

fetched, perhaps, but less so than the usual explanation, 'Go, it is sent', the feminine ending to agree with an *oblatio* understood. For what is the *oblatio* but the means of our at-one-ment?

Moreover there is the military command, 'Dis-miss', which seems to have little to do with *mittere*, 'to send', but must mean to dis-mass, or dis-band; and in Hebrew *masoreth* has a meaning akin to 'bond', and the *Massorah* is 'the body of traditional information on the texts of the Hebrew Bible'.

But the study of this root meaning at its Greek source is the most fruitful for a deeper understanding of the Mass, and in fact opens the door to an endless vista regarding the Mystical Body of Christ and of how we go to the building of it up, or should do. This of itself is a convincing testimony that our quarry has been rightly found. For if the following up of any particular truth in any department is found to bear witness to the Truth (as it must, if correct), then the validity of the particular truth is thereby corroborated, and 'they knew him in the breaking of bread'.

It may also be remembered that 'the breaking-of-bread from house to house' was the earliest title for our 'Mass' of today.

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## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

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One of the tragedies of our time is that practically the whole world has the idea that it is not called to prayer. Yet the paths of prayer form the map of life. It seems odd that, at a time when men are not only off the road but have forgotten there is one, the need for direction is still questioned. For it is spiritual direction which helps men both to find and follow the ways of God. But there are still those who deny its necessity completely, even in the pursuit of the highest sanctity. More commonly it is simply stated that it is not so necessary these days. This applies, presumably, even to the youth of today. It is argued that the young show no liking for direction. They are more independent of mind and better educated than in the past, and so less in need of direction, and sooner able

to read spiritual authors for themselves. To see the spiritual life as a set of rules, counsels, and commands would only discourage them. There is even the suggestion that direction is rather un-English, something from France which English youth does not need.

There are those who grudgingly admit that spiritual direction might be helpful to exceptional souls, contemplative souls and some religious, particularly young religious. But even here it is hardly necessary, for in one sense, religious have much less need than the laity. Usually they are better instructed and are already leading a life guaranteed by the Church as suited to direct them to God. Those holding this view are quick, indeed too quick, to quote St Teresa of the Child Jesus, 'C'est Jésus tout seul qui m'a instruite, aucun livre, aucun theologien ne m'a enseignée'. She is their patron in this regard, as she seems to have done rather well without a director in the strict sense. Some incline to the opinion that with religious, especially nuns, direction is better left to the Mistress of Novices or the Mother Prioress. She is at hand, so that matters can be settled immediately without waiting for a visit from the priest director. Her share of direction is expressly legislated for, in many cases. She is better acquainted with the various temperaments of her community, and seeing the nuns in their daily life her direction can be more concrete. Here the secular priest is conscious of his own inexperience of formal community life. He is often made more conscious of it by the occasionally expressed preference of religious, naturally enough, for 'Order men'.

Of course, there are many, many priests who fully realise, and fulfil magnificently, their obligations as directors. But there must be many, regular and secular, who realise the obligation to provide direction, but are overawed by the high degree of personal sanctity it seems to demand, and the degree of knowledge and experience required. The young priest easily feels unequal to the task. His confidence is not increased when told—and it never loses in the telling—that seminary life leaves him completely ignorant of feminine psychology, a handicap in his dealings with considerably more than half the faithful. So he hopes that special kindness in the confessional and an extra pious word for his penitents will meet their need and his obligations. In cases where this seems insufficient he suggests some suitable reading matter. If this does not suffice he suggests some other priest he hopes more likely to be a good director. So there is one less director available.

There may be few who hold these views, and fewer who act on them. But they have undue influence on those whose views are not so clear, and for whom the principle that 'some direction sometimes for some souls seems necessary' is sufficiently vague as to seem prudent. The results are most unfortunate. Not only is due direction lacking but it becomes less and less sought after, so that confessions from 6.0 to 9.0 soon become con-

fessions from 6.0 to 8.0. That is only one of the evils. It may be that the laity become simply bewildered, for now they seem to have an insoluble problem. Either spiritual writers over-estimate the need for directors, or the Church does not meet the need. Some begin to think that perhaps, after all, the laity are not called to the heights. Even those who are most desirous and determined to find a director give up the search. Many turn to unsuitable books, showing a marked preference for authors who leave the Pearly Gates wide open. Some of these books are enjoying a remarkable popularity today. Even the more suitable books are often read with more enthusiasm than understanding. There result self-made, self-appointed authorities on the art of arts. It is easy enough because we all tend to forget St Bernard's warning that, in the matter of spiritual direction, whoever guides himself has a fool for a disciple.

There are no easy answers to these problems. But two recent books between them contain most of the answers. They are *The Spiritual Director* by Fr Gabriel, O.D.C., and *Direction Spirituelle et Psychologie* (Etudes Carmélitaines).<sup>1</sup> Fr Gabriel refuses to consider the need for spiritual direction as a speculative question. It is a practical need not adequately met. He reminds us that Leo XIII declared it to be 'a common law of Providence that souls should be led to the loftier spiritual heights through being helped by other men'. These words apply formally to spiritual guidance. Certainly, direction is only another aspect of that 'human instrumentality' which forms the basis of the doctrine of the Mystical Body. St John of the Cross warns us that 'The soul which remains alone, without a master, is like the burning coal which is alone. It will grow colder.' Every priest knows that there are thousands who yearn for holiness, and for the fullness of holiness. If God, therefore, has chosen to work through his ministers, competent directors must be found. Kindness and a pious word for every penitent will not suffice.

The case is no different for the youth of today. Those who have most contact with them bear witness to their generosity. They bear witness that the youth complain, and complain bitterly, of the difficulty in finding directors. So few priests seem to have time, especially in city parishes, or sufficient knowledge of the worker's life to give practical direction. Yet many of these youths have great responsibilities. Many have taken on responsibilities in the cause of Catholic Action, and can justifiably look for guidance in their own spiritual lives. Many seek a fuller and wider apostolate. They seek to live Christ, to give themselves to others, and so give themselves to God. And all this in an urbanised society, with its family and working conditions which militate against purity of mind and body, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Spiritual Director*, by Fr Gabriel, O.C.D. (Mercier Press; 8s. 6d.) and *Direction Spirituelle et Psychologie*, Etudes Carmélitaines (Desclée de Brouwer).

threaten to stifle every desire for the life of the spirit. Fortunately, such desires do not die easily in the hearts of the young, but they call for a large and grand direction. Prudence was never the hallmark of youth, in any generation. Many sad and sudden falls from grace could be prevented by a strong direction. If the youthful apostolate is not to rest on insecure foundations; if their charity is not to degenerate into philanthropy, some director has to keep before their eyes the splendour of their vision, and before their minds the great dogmatic truths which give value to their young lives. The suggestion that direction is un-English, and foreign to our youth, can only be made by those who forget the days when England produced some of the greatest directors. They also under-estimate the influence, in our own times, of men like Dom Chapman, O.S.B., Fr Steuart, S.J., Fr McNabb, O.P., and their immediate recognition and appreciation by the laity, young and old.

The direction of religious, men or women, leading a secluded life, is a very different matter. It may be that they have many helps denied the laity. In many cases their life may be so arranged that people of simple natures may feel no great need for further direction. But there are souls, in any community, with an analytical cast of thought who are always seeking solutions to 'problems'. A word from the priest as a theologian can be a great help to such. There are scrupulous souls to whom the priest alone can speak with the necessary authority. There are eager souls always tending to extremes, which the priest easily recognises. There are chosen souls who need the reassurance of a priest when God sends his painful and purifying trials. It may be that older members of a community stand in less need of direction than the young. But there are times of exceptional temptation; of community difficulties; or difficulties arising from a new charge. At such times older members of a community, after long years without need for regular direction, now feel the need strongly and urgently. It is true that in the case of nuns the maternal influence of their Prioress is immense. Her daily observation of their external practice of virtue is a wonderful aid to her direction. But that direction is bound to have its limitations. Her very nearness can cause a familiarity which makes firm direction more difficult. She is not a priest and has not the priestly grace. Neither has she always the necessary theological training. If her community is small she may even be seriously lacking in experience of souls. Her direction may have many advantages over that of a priest, but it is never meant to exclude it, but rather to be its complement.

Many of his tasks must make a young priest conscious of his shortcomings. It would be very unfortunate if that were not so, especially in the matter of directing souls. But to be conscious of one's shortcomings is not the same as being unequal to the task. The task here is to make a soul perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. That is a masterpiece which

can only be the work of the divine Artist himself. Here, as so often, the priest is the mere instrument, God the principal cause. God has called. He has answered. God will surely not desert him. Always, he could be a much more perfect instrument. But he is not expected to be perfect. He is only expected to love Christ, to speak of Christ, to convey Christ to his people by the sacraments, prayer, word, and example. He is not expected to be a contemplative because he is ordained. If he is one, so much the better. But it is only expected that he himself values and struggles with the life of prayer. The number of contemplatives among his penitents are likely to be very few, but the number of those who need encouragement, in the more ordinary ways of prayer, will be many. His own efforts in the spiritual life should enable him to encourage others in theirs. True, he is expected to be a reliable guide even in the higher ways of prayer, for he is consulted as a specialist. So he ought to be. His professional studies will not make him an infallible guide, but they should make him a reliable one. Here St John of the Cross has performed his immense service to the Church, in the person of her directors. He has placed them in a position to follow unerringly the progress of grace in souls, and to give them suitable direction in the most difficult periods of their spiritual lives. He has provided all priests with an ordered body of certain knowledge. He has applied theological principles to the psychological elements of the spiritual life, in such a way as to deduce universal laws of direction. This has put spiritual direction, henceforth, on a scientific basis. He enables every priest, though unworthy, to be learned. That is why he is a doctor of the Church. The Mystical Doctor laboured to achieve this because he knew the need for spiritual directors, and because, as he says, 'God is desirous that the government and direction of every man should be undertaken by another man'. For him to see the need was to do something about it. The purpose of this article is merely to underline that need, lest it be more and more overlooked, and less and less be done about it. It is written in the hope that more will seek and more will find. If more directors are not sought, and found, many souls will never find the surest and quickest way to advance in the love of God. There will always be the lonely soul. He walks in a desert land and knows the horror of its loneliness. But God himself searches for the seeking soul, and he will not give up the search until it can be said, 'He found him in a desert place, in a place of horror, and of vast wilderness; he led him about, and taught him. . . . The Lord alone was his leader.' (Deut. 32, 10-12.)