

THE DESERT FATHERS AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION*

The period of the early monks in Egypt, the Holy Land and Asia Minor lasted until Benedict of Nursia in the 6th century. During this period the way of life of the early monks evolved from anchoritic to communitarian. As a result, their method of giving spiritual direction changed as well.

In this article, we will discuss several significant characteristics of spiritual direction in the anchoritic period. We will treat these as four separate but related questions: 1) What was the concept of man in spiritual direction? 2) What were its aims and its methods? 3) What was the role of the spiritual director? 4) To what extent does the methodology of the spiritual director resemble that of the modern day therapist, in particular Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy?

I CONCEPT OF MAN IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The early monks did not put man on a pedestal, nor did they damn him for his inability to avoid doing evil. Rather, they accepted and took seriously without pre-judgment his everyday realities and daily problems. The disciple's main concern in approaching his chosen spiritual director was to find a solution to a worldly problem that was perplexing or troubling him.¹ In contrast, the goal of spiritual direction was, by working through this problem, to find the next step on the path becoming a real and true person, an authentic person. This next step the spiritual director and his disciple were meant to find together. The early monks believed that it was the task of the spiritual director to guide, further, and sustain the process of becoming a person according to God's image of that person.

In the view of the early monks it is man's task to struggle with his demons, resist his Logismoi, and control his desire to do evil. In modern psychological terms, this could be interpreted as exercising self-control over his actions, as well as his

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¹ In the *Apophthegmata*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 'one meets the figure of the abba, the charismatic holy man of the wilderness, and the sayings of these men contain answers to practical problems and difficulties', K. Leech, *Soul Friend. The Practice of Christian Spirituality*, San Francisco, 1980, 42.

thoughts, desires, feelings, and emotions so as to become a fully developed, mature, and functioning person. The monks believed that man needs not only to free himself from his dependency on his thoughts and desires, but also to differentiate good thoughts from evil ones. This is what is meant by discernment of spirits. Although they did not pass judgment on man for his emotions and desires, they nonetheless felt that it was necessary for emotions and their consequences to be allowed to run their course. Thus the disciple was given the opportunity to reach his ultimate goal of discerning the message embedded in them which was, in the monks' view, an important step forward on the spiritual journey.

A brother came to see Abba Poemen and said to him: 'Abba, I have many thoughts and they put me in danger'. The old man led him outside and said to him: 'Expand your chest and do not breathe in'. He said: 'I cannot do that'. Then the old man said to him: 'If you cannot do that, no more can you prevent thoughts from arising, but you can resist them'.²

'One should not be agitated in this spiritual struggle. Agitation is very harmful to the struggling soul. When a passion crowds in on us, we must not be upset. Allowing ourselves to be disturbed by these experiences is sheer ignorance and pride because we are not recognizing our own condition and are running away from labor. We must be patient, wrestle and call on God'.³

Professor M. Schneider interprets the monks' view of demons in the following way: 'According to the monks, demons in man's inner life are neither a phenomenon of occultism nor merely a psychological reality within the person. The idea of demons is rather a theological expression, and refers to salvation. The monk consciously takes the struggle with the demons unto himself because it has been his experience that his life and the life of every Christian is hanging in the balance in this struggle between powers and dominions, which are in heaven and on earth. Inasmuch as the monk decides to fight the good fight and to resist the powers of darkness he struggles alongside Christ. Together they do God's work for the salvation of the world and the coming of God's kingdom. Thus, one could say that the monks' life's work has an apostolic and missionary dimension'.⁴

Because the old monks were convinced that every man has the capacity to follow a spiritual path and at the same time be guided by God's mercy and the Holy Spirit, they were not thrown into self-doubt if a disciple or another monk committed a sin. They trusted in God's ability to use darkness and sin to open a man's soul. It often

² B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, revised edition, Kalamazoo (Michigan), 1984, 171.

³ K.S. Vineta, *Orthodox psychotherapy. The science of the Fathers*, translated by E. Williams, Levidia, 1994, 283.

⁴ M. Schneider, *Aus den Quellen der Weisheit. Die Bedeutung der frühen Mönchsväter für eine Spiritualität heute*, Köln, 1989², 55 (translation: R. Nusbbaum).

seems that the monks believed that it was necessary for a man to sin in order to become conscious of the fact that his life does not depend only upon himself but rather on God's grace and God's mercy. They didn't pass judgment against a sinner:

One day Abba Isaac (the Theban) went to a monastery. He saw a brother committing a sin and he condemned him. When he returned to the desert, an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell, and said, 'I will not let you enter'. But he persisted saying, 'What is the matter?', and the angel replied, 'God has sent me to ask you where you want to throw the guilty brother whom you have condemned'. Immediately he repented and said, 'I have sinned, forgive me'. Then the angel said, 'Get up, God has forgiven you. But from now on, be careful not to judge someone before God has done so'.⁵

The spiritual fathers and mothers strongly believed that men do not always move directly towards their desired goal, and that they are easily tempted to stray from the right path. Their role, they felt was to accompany the disciple on his path, wherever it led.

It was related of a brother who had committed a fault that when he went to Abba Lot, he was troubled and hesitated, going in and coming out, unable to sit down. Abba Lot said to him, 'What is the matter, brother?'. He said, 'I have committed a great fault and I cannot acknowledge it to the Fathers'. The old man said to him, 'Confess it to me, and I will carry it'. Then he said to him, 'I have fallen into fornication, and in order to do it, I have sacrificed to idols'. The old man said to him, 'Have confidence; repentance is possible. Go, sit in your cave, eat only once in two days and I will carry half of your fault with you'. After three weeks, the old man had the certainty that God had accepted the brother's repentance. Then the latter remained in submission to the old man until his death.⁶

In this connection, it is important to note that the old monks never offered counsel without first being asked a question by a disciple. Moreover, it was the request for spiritual direction itself that the disciple-guide relationship constituted. In other words, the disciple always had to play the active role. However, if the spiritual father gave an answer to the question, the disciple was obligated to accept his advice and to follow it.

This is perhaps best illustrated by a commentary by one of the old monks themselves taken from the *Apophthegmata* in which he is lamenting the disappearance of the practice that we have just described:

⁵ B. Ward, 109-110.

⁶ B. Ward, 122.

Now there is no word anymore. In former times disciples asked and monks answered and disciples did what they were told to do and all was a gift from God. Nowadays disciples ask but they do not follow the advice they are given. And so God does not speak through the monks any longer. It seems as though God has withdrawn his Spirit because there is no longer one who is willing to follow him?⁷

II THE GOAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND ITS REALIZATION

1 Description of the goal

The goal of spiritual direction in the time of the early monks was to bring man to contemplation of God and mystical union with Him. In this connection, Anselm Grün, a modern Benedictine monk, states: The path that the spiritual fathers led their disciples down was a mystical path. The most important concern for the monks was not whether the path was the path of morality and righteousness, nor the knowledge or the doing of God's will, nor making the right choices. Rather, it is always a question of achieving mystical union with God.⁸

While one is on this path to contemplation, one is nonetheless obligated to live one's life in the real world, to become an authentic person and to come to an understanding with one's emotions and desires. The following questions therefore arise: What is the spiritual dimension of my deepest emotions? What is the experience of my relationship to God in daily life? What is God trying to communicate to me? What spiritual counsel from God is striving to reveal itself in my daily life? What is the purpose and meaning of my life?

2 Method

It is known, that the monks left us no written records of their methods for spiritual direction. What we do have, however, are the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, which could be regarded as a series of concise case histories. By studying these accounts, it is possible to get a fairly clear picture of the methods of spiritual direction that they used. We will now briefly describe these methods.

⁷ Quoted in accordance with: Sprüche der Väter, herausgegeben und übersetzt von P. Bonifatius OSB, Graz, 1963, 231 (translation: R. Nuschbaum).

⁸ Cp. A. Grün, *Geistliche Begleitung bei den Wüstenvätern*, Münsterschwarzacher Kleinschriften 67, Münsterschwarzach, 1991, 96.

a Giving concrete advice

The spiritual fathers usually gave concrete answer to very direct and simple questions. But because the often succinct and pointed answers they gave always reflected the everyday reality of the person who was asking them, one finds very different or even contradictory answers to very similar questions. The monks also gave their disciples simple exercises which required them to change themselves gradually over a long period of time. This gradual process allowed the disciples the opportunity to gain a new perspective on their problem and on themselves. The monks believed that performing of this one simple exercise over a long period of time would change a person's whole life far more than any series of complicated tasks designed to encourage self-denial. Moreover, they felt that doing this would strengthen the disciple's relationship to God.⁹

b Giving comfort and support

In counseling the monks' principal aim was neither to pass judgement on their disciples' grief nor to make it worse, but to give them comfort and assurance.

If a man has sinned and denies it, saying, I have not sinned, do not reprimand him; for that will discourage him. But say to him: Do not lose heart, brother, but be on guard in future, and you will stir his soul to repentance.¹⁰

In order to carry out the task of spiritual direction with sensitivity, the spiritual fathers needed to have a very clear idea of what was important for the disciple. They also had to take care not to overwhelm the disciple with high ideals and strict morality, lest he lose hope and become despondent. But as an ideal to be kept in mind, on the other hand, these moral principles do have the power to help a person to renounce his sinful ways and the desires from which they arise. However, once a man brings his desires to the surface of his consciousness they are no longer dangerous. Far more dangerous and destructive, however, are wishes and desires that are continually suppressed. These impulses, the monks felt, must at all costs be taken seriously.¹¹

c Guiding the disciple toward, and not interfering with, the making of a good decision

A third important aspect of the monks' methods is their feeling that it was crucial to maintain a level of awareness of the disciple great enough to enable him to find his own way to his own answer. This meant allowing ample time and space for the

⁹ Cp. M. Schneider, 31ff.

¹⁰ B. Ward, 17n.

¹¹ Cp. A. Grhn, 38.

disciple to speak in detail about his situation. As well, it meant helping the disciple to find a solution to his own problem through a process of either asking questions or of repeating the disciple's words back to him so as to lead him to an answer.¹² Moreover, the spiritual fathers strongly resisted the temptation to impose a solution on or find an answer for the disciple. In their view, it was solely the disciple's responsibility to come to a decision. This was to be accomplished by guiding the disciple through a process of discovery whereby the decision he needed to make, or the principles on which he could base, it would become clear to him.

d Teaching by example

The old monks emphasized the dangers of traveling without a guide. 'But there is no notion of blind obedience or domination, for the spiritual fathers were to teach by example, and only secondarily by word.'¹³

A brother asked Abba Poemen: 'Some brothers live with me: do you want me to be in charge of them?' The old man said to him: 'No, just work first and foremost, and if they want to live like you, they will see to it themselves'. The brother said to him: 'But it is they themselves, father, who want me to be in charge of them'. The old man said to him: 'No, be their example, not their legislator.'¹⁴

e Silence as answer

In certain cases, the monks chose to respond with silence¹⁵ instead of words, which forced the disciple to move from the theoretical to the experiential level. The monks did not care for theological discussions, which they felt were often merely a distraction from the disciple's actual lived situation. For them the aim of spiritual direction was not to engage in spirited theological debates, but rather to help the disciple make progress along the path of knowledge and love of God and His will.¹⁶

A brother from Abba Poemen's neighborhood left to go to another country one day. There he met an anchorite. The latter was very charitable and many came to see him. The brother told him about Abba Poemen. When he heard of his virtue, the anchorite wanted to see him. Some time afterwards when the brother had returned to Egypt the anchorite went there to see the brother who had formerly paid him a visit. He had told him where he lived. When he saw him, the

¹² Cp. A. Grhn, 52.

¹³ K. Leach, 42.

¹⁴ B. Ward, 191.

¹⁵ Cp. also H. Holze, *Schweigen und Gotteserfahrung bei den ägyptischen Mönchsvätern*, in: *Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag* (1993), 314-321.

¹⁶ Cp. A. Grhn, 50.

brother was astonished and very pleased. The anchorite said to him, 'Please will you be so kind as to take me to Abba Poemen.' So he brought him to the old man and presented him, saying, 'This is a great man, full of charity, who is held in high estimation in his district. I have spoken to him about you, and he has come because he wants to see you'. So Abba Poemen received him with joy. They greeted one another and sat down. The visitor began to speak of the Scriptures, of spiritual and of heavenly things. But Abba Poemen turned his face away and answered nothing. Seeing that he did not speak to him, the other went away deeply grieved and said to the brother who had brought him, 'I have made this long journey in vain. For I have come to see the old man, and he does not wish to speak to me'. Then the brother went inside to Abba Poemen and said to him, 'Abba, this great man who has so great a reputation in his own country has come here because of you. Why did you not speak to him?'. The old man said, 'He is great and speaks of heavenly things and I am lowly and speak of earthly things. If he had spoken of the passions of the soul, I should have replied, but he speaks to me of spiritual things and I know nothing about that'. Then the brother came out and said to the visitor, 'The old man does not readily speak of the Scriptures, but if anyone consults him about the passions of the soul, he replies'. Filled with compunction, the visitor returned to the old man and said to him, 'What should I do, Abba, for the passions of the soul master me?'. The old man turned towards him and replied joyfully, 'This time, you come as you should. Now open your mouth concerning this and I will fill it with good things'. Greatly edified, the other said to him, 'Truly, this is the right way!'. He returned to his own country giving thanks to God that he had been counted worthy to meet so great a saint.¹⁷

f To become aware of emotions and desires

The spiritual fathers encouraged their disciples to look deeply into their thoughts and feelings and to act in such a way that their thoughts and feelings would undergo a change. Evagrius Ponticus advised his disciples to get to know their deepest feelings, and to bring them out in the open so as to become aware of them. Working through them in this way enabled the disciple to discover for himself what his feelings were trying to communicate to him. When we show our anger, for example, it is usually a sign that we have given someone too much power over us. Evagrius believed that the force of this anger should be used to break the dependency on the one who has power over us.

Abba Poemen asked Abba Joseph of Panephysis another question saying, 'What should I do when the passions attack me? Should I resist them, or let them enter?'. The old man said to him, 'Let them enter and fight against them'. So he returned to Scetis where he remained. Now someone from Thebes came to

¹⁷ B. Ward, 167.

Scetis and said to the brethren, 'I asked Abba Joseph if I ought to resist the passions when they approach, or let them enter and he replied I ought not to allow them the smallest entry but cut them off immediately'. When Abba Poemen learned that Abba Joseph had spoken to the brother from Thebes in this way, he got up and went to see him at Panephysis and said, 'Abba, I consulted you about my thoughts and you have said one thing to me, and another to the Theban. The old man said to him, 'Do you not know that I love you?'. He said, 'Yes'. 'And did you not say to me: speak to me as you speak to yourself?'. 'That is right'. Then the old man said, 'Truly, if the passions enter you and you fight them you become stronger. I spoke to you as to myself. But there are others who cannot profit in this way if the passions approach them, and so they must cut them off immediately'.¹⁸

In the same way, one needs to become aware that temptation is not evil, but is simply part of life. The disciple should not pass judgment on himself because he experiences temptation. Rather, he should have faith that through experiencing these feelings he will grow far closer to God and through this intimacy with Him will gain inner strength. The same is true of guilt and moral failure: here too the disciple should not pass judgment on himself. He should trust that God in His mercy will give him the strength not to give up and to persevere. In this regard, the *Apothegmata* tells us:

A brother asked Abba Sisoes, 'What shall I do, Abba, for I have fallen?'. The old man said to him, 'Get up again'. The brother answered, 'I have got up again, but I have fallen again'. The old man said, 'Get up again and again'. So then the brother said, 'How many times?'. The old man said, 'Until you are taken up either in virtue or in sin. For a man presents himself to judgment in the state in which he is found'.¹⁹

Thus, the monks believed that every facet of a human being's inner life contains positive forces. They felt that if one tries to kill off one's deepest feelings, because one is afraid that these feelings will lead one to do evil, one will end up yearning for the power that the feelings contained. This can sap the power from one's spiritual life. Thus Evagrius says that changing one's deepest feelings brings about 'desire for the eternal God and virtually inexhaustible strength'.²⁰

Grin describes this process as follows: 'Monastic asceticism is an asceticism of slow inner transformation, not one of self-initiated change which can do violence to one's inner self. I want to change myself, the disciple says, because I hate myself as I am, and so I must force myself to be different and to become a different person. By contrast, the process of slow inner transformation is a far gentler process. All

¹⁸ B. Ward, 102.

¹⁹ B. Ward, 219-220.

²⁰ Praktikos 57.

thoughts and feelings are acceptable, as are all desires and passions. But they need to undergo a transformation. This means deeply experiencing all my passions and desires and inwardly following them where they lead me. Only then can I know what they are trying to tell me²¹.

III THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR IN THE TIME OF THE EARLY MONKS

The writings of the old monks state that the spiritual director must be Pneumatikos, that is, imbued or filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Irenaeus of Lyon, if a man is truly spiritual, the Holy Spirit will suffuse him, body and soul. In other words, all inward separation between body and soul has been eliminated and with help from the Holy Spirit the man has become whole. The old monks' writings also say that the spiritual director must be well versed in God's mysteries, and that it is necessary for him to have looked deeply into the human heart. This means, above all, that he must know his own heart and soul as well as the heart and soul of his disciple. An integral aspect of this knowledge is the gift of discernment of spirits, a skill that one cannot be trained in and which is, rather, a blessing from the Holy Spirit that one must continually pray for. The possessor of this gift has the ability to quickly reach the point where he is able to discover the true meaning behind the words being spoken by the disciple. Moreover, he has a feeling for his disciple's state of mind and for his present needs and wants. He is also able to find a happy medium between requiring too much and too little of the disciple. In order to do this, the spiritual director needs to be able, firstly, to deal with his own deepest feelings and thoughts, and secondly to be attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

At the outset, the process of becoming a spiritual father involved many long years of solitude in the desert where, in order to cleanse his soul and achieve purity of heart, the monk struggled with the demons of his soul. Following this, disciples who came to the monk would tell others of their experiences. It is important to note that it was through building a reputation that was spread by his disciples and not by awarding himself the title of spiritual director that a monk achieved this distinction²².

However, this practice gradually died out as spiritual direction became increasingly institutionalized. The first signs of this are already visible in the *Apophthegmata*.

Father Antonius used to say: 'The first old monks went into the desert not only to make themselves whole but also to become spiritual healers for others. But nowadays, when one of us goes into the desert, he does so in order to heal the others first and himself later. But our weakness comes back to haunt us, and our

²¹ A. Groll, 61.

²² Cp. C. Bamberg, *Geistliche Führung im frühen Monchtum*, in: *Geist und Leben* 54 (1981), 276-290, 279.

past actions even more so. And thus does the Bible tell us: Physician heal thyself (Lk 4,23)²³.

The final stage in this institutionalization was the Benedictine rule, which stated that the abbot was the community's spiritual director²⁴.

Apatheia and kindness were extremely important to the Spiritual Fathers. *Apatheia* is defined as the state in which the monk who has successfully ended his inner struggle and has thereby freed himself from his worldly desires. But *apatheia* does not mean that the person has neither emotions nor desires. It means rather that he does not let his emotions and desires overwhelm him. This characteristic of the old monks enabled them to look upon both themselves and their disciples with kindness and mercy and, as a result, to be helpful to others. For the monks, kindness was not a moral principle but rather an article of faith. They developed the quality of kindness in themselves through a process of working through both their dark side and their powerlessness, and thereby experiencing God's mercy and kindness. Thus kindness became the monk's expression of his faith in God's love for man in spite of his sins. It was also a sign that the Holy Spirit would lift him up when he fell into sin, and will gently accompany him even when he took a roundabout way to his goal. Kindness was a reflection of the monks' strong belief in human dignity. They believed that God created man so that man could discover his individuality, his true character, and the image that God has made him in.

The Desert Fathers looked to their disciples 'for holiness and purity more than for teaching, and the central concept was that of spiritual fatherhood. ... The spiritual father was not simply someone who taught a spiritual technique, but he was a father who helped to shape the inner life of his sons through his prayer, concern and pastoral care'²⁵. An important part of spiritual direction was the prayers the monk offered to God on behalf of the disciple. During these prayers, the monk identified himself with the disciple and asked God to help his disciple. These prayers also allowed the monk to lay the problem at God's feet, so as to identify whatever problems of his own he had projected onto the disciple and to seek help in differentiating between these projections and the real needs of his disciple. Thus, the spiritual father was a giver of advice who also felt a sense of responsibility for his disciple and empathized with his struggle to change himself through prayer and self-denial. In the view of Evagrius Pontikus, the spiritual father's role is not primarily that of psychologist or physician, nor as an adviser for everyday problems. He is rather a mystagogue, teacher of the art of contemplation, of becoming close to God, and of achieving union with God. The spiritual father's role was to pass on to his disciple

²³ Weisung der Väter, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, übersetzt von B. Miller, Trier, 1986³, 328 (translation: R. Nussbaum).

²⁴ Cp. *The Rule of Benedict*, chapter 2.

²⁵ K. Leach, 41.

the knowledge of God that he himself had attained²⁶. In our view, the *Apophthegmata* tends to idealize the spiritual fathers and mothers. However, it is clear from certain passages in the *Apophthegmata*²⁷ that the Spiritual Fathers did not think of themselves as being as perfect as their disciples had described them.

A brother came to Abba Poemen one day and said to him, 'What should I do, Father, for I am tempted to fornication?' I went to Abba Histon and he said to me: 'You must not let it stay with you'. Abba Poemen said to him, 'Abba Histon's deeds are in heaven with the angels and he does not realize that you and I remain in fornication. If a monk controls his belly and his tongue and if he lives like an exile, be confident, he will not die.'²⁸

IV METHODOLOGY OF THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND MODERN DAY THERAPIST

To what extent does the methodology of the spiritual director resemble that of the modern day therapist, in particular Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy? Rogers' client-centered therapy is based on his three therapeutic variables. They are: genuineness, understanding, and unconditional positive regard. If one wishes, one could draw some parallels: on the one hand between these three therapeutic variables and the spiritual and methodological orientation of the spiritual fathers, and on the other between Rogers' process of client-centered therapy and the spiritual fathers' practice of spiritual direction.

The image of the spiritual fathers and mothers that emerges in early church history is one of individuals who can be considered to be genuine in the Rogerian sense, because they possessed intimate knowledge of their emotions and desires. They can likewise be regarded in the Rogerian sense as understanding individuals, because their hearts were open to their disciples, because they were empathic and kind, because they tried to help their disciples to heal themselves spiritually and to find salvation, because they did not condemn their disciples for their failings. This does not mean, however, that they never confronted their disciples with the potentially serious consequences of their moral weakness. But they always did so without passing moral judgment. This is similar to Rogers' concept of unconditional positive regard.

Insofar as spiritual direction as therapeutic process is concerned, what the monks did was to give comfort and support to their disciples as well as to guide them to, but not interfere with, the making of a good decision. In client-centered therapy the

therapist acts in a similar way. Like the monks, he or she works with his or her client to find the next step without either making the decision for the client or interfering with the client's arriving at his own decision. Another parallel with the monks could be found in the importance of the therapist's giving comfort and support in order to encourage the client to follow his positive rather than his negative impulses, thus allowing the client the freedom to find his own truth and to become his real self.

We come to the conclusion that both, the early monks and the therapists, are concerned with promoting a healthy state rather than concentrating on a method. Therefore, keeping in mind all the differences between the early monks and modern therapists, as well as the difficulties of comparing these 'methods', it is obvious that there are parallels, which could support and enrich contemporary training programs for spiritual directors.

SUMMARY

The article discusses several significant characteristics of spiritual direction in the anchoritic period: 1) What was the concept of man in spiritual direction? 2) What were its aims and its methods? 3) What was the role of the spiritual director? 4) To what extent does the methodology of the spiritual director resemble that of the modern day therapist, in particular C. R. Rogers' client-centered therapy?

The early monks believed that every man is called to perfection, to become a person according to God's image. In this way spiritual direction is of help to discover the passions and to fight with the demons. The idea of demons is more a theological expression, and refers to salvation. To fight with them and resist the powers of darkness is to struggle alongside Christ for the salvation of the world. The goal of spiritual direction was to bring man to contemplation of God and to mystical union with Him. The early monks taught their disciples a mystical and not predominantly an ethical path.

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* tells little stories about the Desert Fathers and Mothers. They show how the old monks guide people to the described goal. They gave concrete answers to very direct and simple questions reflecting the everyday realities of the person who was asking them. They gave comfort and support and did not pass judgement. Their aim was to guide the disciple toward the making of a good decision, but they did not interfere by making the decision for the disciple. They wanted to teach more by example than by words. Sometimes they kept silence to force the disciple to move from the theoretical to the experiential level. For the old monks it was very important to become aware of emotions and desires, to experience them deeply and to transform them into positive powers on the way to contemplation.

The spiritual director must be well versed in God's mysteries, and should have looked deeply into the human heart. Above all, he must know his own heart and soul. He needs the gift of discernment of spirits, and to have had a long period of living in solitude in the desert struggling with the demons. Apathetia and kindness

26 Cp. G. Bunge, *Geistliche Vaterschaft. Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrius Pontikos*, Regensburg, 1988.

27 For example: B. Ward, 109-110 and 175.

28 B. Ward, 175.

were the fruits of this struggling. The spiritual director should be a mystagogue, teacher of the art of contemplation and of achieving union with God. In the times of the Desert Fathers and Mothers spiritual direction was also a therapeutic approach which could be compared to the modern therapeutic concept of C. R. Rogers, especially regarding the so called 'therapeutic variables' (genuineness, understanding, unconditional positive regard) and the ways of acting in the therapeutic process.

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I SPIRITUAL

Not only in Young people security. Of This article according to I gether become theories of v the discover behavior. Or celebration : common Ch framework, I the model o makes an in for an integri world. So it i a knowledge authentic experiences or teachers and pupils in a pluralist society. A teacher of spirituality should teach spirituality as well as live it, in order to show the living importance of spiritual doctrines. Basil of Caesarea is an example of this.

II BASIL OF CAESAREA (CIRCA 330 - 379)

At a time of continuing reflection on the pedagogy and living of Christian values and living, Basil of Caesarea is of great interest. In a classical work - *To the young, how to benefit from pagan literature*² - he reflects the possibility of teaching religious life in pagan schools. This work has had

1 See: Evangelische Kirchenkanzlei (Ed.), *Evangelische Spiritualität*, Gütersloh, 1979, 12-28.
2 The citations from 'To the Young' are from R.J. Deferrari/ M.R.P. McGuire, *Saint Basil, The Letters IV*, London, 1961: the Letters-citations are from Deferrari I; the other Basil-citations are