

CHAPTER 3
COLLABORATING WITH THE SPIRIT:
THE APPROACH OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Introduction
Description of Spiritual Direction

The term “spiritual direction” has often induced feelings of animosity, as it seems to infer the authoritarian control that many have experienced in spiritually abusive environments. The mere mention of this term easily calls to memory spiritually oppressive leaders and systems that have brutalized the vulnerable. Without a doubt, some of the greatest spiritual abuses occur when a mortal aims to usurp the influence of God in another’s life. This term is akin to a statement made by Boniface VIII. In 1301 he wrote these words to the king of France: “Hearken, dearest son, to the precepts of thy father and bend the ear of thy heart to the teaching of the master who, here on earth, stands in place of Him who alone is master and lord.”¹ Such a demeaning attitude does not have any place in true spiritual direction. One revealing definition of spiritual direction is that it is “nothing more than a way of leading us to see and obey our real Director—the Holy Spirit, hidden in the depths of our soul.”² This is precisely what true spiritual empowerment is about—helping others help themselves be helped by God, that they might be emancipated pilgrims instead of emaciated patients.

Occasionally, spiritual direction is likened to discipleship. However, while both fulfill important roles, the focus of each is principally different. While discipleship focuses on knowing and doing the will of God, following in his footsteps, so to speak,

¹ John Mundy, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1973), 323, in “Christian Adulthood,” William J. Bouwsma, in *Adulthood*, ed. Erik Erikson (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 84.

² Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresa Coombs, *The Way of Spiritual Direction* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1985), 84.

spiritual direction focuses on how one can be more present to and with God.³ Thus, while discipleship generally emphasizes character and service, direction concentrates on sensitivity to God and entering into His life.

Central to the practice of true spiritual direction is the belief that the director does not actually give direction, but is involved in discerning the Direction that already exists within the directee. Thus the director, with a small “d”, must be careful to follow the Director—speaking only what, how much, and when, he is led. It is in this setting that the director can help the individual “bring out his inner spiritual freedom, his inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in his soul.”⁴ What makes direction different from most counseling is the surrender of human control. For “the agenda of spiritual direction is to have no agenda except to be open to God.”⁵

Specifically detailing the characteristics of spiritual direction can be challenging. Each director has a special gift and slant, and thus the direction of each is unique, though graced by the same Spirit. Joel Giallanza observes that “principles for spiritual direction can be as many and varied as there are writers and speakers and directors to present them. Most directors however, would likely agree that each directee is moving toward union with the Lord in a unique way.”⁶

History: Pre-Modern Roots

The tradition of spiritual direction has its roots in the monastic setting of the Desert Fathers and Mothers who lived as hermits, or in cloisters, in the wastelands of Palestine, Egypt, and Samaria. These ascetics sought a lifestyle that made a statement against the societies from which they had withdrawn. However, despite their distance,

³ John R. Throop, “Becoming a Spiritual Director,” *The Clergy Journal* 76, no.8 (July 2000), 6.

⁴ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, n.d.), 16.

⁵ Carol Stream, “Making Space for God,” *Christianity Today Magazine*, 23 April 2001, 89.

⁶ Joel Giallanza, “Integration in Spiritual Direction,” *Contemplative Review* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 31.

they made ample contact with souls still living in those societies. People seeking a deeper encounter with God would make the painstaking journey to visit these desert sages and receive spiritual guidance.⁷ The emphasis of the guidance was spiritual, the words they spoke were not intended to be profound, but rather, they were intended to be Spirit sourced. Two outstanding guides during this period were Evagrius and Cassian.⁸

Over the years, spiritual direction developed and became more refined. The Orthodox tradition has continued to have a strong heritage of direction. The director is referred to as a “staretz” or father, and the emphasis has been to truly see face and accurately hear voice.⁹ St. Seraphim of Sarov has been considered perhaps the greatest staretz of all time. Some special aspects which Orthodoxy added to the role of the director include: (1) insight and discernment to see into the heart, (2) to love and make sufferings his own, and in this way share in the passion of Christ, (3) power to transform the cosmos by intensity of love.¹⁰

The Catholic tradition of direction is also exceptionally rich. Catholicism has encouraged the development of direction in both the mystical and the practical. Bernard said of his director, the monk Humbert, “He knew so well how to penetrate into the corners of a sick conscience that he who went to confess to him might have believed that he had seen everything, been present at everything.”¹¹ Eventually, Ignatius developed an

⁷ *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith*, Richard Foster (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 32. In *The Life of Antony*, Athanasius summarizes how this desert father ministered to visitors suffering a great variety of ailments.

⁸ Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 42. Leech gives one of the best brief overviews of the history of direction.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

entire school of systematic spiritual direction. The Ignatian retreat brought together many exercises into a practical training method of spiritual development.¹²

Besides Ignatius, perhaps the two most dominant figures referred to in Catholic spiritual direction are St. John of the Cross and is St. Teresa of Avila, both of whose writings have been used extensively in direction. Though St. John wrote only a couple dozen poems, and the accompanying commentary, he gave profound insight into the stages of progress toward union, with particular emphasis upon the “dark night of the soul” and the “dark night of the spirit.”¹³ St. Teresa, a contemporary and friend of St. John, though older, exhibited immense humility, and in a way came under St. John’s direction. Her work, *Interior Castle*, is a classic of spirituality, tracing the levels of entry into the unified life.¹⁴

The Catholic tradition produced many greats of spiritual direction, from Francis De Sales, Jean Paul De Caussade, and Jean N. Grou, to more recent figures like Benedictine Dom Columba Marmion and Joseph de Guibert.¹⁵ Other noteworthy figures inhabit other Christian traditions. Reginald Somerset was from the Anglican Church. Martin Bucer, who authored *On the True Cure of Souls*, was a Lutheran. Renowned Quaker, George Fox, was well known for spiritual guidance. Others in the Protestant tradition who incorporated of confession and guidance characteristic of spiritual direction include Max Thurian, Deitrich Bonhoeffer, and Neville Ward.¹⁶ Many elements of

¹² Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. Pierre Wolff (Liguori, Mo.: Triumph, 1997). This classic is the manual for the systematic and intensely practical Ignatian retreat.

¹³ John of the Cross, “John of the Cross,” in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 162-209.

¹⁴ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1989). This work was written under compulsion, in snatches of time in a busy schedule, and Teresa never re-read or edited the work.

¹⁵ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 67-75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84-88.

spiritual direction can also be found in certain Protestant discipleship programs, as well as in Pentecostal practices like “listening prayer.”

Assessment/Approach

Determining what point an individual or family is at on the spiritual spectrum is a daunting, if not impossible, task. One cannot simply classify or categorize any person according to case, for each is unique. God’s working is unique. The Divine manifestation is unique. God loves each personally and intimately, and the experience of this love is unparalleled. However, herein lies a paradox of direction; one must simultaneously embrace mystery as well as make some definitions. Thus, in beginning to define where an individual or family system is spiritually, it is helpful to have a framework from which the director can recognize the brushstrokes of spiritual maturity. The evaluation of spiritual life poses a challenge. Through more than two thousand years of history, the elasticity of Christianity has helped it accommodate changing times and cultures. However, this often causes challenges in identifying the image of a mature Christian.

According to William Bouwsma, maturity entails childlikeness, that is, an openness and propensity for radical growth and change, as opposed to childishness that rejects growth.¹⁷ One psychologist offers this interesting proposition: whereas “Socrates encouraged his young followers to develop towards maturity; Jesus tried to reduce his to the level of children.”¹⁸ Childhood not only entails growth, but welcomes the years with fearless interest and trust, poses simple but profound questions, and lavishly expresses wonder and astonishment. Perhaps this was Søren Kierkegaard’s insight when he wrote, “Therefore one does not begin by being a child and then becoming progressively more

¹⁷ William J. Bouwsma, “Christian Adulthood,” in *Adulthood*, ed. Erik Erikson (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 91.

¹⁸ Margaret Knight, *Honest to Man* (London: 1974), 41-42, in Bouwsma, “Christian Adulthood,” 83.

intimate (with God) as he grows older; no, one becomes more and more a child.”¹⁹ This is part of the journey in spiritual direction, a discovery of one’s identity as a child of God. Thus, one begins to rise from under the strangle-hold of false identities and twisted attitudes in the spiritual life.

Likely, the premier indication of a healthy spirituality is the image of Christ, that “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness (*pleiroma*) of Christ.”²⁰ Interestingly, the *pleiroma* also occurs in Colossians 1, where it refers to the fullness of God dwelling in Christ, perhaps indicating that in the same way Christ fully embodies God, we fully embody Christ.

Prayer

The key criterion for evaluating the spiritual life in spiritual direction is in the prayer life of the individual. The characteristics of prayer in a life indicate spiritual depth, struggle, and intimacy. Beatrice Bruteau suggests that ideal prayer “involves all our faculties, directed toward the whole of Reality and the *totality* of meaning: all of me toward and in all of It.”²¹ Of course, the “all of It” and the “all of me” cannot be fully encountered in the sense that “It”, or God, is infinite, and mankind may never fully understand himself truly and completely. However, perhaps this definition of prayer can be simplified to “all that I know of me, directed toward all that I know of Him.” The path to knowing and joining oneself to God is also found through prayer. On this path, one discovers that true prayer begets true prayer, and consequently, the approach to, and result of, prayer is transformed.

¹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, 1967), 122, in Bouwsma, “Christian Adulthood,” 91.

²⁰ Eph 4:13.

²¹ Beatrice Bruteau, “Insight and Manifestation: A Way of Prayer in a Christian Context,” *Contemplative Review* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 18.

Bruteau refers to five different paths to knowing and joining oneself to God is also found through prayer. First is the “prayer of petition,”²² where one brings his/her problems and needs to God and implores Him to do something about them. Then is the “prayer of appreciation,”²³ in which one’s attention has shifted from private concerns to a fascination and awe over experiencing another kind of reality. In petition, one sees Jesus as simply a means to “getting the goods,” but one also contemplates Jesus and is caught by his beauty. Eventually, one begins to enter into conversation, not speaking about Jesus, but addressing him in the first person. This is the “prayer of dialog,”²⁴ where friends talk to each other. In this prayer, the subject of conversation is insignificant, for the intercommunication is what matters. One is not seeking answers or things; one is experiencing a new way of being. As Bruteau says, “the intercommunication itself is a living reality and experienced in the moment as a living reality. There is living, energy-filled reality in it, moving both ways between the two persons.”²⁵ Then, one may enter into the “prayer of intimacy.”²⁶ In this prayer, what Jesus is communes directly with what one is. Traditionally, this is where language has been inadequate to describe what occurs. Descriptions and boundary lines begin to blur and the “two luminosities gradually grow together.”²⁷ There is a sense that Christ and self are moving together as a single unit. Prayer is no longer an event, nor is it an action at a particular time; prayer is living, and living is prayer. Bruteau writes, “Where is the individual self now? There is no way to answer, because the question no longer makes sense.”²⁸ As lofty as this prayer may seem,

²² Ibid., 21.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 24.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

there is another prayer beyond this— the “prayer of coincidence.”²⁹ In this prayer, one begins experiencing the consciousness of Jesus Himself. St. John of the Cross captures this thought, “your beauty will be my beauty; and therefore we shall behold each other in your beauty.”³⁰ In “intimacy” there is a blur in the distinction of persons, in “coincidence” the blur is complete, there seems to be a confusion of identity that is sourced in the insufficiency of language to express the experience.

The journey in prayer is tough and often filled with obstacles and distractions. Some of the more basic obstacles to life, spirit, and prayer must be resolved in order to mature through these steps of prayer. One obstacle is a refusal to forgive self or others. Another obstacle is a refusal to be reconciled; this continually stirs the waters of resentment and bitterness. Yet another obstacle involves anger, not just at others but also at self or at God. Any of these impediments will the soul and quench the Spirit, propagating, in the words of Kenneth Leech, a condition of “anti-prayer.”³¹

The inner noise of self-talk is often the greatest distraction of all. One may give little attention to the rhythms and patterns in his/her life, and ignore them in prayer, as well. People are often ignorant of their incapacity for prayer. In the words of Monica Furlong, “We have the audacity to suppose that prayer is something we ought to be able to do.”³² Yet, true prayer can be nothing other than a gift of grace and a movement of God upon the being. This is typically a slow and impediment infested experience. At some point, as William Barry and William Connolly explain, “prayer comes to take on a

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 36, in Bruteau, “Insight,” 26.

³¹ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 169.

³² Monica Furlong, *Christian Uncertainties*, (1975), 75, in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 168.

life of its own.”³³ Prayer becomes a living, breathing entity, and this union of spirit and Spirit, a reflection of Trinity.

Wholeness and Integration

One of the common themes people hope to achieve through their efforts to attain the ideal spiritual life, particularly in more recent times, is wholeness or integration. This has been a longstanding theme of spiritual direction also. The supernatural result of a deepening prayer life is a deepening self-awareness. Thomas Merton boldly defined prayer as merely “awareness of one’s inner self.”³⁴ Perhaps his assumption is that only a person of prayer is aware of self, and the self-aware person must, of necessity, be a person of prayer. The two are inseparable. In prayer, one moves within oneself, and there encounters the darkness and the monsters. The inner being becomes life’s greatest battlefield. Dillard describes this journey:

In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world’s rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for one another, and for our life together here.³⁵

After descending and discovering the frightening reality of self, one must go deeper still, to the most inner core. Merton, a Trappist monk well acquainted with this journey, writes:

If you descend into the depths of your own spirit...and arrive somewhere near the center of what you are, you are confronted with the inescapable truth that at the very root of your existence, you are in constant and immediate and inescapable contact with the infinite power of God.³⁶

³³ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper, 1982), 59.

³⁴ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 170.

³⁵ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 94-95, in *The Active Life*, Parker J. Palmer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 30.

³⁶ Thomas Merton, “article title,” *Dublin Review* 223 (1949): 28, in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 170.

This is the stage where wholeness or integration begins. The false parts, the true parts, and the Divine presence are recognized. The healing, and the melding, and the transformation can begin, or have already begun. So to pray may be the definition of being truly human; through prayer, one begins the journey into the Eden walk, where God and naked humankind commune. Becoming human means becoming whole, or finding resolution to the problem wherein “sin diminish[es] and distort[s] one’s humanity.”³⁷

Listening

The place to start in prayer, in assessing life, and in spiritual direction, then, is listening. True listening, however, is excruciatingly difficult, particularly in the fast paced and cluttered world where people are constantly inundated with irrelevant advertisements and boisterous cell phone conversations. Many live in a turned-off mode where sensitivities have been cauterized. Barry and Connolly explain that the two fundamental tasks of a director are, first, to help the directee pay attention to God, and second, to help the directee recognize God’s actions.³⁸ This poses a challenge, as distracted people must now be encouraged to listen to someone who is invisible and mysterious. Once again, one is reminded that the simple act of listening is ultimately dependent upon an act of grace. True listening also involves employing the wholeness of one’s being. The entire person must find practical ways to enter stillness, because “prayer is not an activity of the mind, for God is not in the head. It is an activity of the whole person, and God is in the wholeness.”³⁹ Large portions of time in sessions for spiritual direction may be spent in

³⁷ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 172.

³⁸ Barry and Connolly, *Practice*, 46.

³⁹ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 173.

silence. Silence may be the most productive time, for it encourages and trains one into a spirit of listening. There is a great temptation on the part of both novice director and directee to avoid this silence and to run from the sense of helplessness, poverty, and dependence it gives. But it is only in surrendering to silence that listening can actually begin. Francis Nemeck and Marie Combs encourage the following mode of operation, “When nothing is forthcoming we are to rest in nothing (*nada*): doing nothing, saying nothing.”⁴⁰

By listening, the directee may be entering into a totally new way of living, a life transforming consciousness. Spiritual attentiveness is of prime importance. Nemeck emphasizes “fostering in directees maximum receptivity to God’s transforming and purifying love” to “assist directees to discern the obstacles which block the growth of Christ in them.”⁴¹ To accomplish this, the director must also abide in the same spirit of listening, releasing the mentality of speculation in order to hear the Spirit revealing his/her needs. In listening, both director and directee enter into an opening, as opposed to an analyzing, a self-abandon, as opposed to a self-absorption.

⁴⁰ Nemeck and Coombs, *The Way*, 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

Finding God

The Triple Way

History

As spiritual direction has developed over the centuries, it has been shaped by the systems of classical spiritual thought. Perhaps the premier system is “The Three Ways” (“De Triplici Via”) or “The Mystical Way.” The notion of dividing processes into three parts seems deeply rooted in mankind, and the tendency to see spiritual progress as having three stages has persisted through time. The Greek and Latin Fathers proposed three periods of the interior life. Clement of Alexandria, in his *Stromata*, conceived of three successive states: fear of God, faith and hope, charity and wisdom.⁴² Origen also delineated three distinct stages: beginners, in whom inordinate passions lose their strength, proficient, in whom passions begin to die out under the abundance of grace in the Holy Spirit, and finally, the perfected.⁴³ Gregory the Great wrote of three steps, as well: the beginning of virtue, its progress, and its perfection.⁴⁴ Likewise, pagan religions also defined their principles in terms of threes. From the Neoplatonists came the principles of purgation, illumination, and perfection, and it was Pseudo-Dionysius who christianized this system.⁴⁵

Many centuries transpired, before Hugh of St. Victor adopted the christianized threefold Dionysian themes. At the same time, Hugh added the powerful element of love as the chief means in advancing to union or perfection with God.⁴⁶ It was Bonaventure,

⁴² Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “The Three Ages of the Interior Life,” in *Scriptural Value of Lenten and Easter Liturgical Texts*, ed. Edward M. Wilson (1955), 4, Collections of St. Bonaventure Library, St. Bonaventure, N.Y.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁴ Pascal Parente, “The Ascetical Life,” in Wilson, *Lenten Texts*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁶ Rorem, Paul, ed. *Pseudo-Dionysius in Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 217.

however, who transformed Dionysius' static model into a dynamic one. Bonaventure was a genius in joining both dogmatic and ascetic theology. Paul Rorem explains that Bonaventure's creative work is the culmination of the Victorine integration of Dionysian darkness into the Western legacy of love for Christ crucified. Rorem also indicates that his effort successfully meshes Dionysius' apophatic cloud with Francis' kataphatic stigmata.⁴⁷ Thus, through Bonaventure, The Triple Way took on a new and powerful form—a form that utilized all the major streams of earlier Western mysticism: Augustinian, Dionysian, Gregorian, Cistercian, Victorine.⁴⁸

The influence of The Triple Way impacts not only much spiritual thinking and writing, but also the philosophy of spiritual direction. Contemporary theological discussions of The Triple Way include: Adolphe Tanquerey in *The Spiritual Life*,⁴⁹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange in *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life*,⁵⁰ and Louis Bouyer in *Introduction to Spirituality*.⁵¹ Writers that give The Triple Way attention from a psychological viewpoint include: Evelyn Underhill in her classic *Mysticism*,⁵² Adrian van Kaam in *The Dynamics of Spiritual Self-Direction*,⁵³ Gerald May in *Care of Mind Care of Spirit*,⁵⁴ and Benedict Groeschel in *Spiritual Passages*.⁵⁵ Others have even redefined

⁴⁷ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 220.

⁴⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 93.

⁴⁹ Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Tournai, Belgium: Desclee, 1932).

⁵⁰ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1950).

⁵¹ Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, trans. Mary Perkins Ryan (New York: Desclee, 1961).

⁵² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999).

⁵³ Adrian van Kaam, *Dynamics of Spiritual Self-Direction* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1976).

⁵⁴ Gerald May, *Care of Mind / Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

⁵⁵ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

The Three Ways with new terms, like Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr's use of "uncovery," "discovery," and "recovery."⁵⁶

Despite the fact that The Triple Way is not primarily based on theological considerations or restricted to Christianity, it has provided a framework for the spiritual journey that is difficult to explain otherwise. Each of the three stages, Purgation, Illumination, and Union, are like hooks on which solid, scriptural truths can be hung.

The Way of Purgation

The first stage in The Triple Way is the way of purgation. Although there are two other progressive stages, a certain amount of overlap and interplay occurs among the three. Purgation is the process through which an individual is cleansed and freed of the impediments that block the soul's intimate union with God. Bonaventure writes that the purgative way is practiced in sorrow, but finished in love.⁵⁷ Bonaventure also implores all humanity to consider the condition of our hearts before God:

Have you thought of where you are?
 What was once close to heaven itself is now clawing at the gates of Hell!
 Have you considered what composes you?
 What was once beautiful and pure is now ugly and filthy!
 Have you meditated on what you are?
 What was once free is now a slave!⁵⁸

The Cloud of Unknowing describes the beginning condition of mankind; every person is occupied with the "foul and fetid lump of himself," and this is what must be overcome.⁵⁹

The Cloud also describes the wretched condition of a person entering purgation, "...if a man would be God's perfect disciple and taught by him on the mountain of perfection, he is nearly out of his mind with sorrow, so much so that he weeps and wails, strives with

⁵⁶ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban, 1993), 15.

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, *The Triple Way*, ed. William I. Joffe (Paterson, N.J.: Saint Anthony Guild Press, 1956), 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁹ Anonymous classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981), 204.

himself, denounces and heaps curses upon himself.⁶⁰

At the turning point between the purgative way and the illuminative way there is an experience which St. John of the Cross describes as the “dark night of the senses.”⁶¹ Though the dark nights are intensely painful, they lead to inevitable joy. In the following excerpt from *The Living Flame of Love*, both the pain and the joy coexist:

O living flame of love
 That tenderly wounding my soul
 In its deepest center...
 O sweet cautery
 O delightful wound
 O gentle hand! O delicate touch
 That tastes of eternal life
 And pays every debt!
 In killing you changed death to life.⁶²

The Way of Illumination

The stage of illumination is characterized by contemplation and knowledge of God. Bonaventure explains that “this heavenly light must first illumine all of our forgiven sins; then it must spread out to cover the gifts that God has given us; lastly, it must reflect on the rewards that He has promised us.”⁶³ To enter illumination is to bask in the immensity of God’s gracious goodness and reality.⁶⁴ Wayne Teasdale reasons that the intention of gaining knowledge of God is like a five-year-old trying to understand relativity; what is needed is an interior explosion of consciousness at the center of one’s being in God.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁶¹ *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, # (4th, 2d, 11th, etc.) ed., s.v. “catharsis.”

⁶² John of the Cross, *John of the Cross*, 293-294. (you already gave all the other info) ed. Kieran Kavanaugh. New York, Paulist Press, 1987), 293-294.

⁶³ Bonaventure, *Triple Way*, 13.

⁶⁴ Wayne Teasdale, “The Mystical Approach to Life,” *Studia Mystica* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 55.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 56.

Many writers deal with the struggle to be illuminated in terms of an ineffable God.

Perhaps a large part of illumination is attained through dismantling all we thought God to be. Dionysius himself explains the compromised position to be held:

But as for now, what happens is this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. (Then) we leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our mind's and, to the extent that is proper we approach the ray which transcends being.⁶⁶

In purgation, the lens of how one sees reality has been significantly cleansed.

Finally, there is room to receive the Divine sketches, many of which are dark and unclear.

Though the spiritual life may be filled with darkness, there are also bright times. The theme throughout *The Cloud of Unknowing* is the darkness and ineffability of God; however, it also speaks of the rays that pierce through the cloud:

Then perhaps it will be his will to send out a ray of spiritual light, piercing this cloud of unknowing between you and him, and he will show you some of his secrets, of which many may not or cannot speak. Then you shall feel your affection all aflame with the fire of his love, for more than I know how to tell..⁶⁷

The Way of Union

Of the three ways, union is by far the most probed and fondled. Something about union with the Almighty seems to irresistibly draw mankind. It is just as Meister Eckhart's quote of St. Bernard of Clairvaux goes, that "God, despite himself, is ever hanging over us some bait to lure us into him."⁶⁸ Union is the ultimate goal of The Triple Way, and of mysticism. Union can be defined as the ecstatic experience through which the soul is radically transformed in God and mysteriously radiates His presence.

⁶⁶ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 210.

⁶⁷ *Cloud of Unknowing*, 174-175.

⁶⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, quoted in Meister Eckhart, "Sermon on St. Benedict's Day," quoted in David Mueller, "The Mystical Union in the Sermons of Meister Eckhart," *Science, Faith, and Revelation*, ed. Bob E. Patterson (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1979), 79.

Bonaventure says union is highly mysterious and beyond description:

All intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God. This, however, is mystical and most secret, which no one knows except him who receives it, no one receives except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit...⁶⁹

In the state of union, the rules of this world do not apply, and the seemingly eccentric descriptions may alarm certain people. Jan van Ruusbroec's eloquent description of union as a wanton and unrestrained experience is sure to bring discomfort to many:

Nevertheless, all loving spirits are one enjoyment and one beatitude with God, without difference, for that blessed state of being, which is the enjoyment of God and of all his beloved is so simple and undifferentiated that there is within it neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit as regards the distinction of Persons, nor is there any creature either. Rather, all enlightened spirits are there raised above themselves into a modeless state of blissful enjoyment which overflows whatever fullness any creature has ever received or ever could receive. There all exalted spirits are, in their superessential being, one enjoyment and one beatitude with God, without difference. This beatitude is so simple and undifferentiated that no distinction could ever enter within it.⁷⁰

There is also an irresistible quality to union that pulls on each spirit, despite the fearsome descriptions of that state of being. Ruusbroec speaks of that "dark stillness in which all lovers lose their way," and then "flow into the wild waves of the Sea, from which no creature could ever draw us back."⁷¹ In this "Sea," the self seems lost, and so do all descriptions of the self. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross speaks of this loss:

I abandoned and forgot myself
Laying my face on my beloved
All things ceased; I went out from myself,

⁶⁹ Bonaventure, *Bonaventure*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Ewert Cousins, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 113.

⁷⁰ Ruusbroec, John, *John Ruusbroec*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. James A. Wiseman (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 226.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

Leaving all my cares
Forgotten among the lilies.⁷²

The issue of loss of self has been highly debated throughout history. Is the union a mere union of wills? Is it an essential union where self is absorbed into God? Dealing with the paradox involving union has become a point of contention for many. The description of union became a dilemma for Meister Eckhart, who was eventually condemned by the Catholic Church the early 14th century as a heretic.⁷³ His writings, though the source of great controversy, continue to have great influence today. Still there are statements, such as this quoting of Dionysius, that concern many people, “Thus Dionysius says: This race is precisely the flight from creature to union with the uncreated. When the soul achieves this, it loses its identity, it absorbs God and is reduced to nothing, as the dawn at the rising of the sun.”⁷⁴

One of Eckhart’s disciples, John Tauler, though more cautious than Eckhart, has also made statements that endorse absorption, “In this absorption all like and unlike is lost. In this abyss the spirit loses itself and knows neither God nor itself, neither like nor unlike. It knows nothing, for it is engulfed in the oneness of God and has lost all differences.”⁷⁵ Others, however, seek to erase the ambiguity and clarify that union does not mean absorption. In this vein, Ruusbroec says, “I just said that we are one with God, something to which Scripture bears witness. I now wish to say that we must forever remain different from God, which is also taught us by Scripture. We must understand and

⁷² John of the Cross, *John of the Cross*, 56. Kavanaugh, 56.

⁷³ Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, trans. and ed., *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 11-13.

⁷⁴ Meister Eckhart, quoted in Raymond B. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper, 1941), 89, in “The Mystical Union in the Sermons of Meister Eckhart,” David L Mueller, in *Science, Faith, and Revelation*, ed. Bob E. Patterson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1979), 76.

⁷⁵ John Tauler, Sermon 28, *Homo Spiritualis*, trans. Steven Ozment, 38, in *Ordinary Mysticism*, Dennis Tamburello (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 117.

experience both these points if we are to be on the right path.”⁷⁶

Whatever the case, it seems a formidable task to try describing the mystical paradox of the union experience. Teasdale recognizes that the language from each tradition is drawn from the “common experience, from ordinary life: it is not equipped to adequately describe mystical awareness at its zenith.”⁷⁷ Long ago, St. John of the Cross gave poetic support for the inadequacy of descriptive language:

Deep-cellared is the cavern
Of my hearts love, I drank of him alive;
Now, stumbling from the tavern,
No thoughts of mine survive,
And I have lost the flock I used to drive.⁷⁸

The Dark Nights

Night of the Soul

As a person begins to pass from illumination to union, St. John of the Cross describes another phenomenon known as the “dark night of the soul [or sense].”⁷⁹ After the soul has been unencumbered through purgation, and now enlightened regarding the beauty of God through illumination, the intense longing for God is accompanied by His stark absence. Note St. John’s agony in *The Dark Night*:

Poor, abandoned, and unsupported by any of the apprehensions of my soul (in the darkness of my intellect, the distress of my will, in the affliction and anguish of my memory) left to darkness in pure faith, which is a dark night for these natural faculties, and with only my will touched by the sorrows, afflictions, and longings of love of God, I went out from myself. That is, I departed from my low manner of understanding, and my feeble way of loving, and my poor and limited method of finding satisfaction in God.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ruusbroec, *John Ruusbroec*, 174.

⁷⁷ Teasdale, “Mystical Approach,” 56.

⁷⁸ John of the Cross, *Poems of St. John of the Cross*, ed. Roy Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1951).

⁷⁹ St. John’s use of the term “dark night” is rooted in literal experience. Caught up in the turmoil of Teresa’s reform, he was imprisoned for nine months in a six-by-ten-foot cell. The only source of light was a two-inch window. While imprisoned, he wrote the majority of his poems, including the first 31 verses of *Spiritual Canticle*.

⁸⁰ John of the Cross, Kavanaugh, 200.

Though there are not direct references to these nights in Scripture, inferences of such spiritual states can be found particularly in books like Job or the Psalms.⁸¹ Typical symptoms of the dark night include a sense of the absence of God, dryness in prayer, disillusionment with one's understanding of the Christian life, and a spiritual loss of control.⁸² These conditions can also easily be symptoms of negative conditions, such as depression, illness, or sin. With contemporary general familiarity with Sanjuanist⁸³ writings, it has also become popular for people to say they are going through a dark night when they experience grief, stress, or even some trivial problem. The dark night of the soul, though it may include these problems, is much more; it is a complete spiritual reorientation. The fruit of this experience is to see self and God as never before. Foster explains that, through the dark night, one gains "a profound and holy distrust of all superficial drives and human strivings. We know more deeply than ever before our capacity for infinite self deception."⁸⁴ In spite of the spiritual suffering, there comes a sense that something is very right, albeit terrible, and when the suffering finally bears the intended fruit, God rescues us through illuminative or unitive experiences. Benedict Groeschel says of this transition, "the cause of darkness may still remain and tears of sorrow may still flow, but in spite of it all a new soft and gentle light is rising in the inner being of the individual."⁸⁵

⁸¹ For example: Job chapter 3 and Psalm 22:1-2.

⁸² Nancy Pfaff, "Spiritual Direction and the Dark Night of the Soul," *Presence* 4, no. 2 (May 1998): 34.

⁸³ The term "Sanjuanist" is sourced in the original Spanish to the name San Juan de la Cruz or St. John of the Cross.

⁸⁴ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 24, in Pfaff, "Direction and the Dark Night," 41.

⁸⁵ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 154, in Pfaff, "Direction and the Dark Night," 41.

Night of the Spirit

Before the experience of full union, another dark night is needed—the night of the spirit. There are two levels of psyche requiring purification. The first is the soul or sense, which has to do with interior and exterior senses such as imagination, memory, feelings, and intellect. These senses can be pleasant consolations, but also distractions. The second level of psyche that must be purified is the spirit. The night of the spirit involves a cleansing of intelligence and will. This night is much more painful than the former.⁸⁶

While the first night, the night of the soul, is like clipping seeds off weeds, the second night, the night of the spirit, is like ripping up the unseen roots.⁸⁷ The “night” may be mingled with depression, for the two states hold much in common:

Depression demands that we reject simplistic answers, both “religious” and “scientific,” and learn to embrace mystery, something our culture resists. Mystery surrounds every deep experience of the human heart: the deeper we go into the heart’s darkness or its light, the closer we get to the ultimate mystery of God.⁸⁸

However, night and depression do not necessarily co-exist. For someone experiencing the dark night of the spirit, life may seem fine at both work and play, but an indication of night may be found in the starkness of one’s prayer life. Though the spirit wants nothing but God, it experiences a loss of Him. It thus faces an “oppressive undoing,” where God’s love assails, strikes, disentangles, dissolves, divests, chastises, afflicts, and purifies it.⁸⁹

Trouble in the prayer life, however, is a likely indication of progress. As Marie Dyckman and Patrick Carroll explain, “difficulty in prayer often marks the beginning of

⁸⁶ Benedict M. Ashley, *Spiritual Direction in the Dominican Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1995), 111-113.

⁸⁷ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 170.

⁸⁸ Parker Palmer, “All the Way Down: Depression and the Spiritual Journey,” *Weavings* 13, no. 5 (September-October 1998): 35.

⁸⁹ St. John of the Cross, quoted in Dubay, *Fire Within*, 169.

real prayer... Through darkness, aridity, and emptiness we are called to a new form of prayer, a new stage of our relationship with the Lord.”⁹⁰ The result of this struggle in the second night means the spirit is freed from:

Dullness of mind
 Lack of sensitivity to the Spirit
 Distracted and inattentive inner life
 Lowly and natural mode of communion with God
 Feeble and imperfect knowledge of God
 Remnants of pride
 Undue security in spiritual experiences⁹¹

The Three Ways and The Dark Nights are not as clear and orderly as they are often made out to be. There is significant overlap and the stages are not always linear. The path for each person is a little different from that of any other. The degrees to change in each area of the spiritual life may vary before moving to another stage. As complicated as these stages and processes may seem, great relief comes through understanding that human effort is not sovereign in spiritual progress. Grace begins the path and grace continues the path—nothing occurs without grace.

Entering the Calm

The realization that progress only comes through grace is the beginning of entering the calm. The calm is an experience far from normal in today’s bustle and clutter. Many people allow their environments and their inner conditions to harass them away from “graced calm,” that level of calm that comes only from God. Adrian van Kaam captures this turmoil:

He allows his managing, controlling ego to dominate his life, he reduces or eliminates any possibility of being open to the Spirit. Graced aspirations can no longer guide, modify and mellow the aggressive ambitions of his ego. He

⁹⁰ Katherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 62-63.

⁹¹ St. John of the Cross, quoted in Dubay, *Fire Within*, 168.

becomes driven by isolated ambitions that blind and overwhelm him. No room is left in the personal sphere for the gentle, stilling influence of the Spirit...⁹²

Oddly, mankind continues to run from God, avoiding him like some distant friend.

Perhaps one thinks, “If I were to stop and call, it would take too much time, for so much water has passed under the bridge since we last talked.” Thus, one procrastinates, missing the calm. Perhaps one avoids him out of fear—fear that since so many things demand attention, time with him seems beyond reckoning, for life is already overwhelming enough.

May explains that “any attempt to produce anything in meditation is bound to be a hindrance. . . meditation must ideally be a situation in which trying stops and things are allowed to settle.”⁹³ He also quotes the advice of St. John of the Cross: “In order to arrive at being everything, desire to be nothing. In order to arrive at knowing everything, desire to know nothing.”⁹⁴

Upon entering the calm, one is content to surrender, to yield, and to wait. Prayer takes on a new atmosphere. It is not seeking relief or cure. It is “inarticulate communion” and “silent gazing” which may lead one to spontaneously slip into the prayer of orison. Orison, according to Evelyn Underhill, has nothing to do with petition, it has no forms, but rather, it is the mere yearning of the soul, wordless prayer.⁹⁵ Such prayer cannot be conjured; rather, it is a graced experience. The person experiencing this type of prayer life is living beyond circumstances and situations.

⁹² van Kaam, *Spiritual Self Direction*, 511.

⁹³ Gerald May, *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1982), 57.

⁹⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, in *Complete Works*, ed. E. Allison Peers (London: Westminster, 1953), in May, *Will and Spirit*, 57.

⁹⁵ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 323. This classic work is likely the premier evaluation of mysticism. The book expands consciousness. It also maintains intellectual stamina and is sensitive to the sciences.

To begin to enter the calm is a gift of grace. Grace transforms one's psyche and spirit, quieting "his vital drives and sensate feelings sufficiently to leave him open for the inspirations of the Spirit and the aspirations that blossom forth from them."⁹⁶

Such stilling is far from being paralyzing. Even in the depths of contemplation, vital action occurs, because vital action includes the spirit of contemplation. In the spirit of one who is stilled, much is happening, for it is in the stilling that revelation comes. To "be still" precedes "knowing God."⁹⁷

New Meaning

In any person's spiritual journey, particularly when that person is dealing with the painful circumstances of life, a sense of meaning is inseparable from a sense of hope, and hope is at the root of growth. However, in direction, meanings cannot be taught. Meaning is not systematic and is often shrouded in mystery. Meaning is intensely personal and oblique. Each individual must personally discover meanings through the new sense of openness and calm that has been established through the environment of direction.

Unavoidably, everyone must live with a certain degree of tension between mystery and meaning. All people, however, long to assign some meanings to their experiences, particularly the painful ones. Assigning meaning is critical to one's spiritual progress. Tournier says of those who get stuck in life because of an inability to find meaning:

Patients who are skeptics endure a threefold suffering. They suffer from their disease, and they suffer on account of its meaninglessness for them. It is in their eyes nothing but a more or less serious vexation, the result of blind chance. They

⁹⁶ van Kaam, *Spiritual Self Direction*, 510.

⁹⁷ Psalm 46:10

suffer again because it suspends their lives. They wait passively for their cure in order to begin living again.⁹⁸

The age-old vexation for the skeptic in pain has been the entrapping line of questioning that begins, “If the suffering is from God, how can God be both powerful and good? If the suffering is not from God, how can there be meaning in it?” Such logic seems impeccable, but guarantees that either way one decides to answer, one will lose. By taking the skeptic’s attitude, the individual freezes his/her growth and stunts all relationships. There is another way, the way of faith—faith in a God who, in the words of Carlo Carretto, “annihilates himself for love, in Christ, and to save his creatures pays with his blood.”⁹⁹ It is in embracing such an image of God that we are able to step into the mystery of suffering and begin to discover meaning; it is a difficult journey, but not a meaningless one. Carretto found meaning in this way:

...it is difficult to understand how he loves, and how he shows his love by making you suffer is the secret hidden in the ages.

I died for you – he tells me on Calvary – now learn to die a little for me.

By dying you will learn the secret.

But you will only learn it if you die for love like me.¹⁰⁰

In this struggle, one must take care to nurture and cherish hope, for often the revelations seem exceedingly rare, especially considering how long one has waited for them. Wise direction is careful not to harm the smoldering wick, but instead, to find life in the midst of death. Sandra Cronk states, “each of the people who experienced a symbolic confrontation with death had to find a symbolic experience of new life in order to enter fully into his or her way of being in actual daily living.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Paul Tournier, *The Healing Spirit* (Westchester, Ill.: Good News, 1979), 19.

⁹⁹ Carlo Carretto, *Why O Lord? The Inner Meaning of Suffering* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: New York: Orbis, 1985), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Carretto, *Meaning of Suffering*, 59.

¹⁰¹ Sandra Cronk, *Dark Night Journey* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Pendle Hill, 1993), 72, in Pfaff, “Direction and the Dark Night,” 36.

Transformation

Although the ultimate goal of direction is not positive results, but rather union with the Divine, positive transformational outcomes do occur, as well. Some may view these outcomes as mini-conversions in the inner life, for there are many types and levels of conversion. Walter Conn refers to a multi-dimensional view of conversion involving moral, affective, cognitive, and religious conversions. The ensuing changes that follow each are consecutively a new way of living, a new way of loving, a new way of knowing, and a new way of being.¹⁰² Certainly these play a part in spiritual direction as well, for direction is holistically focused.

Dallas Willard gives insight into another popular concept related to transformation, specifically, integration: that being, integration:

The condition of normal human life is one where the inner resources of the person are weakened or dead and where the factors of human life do not interrelate as they were intended by their nature and function to do. This is sin in the singular: not an act but a condition. It is not that we are wrong, but that our inner components are not “hooked up” correctly any longer. Our thinking, our feeling, our very bodily dispositions are defective and connected wrongly with reference to life as a whole.¹⁰³

Integration is difficult to define, because in defining, according to Joel Giallanza, its dynamic quality would atrophy. Integration is never static, but continually in progress, bringing the various parts into an organic wholeness. The four parts that comprise this wholeness are: self-knowledge, self-articulation, self-recognition, and self-acceptance. But these elements are integral to one another, strengthening or weakening each other, and supporting each other without solid lines of demarcation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Walter Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York: Paulist, 1998), 116.

¹⁰³ Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 104-105.

¹⁰⁴ Joel Giallanza, “Integration,” 32-33.

Of course, the director must be a person who has undergone significant transformation, as well. This means the director has come to some moderate level of health through the process of integration. In the description of Elaine Korthals, “To be the perfect spiritual director means that one must reflect in one’s being the Trinitarian dynamic of self-knowledge, acceptance, and mission as a part of a responsive relationship that is centered in love and truth.”¹⁰⁵ This does not necessarily mean that the director has “arrived” or become “enlightened” in the popular sense. David Lonsdale tells of how the most effective of spiritual directors often appear to be very fragile themselves, and may seem to be in more turmoil than the average person. The French director Abbe Marie-Joseph Huvelin was an example of this. He offered direction while lying on his couch in a dark room, suffering from gout, migraines, and other afflictions. His notebooks indicate that he suffered depression and thoughts of suicide. However, he was director to great spirits like Charles de Foucauld and Baron von Hugel.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps this is a picture of the director who is most deeply acquainted with inner self—a soul who is truly a “wounded healer.”¹⁰⁷

The central aspect of transformation in spiritual direction might be described as transcendence. This means moving away from the usual and natural life, and moving toward living life on another level. This transcendence changes a person both inwardly and outwardly. In regard to the self, the individual is moved from an unproductive self-focus to a fruitful centering where one sees the truth of oneself. In regard to others, the individual is moved from unproductive distraction to having eyes opened to see as Christ sees, and to see God presently within oneself and others. The ultimate definitions come

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Korthals, “The Key to Spiritual Direction,” *Review for Religious* (November-December 1986): 908.

¹⁰⁶ David Longsdale, “A Paradox in Spiritual Direction,” *Review for Religious* (July-August 1986): 567.

¹⁰⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1990).

from God, not man, and they are found in transcending beyond the surface levels of life and entering into a biblical reality.

Transformation can be seen as a progressive enlightenment that moves inward. This enlightenment stimulates a new way of existing. The following diagram could be viewed as a grotesquely abbreviated rendering of St. Teresa’s “inner castle,” showing the different places of existence.

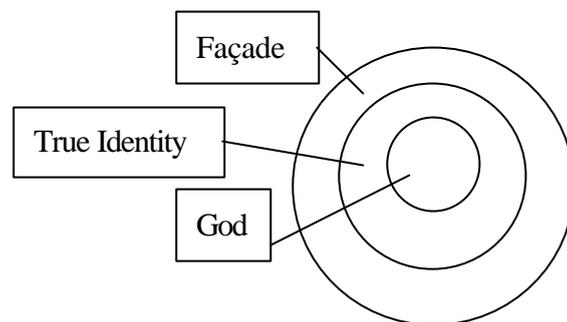


Figure 3.1. Levels of Existence

First, wisdom warrants some clarity—the diagram does not seek to imply that the individual is God, but that God dwells at the core of the individual. In addition, the lines of delineation are not as cleanly cut as the diagram portrays. Each person is a mixture of the above, some living more toward the outside, and some, toward the inside. One exists more fully within some aspects of life than within other aspects of life. However, it seems evident that most of humanity exists predominantly in the realm of façade. Humankind recognizes self and others in terms of jobs, roles, credentials, possessions, experiences, and appearances. Each evaluates his/her own significance and others’ value by the temporal externals. This is what Nemeck refers to as a life of “self-alienation.”¹⁰⁸ The individual caught in this system is plagued with feelings of insecurity,

¹⁰⁸ Nemeck, *The Way*, 57.

inadequacy, and inferiority. This is devastating to his/her ability to be intimate.

Philomena Agudo addresses this problem:

Alienation from self increases the need to be loved and accepted but decreases the capacity to love. Self-hatred erects a barrier to satisfactory relationships. When an individual hates himself or herself, he or she operates by means of pretense and deceit. Since these means cannot be hidden from self, contempt for self increases. Self-contempt, self-alienation, and self-hatred are expressed in hostility towards others. Such hostility breeds so much anxiety and guilt that an individual finds it impossible to enjoy any relationship at all...¹⁰⁹

So in self-alienation, not only is intimacy with others thwarted, but also intimacy with God. Thus, spiritual direction aims to aid a person or group in becoming liberated and unencumbered, that they might find themselves— their true selves— and find the true God who is speaking at the center of their beings. Such a life is an existence at a totally different level.

¹⁰⁹ Philomena Agudo, *Intimacy with Self vs. Self-Alienation*, in *Intimacy* (Affirmation Books, 1978), 20-21, in Nemeck, *The Way*, 58.