he *reconciles* them to God.⁴⁷ Climacus developed this idea in *To the Shepherd*. The 'superior' or spiritual father is the friend of the king; because he has free access to the royal presence, he can plead with boldness on behalf of others:

No one can be a true elder at second hand; he needs to speak of what he has seen and felt for himself. If he is to be an instrument of reconciliation on behalf of others, he must first have reconciled God to himself.⁴⁸

42. Ep. i. 7 (p. 117, 1-2) in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xiii.

43. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xiv.

44. *Erotap.* 17; cf. 27, 144 (regnault, 217), 208 (regnault, 113), 507 in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xii.

45. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, New York/NY 1982, Step 14, *On renunciation of life*, 73-80.

46. Ep. i. 7 (p. 117, 3-5) in KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xv.

47. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, xv.

48. JOHN CLIMACUS. *The ladder of divine ascent*, translated by Coln Luibheid and Norman Russell, New York/NY 1982, Step 11, *On talkativeness and silence*, 158-159.

Both Symeon and Climacus considered the spiritual father as *anadochos*, somebody who assumes responsibility or provides security for another, standing surety for his obligations. Climacus insisted that it is the elder's vocation, 'to take upon himself the burden of the one under obedience to him'.⁴⁹ Here, many of the responsibility of the actions of the person receiving spiritual direction is shouldered upon the director. Besides this compassionate and sacrificial love such responsibility is considered as an essential characteristic of the true sponsor – the true elder.

2.3.2.3 *St. Nilus*⁵⁰

Saint Nilus addressed many of his letters to lay people.⁵¹ In his letters he was not afraid of recalling the last events: death, judgement, heaven and hell. He was convinced that lay people will show prudence and uprightness when they live as well as they can in the way monks should live; or if in moments of temptation they behave as the great masters of monasticism have taught they should. An example of this is the letter he wrote *To the Young Count Pierios*. The letter opens by stating that one should not confuse *erōs* and *agapē*, 'as this virtuous friend of God' did. This somewhat tremulous concern with safeguarding innocence was justified by an experience frequently referred to by Saint Nilus: the difficulty of correcting a habit.⁵² Saint Nilus is said to have been a disciple of St John Chrysostom.⁵³ Both of them know how difficult it is to correct an inveterate habit. This is why Nilus gave detailed precautions to the people in the world who confided in him.⁵⁴

According to Nilus, one of the most dangerous disorders which he condemned mercilessly was visiting the theatre.⁵⁵ Count Constantinus had objected that going to the theatre or the hippodrome was simply recreation for the soul. Nevertheless, Nilus replied, 'It is supreme destruction, a most terrible damage to the soul.' The

49. Ibid., Step 2, On detachment, 81-84.

50. His date of birth is unknown. He died in 430.

51. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 312.

52. Ibid., 315.

53. He is a Doctor of the Church. He was born at Antioch, around 347 and died at Commana in Pontius, on 14 September, 407.

54. KALLISTOS WARE, BISHOP, *Foreward*, in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 316.

55. *Epistol.* II. 286, col. 341B in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 316.

rest of the letter clearly gives us a sense of the spiritual direction Saint Nilus gave to lay people. At the root of such counsels, we find Nilus' line of thought:

since monks have chosen the surest path to salvation, everyone should therefore come as close to it as possible. Yet it should be noted that neither Saint Nilus, nor perhaps any other monastic founder or superior, seems to have been preoccupied with provoking monastic vocations.⁵⁶

When young men had written to him, Nilus merely advised them against evil and guided them to ways of practising virtue, depending on each young man's situation, and in conformity with his own ideas on perfection.⁵⁷ Even to those who were amongst the most beloved of his spiritual children, Nilus, the great director, only recommended exercises of the interior life similar to those performed by monks, and although Nilus never asked the young man to become one of them, he was to visit them. According to Nilus, one acquires noble crowns not only by pursuing those who practice virtue but also by praise.⁵⁸

He also gave importance to spiritual reading,

since from this, at the right moment, follows all right action... People find great profit in reading the inspired Scriptures. If therefore you want to keep the eye of the soul ... and maintain its keenness, so as to be led to what is best ..., do not be sluggish in reading Scripture.⁵⁹

Prayer has a special place in the direction Nilus gives to others. Prayer is of utmost importance to overcome temptations, to be freed from the passions that cause them, to become detached from apparent goods, to obtain forgiveness of sin and, finally, salvation.⁶⁰ We find Nilus corresponding to a priest, explaining to

56. IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 317.

57. *Ibid.*, 318.

58. *Homilia in Martyrem Julittam*, n.2., col. 237AB in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 318.

59. NILUS, *Epistolarum Liber II*. 16, *Theodosiae Moniali*; PG 79: 249D in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 319.

60. *Historia Lusiace*, 34 in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 319.

him: 'One must prefer prayer to Christ above all other things, and invoke the help and protection of the Holy Spirit. For there is no way to be freed from the power of corruption unless divine power holds power over us.'⁶¹

All the other monastic practices are sometimes recommended for people in the world concerned about their souls. Worldly practices are similarly recommended to be avoided for the benefit of the soul: 'Excessive pleasure, boundless joy, the soul's insolence inspired by repeated success, let us restrain these by sorrow and silence.'⁶²

2.3.2.4 Saint Basil the Great⁶³

Saint Basil in his Letter XXIII goes very much to the point as to what concerns the need of a guide in our lives.⁶⁴ He was adamant about the fact that the new monk must be given the spiritual *aleiptēn* (trainer) whom he may ask for. In the mentioned Letter he told the new monk that once he had left the world,

do not throw yourself away like a worthless vessel. On the contrary, with exceeding care and intelligence, find someone who walks before you unerringly on the path of your profession, one who is able to lead those who are on their way to God, who is adorned with virtues, who through his own works witnesses to the love of God, who has knowledge of the divine Scriptures; someone who is not drawn hither and yon by distractions, who does not love money, does not meddle, is peaceful, a friend of God and of the humble, someone who is not angry or resentful, without vanity or pride, insensitive to flattery, not subject to inconstancy, and someone who puts nothing above God. If you find such a person, surrender yourself to him, spewing out your

61. *Epistolarum Liber II*, 48; PG 99:1297A in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 320.

62. IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 54.

63. He was Bishop of Caesarea, and one of the most distinguished Doctors of the Church. He was born probably in 329 and died on 1 January, 379.

64. *Epistola XXIII*; PG 32: 296B in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 191.

65. *Sermo de renuntiatione saeculi* n. 2-3 in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 191-192.

66. IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR *Spiritual direction in the early Christian East*, Kalamazoo/MI 1990, 192.

67. Probably he was born in 340 and died in 397.

own will and casting it far from you . . . This is the second struggle against the opponent of our salvation. The lessons of good masters are good; those of evil masters are altogether evil. If our adversary cannot persuade us to remain in the agitation and the ruin of the world, he tries to get us not to devote ourselves to a regular life, or to surrender not to a person who condemns all our faults to correct them, but to one of those who crave glory and who, on the pretence of condescending to their companions, exhibit their own vices so that imperceptibly we become subjected once more to a thousand vices and become fettered by his own chains, which are those of sin. *If you surrender to a man of great virtue, you will inherit the inward possessions he owns, and be worthy of being called blessed before God and man.* If, out of concern for the body you seek a master who is able to condescend to your passions, or, to say it better, to tumble down with you, in vain will you have endured the struggle to a dissolute life by taking a blind guide who will push you into the *pit*? And if one blind man leads another, both will fall into a pit. It is enough for the disciple that he should grow to be like his teacher; this is a divine word, and it does not fail.⁶⁵

These observations show us that Basil was afraid that the new monk may choose a guide according to his desires. In this he agrees with all the Fathers. It is to be noted that in Basilian monasteries, a novice could make a choice for his spiritual father but only among ‘elders’ recognized by competent authorities as being able to direct.⁶⁶ In such a method the directee is not free to choose his master and teacher. Besides this, the master is perceived as quite a perfect man and spiritual direction as a rigid procedure.

2.3.3 *Fathers of the West*

During the fourth century, at the time when Christianity was made legal by the Roman Empire, the Church Fathers such as Ambrose,⁶⁷ Jerome,⁶⁸ and Augustine,⁶⁹ were deepening their understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, eradicating dangerous heresies like Pelagianism and Arianism. At the same time, they were giving their share in the spiritual formation of those who sought their help.

68. Probably he was born either in 340 or in 342 and died in 420.

69. His life stretched from 354 to 430.

2.3.3.1 *St. Ambrose*

St. Ambrose of Milan was the one to open the series of the great spiritual directors of the West. As such, “the qualities which make him an excellent director are his family origins, his education, his practical involvement in life’s matters, questions and problems. Also, one has to add, his fine intelligence and his refined moral sense.”⁷⁰ Ambrose borrowed the language of Stoicism and, in a certain measure, Stoic precepts as well. Ambrose spoke and wrote as a bishop, completely faithful to the teachings of Scripture and of the Church. His qualities as a director are seen above all in his treatises and letters.⁷¹ Ambrose’s letters vary a great deal in their content:⁷²

- a. Some of his letters are addressed to new bishops. Ambrose speaks to Virgilius, bishop of Trent and to Costantius, bishop of Claterna about the burdens, duties and responsibilities of the episcopate. He also speaks about *the Arian problem*.⁷³
- b. There are letters of consolation, like Letter 39 to Faustinus who, after the death of his sister, wanted to retire into solitude.
- c. Some other letters, like Letters 37 and 38 to Simplicius, envisage philosophical problems and blend curiously the Stoic paradoxes with the lessons of the Gospel and of the Apostle.
- d. Others, which are numerous and varied, are addressed to a priest of Milan, Orontianus, who was ordained by Saint Ambrose. Here, among other things, he expressed that the soul is heavenly substance; that it is the Spirit who intercedes for us by ineffable moaning.
- e. Other letters, of the same kind, are written to a certain Irenaeus who is unknown.

70. The French version is: Il trouve dans ses origins familiales, son education, sa pratique des affaires et, il faut l’ajouter, dans son intelligence déliée et l’affinement de sons sens moral, les qualités auxquelles se reconnaît un excellent directeur, in GUSTAVE BARDY, *En Occident : A. Jusq’au 11^e Siècle, Direction Spirituelle en Occident*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*, edited by M. Viller, F. Cavallera, J. De Guibert, Paris, 1062.

71. Ibid.

72. The Letters of Ambrose are found online at http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/ambrose_letters_00_intro.htm

73. Ambrose deals with this matter in other letters, amongst which we find Letters 10, 11 and 12 which are addressed to the Emperors Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius respectively; Letter 20 which is addressed to his sister, Marcellina, keeping her abreast of the continuous engagements with the Arians; and Letter 21 which is addressed to Valentinian II concerning the same topic.

While revealing the religious and political situation of his time, all letters reveal a simple Ambrose, kind, obliging, and always concerned to raise souls towards God. He was surely preoccupied with the life of the church and the life of the followers of Christ.⁷⁴ In spite of the subjects which seem abstract, these last letters are personal enough to deserve to be considered among the letters giving direction.⁷⁵

2.3.3.2 *St. Jerome*⁷⁶

St Jerome advised his friend Rusticus not to set out on an unknown way without a guide, and Jerome himself wrote a number of letters of direction which are of particular interest.

Jerome's letters vary a great deal. He wrote some 150 letters to various people. Jerome's correspondence received quite a good attention and has been most widely read. This correspondence has been passed down through diverse manuscript traditions. The most famous letters are those regarding virginity⁷⁷, widowhood,⁷⁸ monastic life⁷⁹ and the clerical state,⁸⁰ and the education of young girls.⁸¹ Jerome addressed the most famous of all his letters to Eustochium, giving the reasons for a life of consecrated virginity.⁸² Jerome praised Paula⁸³ for her humility and

74. JOHANNES QUASTEN, *Ambrose of Milan, Amrosiaster and Nicetas*, in *Patrology*, IV, Allen/TX 1949, 176.

75. GUSTAVE BARDY, *En Occident : A. Jusq'au 11^e Siècle, Direction Spirituelle en Occident*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*, edited by M. Viller, F. Cavallera, J. De Guibert, Paris, 1063.

76. LOUIS SALTET, *St Jerome in The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol 8, (1910) (on-line): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08341a.htm> [8 June 2007]

77. Jerome's letters can be found at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001023.htm>. Letter 22 is addressed to Eustochium. It was written in Rome in 384. Letter 130 is addressed to Demetrias, and dated 414.

78. Letter 46 was written in Bethlehem in the year 386 and is addressed to Paula and Eustochium. Letter 79 is addressed to Salvina.

79. Letter 14 is addressed to Heliodorus, monk and was written in the year 373 or 374. Letter 58 is addressed to Paulinus and Letter 122 is addressed to Augustine.

80. Letter 52 is addressed to Nepotian.

81. Letter 107 is addressed to Laeta and Letter 128 is addressed to Gaudentius and was written in 413.

82. An example of such letters is Letter 108.

83. Paula gave so freely to anyone in need that she had no earthly inheritance for her children. She insisted that the legacy of Christ is more precious. Paula and Eustochium were Jerome's closest confidantes and assistants. Paula died in 404 and Eustochium in 419.

generosity.⁸⁴ In Letter 22, he exhorts Eustochium to “avoid with special care the traps set for you by a desire for vainglory. Jesus says: ‘How can ye believe, who receive glory one from another?’” He also encourages Eustochium to give alms and to let God alone see him. While fasting, she should keep a cheerful face. Here, Jerome also put great emphasis on prayer without ceasing since saints were very slumber in praying and “we ought to have fixed hours for prayer, that if we are detained by work, the time may remind us of our duty.”⁸⁵

In Letter 66, addressed to Pammachius, Jerome spoke to this person who, in spite of his high rank and position, had become a monk and was now living a life of severe self-denial. In this letter, Jerome showed that he ranked chastity and virginity quite high. He also encouraged Pammachius to purchase food for the needy and to lead a spiritual life: “If thou wilt be perfect,” the Lord says, “go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor ... and come and follow me. If thou wilt be perfect. Great enterprises are always left to the free choice of those who hear of them”. He also insisted that it is not enough for the disciple to despise wealth unless he follows Christ as well. Only he who follows Christ forsakes his sins and walks hand in hand with virtue. Christ, the wisdom, is the treasure which in the scriptures a man finds in his field. Jerome was very much aware that the battle with impurity is a harder one than that with covetousness: “It is easy to cast off what clings to us from without, but a war within our borders involves far greater peril.”⁸⁶

There was also some correspondence going on between Jerome and Augustine.⁸⁷

2.3.3.3 *St. Augustine*

St. Augustine was the one who emphasized that ‘no one can walk without a guide’.⁸⁸ Augustine was not content to strive only for his own holiness. So he directed groups of clergymen, monks, and religious persons, as well as men and women living in the world. The following are amongst his correspondents:

84. In Letter 30, which St Jerome wrote in Rome, in 384.

85. Letter 22.

86. Letter 66.

87. Examples of Letters which Augustine sent to Jerome are Letters 66, 101, 131 and 132. Examples of Letters sent from Jerome to Augustine are Letters 102, 105, 112, and 142.

88. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul Friend*, London² 1994, 37.

- a. Aurelius of Carthage, Alipius of Thagaster, Erodian of Uzala, and Severus of Mîlève: these are Augustine's most loved bishops. They wrote to him and he to them:
 - i. Aurelius of Carthage was the metropolitan respected as much as loved. With him Augustine treated, above all, some Church affairs, and when he gave him some advice he did so in a way that he kept a perfect sense of distance.
 - ii. Alipius, Bishop of Thagaster was the witness of Augustine's last struggles before his conversion, his companion at Milan and Cassiciacum. Although the two of them do not always agree on matters of detail, these divergences do not weaken their mutual affection.
 - iii. Erodian, Bishop of Azala remains a curious (or inquisitive) man who posed to Augustine the most extraordinary problems. He was interested in miracles and, after the discovery of the remains of Saint Stephen, became the most ardent promotor of his cult.
 - iv. The most loved bishop [of Augustine] was Severus of Mîlève: with him Augustine became very tender and confiding.
- b. Some lay persons:
 - i. Dioscurus was a young Greek man who went to study at Carthage and who asked Augustine about the *Dialogues* of Cicero; Augustine answered him by inviting him to appreciate the true wisdom of the Gospels.⁸⁹
 - ii. Consentius would like some clarifications on the Trinity. Augustine sent him the clarifications asked for and showed him how Christian doctrine, though surpassing reason, does not contradict it.⁹⁰
 - iii. Laetus who had entered into ascetic life, was tempted to give in to the enticements of the world.⁹¹
 - iv. A young woman, Florentina, was put by her parents (or relatives) under the direction of the bishop who promised to lead her in the divine ways.
 - v. Ecdicia, a zealous and prudent woman, made the vow of keeping continent without asking the permission of her husband. She gave out her property as alms without being concerned about the future of

89. [SAINT AUGUSTINE], *A Translation for the 21st. Century*, translated and notes by Roland Teske and edited by Boniface Ramsey, II/2, New York/NY 2003, Letters 117-118, 102-103.

90. *Ibid.*, Letter 119, 125-128 and Letter 120, 129-140.

91. *Ibid.*, Letters 243, 164-170.

her son and was very surprised when her husband practised adultery. Augustine made her learn her true duty.⁹²

Augustine was ready to give his advice to anybody who sought it and his advice was very much heeded. Amongst other persons, he wrote to Italica,⁹³ to Fabiola,⁹⁴ to Juliana to whom he dedicated his treatise *On Widowhood* and to Proba with whom he dealt on how to pray⁹⁵ and to profit from the trials of this world.⁹⁶ Augustine's letters of spiritual direction, together with Ambrose's and Jerome's are very beneficial in the Catholic Tradition. They were adamant about their ideas since they knew well that the spiritual journey involves constant struggles.

2.4 The Medieval Period

2.4.1 The Franciscan Tradition

2.4.1.1 Francis of Assisi⁹⁷

The First version of the Letter to the faithful which Francis addressed to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance⁹⁸ is introduced with these words: "These are words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation." It has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share in his Gospel for their way of life.⁹⁹ It can also be considered as an open letter which in fact became the basic document for tertiary penitents then as well as now. One of the authors of the life of the Saint and his works states that:

The first appearance of this writing came at an intersection of monumental change for thousands of Franciscan men and women

92. Ibid., Letter 262, 203-208.

93. Ibid., Letters 92, 375.

94. Ibid., Letter 267, 222.

95. Ibid., Letters 130, 183-199.

96. Ibid., Letter 131, 200-220.

97. St. Francis was born in 1181/1182 and died in 1226.

98. [ST.FRANCIS OF ASSISI], *An Earlier Exhortation to the brothers and sisters of penance (the first version of the letter to the faithful – (1209 – 1215)*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short, in *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, I, New York/NY 1999, 41-44. The earliest manuscript of this writing is located in the Guarnacci Library in the Italian city of Volterra.

99. Ibid.

and became a foundation for that change. It stands at the beginning of both pontifically approved rule texts to express a textual and spiritual connection with the earlier Franciscan penitents.¹⁰⁰

Lehmann sees this work as “a contemplative prayer of praise and rejoicing.”¹⁰¹ This rejoicing is, however, balanced by the warning to those who remain in moral blindness. Francis stressed the active, urgent nature of the appeal to “doing” penance through good works. The practices of penance lead to an experience of filial relationship to God.¹⁰²

Francis exhorted those who were willing to please the Lord with their whole bodies, thus condemning sin and vices. Within these persons we find the excellent dwelling place for the Spirit of the Lord:

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love the neighbour as themselves, who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make its home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰³

According to Francis, the Spirit of the Lord rests upon the children of the Heavenly Father who are united with Our Lord Jesus Christ: “We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and

100. *Francis of Assisi. History, hagiography and hermeneutics in the early documents*, edited by Jay M. Hammond, London 2004, 91.

101. Leonhard Lehmann, *Exultation and exhortation to penance: A study of the form and content of the first version of the letter to the faithful*, 1990, in *Francis of Assisi. History, hagiography and hermeneutics in the early documents*, edited by Jay M. Hammond, London 2004, 96.

102. *Francis of Assisi. History, hagiography and hermeneutics in the early documents*, edited by Jay M. Hammond, London 2004, 97.

103. [St.FRANCIS OF ASSISI], *An Earlier Exhortation to the brothers and sisters of penance (the first version of the letter to the faithful – (1209 – 1215)*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short, in *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, I, New York/NY 1999, 41, 42.

sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine an example before others.”¹⁰⁴

A later admonition and exhortation to “the Brothers and Sisters of Penance” called for adherence to the Church; it spoke also of the Eucharist and the priesthood, the state of penance as a journey to God, the characteristic virtues of the penitent, the relationship of penance/*metanoia* to the identity of the Third Order.¹⁰⁵

We also find a letter of Francis addressed to St. Anthony of Padua. A former Augustinian religious, Anthony entered the Franciscan Order impressed by the joyful and simple life led by the Franciscans at Olivalis, near his Augustinian monastery. He was even impressed by the heroic death of the Franciscan missionaries sent to Morocco to convert the king to the Christian faith. Entering the Franciscan Order, Anthony accepted the responsibility of teaching the brothers. Francis wrote to him that he can do so as long as in the words of the Rule he will not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion with study of such a kind.

In a Letter to Brother Leo, Francis did not hesitate to admonish him. In the Letter to all Clerics, Francis reiterated the reaction of the Lateran Council IV against the abuses with legislation. Francis, following the directives of the Church, wrote his own exhortation.

We cannot ignore a Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples. After sending his wishes of health and peace to all of them, he reminds them of their hour of death, so as not to abandon the Lord’s commandments because of earthly cares and preoccupations. Otherwise, they will be condemned to endure punishments in hell. He firmly advised them to receive the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. They should set the example to the people they are responsible for or otherwise they will be judged for their lack of observance of the Law of the Lord.

2.4.1.2 Claire of Assisi¹⁰⁶

Shortly after Claire’s conversion in 1212, Francis brought her and her sister Agnes to the church of San Damiano, outside Assisi’s walls, a small church

104. Ibid., 42.

105. *Francis of Assisi. History, hagiography and hermeneutics in the early documents*, edited by Jay M. Hammond, London 2004, 96.

106. She was born in 1194 and died in 1253.

which he had earlier repaired. Other women soon joined them to form the first community of Franciscan women. Earlier, in 1209, Pope Innocent III granted permission to itinerant friars to have their abode at San Damiano while preaching. They lived supported by alms. Oral directions from Francis, including his promise of perpetual care and spiritual exhortations were the foundation of their religious life. Nevertheless, sometime before 1217, Francis wrote out a brief “form of life” for Claire and her sisters to follow. For more stability, Claire started writing her own Rule for which she then tried to get papal approval, which she did just two days before her death.

Claire is undoubtedly to be considered as a great figure in the religious female world of the Middle Ages. However, she is not a solitary figure.¹⁰⁷ Such women belonged to a group of women who wanted to be and felt themselves to be subjects and not objects in the life of the Church.¹⁰⁸ These women wrote, gave advice, suggested guidelines and sought to settle clerical matters, even through the foundation of a movement for women. Besides writing the Rule as a “form of life”, Claire also wrote letters. We have her letter to Ermentrude of Bruges and four letters to Blessed Agnes of Prague, the daughter of the King of Bohemia and the Queen of Hungary.

Ermentrude of Bruges was encouraged by Claire to remain faithful until death to Christ, to whom she had promised to be solely his. She would definitely be repaid by him for this. The fact that after carrying our cross we will enter the glory of heaven is to encourage Ermentrude to be steadfast to her way of life in Christ. Love of God and Christ are to direct her path. She was encouraged to “pray and be always vigilant” and to fulfil her ministry through poverty and sincere humility.¹⁰⁹

Agnes of Prague had rejected the marriage proposal of Emperor Frederick II and established a monastery where she and other women could live like the Poor Sisters

107. Among other women we find Eloise (1101–1164), Hildegard di Bingen (who died in 1179), Maria d'Oignies, Beatrice di Tienen, Mtilde di Magdeburgo, Matilde di Hackeborn, Hadewijch and Gertrude di Helfta. These are mentioned in FREDERIC RAURELL, *Introduzione. Verso il femminile delle fonti francescane in Chiara. Francescanesimo al femminile*, edited by David Covi – Dino Dozzi, Rome/Italy² 1992, 16-18.

108. FREDERIC RAURELL, *Introduzione. Verso il femminile delle fonti francescane in Chiara. Francescanesimo al femminile*, edited by David Covi – Dino Dozzi, Rome/Italy² 1992, 15.

109. [CLARE OF ASSISI], *Clare's letter to Ermentrude of Bruges*, http://www.fransiscanfriarstor/stf_st_clare_of_assisi_writings.htm [9 June 2007].

at San Damiano. Claire encouraged Agnes that by doing this, she “took a spouse of a more noble stock, who will keep your virginity ever unspotted and unsullied.”¹¹⁰ She would remain a virgin because Christ was her spouse who would watch over her to keep her virginity always immaculate. In the First letter she encouraged her: “Be strengthened in the holy service which you have undertaken out of an ardent desire for the Poor Crucified.” She blessed Agnes for embracing wholeheartedly the blessed and holy poverty. As such she was to rejoice and be glad.¹¹¹

Together with virginity, Claire esteemed poverty very highly. She included it even in her theology and in her way of life – poverty concentrated on God. Internal poverty keeps us free to be endorsed in the profound mystery of God and his Kingdom.¹¹²

2.4.2 The Dominican Tradition

With the Dominicans, spiritual direction became directed more towards the laity, though at first they tried to avoid long-term commitments in the care of individuals. However, they directed their preaching and teaching to the new urban classes and, in Germany in particular, to sectarian groups such as the Beguines, Beghards and Fraticelli. By the thirteenth century, laymen were themselves acting as directors as in the early monastic movement.

2.4.2.1 Saint Dominic¹¹³ and Saint Peter Martyr¹¹⁴

Saint Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers, did not leave many of his writings. Even in Dominic spirituality we find spiritual direction by means of

110. *The lady: Clare of Assisi: early Documents*, translations and editing by Regis J. Armstrong, NY 2006, 43-44. Claire is also specific about the life of Agnes – she is the virgin bride of Christ. (First letter to Agnes (1Lag) 7, Fonti Francescane (FF) 2859; Second letter to Agnes (2Lag) 18, Fonti Francescane 2878 and Third Letter to Agnes (3Lag) 25, Fonti Francescane 2893 in FREDERIC RAURELL, *Introduzione. Verso il femminile delle fonti francescane in Chiara. Francescanesimo al femminile*, edited by David Covi – Dino Dozzi, Rome/Italy² 1992, 137.)

111. First letter to Agnes in FREDERIC RAURELL, *Introduzione. Verso il femminile delle fonti francescane in Chiara. Francescanesimo al femminile*, edited by David Covi – Dino Dozzi, Rome/Italy² 1992

112. FREDERIC RAURELL, *Introduzione. Verso il femminile delle fonti francescane in Chiara. Francescanesimo al femminile*, edited by David Covi – Dino Dozzi, Rome/Italy² 1992, 413.

113. He was born in Castile in about 1170. He died on 6 August 1221.

114. This Saint was born at Verona in 1206 and died near Milan on 6 April 1252.

letter-writing. In May 1220, Saint Dominic himself wrote an open letter to the sisters. He addressed the letter to the dear prioress of Madrid and all the nuns in the community. In this letter the Saint expressed his delight in knowing that all members of the religious community were following the holy way of life. He encouraged the community to fast so that they will be able to enjoy the crown of glory. He also encouraged silence in their buildings and to observe the Rule and obedience to the prioress.¹¹⁵

We also find a letter of Saint Peter Martyr to the prioress of Saint Peter's in Campo Santo, Milan. He expressed his delight in knowing that the prioress was able to acquire strength in living the monastic life. Sacrifice was needed on her side to reach this end. He instructed her to pray for him so that he would be able to acquire perfection in the eyes of God. He instructed her:

Abandon all that is vain and strive to fulfil your ministry by your way of life, and clothe yourself in holiness, so that you can pay your due service to him who is the Holy of Holies. Be upright in your riches, I beg you, modest in your speech, discerning in what you command, eager to help others, reliable in your advice, circumspect in the answers you give people, and inclined always towards patience. Show devotion to the older sisters, gentleness to the younger ones, and kindness to your equals; show yourself stern to the proud, kind to the humble, merciful to the penitent, unyielding to the obstinate.¹¹⁶

Here, we can see the encouragement for the living of the perfect life.

2.4.2.2 Saint Catherine of Siena¹¹⁷

Saint Catherine of Siena will always remain an outstanding personality in the life of the Church for her zeal for the salvation of souls and for the benefit of the Church founded by Christ. As a theologian and Doctor of the Church,¹¹⁸ Catherine

115. [SAINT DOMINIC], *Early Dominicans. Selected Writings*. edited with an introduction by Simon Tugwell, New York/NY 1982, 394.

116. [SAINT PETER MARTYR], *Early Dominicans. Selected Writings*. edited with an introduction by Simon Tugwell, New York/NY 1982, 410.

117. She was born in 1347 and died in 1380.

118. On 4 October 1970, Pope Paul VI declared Catherine of Siena Doctor Ecclesiae, Doctor of the Church. This title has been conferred on relatively few Christian saints and on no woman before

of Siena drew on her experience of God's transforming love to create an original body of Christian doctrine, prayer, and counsel.¹¹⁹ St Catherine of Siena became spiritual director to a circle of friends, her *bella brigada*, and she wrote numerous letters of guidance.¹²⁰ The essential characteristic of the mystical knowledge which we meet in such letters is its affective dimension. Such knowledge is rooted in love which leads the person to know God and divine things through the awareness of union with God experienced within oneself.¹²¹ She was well aware of this. In fact, in a letter to Raymond of Capua, she explains that the gift of writing was given to her so that "when I came down from the heights I should have some way to pour out my heart so that it would not burst."¹²²

Her teaching, even in correspondence, displays a rich knowledge of Scripture together with a certain familiarity with patristic and medieval theology. Certainly there is evidence in her writings of some acquaintance with patristic literature. There is evidence of her familiarity with St. Augustine. This is not surprising, for Augustinian theological thought was the most prevalent in the Church of the fourteenth century. However, the Dominicans, with whom Catherine had so much contact, were beginning to adopt Thomistic teaching. The result is that Catherine's message and that of Scripture fuse into one.¹²³

Catherine's theological output is not extensive. It consists of three works: the *Dialogue*, her *Letters*, and her *Prayers*.¹²⁴ Catherine's Letters treat the same theological topics as in *Dialogue*, but often in a more easily digestible manner, because in them she usually confines these to a few, or simply one, of her themes

1970. It places Catherine among the Church's major theologians and recognizes the relevance of her teaching for the whole Church and for all time. The Pope declared that Catherine was able to communicate to others "the word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge" for her own benefit and for the benefit of the whole body of the Church. As such she was able to grasp what is essential in the Christian life and thus she was able to explore the depths of insight into the central Christian mystery of God's love for humanity in Jesus Christ. MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the Theologian* in *Spirituality Today* 40/1 (1988) 4-5.

119. MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian* in *Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 4.

120. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul Friend*, London² 1994, 51.

121. MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian* in *Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 5.

122. *Le Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena* edited by P. Misciattelli, Giunti, 1940, 272 in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian* in *Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 6.

123. G. Cavallini, "Fonte neotestamentarie degli scritti cateriniani," *ATTI*, 44-69 in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian* in *Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 11.

124. Each of these belongs to a different literary genre. In her literature Catherine goes through the trouble of applying images which she used to observe in the life around her: light filtering through a dark passage, a building in the course of construction, the kitchen fire eagerly consuming the

and presents her thought in a lively, forceful style. Almost four hundred of her letters have been preserved. Catherine addressed her letters to people from all walks of life: members of her family, her friends and acquaintances, and public figures in church and state. Her correspondents can be said to represent the famous and the infamous, as well as the ordinary woman and man of her day. She was able to deal with the different temperaments, needs and circumstances of the persons to whom she wrote.¹²⁵ She was able to do this because she could perfectly understand that human existence is limited, incomplete and imperfect. Nevertheless, such an anthropological premise has to be taken seriously.

When she wrote to Pope Gregory XI,¹²⁶ she addressed him as her most holy and most revered father in Jesus Christ. She spoke to him in the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary. As a poor unworthy daughter, servant and slave of the servants of Christ, she really desired to see him a good shepherd. She encouraged him to learn from the Crucified Christ to love his flock just as Christ did and to give himself unto them. Nevertheless, she considered this man as created on the image and likeness of God and it was by love that his father and mother gave him substance, conceiving and bearing a son. It is for this reason that God has given His Son to man, who takes our humanity to make a great peace through his death on the cross. So, by his death He destroyed our death:

And if He commended the love which gives one's life for one's friend, what then shall we say of that most burning and perfect love which gave its life for its foe? For we through sin had become foes of God. Oh, sweet and loving Word, who with love hast found Thy flock once more, and with love hast given Thy life for them, and hast brought them back to Thy fold, restoring to them the Grace which they had lost!

wood thrown onto it, a tall tree laden with fruit, the bridge across the Arno in Florence, a Tuscan vineyard, the mirror in which she sees her own reflection, the vast ocean with its peaceful surface. All of these images, as well as many more, draw her beyond their physical reality to a further spiritual reality.

125. See MARY O'DRISCOLL, "Catherine the Letter-Writer," *Dominican Ashram* 3, 3 (1984) 107-13. Besides their theological value, her Letters are important because they provide interesting autobiographical and historical facts. When we consider them as literature, then they rank Catherine among the great Italian letterwriters of the fourteenth century. See also G. PAPINI, *Storia della Letteratura Italiana* (Firenze, 1937), I, 407-32, in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian in Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 9.

126. See *Le Lettere* 371, V, 274, in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian in Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 8-9.

Thus, she went on asking Pope Gregory XI:

I pray you therefore, in the name of Christ crucified, and I will that you do me this grace, to overcome their malice with your benignity.... For they have breathed the stench of the lives of many rulers whom you know yourself to be incarnate demons, and fallen into terrible fears, so that they did like Pilate, who not to lose his authority killed Christ; so did they, for not to lose their state, they maltreated you. I ask you then, father, to show them mercy.

She assured him that by so doing, he will lead them to “lay their heads on your bosom. Then you will rejoice, and we shall rejoice, because by love you have restored the sheep to the fold of Holy Church.”¹²⁷

Although her life may include some extraordinary phenomena, her doctrine deals with the ordinary path of holiness open to all Christians: the way of faith, hope, and love. She wrote to Francesco, a tailor in Florence: “The way has been made. It is the doctrine of the Christ crucified. Whoever walks along this way . . . reaches the most perfect light.”¹²⁸ All her teaching is concerned with this way. She follows its every turn from its fearful, faltering beginning to its last stage of loving union. For this reason her theology can be described broadly as a self-understanding that becomes a God-understanding, which in turn leads to further self-understanding.

2.5 The Modern Period

2.5.1 The Carmelite Tradition

In the teaching of the great Carmelite saints, St Teresa of Avila¹²⁹ and St John of the Cross,¹³⁰ the spiritual director assumes a central role and the need of competent spiritual guidance is seen to be essential.¹³¹

127. *Letters of Saint Catherine of Siena*, translated by Vida D. Scudder 1906 in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the Theologian in Spirituality Today* 40/1 (1988) 12.

128. See *Le Lettere* 249, IV, 61 in MARY O'DRISCOLL, *Catherine the theologian in Spirituality today* 40/1 (1988) 4-17.

129. She was born at Avila, Old Castile, on 28 March, 1515 and died at Alba de Tormes, on 4 October, 1582.

130. She was founder (with St. Teresa) of the Discalced Carmelites. She is doctor of mystic theology. She was born at Hontoveros, Old Castile, on 24 June, 1542 and died at Ubeda, Andalusia, on 14 December, 1591.

131. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul Friend*, London² 1994, 61.

2.5.1.1 St. Teresa of Avila

In 1492, that is, less than twenty years before Teresa was born, Columbus opened up the Western Hemisphere to European colonialization. In 1517 Luther started the Protestant Reformation. Out of all this change, Teresa came out pointing the way from outer turmoil to inner peace!

The need for sound theological training and experience of advanced prayer in spiritual directors was firmly insisted upon by St. Teresa of Avila, one of the greatest spiritual masters of all time.¹³² Teresa herself suffered much at the hands of half-learned directors. They knew enough to think they knew it all. Some of them had no personal knowledge of advanced prayer, and thus assumed that Teresa was being proud and presumptuous when she related some of the favours that the Lord was bestowing on her. St. Teresa was fully in accord with the biblical idea that it is foolish to trust (solely) in oneself in the area of spiritual experiences, since it is easy to be deluded.

Nevertheless it is St. Teresa herself who listed the qualities she would look for in a spiritual director. She insisted that he should be living a deep and experienced prayerful life. He should also be endowed with theological knowledge, especially in regard to the spiritual life. Spiritual depth entails knowing advanced prayer such as the prayer of quiet or maybe even the prayer of union and beyond. St. Teresa lamented the fact that many spiritual directors of her day knew the prayer of quiet only from their study books, if even that much. However, if a person is experiencing the prayer of quiet for the first time and can't find anyone who possesses first-hand knowledge of this stage of prayer, it would still be helpful to consult someone who truly knows from studying, such as a college professor in the area of Christian spirituality.

St. Teresa advised that we should consult people who have studied spirituality,

132. "From the point of view of spiritual guidance, St Teresa's most important cry was for good and wise directors for her nuns. She herself had suffered much from the unlearned and the unwise, and she was emphatic about the need for discerning, wise and proper direction for those seeking to make progress in the spiritual life. She was not prepared to accept holy men if they did not know what they were talking about or dealing with in terms of experience along the spiritual path. Her own works were written at the request of others and they provide a guide in themselves to correct spiritual awareness of the variety of developments which can occur to the soul on its journey to the Lord of all." MICHAEL BRUNDELL, *Themes in Carmelite spiritual direction in Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 70.

unless of course we have already studied it ourselves. Another quality which the director should possess is to have a balanced view about unusual experiences in prayer. He or she should be aware that deception is possible in prayer, but also that God can and really often does deal with individual people in the life of prayer. The balanced director should realize that not every claim to hear the Spirit is really what it purports to be. On the other hand, there should be awareness that not all grace is unperceived. She was fully aware that many a time we tend to seek a director just because he or she is likely to agree with us regarding our pet theories and will approve of all our plans – spiritual and otherwise. This should not be the case if we are truly interested to advance in our spiritual life. Teresa greatly held that a genuine spiritual director should have a genuine interest in the well-being of the directee. He or she should take a holistic approach and think of the consequences of spiritual advice on the whole structure of the individual directee's life.

Her correspondence was most extensive, including letters to bishops, archbishops, kings, ladies of rank, gentlemen of the world, abbots, priors, nuncios, her confessors, her brothers and sisters, rectors of colleges, father provincials of the Society of Jesus, nuns and superiors of her convents and monasteries, learned doctors of different religious orders, and even most eminent saints, such as St Peter of Alcantara, St. Francis Borgia, St John of the Cross and others.¹³³

The letters picture the Saint as a possessor of “common sense” in a most remarkable manner. She was endowed with a solidity of judgement, and a prudence and sweetness in all her actions. She watched against melancholy and *never* allowed anyone to enter the Order who seemed to be even remotely affected by it.

In her so-called Second letter to her brother SeDor Lorenzo de Cepeda,¹³⁴ which she wrote about 1577 from Toledo, she encouraged him: “It is a great favour from God, that what gives rest to others tires you. But you must not on this account give up your business; for we must serve God not as *we* wish, but as He wishes.” She even wrote to him Letters XXXII and XXXIII, where she gave him some spiritual advice.

133. Translator's Preface – translated from the Spanish by the Rev. John Dalton, London, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/teresa/letters/letters.html>.

134. [ST. TERESA], *The Letters of St. Teresa*, translated from the Spanish by John Dalton (1902), in <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/teresa/letters/letters.html> [9 June 2007], Letter XII.

She was so able to express herself regarding the greatness as well as the humility of God. In her Letter XIII, to Don Alonso Valasquez, Bishop of Osma, she expressed herself as such:

Consider, in the first place, the divine nature of the Eternal Word, of the Father united with the human nature, which of itself had no being till God gave it one. Consider also the ineffable love and profound humility with which God annihilated Himself, man becoming God, and God becoming man. Consider that magnificence and bounty with which He exercised His power, by manifesting Himself to men, and making them partakers of His glory, His power, and His greatness.

To the most Illustrious Lord, Don Sancho D'Avila, afterwards Bishop of Jaen, then confessor to the Saint, she addressed Letter XVI, dated 1580. In this letter she consoles him on the death of his mother, and gives him some instruction how to act in regard to certain scruples which troubled him.

Letter XXV, dated 1577 and addressed to the Reverend Geronimo Gracian de la Madre de Dios, is conspicuous for its spirituality and the beautiful instructions it contains on the interior life. In this letter, St Teresa wrote: "I wish to have no other prayer, but that which shall give me an increase in virtues". Her Letter XLVII is addressed to the Carmelites of St. Joseph's Convent at Seville. The Saint encourages and consoles them on account of a violent persecution which had been raised against them and the reform. She disapproves of the conduct of some of the sisters.

Letter LV – to Mother Maria de San Joseph, Prioress of Seville – was written at the time when the persecution was still raging at Seville. The Saint exhorts the prioress to patience, and speaks on several other topics which are crucial for one to get on well with others when governing others as prioress.

2.5.1.2 *St. John of the Cross*

The qualities of genuineness, empathy and understanding are the very qualities that appear in the spiritual direction of Saint John of the Cross,¹³⁵ one of the world's

135. "St John of the Cross (1542-1591), associated with St Teresa in the reform of Carmel, with his poetic soul has given to the Church a depth of understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ the true shepherd and guide. . . But his works, while theologically complex, are still

most reliable spiritual guides, as we can see from his letters. We have today only 33 letters, either whole or in part, from the pen of John of the Cross.¹³⁶

Ironically, the people who benefited the most from his spiritual guidance destroyed his other letters. St. Teresa of Jesus, for example, following a familiar practice, routinely destroyed letters after she answered them. That John wrote to Teresa may be seen in his July 6, 1581 letter to Catalina de Jesús, a discalced Carmelite nun in Palencia. This letter, the first in our present collection, was apparently included with another letter that John wrote to Teresa, for he says: "I write these lines trusting that our Madre [Teresa] will send them on to you if you are not with her".¹³⁷ Teresa highly regarded John's skill as a director, stating that "our Lord has given him special grace for that purpose."¹³⁸ In fact, he guided her own soul during a crucial period in her spiritual journey when they were both in Avila from 1572 to 1574. Forever after, she regarded him as "the father of my soul."¹³⁹ It is a lamentable loss to the history of spiritual direction that the correspondence between these great spiritual teachers has not survived.¹⁴⁰

comprehensible to those who really take the journey of the spiritual seriously. Poetry must be savoured meditatively; his maxims are pithy, relevant and very much down to earth; his letters are replete with practical guidance for the individual and related to the concrete situation. The commentaries explain for the soul wandering the paths of darkness to light the different phases of transforming union and the activity of grace on nature. Applications may vary, but the essential is the same. John of the Cross realized that sometimes written guides are needed in the absence of good and holy learned directors." MICHAEL BRUNDELL, *Themes in Carmelite spiritual direction in Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 72.

136. All quotations from John of the Cross are taken from *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, rev. ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991). The letters appear on pages 736-764 of this new edition, and will be cited both by letter and by page number. Thus, "Letter 4, 738" refers the reader to John's Letter N. 4, on page 738 of the new revised edition.
137. Letter 1, 736.
138. KEVIN CULLIGAN, *Qualities of a guide: spiritual direction in John of the Cross's letters* (2000) (on-line) : http://www.icspublications.org/archives/others/cs6_7.html [20 December 2005].
139. Letter of Teresa of Jesus to Ana de Jesús, December, 1578 (#261), in *The Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers, 2 vols. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950) 2: 625.
140. More tragically still, is that the communities of Carmelite nuns in Granada, Málaga, and Sevilla, for whom John was a spiritual guide, burned his letters to protect against their falling into the hands of one of his fellow Discalced Carmelite friar, Fray Diego Evangelista. When John was his religious superior, Diego, retaliating for reprimands received years earlier, was determined to drive him out of the Order during the last year of John's life on the grounds of indiscreet relationships with the Carmelite nuns. See FEDERICO RUIZ, et al., *God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, Washington/DC 1991, 297, 343, 362-364.

The letters that remain, have been written during the last ten years of John's life when he was at the height of his effectiveness as a spiritual director; some twenty of these can be considered letters of spiritual direction. They were written to Carmelite friars and nuns (both individuals and communities) and some lay persons. These letters reveal John's genuineness, care, and understanding.

Madre Leonor de San Gabriel was a Carmelite nun in the convent of Cordoba who felt deeply misunderstood by her Father Provincial. John writes to her in the summer of 1590 from Madrid. While understanding her affliction and grieving over the situation because of the harm it can inflict on her spirit and health, he stresses that he firmly believes that it was a temptation of the devil, in order to deflect their energy from doing God's things. He encourages her (calling her, my daughter) to give herself greatly to prayer, for after all we have no other good or security or comfort than God: "... it is right that we not long for support or comfort in anything but God".¹⁴¹ Here, John, projecting himself as a spiritual father, empathically understands her affliction and expresses his care in the grief he feels over the potential harm it can do to her. At the same time, he genuinely shares his assessment of the situation, urging her to have courage in her commitment to God, reminding her that she lives for God, and not for the provincial.

In his letters to Doña Juana de Pedraza,¹⁴² we can deduct that she was undergoing prolonged periods of spiritual darkness and had complained that he was too far away and his letters too infrequent to help her, and she wanted the help of other spiritual directors to whom she might have more ready access. He told her: "I have felt your grief, afflictions and loneliness. These, in silence, ever tell me so much that the pen cannot declare it."¹⁴³

Then, in the body of the letter, John speaks genuinely to her concerns:

In what concern the soul, it is safest not to lean on anything or desire anything. A soul should find its support wholly and entirely in its director, for not to do so would amount to no longer wanting a

141. Letter 22, 757-758.

142. She was a single woman in her early thirties, living in Granada, John had been her spiritual director when he was stationed there from 1582 to 1588. In June 1588, John was transferred hundreds of miles to the north to Segovia, but continued to guide her through the mail. We do not have Juana's letters to John, but we have two of his to her.

143. On January 28, 1589, John wrote from Segovia to Juana in Granada.

director. And when one director is sufficient and suitable, all others are useless or a hindrance. Let not the soul be attached to anything, for since prayer is not wanting, God will take care of its possessions; they belong to no other owner, nor should they.¹⁴⁴

Juana continued through most of 1589 writing to John, complaining that her darkness was not lifting and accusing him of forgetting her because she had not received any letters from him. On October 12, 1589, John again wrote to her from Segovia. Again his letter is marked with genuineness and care:

Jesus be in your soul and thanks to Him that he has enabled me not to forget the poor, as you say, or be idle, as you say. For it greatly vexes me to think you believe what you say; this would be very bad after so many kindnesses on your part when I least deserved them. That's all I need now is to forget you! Look, how could this be so in the case of one who is in my soul, as you are?¹⁴⁵

The passage thus indicates John's ability to express strong emotion to his directee when he judged it appropriate to do so. Yet, at the same time the very next line conveys how he truly cherished her. After a prolonged exhortation to walk in her "darknesses and voids of spiritual poverty" with trust in God, John concluded his letter, as he began it, with genuineness and care:

Desire no other path than this and adjust your soul to it (for it is a good one) and receive Communion as usual. Go to confession when you have something definite; you don't have to discuss these things with anyone. Should you have some problem, write to me about it. Write soon, and more frequently. Commend me also to God, my daughter in the Lord.¹⁴⁶

Madre Leonor Bautista, a Carmelite nun in Beas, was quite upset because her community did not re-elect her as their prioress. He wrote to her as such:

144. Letter 11, 744-745.

145. Letter 22, 757-758.

146. From Segovia, October 12, 1589. Fray John of the Cross (Letter 19, 754-55).

... in remembering that since God called you to live an apostolic life, which is a life of contempt, he is leading you along its road, I am consoled. . . For it is God himself who wishes to be their riches, comfort, and delightful glory.¹⁴⁷

John demonstrated genuineness and caring in a letter to Madre Ana de Jesús Jimena, distraught over his transfer from Segovia where he had been her director for three years. He wrote to Ana:

Now, until God gives us this good in heaven, pass the time in the virtues of mortification and patience, desiring to resemble somewhat in suffering this great God of ours, humbled and crucified. This life is not good if it is not an imitation of his life. May His Majesty preserve you and augment his love in you as his holy beloved. Amen.¹⁴⁸

One recipient of his letters, a Carmelite nun in Toledo, testified that a letter from him had the same effect as hearing him speak.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, his letters suggest that John was capable of pursuing his own agenda rather than responding directly to the person's expressed issues and needs. One example is a letter to Ana de Jesús and the Carmelite sisters at Beas, where John defended the long absence of his letters with an eloquent statement on the value of "silence and work" over "writing or speaking".¹⁵⁰

On another occasion, he wrote to a young Castilian lady who desired to be a Carmelite nun. He gives apparently unsought advice about sin, the Lord's passion, and seeking true glory, ending the letter with a prayer that God will grant her his spirit.

His learning may be seen in his combined use of Sacred Scripture, the theology of divine transcendence, and the psychology of attachment or addiction

147. Letter 9, 742-3.

148. On July 6, 1591, from Madrid. Letter 25, 759-60.

149. See *Collected Works*, rev. ed., 735.

150. Letter 8, 741-742.

to challenge persons in the journey towards God, not by pleasant feelings, but in deep faith, concerned only with living in union with the divine will. To one of his fellow Carmelite friars who sought his advice on how to occupy one's will in God alone "by loving God above all things", John replied:

It is worth knowing, then, that the appetite is the mouth of the will. It is opened wide when it is not encumbered or occupied with any mouthful of pleasure. When the appetite is centred on something, it becomes narrow by that very fact, since outside of God everything is narrow.¹⁵¹

John's discretion is expressed in words that imply practical and natural judgment of internal realities and the virtue which moderates external behaviour in his letter to his dear friend, benefactor, and directee, Doña Ana de Mercado y Peñalosa, the "very noble and devout" lay woman for whom he wrote his masterful poem and commentary, *The Living Flame of Love*.¹⁵² Writing to Doña Ana, then a widow in Granada, from the "holy solitude"¹⁵³ in La Peñuela, on August 19, 1591, four short months before his death, John advises: "Take care of your soul and do not confess scruples or first movements or imaginings in which the soul does not desire to be detained. Look after your health, and do not fail to pray when you can."¹⁵⁴ Doña Ana's condition at the time of this letter is unknown; but there appears to have been a health problem, possibly a lingering depression related to the successive deaths of her husband and daughter, together with other family misfortunes over the previous ten years. As a general rule, John would have been the first to insist on continuous prayer; in particular cases, he also knew that illness can adversely affect one's ability to pray.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, with this particular woman at this time in her life he counsels her to take care of her health first and pray when she is able. Evidently, Doña Ana was also prone to scruples, a neurotic and often very painful obsession with religious and/or moralistic ideas. Because these obsessive thoughts (e.g., images or "first movements" of attraction or revulsion toward objects) are not voluntary, there is no sin in such mental activity, regardless of its content. Therefore John directs Doña Ana not to confess them in sacramental penance.

151. Letter 13, 748-749.

152. Prologue, 1.

153. Letter 31, 763.

154. Letter 28, 761.

155. See Letters 1-9, where John acknowledges the disturbing effects of «bodily indisposition,» «bad humor,» and «melancholia» in one's prayer life.

He gives the same counsel to a discalced Carmelite nun suffering from scruples to whom he wrote a year or so earlier, shortly before Pentecost: "If you could put an end to your scruples, I think it would be better for your quietude of soul not to confess during these days."¹⁵⁶ After acknowledging with empathic understanding how difficult it is to break the obsessional process, John recommends some practices to help her do just that. The first is not to allow her obsessional thoughts of sin or unworthiness keep her from the communion rail. "Receive communion on Pentecost in addition to those days on which you usually receive." Next, he recommends the practice of silence: "When something distasteful or unpleasant comes your way, remember Christ crucified and be silent. Live in faith and hope, even though you are in darkness, because it is in this darkness that God protects the soul." Finally, he directs her to practice trust in God: "Read, pray, rejoice in God, both your good and your salvation. May He grant you this good and this salvation and conserve it all until the day of eternity. Amen, Amen."¹⁵⁷

We see clearly John's approach in spiritual direction. He counselled persons to let go of inordinate emotional attachment to specific desires, thoughts, memories, images, and interior movements, no matter how religious or spiritual, and instead to centre their mental energies on the incomprehensibly good God present in the depths of their being.

John maintained, above all, that the Holy Spirit is a person's primary and ultimate guide. As such the human director is merely the Holy Spirit's instrument in this guidance. John firmly believed that the Christian spiritual journey itself is one of personal transformation through dark faith and self-transcending love. John similarly cautioned the Carmelite community at Beas de Segura where he served as both confessor and spiritual director following his first assignment to Andalusia in 1578:

The waters of inward delights do not spring from the earth. One must open toward heaven the mouth of desire, empty of all other fullness, that thus it may not be reduced or restricted by some mouthful of another pleasure, but truly empty and open toward God who says: Open your mouth wide and I will fill it [Ps 81, 11].

Serve God, my beloved daughters in Christ, following in his footsteps

156. Letter 4.

157. Letter 20, 755-756.

of mortification, in utter patience, in total silence, and with every desire to suffer, becoming executioners of your own satisfactions, mortifying yourselves, if perhaps something remains that must die and something still impedes the inner resurrection of the Spirit who dwells within your souls. Amen.¹⁵⁹

2.5.2 St. Ignatius of Loyola¹⁵⁹

When the Jesuit community was in the process of growing over four continents, Ignatius felt the need to strengthen the bonds that held the Society together through mail, even though sixteenth century mail was so slow. Though the reality that the Jesuit community was ever growing in number was a very happy one, it brought about with it the other hard reality of separation. The community originated from a very closely knit group of university friends. Now it was only mail and correspondence that could allow for an exchange of news about different men and their apostolates, and ensure that the same plan and manner of living was kept intact by all, while keeping affective bonds. As a consequence, Ignatius urged his followers to write letters not as a hobby but as an obligation for them so that they would strengthen each other and inform each other with each other's news. He himself accepted the responsibility of answering all the letters he received and of carrying on a never-ending worldwide correspondence.¹⁶⁰

Although his *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* bring brilliantly out his personality, in his letters the abstract becomes more personal – both on the part of the writer and the addressee – his method and his rule take on a here-and-now meaning.¹⁶¹ We have approximately seven thousand of his letters, some long, some short. He wrote more than these. He was a man who took great pains at writing carefully worded letters. Like all Basques, he had a respect for the word, to the word pronounced and expressed, and a kind of veneration for the word that was written. In each word he expressed, there was the full intention of what it meant. As such each word was rendered rich in its expressive density.¹⁶²

158. Letter 7, 740-741.

159. He was born in 1491 at the castle of Loyola above Azpeitia in Guipuscoa and died at Rome, on 31 July, 1556.

160. IDÍGORAS J. IGNACIO TELLECHEA, *Ignatius of Loyola. The pilgrim saint*, translated from Spanish, edited and with a preface by Cornelius Michael Buckley, Chicago/IL 1994², 494.

161. *Ibid.*, 495.

162. *Ibid.*

His letters narrate, counsel, exhort and give orders. They also set out plans for the undertaking of a crusade against the Turks. Mail suited Ignatius quite well. The correspondence shows that he reaffirmed principles, directed business affairs, solved problems and brought the best out of given circumstances. He also revealed "his top priorities in these pieces of correspondence; his aspirations and his ideals, his worries, his mettle before adversity and in the face of confrontation; his sentiments of affection, gratitude, and patience, and even a certain dissimulated irony sometimes shows up."¹⁶³

He corresponded with Charles V, Philip II, John III of Portugal, with members of his own family, with Gouveia, with one of the Barcelona women who once looked after him, and with some particular nuns, cardinals, bishops, his companions, novices, high-placed ladies, ordinary women. He was never afraid of any of his correspondents and thus he faced each and every one of them squarely in all types of circumstances. He was indifferent towards the accepted social conventions of his time. His correspondence addressed each pleasantly and with grave courtesy, giving him or her a small light that may illuminate truth in a singular, personal way. A word of parting coming with affection and pointing toward transcendence was always present: "May it please God that we may know His most holy will and fulfil it".

It is to be reminded that the original reason of Ignatius' letters was that while dealing with the members of his evolving society individually, he was to safeguard the union and uniformity of the whole group.¹⁶⁴ It was he himself who sent his followers away from where he was. He was ready to sacrifice the community spirit. The letters reached their objective because they gave the Society life and gradually, over a period of time, they gave birth to the living entity well before the rules came into existence. Some of these letters already contained a nearly complete set of rules because they indicated the patterns that the Society was later to adopt.¹⁶⁵

However, he wanted to know the news about the men he sent and wanted them to know the news about one another. So he encouraged them to write to him their news. Being a man of insight, Ignatius soon came to realize that:

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid., 496.

165. Ibid.

apart from their importance for the members of the Society, these letters should be shared with others, non-Jesuits, who were true friends of ‘the least Society’ and who were in some ways involved with its mission. The letters provided an insight into the lives his men were leading and into the work they were doing, but they were generally scribbled out quickly and at random and were not meant to be broadcast.¹⁶⁶

Non-Jesuits who were friends of the Society, were fully aware that the founder was receiving mail from all over the continents. However, he was “very much ashamed” to share them with them. So he imposed on all Jesuits the norm that they should write a well-structured “principal letter” that could be shown to others, and therefore edifying in content, in addition to a second letter whose style would be less formal, and whose content could be written out of the abundance of the heart and without order.¹⁶⁷

In his letter to Father Pierre Favre, received by Pierre on January 25, 1543, (the day of the feast of the conversion of St. Paul), Ignatius instructed him about the care to be given in of letter-writing: “They should devote this letter to a description of their spiritual activities, and are to leave the more mundane, but interesting, news items for additional enclosures.” Since Ignatius found that all were deficient in this regard, he sent a copy of his letter to everyone.¹⁶⁸

Obedience was of crucial importance for Ignatius. To Father Giovanni Battista Viola, and to many other people, including to Father Giovanni Francesco Araldo, he wrote on obedience. To Father Viola,¹⁶⁹ Ignatius advised him that, since he would be arriving several months after the school year had begun, it would be good for him to spend his first months brushing up on his Latin. When he did not succeed, he wrote to Ignatius. Thus, Ignatius replied while emphasizing on blind obedience: “You yourself can judge whether you are seeking to obey, or whether you are submitting your judgement to whatever decision I make. If you so abound

166. *Ibid.*, 497.

167. Letter 7.

168. <http://www8.georgetoen.edu/centers/woodstock/ignatius.htm>.

169. Father Viola entered the Society as a priest in February 1540. He was among the first Italians to enter the Society. In 1541 he was sent to Paris by Ignatius for further studies and to be, at the same time, superior of the young Jesuits attending the university.

in judgement of your own and are convinced that you are wasting your time, where is the submission of your judgement?" Closing: "I close asking our Lord in His infinite goodness to give us the fullness of his perfect grace, so that we may know His most holy will and perfectly fulfil it".

To the Scholastics at Alcalá, he wrote on maturing spirituality. He gave them counsels which are meant to shape a youthful scholastic into the mature Jesuit; they will eventually evolve into "rules for Scholastics". He mentioned purity of heart, to speak only out of necessity, to love with a tender charity. He admonished them to do nothing which could not be done in the presence of God and his creatures. He also encouraged them to behold the person of Christ in our superiors. Perseverance in the vocation to which God calls us is also important.

Ignatius wrote to the Fathers and brothers studying at Coimbra as regards perfection. He learned of certain "holy follies" practiced by these young Jesuits at the College of Coimbra. Ignatius tells them of the need to restrain their fervour. He suggested to them ways of exercising zeal during years of study, thus they should offer their studies to God, they should seek to grow in virtue, a necessary requirement for the Apostolate, to give good example and to have holy Desires. They should also find time to pray.

Ignatius spoke of prayer and penance in various circumstances. We have a letter addressed to Francisco de Borja, Duke of Gandā who secretly pronounced his vows in the Society on February 1, 1548. Since his wife's death, in May 1546, he lived a vibrant spiritual life, and now in 1548 he was making plans to resign his title so that he could fully live as a Jesuit.

Saint Ignatius, through his letters, strengthened others and shed light on the will of God for the people he met and who sought his advice. All that he narrated, instructed and exhorted, reveal his own spiritual maturity. His desires and attitudes show a great man, who together with other great men and women, helped others in the path to holiness and will remain persons for all seasons.

2.5.3 Salesian Spirituality

In Salesian spirituality, spiritual direction is seen as a process of intuitive response practiced between two persons – the director and the directee. The director is seen as the one who lives authentically the vocation of the Christian so as to

become a model for the directee. This style was firmly rooted in the cultural context of early seventeenth century Catholics.

2.5.3.1 *St. Francis of Sales*¹⁷⁰

The writings of Francis de Sales clearly insist on the necessity of direction. This is especially evident in his famous book, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*. St Francis did not restrict direction to the spoken word, but he himself wrote many letters, all with his own hand. In one of these, he defines his method as gentle, and allowed spiritual exercises to have their own gradual effect on souls. But, in one of his letters he commented upon the shortage of competent directors:

It is difficult ... to find people of all-around discernment who can see clearly to an equal in all matters: nor is it essential to have people of this kind so as to be well directed, and there is no harm, it seems to me, in gathering from many flowers the honey which we cannot find in one alone.¹⁷¹

Those who knew him best, either through ties of friendship or because they had taken his spiritual advice, realised that in a very special way this man understood rightly the heart of the matter where real religion - the personal link between man and God - was concerned. He considered God to be all-loving, infinitely wishing well to human persons. What man is called upon to do, is to return this love in even greater knowledge and service to God. He understood the human limitations of all those that came in contact with him, one way or another. "I am nothing, if not a man" he was to confess many years later, thus showing his character and the greatness of his ultimate sanctity.¹⁷²

He always spoke of God as a lover. It was always by the love of God that he caught souls. As such he was an innovation for his epoch.¹⁷³ He knew, for example,

170. He was born in 1567 and died in 1622. In the time when Francis de Sales was born, Christendom was in the midst of great religious trouble. Europe was about to start its thirty years' war of religion. Mary Tudor had come to the throne six years earlier and Elizabeth I started reigning the year before. It was the time when England was governed by a Catholic Queen and a Protestant one.

171. Letter 107 in *St Francis de Sales: Selected Letters* translated by Elizabeth Stopp, 1960, 263 in KENNETH LEECH, *Soul Friend*, London² 1994, 60.

172. MICHAEL DE LA BEDOYERE, *François de Sales*, London 1960, 15.

173. MARGARET TROUNCER. *The Gentleman Saint. St. Francois de Sales and his Times 1567-1622*, London 1963, 51.

that the Council of Trent had laid it down that “the first and principal duty of the bishop is to preach.”¹⁷⁴

However, he was able to write to whoever was in need of his written word. Even his mother was in such need. He wrote to her (*his mother*) letters full of affection and respect and went to see her as often as possible. Smilingly he excused her maternal possessiveness, for he understood and forgave it. He tried to meet her demands, and when he knew that God did not want her to enter Heaven in melancholy, he made the last month of her life very happy. He had then become her spiritual director. She stayed with him in his Bishop’s house at Annecy and he surrounded her with much kindness and tenderness.¹⁷⁵

The friendship that grew between Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal, two saints, was a Jesus-centred, affectionate one.¹⁷⁶ The way they addressed the letters to one another, “Live Jesus”, shows that they both had the name of Jesus engraved in their hearts. The contact between the two grew into a providential, immensely fruitful contact, holding a spiritual intimacy that placed both of them apart and made them unique in the ranks of the saints. Jean would teach him truly to know himself

174. Francis once wrote to a friend who was about to be raised to the episcopate: “Never allow any excuse to turn you away from this order of Trent . . . Do not preach in order to become a great preacher, but simply because it is your duty and God wills it. A fatherly sermon of a bishop is worth more than all the artifice of any elaborated sermon of other preachers. A bishop needs little to preach well, for his sermons should deal with necessary and useful subjects, not far-fetched ones. His words should be simple and not affected, his mode fatherly and natural without art or over-care. However short his sermon may be and whatever the subject, it always means much that he preaches.” Letter XII in MICHAEL DE LA BEDOYERE, *François de Sales*, London 1960, 102.

175. MARGARET TROUNCER, *The Gentleman Saint. St. Francois de Sales and his Times 1567-1622*, London 1963, 79.

176. One day, Francis de Sales was preaching in Sainte-Chapelle of Dijon, when he noticed near his pulpit a lady dressed as a widow, listening so attentively. Her figure seemed to recall the vision he had before leaving Annecy. On her side, Jane, the widow, saw in this priest the figure which appeared to her with a call to choose him as her director. Jane, let herself be guided so as to look at the temptations of the devil, prayer and penance in their own right perspective. Deep within her, she knew that the spiritual director she had before Francis was all wrong and had no understanding of such matters. But still she obeyed. It was during the loneliness of her widowhood and during his rise to public service and visibility that Jane and Francis met. He became her director and began the process of enabling her to achieve spiritual liberty, that inner freedom that allows one to perceive and then to respond to the deepening layers of awareness of God’s constant and challenging presence. See *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988.

as he would teach her how best to apply her spiritual vocation and genius. Between them, they would map out the way of spiritual perfection in its application to men and women of every kind according to the nature of their spiritual calling. Much later, he confessed to Jane de Chantal: "God, whose will I looked to directly, so drew my soul towards that blessed journey that nothing could have stopped me."¹⁷⁷ The love of God revealed in Jesus Christ pervades every line of the letters they both wrote.¹⁷⁸ "They have been given to each other as spiritual friends, to enjoy each other's spiritual gifts, to support each other in their commitment to faithfulness, to be of mutual help in their search for perfection and to give shape to a new spiritual family in the Church."¹⁷⁹ God's strength was manifest in their mutual openness, sharing, confession and forgiveness, and a mutual knowing and being known.

To Madame de Chantal, he explained that the reason persons are in the world, is: "... to receive and carry the gentle Jesus: on our tongue by proclaiming Him; in our arms by doing good works; on our shoulders by supporting the yoke of dryness and sterility in both the interior and exterior senses..."¹⁸⁰ All men and women are to be encouraged to become authentic Christians, to realize the gospel in their lives. One means by which this was to be done was through spiritual direction. He encouraged others to direct and to seek direction.¹⁸¹

To Mlle de Soulfour, whose father was an acquaintance to Francis, the saint admonished her to be aware of the vanity of the human mind because it is so easy that it becomes confused and wrapped up in itself.¹⁸² He also spoke to her to be

177. Letter XIII, 142, in MICHAEL DE LA BEDOYERE, *François de Sales*, London 1960, 117.

178. *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 3.

179. Ibid.

180. *Oeuvres*, XIV, 211: Letter DLV in *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Evêque de Genève et Docteur de l'Église, Edition Complète* d'après les autographes et les éditions originales... publiée... par les soins des Religieuses de la Visitation de l' Monastère d'Annecy, 27 vols. (Annecy: J. Niérat et al., 1892-1964), in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 15.

181. An example of those who came to Francis' direction we find Madame de Charmois, wife of a courtier at the decadent French court. This young woman sought to live out her religious desires to realize a greater love of God and to live in accordance with that love. *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 24.

182. *Oeuvres*, XII, 202-206; Letter CXC dated July 22, 1603 in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 96.

patient since “patience is the one virtue which gives greatest assurance of our reaching perfection and, while we must have patience with others, we must also have it with ourselves.”¹⁸³

A recurring theme in his letters is the grandeur and immensity of God. In the same letter just quoted, the Saint writes:

... anyone who reflects on the grandeur of God and the immensity of His goodness and dignity can never go to excess in making grand and glorious preparations of the heart for Him. It prepares for Him a body that is mortified and not rebellious, an attention to prayer that is not distracted, gentle conversation free of rancour, and a humility in which there are no bursts of vanity.¹⁸⁴

Francis encouraged Madame Brûlart, a married woman from Burgundy, to go on living according to her saintly desire – to reach Christian perfection: “Nurture it and help it grow every day.... For you, Madam, who are married, the means is to unite yourself closely to God and to your neighbour, as well as to all that concerns them”.¹⁸⁵

In another letter,¹⁸⁶ he suggested to her to remain with the beginners’ method of prayer a little longer. He also encouraged her to bear her crosses as patiently as possible: “Believe me, this is the most important and the least understood point in the spiritual life. We all love what is according to our taste; few people like what is according to their duty or to God’s liking”.¹⁸⁷

It has been noted that Francis de Sales felt himself particularly called to the direction of women. He had a special genius for this work.¹⁸⁸ There were many women with whom Francis corresponded in order to give them spiritual direction.

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid., 97.

185. *Oeuvres*, XII, 267-271: Letter CCXVII in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 102.

186. *Oeuvres*, XIII, 289-292: Letter CD in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 112.

187. Ibid.

188. *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 66.

A letter which the saint addressed to a gentleman whom he did not know personally, shows that the saint-director had the same personal and pastoral caring to all, even to those not considered to be his close friends. With this correspondent, Francis empathized with his depressed situation with which he had to struggle in Paris years before:

Neither do we always have to *feel* strong and courageous; it is enough to hope that we will have strength and courage when and where we need them. We don't have to have a sign that these virtues will be ours; it is enough if we hope that God will help us.¹⁸⁹

Francis wrote also to Mme de Cornillon, his own younger sister, who was also his directee and "daughter": "Let us all belong to God, my daughter, in the midst of so much busyness brought on by the diversity of worldly things."¹⁹⁰ Amongst the themes with which he dealt in his letters we find: perfection pleasing to God, vanity,¹⁹¹ patience,¹⁹² the grandeur of God and the immensity of his goodness.¹⁹³

2.5.3.2 *St. Jane Frances de Chantal*¹⁹⁴

Jane's letters reflect an understanding of spiritual enterprise. For such a reason, like Francis, she wrote to her correspondents amid the routine of her own day at the

189. *Oeuvres*, XXI, 11-14: Letter MCMLXXIV in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 181.

190. *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 45.

191. *Oeuvres*, XII, 202-206: Letter CLXXXI in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 95.

192. *Ibid.*

193. *Ibid.*, 97.

194. Jean Frances was born at Dijon, France on 28 January 1572. She died at the Visitation Convent in Moulins on the 13 December, 1641. After eight years of marriage she was left a widow with four children. In her prayers she asked God to send her a guide and God, in a vision showed her the spiritual director he held in reserve for her. At Annecy, God called her to found the Congregation of the Visitation. Its aim was to receive young girls and even widows who wished to advance in their spiritual life. They were to do so through austere ascetical practices in force in all the religious orders at that time. St. Frances de Sales was especially desirous of seeing the realization of his cherished method of attaining perfection through the realization of the Divine will and in seeking always to do what is pleasing to God. RAPHAEL PERNIN, *St. Jane Frances de Chantal* (1910), in *New Advent* (on-line): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08282c.htm>.

Visitation.¹⁹⁵ Jane, with the help of a secretary, penned her hasty letters, especially the formal correspondence. Letters of direction were generally written in her own hand, jumbling together bits of news, requests, informal advice, with what might be called more formal spiritual counsel. After Francis' death she went on excelling as a religious spiritual mother.¹⁹⁶ Her major concern was to stay close to the very Salesian spirit of beginning right where one is and with the facts at hand. She sought, thus, to bring out the practical implementations of the spiritual principles within the ordinary context of ordinary lives, an exercise which both Francis and Jane excelled in.

Jane was demanding with the superiors of the Visitandines. From them she expected an attitude of motherly attentiveness toward all the Visitandines, that care and solicitude for each entrant that a mother might show towards her own child. It was important for her that faults were to be noted and that advancement in virtue is cultivated. As such no guidance was to be judgemental and so cause discouragement or intimidation. ... Jane de Chantal had a genius for spiritual direction which made that continuing work a viable and commendable one.¹⁹⁷

To Mother Marie-Jacqueline Favre, Superior at Lyons, Annecy, 9 February 1616, after the usual opening of "Live + Jesus" she encourages her: "I can see that God, by His grace and fatherly care, is leading you by the hand and that all you have to do is trust in Him, cling to Him, and, under His protection, journey on as humbly and simply as possible." She called her: "my very dearest daughter."¹⁹⁸

She sought to guide Sister Péronne-Marie de Châtel at Lyons, to acknowledge Christ as her Saviour and her all:

Once in a while, if you feel particularly weak, without courage, without confidence, force yourself to make affirmations which are the opposite of your feelings. Say with conviction: "My Saviour, my All, despite my feelings of misery and distrust, I place all my confidence in You."¹⁹⁹

195. *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal. Letters of spiritual direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power and translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, Mahwah/NJ 1988, 29.

196. *Ibid.*, 32.

197. JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 300.

198. 1986, 296.

199. *Ibid.*, 298.

She encouraged her in being a superior:

So look beyond your timid, fearful hesitations, Trample them underfoot, my dearest daughter, and keep your eye on God's good pleasure and His eternal plan for you. Surrender all the remaining days of your life to Him and let Him use them for such activities and services as please Him, and not yourself.²⁰⁰

In her more mature years Jane counselled superiors and Sisters with the same affection – although sometimes there is less spontaneity in its expression – understanding and firmness. She guided Sister Anne-Marie Rosset, Assistant and Novice Mistress at Dijon, in the way she was to react to the actions of the people around her: “To be sure, I am convinced, and experience has taught me, that nothing so wins souls as gentleness and cordiality. I beg you, dearest, follow this method, for it is the spirit of our blessed Father.”²⁰¹

We find such themes that she dealt with in her letters of spiritual direction: humility,²⁰² the spirit of God,²⁰³ purity and uprightness of intention,²⁰⁴ imitation of the Lord,²⁰⁵ observance of the Rule of the institute,²⁰⁶ dealing with temptations,²⁰⁷ true happiness²⁰⁸ and an authentic helping of souls.²⁰⁹

200. Letter to a Superior, *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, VII, 556-57: Letter MDCCCLXXII with no date in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 311.

201. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, V, 175-77: Letter CDLXIX dated 1623 in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 301.

202. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, V, 513-14: Letter DCLXXII dated 1625 in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 302.

203. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, V, 546-47: Letter DCXCI dated 12 December 1626, in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 303.

204. *Ibid.*

205. *Ibid.*, 304.

206. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, VI, 47-49: Letter DCCLXXXIV dated after 1623 in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 305, 306.

207. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, VI, 49-51: Letter DCCLXXXV dated 1627 in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 307.

208. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, VIII, 432-34: Letter MDCCXC with no date in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters*

2.5.4 Abbot John Chapman²¹⁰ – a Benedict Monk

St Benedict,²¹¹ in Chapter 73 of his Rule, refers his readers to sacred scripture and to the tradition preserved in the writings of the ancient monks.²¹² The Saint emphasised in some rather brief passages, about the relations the monk must have with one or two other persons concerning his progress to God. Nevertheless he did not treat these in as much detail. Other authors before him presented as though personal guidance had lost something of the importance it enjoyed in the lives of those who lived alone, now that the way of God is pursued in the common life.²¹³

In Chapter 46 of the Rule of St Benedict, we find instructions for those who manifest their guilt to the Abbot or ‘the spiritual seniors who know how to deal with their own wounds and not to disclose or publish those of others’. This regulation had nothing to do with sacramental confession, but rather with a relationship of a disciple to a master.²¹⁴

During the twentieth century we find several great abbots who remain famous on account of their spiritual teaching. Dom Columba Marmion, the Irishman who became Abbot of Maredsous in Belgium, and who died in 1923, is an example *par excellence*. In his work on Christ, the ideal of the monk, he said nothing about direction. He claimed that he was not a ‘great partisan of a large amount of direction’. Nevertheless his biographer and admirer, R. Thibaut, was able to present him as an ‘eminent spiritual director’, above all on account of his vast correspondence, even while insisting that ‘no director was less like a tyrant or an oracle’. Above all else Marmion recommended ‘great fidelity to movements of the Holy Spirit’.²¹⁵

of spiritual direction, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 308.

209. *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, VIII, 452-54: Letter MDCCCIV dated 26 June 1641 in JANE DE CHANTAL, *Letters of spiritual direction*, in *Women's spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn, Mahwah/NJ 1986, 309.

210. He was born at ashfield, Suffolk, on 25 April, 1865. He died on November 7, 1936.

211. Saint Benedict was the founder of monasticism. He was born in Nursia, c. 480, and died at Monte Cassino in 543.

212. JEAN LECLERCQ *Spiritual Direction in the Benedictine Tradition*, in *Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 16.

213. *Ibid.*, Pg 17.

214. KENNETH LEECH, *Soul Friend*, London² 1994, 46.

215. R. THIBAUT, *L'union à Dieu dans le Christ d'après les lettres de direction de Dom Marmion*, Paris 1941, xiii in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, 25.

Later on we find Dom John Chapman, Abbot of Downside, who died in 1936, who could claim: 'I have been my own director, and that is very hard'.²¹⁶ He did not refuse to direct others as his *Spiritual letters* testify, though with two reservations. First, of all, he said: 'I am not inclined to assume the role of a professional "director" to anyone'.²¹⁷ As well, he thought of direction as leading to the moment when it would no longer be necessary. "A good director must be a nurse, no more. He should confine himself to the task of teaching his penitent how to walk alone and unaided", he wrote.²¹⁸

John Chapman's advice was inclined to send people towards a contemplative and characteristically simple form of prayer. He intentionally quoted St Ignatius, St Francis de Sales and particularly St John of the Cross and in this was very revealing. He wanted to strengthen his arguments for the perfection of others. The Benedictine tradition has always been able to draw from the full spectrum of experts on prayer.²¹⁹

He addressed his letters to lay people, to religious persons and also to a Jesuit. All along he insisted on interior peace. To one living in the world, he wrote: "... there is another interior peace, which consists in simply willing what God wills, even though it seems to be just the unpleasant distraction and exteriorizing which one supposes to be bad for one."²²⁰ People pass through various kinds of moments in their lives. Whatever that may be, we have to see situations as God's will: "Then you take that as His Will, and do the best you can in darkness and humility."²²¹

We find whole passages regarding prayer, even contemplative prayer. He could

216. [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 23.

217. Letter XXVI, a letter addressed to an unmarried lady, dated Easter Tuesday, 14 April 1925 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 84.

218. [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 23.

219. JEAN LECLERCQ *Spiritual Direction in the Benedictine Tradition*, in *Traditions of spiritual guidance*, collected and edited by Lavinia Byrne, London 1990, 25-26.

220. Letter I, a letter addressed to a lay living in the world dated August 29, 1916, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 33.

221. Letter XXXVIII, a letter addressed to a lady living in the world dated 4 September 1932 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 109.

see the importance of prayer in the life of the true follower of Christ: "... give yourself to prayer, when you can, and trust in God that He will lead you, without your choosing your path."²²² To the same, he said:

on the other hand, the only way to pray is to pray; and the way to pray well is to pray much. If one has no time for this, then one must at least pray regularly.... You say very naturally that you do not know what to do if you have a quarter of an hour alone in Church. Yes, I suspect the only thing to do is to shut out the Church and everything else, and just give yourself to God and beg Him to have mercy on you, and offer him all your distractions.²²³

Spiritual life is concerned with the daily struggle of our sins. Fighting sins makes the faithful to acknowledge even more one's sins. To the same he says: "When you become a saint, you will believe yourself to be the *greatest* of sinners – that is real fervour, when combined with the determination still to go on fighting."²²⁴

He also suggested some reading, like *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Caussade and St John of the Cross and De Sales. Familiarity with these authors makes us become more aware of our way to God. We are not alone walking this path towards God.²²⁵ He insists on the will of God and on obedience.²²⁶

As regards direction to religious, he spoke to them about prayer as he does to his directee in Letter XLIII.²²⁷ To the same, he explained himself as such:

The great danger is that people love God for His gifts, and are always on the look out for them, and think all is lost when they have a little

222. Letter II, a letter dated Aug 29, 1916 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 35.

223. Letter XII, a letter addressed to the same, dated April 11, 1927, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 53.

224. Letter V, a letter addressed to the same dated 17 July 1917 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 43.

225. Letter XXVII, a letter addressed to an unmarried lady addressed dated 27 April 1935, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 85, 86, 92.

226. Letter XXVIII, a letter addressed to a lady living in the world dated Sept 27, 1920, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 95.

227. Letter XLIII, a letter addressed to a canoness regular of the Lateran dated 2 April 1913 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 118.

aridity; it is hard for them to learn to love aridity, to desire nothing so much as to be perennially dissatisfied with themselves, and full of an entire vague and unsatisfactory longing for something unknown and unknowable.²²⁸

He gave these guidelines: “All progress in virtue is progress in humility, - knowledge of our own wretchedness”,²²⁹ “Meanwhile, thank God for all the trials you have to bear,”²³⁰ and “Do not think that the right way to bear a trial – or many trials together – is to love God so much that you can bear the trial with joy; so that it ceases to be a trial. On the contrary, it is obvious that the essence of suffering of any kind is that we suffer from it!”²³¹

2.5.5 Baron F. Von Hugel²³²

Baron Friedrech Von Hugel was a layman. By the time he reached adulthood, he was fluent in four modern languages, and well-versed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew; he was Roman Catholic familiar with the Protestant mind. By the letters he wrote to his niece he wanted to strengthen her character. In her introduction to the letters which she received from him, she quotes him saying: ‘I want to prepare you, to organize you for life, for illness, crisis, and death’. The essence of his advice might be synthesized in his own words: ‘Live all you can – as complete and full a life as you can find- do as much as you can for others. Read, work, enjoy – love and help as many souls – do all this. Yes – but remember: Be alone, be remote, be away from the world, be desolate. Then you will be near God!’²³³ His niece spoke very highly of her uncle: “... a great theologian... a true member of the Roman

228. Letter XLIV, a letter addressed to the same dated 7 June 1913, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 125.

229. Letter LXI, a letter addressed to a Benedictine nun dated 8 November 1927, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 153.

230. Letter LXIII, a letter addressed to the same dated 28 February 1929, in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 155.

231. Letter LXIII, a letter addressed to the same dated 28 February 1929 in [ABBOT CHAPMAN], *Spiritual Letters*, with an introduction by Sebastian Moore, London 2003, 157.

232. Baron F. Von Hugel was born in 1852 in Florence, the son of an elderly Austrian diplomat and his young Scottish wife. Then in 1866, when Friedrich was fourteen, his father retired, and the family moved to Torquay in England, where a Quaker geologist was hired as tutor in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain 1995, 4.

233. BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995 4.

Catholic Church. He lives so deeply in his Church's life that I cannot think of him as without her. His whole life and practice were inspired by her teaching and doctrine. He lived within all her boundaries; his mind was knit to, and his soul fed by, her soul."²³⁴

He wanted her to read a great deal "to be a deeply spiritual woman: I want to feed your mind and soul; to make you a sober, persevering, balanced, genial, historical Christian."²³⁵ He was so glad when he got to know through her that she was reading and working on the *Imitation*. "It is the only way to read it which is really worthy of what itself is so intensely alive."²³⁶

Friedrich esteemed suffering very highly as a means for perfection. For this reason he spoke to his niece many a time regarding this subject. Once he told her: "Suffering is the greatest teacher; the consecrated suffering of one soul teaches another. I think we have got all our values wrong, and suffering is the crown of life. Suffering and expansion, what rich combination!"²³⁷ He continued: "Do not be greedy of consolation. ... Suffering teaches; life teaches. Don't weaken love; never violate it. Love and joy are your way."²³⁸ He asked of his niece to go that extra mile. As regards Lenten penitence he told her that it consists primarily:

in the ever gently and really dropping of our several over-intensenesses, and as gently and really adaptably as we can, accepting, fitting into, the rubs and jolts, the disappointments and drearinesses which God in his merciful training of us may allow to send us. And we will both add to this central chief thing just one or two little renunciations.²³⁹

Prayer keeps us humble in front of our God. Baron Hugel encourages his niece to be and stay humble. She is to acquire the courage to remain so through prayer: "Be very humble, it's the only thing. That is why I try to keep my little thing always on her knees."²⁴⁰ In turn prayer and humility kept the niece resigned into God's

234. Ibid., 22.

235. Ibid., 4,5.

236. Letter written at 13, Vicarage Gate, Kensington, W8 on 2 January 1920, in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 84.

237. BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 7.

238. Ibid.

239. Letter written on 8 February 1921 in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 119.

240. BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 7.

hands.²⁴¹ We cannot go through this life without crisis and that is why we have to keep ourselves united with the will of God: “. . . to turn gently to other things, to maintain a vague, general attitude of resignation – to be very meek, with oneself and with others: the crisis goes by, thus, with great fruit. What is a religion worth if at your disposal, capable of being comfortably elicited when and where you please? It is far, far more God who must hold us, than we who must hold him. And we get trained in these darkneses, into that sense of our impotence without which the very presence of God becomes a snare.”²⁴²

Such resignation brings to us consolation which is followed by desolation. Both are part and parcel of the life of the followers of Christ. All we have to do is to be faithful to our call as Christians:

... And lastly – consolation, Dear, is sooner or later followed by Desolation; and the latter is, when and where God sends it, and we have not ourselves brought it on our selves by laxness and dissipation, as true a way to God, and usually a safer one, than consolation. Day and night, sunshine and storm, union and aloneness – both are necessary, sooner or later, Sweet. But, of course, it is for God, for him alone, to leave and to apportion these vicissitudes to each soul. And certain it is that it is of much help to have some older, more experienced soul handy also, who can and will, if and when we get into Desolation, cheer us on, by the reminder of the former consolation, and still more by the great fact that only through such vicissitudes – through fidelity in them – can we grow strong and deep in God and for him.²⁴³

The Baron recalled what a great soul and mind told him. This person was a noble Dominican. He warned him:

You want to grow in virtue, to serve God, to love Christ? Well, you

241. Letter written on 30 September 1918, in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 33.

242. Letter written on 21 April 1920, in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 93.

243. Letter written on 2 July 1919 in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 64.

will grow in and attain to these things if you will make them a slow and sure, an utterly real, a mountain step-plod and ascent, willing to have to camp for weeks or months in spiritual desolation, darkness an emptiness at different stages in your march and growth.²⁴⁴

He was also well aware that we have to pray for each other as well as suffer for each other:

Nothing is more real than this interconnection – this gracious power put to God himself into the very heart of our infirmities. And, my little Gwen, it is the Church ... which, at its best and deeper, is ... that inter-dependence of all the broken and the meek, all the self-oblivion, all the reaching-out to God and souls.²⁴⁵

We acquire such benefit through the Church. We owe it so much! So he wrote:

I am hoping only to get you gradually to see the huge, unique, irreplaceable good that you, as we all, owe to the Church.²⁴⁶

2.5.6 Carlo Carretto²⁴⁷

Carlo Carretto was a religious. His experience in the Sahara as a hermit helped him to understand the importance of the interior life and prayer, in silence and in work. Such experience nourished the rest of his life and later activity.²⁴⁸ Carlo corresponded a great deal with his sister, Dolcidia. According to Sister Emerenziana, Carlo's and Dolcidia's other sister, Carlo and Dolcidia had always cherished the same ideals and their common care as to love the Lord.²⁴⁹

He felt that it was important for himself to live in the desert where he could

244. Extract from letter dated 23 January 1919, in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 41.

245. Letter dated 7 April 1919 in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 48.

246. Letter dated 5 May 1919, in BARON F. VON HUGEL, *Letters to a Niece*, edited by Gwyen Hugel, Great Britain, 1995, 52.

247. He was born on 2 April 1910.

248. *Ibid.*, 10.

249. *Ibid.*, 15.

empty himself. As such he encouraged his sister to ask Jesus: “Fill me with Your self alone. Isn’t that a grace? Be happy.”²⁵⁰

He acknowledged God as so merciful for having forgiven all his sins and being so merciful to him:

Truly our God is a God of mercy! He loads you with gifts at the very time you’re giving Him no thought, or worse, betraying Him.

He is Father!

And I want to become His son, His real son.

He is Jesus my brother.

And I want to become a genuine brother to Him.

He is the Spirit of Love.

And I want to enrol in His School of Fire and let myself be all burnt up.

What a joy, my dear sister!²⁵¹

Relying simply on God makes us feel what we really are and who the Trinity really is: the All. We can do all things simply through God who strengthens us:

I could do nothing because I am nothing, I have nothing. There is only one Giver: the Father; there is only one Redeemer: Jesus; there is only one Sanctifier: the Holy Spirit. To plunge into this reality, to discover these truths, that is the real stripping, that is becoming like little children, taking pleasure in one’s own nothingness, loving simple, real and genuine things; and getting away from rhetoric.²⁵²

Carlo expressed to his sister the fact that it is very important to express our love to each other and to God. It is important for Carlo that Dolcidia would come to know who this loving God is: “Dolcidia, take account of the being of God.... The other [God] is in love with you and does nothing but love you and gaze at you, and the same thirst for the salvation of the brethren leads Him to a love, from

250. Letter 1, dated 11 December 1956, in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidia – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 20.

251. *Ibid.*, 21.

252. Letter 16, dated 31 July 1956, in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidia – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 60.

which one can never be separated. Which of the two has more truth about him? The calculation is very simple and is just a question of being consistent.”²⁵³ We have to express our love personally. God expects our love and expects us to talk to him. So Carlo wrote: “Love is personal and needs personal expression. Dialogue with God is personal too: I-Thou is the model for all dialogues based on love.”²⁵⁴ At the same time he considered prayer very highly. So he encouraged his sister to get involved in this act of love: “Prayer is adoration of God and his will, not a jumble of formulae created for the very purpose of smothering the soul and shutting it into the tentacles of habit and the ready-made. Prayer is breathing, love, freedom, inexhaustible dialogue, and above all it is thinking about God.”²⁵⁵ For this reason Dolcidea is given the advice to read the Works of St Teresa on contemplative prayer, and afterwards those of St John of the Cross.²⁵⁶

For Carlo, humility is very important. This helps us concentrate on our littleness, since we put our will at God’s disposition:

Make yourself little, little, consider yourself ‘nothing’, don’t make spiritual plans but abandon yourself totally to the action of God. All our plans, even on the road to holiness, are perfectly useless: the real plan is in His hand and we need to go to Him like children seeking love.²⁵⁷

The Christ child is the real model of this ‘littleness’, this poverty, this nothingness.²⁵⁸ Our littleness helps us to understand the value of poverty, which

253. Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 49.

254. Letter 38, dated 23 March 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 38. Letter, 9 dated the Feast of St Peter 1955 in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 45 and Letter 36, dated 8 October 1958, 96.

255. Letter 11, dated 25 January 1956 in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 52.

256. Letter 14 dated 29 June 1956 in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 56.

257. Letter 31, dated Christmas 1957, in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 84.

is an understanding of our wretchedness, our nothingness, our being like Jesus in Bethlehem, twigs at the mercy of history, defenceless, powerless and without money in the hands of arrogant masters. In return Dolcidia is encouraged to obey. Obedience can be “a total, unconditional, joyous abandonment to our one King and Master: or it can be a school for cowardice and a priori rejection of the thing that costs a man dearest: personal responsibility. Isn’t that so?”²⁵⁹

The brother is ready to give the secret formula of the Gospel, the way for flying onto the road to holiness:

Here it is:

‘Strive to love.’

I don’t tell you to love, because it’s not an easy thing. To love certain unlikable ‘Sisters’ who are living and getting on alongside us, especially in a big house, is almost impossible. I tell you instead to ‘strive’ to love because translating a precept into action is almost always done *on the Cross*. Nothing which is really good and holy is easy for us. It takes an effort. It is the Cross laid upon our poor hearts and at the touch of it life begins to flow again.²⁶⁰

Although Carlo could feel that sometimes the Lord was cradling his sister in sweetness, there were times when she was taken to Calvary.²⁶¹ This is the suffering which she had to go through:

Suffering is the great treasure of life, especially when it is spiritual suffering, mature and solitary, lightened a little at a time. Everything else is like a preparation, but altogether more superficial, light and unsubstantial. The years of human fullness pass by and we leave no trace, but in the passing of these few minutes we build eternity.²⁶²

259. Letter 40 dated 1 March 1955, in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidia – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 36.

260. Letter 37, dated Christmas 1958 in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidia – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 98.

261. Letter 47, dated 10 January 1961, in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidia – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilia and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 116.

262. Ibid.

Suffering helps us to strip away – the total sacrifice of ourselves, as it is for Jesus in the Mass.²⁶³ At such moments and times we have to press onwards and through suffering we can become great saints.²⁶⁴ Carlo Carretto suffered a lot himself!

2.6 Conclusion

From all that I have discussed in this chapter, we can easily detect that the Holy Spirit was always at work throughout the history of the Church. He never hesitated to choose persons who would be able to direct others spiritually in the ways of the Lord, even through letter-writing. The persons whom I mentioned here were really few when compared to the extensive amount of persons who directed others spiritually through letter-writing. As I was working on this study, I felt that I was doing a disservice to these great people due to the extensive amount of letters that they wrote and the conciseness with which I had to present their works here.

In the light of all that I have exposed in Chapter 1, as regards the main models used in spiritual direction, namely the directive and the contemplative models, it is clear that the predominant model that transpired in the Catholic Tradition of spiritual direction through letter-writing was the directive one: Paul, holding the role of a parent, consoled, rebuked, encouraged and instructed the recipients of his letters; the Desert Fathers prohibited discussion even though they had the opportunity of meeting their directees face-to-face; the Fathers of the East suggested a superior-subordinate relationship in spiritual direction. Even St. Francis and St. Claire held to the directive method. Nevertheless, we do find traces of the contemplative model, as for example, in the correspondence between St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances Chantal, although their method remains mostly directive. Even Carlo Carretto, being a more recent spiritual director, belongs more to the contemplative school.

Spiritual direction always remains a crucial aspect in the life of the Church. Letter-writing served these people a great deal since they accomplished their mission just as well as if they had met personally with the people who sought their advice. However, letter-writing gave them less opportunity to discuss with their directees

263. Letter 54, dated 5 September 1962, in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilis and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 124.

264. Letter 51, dated ~~Holy Sunday~~, 1962, 21 April 1962, in Letter 10, dated 25 November 1955 in [CARLO CARRETTO] *Letters to Dolcidea – (1954 – 1983)*, edited by Gian Carlo Sibilis and translated by Michael J. Smith, London 1991, 122.

and hence this method led more to the practice of the classical model – the directive method. At the same time, we have to keep in mind that such people had a long experience in spiritual life and in the solid Christian formation. This experience led them to give clear instructions without hesitation.

In the following chapter we will go through the historical milieu in which Saint George Preca lived and the way he looked at spiritual direction, always keeping in mind that he is also the fruit of his times. This transpires also in the way he does spiritual direction through letter-writing.

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