

“GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION”

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis is under the direction of Professors Robert Hughes and Julia Gatta

Group spiritual direction is being practiced as an effective format for bringing together persons in relationship based on the shared desire for God, shared experience of God, and shared relationship with God and with one another in the church. This thesis includes information about structure and process of group spiritual direction and identifies essential elements that foster relationship reflecting Christian *agape* and *koinonia*. The theological tenets that would support and further define the importance of persons finding and living into Christian *koinonia* are presented along with discussion of wider application of the group spiritual direction method in a diversity of contexts.

A brief history of the development and purpose of spiritual direction within the Christian tradition is followed by an analysis of group spiritual direction methodology used as the standard format developed at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Bethesda, Maryland. An evaluation of the literature pertaining to group spiritual direction identifies particular beliefs and motivations necessary on the part of each member: a shared desire for God, a recognition of God’s presence in each of us, and a willingness to share our spiritual journey with others. The essential elements in the group structure that allowed for spiritual formation in the group are: shared silence, reflective listening, and prayerful response.

A deeper understanding of the theology of interpersonal relationships follows with particular emphasis on our persons being in relation to each other through Christ and the church--a relationship that achieves particularity of the person, yet allows for the inclusion of all in relationship. The significance of the findings is that group spiritual direction can foster “spiritual” community, *koinonia*, that is found to be relevant to fulfilling our desire to honor our relationship with God and to be friends with others in Christ. If it is acknowledged that the ministry of spiritual direction is to be formative of the individual Christian person, then group spiritual direction is formative of the communion of Christian persons.

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Dedicated

To the Glory of God

and to my husband and children

who have loved me through out

my theological studies,

and to my Readers for their everyday ministry and love.

CHAPTER ONE

Tradition and Purpose of Spiritual Direction

Part I: The origin and practice of spiritual direction

The Christian faith has had a tradition of offering spiritual direction for others to guide them on their journey towards a deeper relationship with God. In the past twenty-five years, with the increase in interest and practice of contemplative prayer and heightened recognition of our spiritual lives, the interest in spiritual direction has increased. In addition to the tradition of spiritual direction taking place between the director and an individual, a new format has developed called group spiritual direction.

My intention for this thesis is twofold: first, to explore the possibility of showing a theological foundation in affirmation of group spiritual direction, and second, to discover if group spiritual direction is aligned with the ecclesiological principle that an important function of the church is to establish spiritual community based on love towards the other in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The paper will begin with an introductory section giving a brief history of the tradition of Christian spiritual direction. This introduction will be followed by a description of the structure and process of group spiritual direction as developed at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. Individual and group spiritual direction will be compared within the framework of the goal or intention of spiritual direction in general.

This thesis will then explore a theology of interpersonal relations in an attempt to understand how being in communion with God and one another fosters the model of *koinonia*. The Trinity is the church's paradigm for ideal community, in which we are invited to participate.

Learning from another is one of the primary ways that humans acquire knowledge about themselves, others, and their world. Historically, we find in all cultures individuals allowing others to be their teachers, guides, and mentors. The obvious social structure that represents this relationship of teacher/student is found within each culture's educational system. Those who possess higher knowledge in a particular field of study teach those who desire to acquire this knowledge. This paradigm of the learned instructing the apprentice or novice is also found within the institution of the church between those who have acquired religious knowledge, spiritual practice, and obedience to God and those who seek to learn from them.

We all participate in living out our lives in the 'matter' of the world through the activities that make up our daily lives. However, all religions assert that our 'selves' are imbued with a spiritual life, and this spiritual aspect of ourselves actually encompasses and permeates our being and all our actions. This spiritual dimension of our being is caused by God. Therefore, humans have a 'holy longing' for this God, who is their creator, sustainer, and their ultimate lover. Acknowledgment of this yearning for the 'Other' leads individuals to seek a personal guide for journeying in the inner life.

Kenneth Leech, in *Soul Friend*, points out that traditions in other cultures have sought spiritual guides designated by such names as *shaman* in South Africa, the *sage* in philosophical schools, the *master* in the arts, and the *guru* in Hinduism.¹ In addition, Leech maintains that in the Jewish tradition, *Yahweh* himself was seen as a 'guide and director' (Psalm 73:24, Wisdom, 7:15), and his word was the lantern of the soul (Psalm 119:105).² Prophets chosen by God were often requested as spiritual guides by kings, or spoke the word of God to kings. Examples abound in the Old Testament of prophets who were specially called to speak to others of Israel's God. From Samuel, Israel's first prophet, to Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and on through the rest of the twelve prophets of Israel, we have those who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, point the way to God.

One might say that Jesus of Nazareth, in his role as a rabbi, was Christianity's first spiritual director. His teachings to his disciples and to those who would hear him spoke directly to the inner life. Jesus' admonition that it is what comes out of the interior of a person that causes sin gives credence to the truth that it is the contents of a person's heart that make him holy or unholy. (Mark 7:21)³ Therefore, Jesus spoke to this inner way as the way of true light and holy life. Certainly the writings of St. Paul and the four evangelists include the teachings of Jesus and the good news of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection expressly for the purpose of

¹ Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2001), 35.

² Leech, *Soul Friend*, 36.

³ *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha* (Cambridge, University Press, 1972), 48. Mark 7:21-23, "He went on, 'It is what comes out of a man that defiles him. For from inside, out of a man's heart, come evil thoughts, arrogance and folly; these evil things all come from inside, and they defile a man.'

enlightening others about the reality of our life in God. Furthermore, in the beginning centuries of the Christian church, the early Fathers such as St. Basil the Great (330-79), St. Gregory Nazianzen (330-87), and St. Jerome (340-420) all wrote letters of direction and encouragement in leading a faith-filled life.

The early Christian Fathers referred to above, as well as the Desert Fathers, considered it a risky undertaking to seek one's true self in God without also seeking a spiritual guide. St. Augustine (354-430) advised "no one can walk without a guide."⁴ The entire basis of monastic community required that one be obedient to the teachings of the church and to one's superiors and surrender one's soul to the care of the Christian community, and particularly the abbot in charge. However, the real impetus for crystallizing the role of a spiritual director came with the acute need for a spiritual guide when early monks of Eastern Christianity chose to lead a solitary, ascetical life in the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. These ascetics of the fourth and fifth century found that they required guidance and discernment and some of them eventually became spiritual fathers and mothers themselves.

In the Anglican tradition, it was always implied in the liturgy of ordination that one of the priest's roles would be that of a spiritual director. In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, part of the prayer that the Bishop says during consecration of the priest is, "Make *him* a faithful pastor, a patient teacher, and a wise councilor."⁵ The idea that being a priest is sufficient for being a spiritual director is reiterated in the

⁴ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 37.

⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer* according to the Episcopal Church (1979), 534.

words of Martin Thornton, an Anglican priest, “It is because a priest has the time for prayer, study, and reflection that his guidance of those in the world’s hurly burly is likely to be worth having.”⁶ In fact, *The Book of Common Prayer* itself is considered a tool of spiritual direction with its inclusion of devotional services and the sacraments, the Psalters, prayers of thanksgivings, catechisms, and historical documents.⁷

Spiritual direction in the Church of England and its counterpart, the Episcopal Church in the United States, draws from a wellspring of writings coming from Roman Catholic spirituality. Included in these spiritual writings would be Ignatius of Loyola’s, *The Spiritual Exercises*; Teresa of Avila’s, *The Way of Perfection*; John of the Cross’s, *The Living Flame of Love*; Thomas a Kempis’s classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, and Francis de Sales’, *Introduction to the Devout Life*. More recently, in the twentieth century, two outstanding books regarding spiritual direction in the Roman Catholic tradition are William A. Barry and William J. Connolly’s, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* and David Fleming’s edition of a collection of articles entitled, *The Christian Ministry of Spiritual Direction*.

In addition, the English mystics also produced writings describing the life of prayer and centeredness on God. English spiritual writings of this era from the fourteenth to the twentieth century include Walter Hilton’s *The Scale of Perfection*,

⁶ Martin Thornton, *The Rock and the River: An Encounter between Traditional Spirituality and Modern Thought* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1965), 141-2.

⁷ Gray Temple, “Spiritual Direction in the Episcopal Tradition” in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*, ed. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner (Downers Grove, Illinois), 82.

Julian of Norwich's *Showings: Revelations of Divine Love*, the anonymous author's *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, Reginald Somerset Ward's *The Way* and *Following the Way*, and Evelyn Underhill's, *The Life of the Spirit and The Life of Today*. In the Episcopal Church, leaders in writing about the praxis and guidance of the religious life include Tilden Edwards, former Director of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, and author of *Living in the Presence*, Gerald May, a psychiatrist, spiritual director and author of *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*; Margaret Guenther, Episcopal priest, spiritual director, and former Director of the Center for Christian Spirituality at General Theological Seminary and author of *Holy Listening*; Alan Jones, Episcopal priest and Director of the Center for Christian Spirituality at General Theological Seminary, and later Dean of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, author of *Soul Making* and *Exploring Spiritual Direction*.

Recently, in the past two decades, there has been an amazing development of spiritual direction and formation training programs offered by higher educational settings throughout the United States and England. One might say that in America spiritual direction “exploded on the scene in the late 20th century.”⁸ There have been many reasons given for the heightened recognition of the value of spiritual direction. Within the Episcopal Church itself, there is the academic expression recognized by the establishment of the Center for Christian Spirituality. In addition, the Cursillo movement has enriched the life of the laity, and consequently, parishioners are seeking further spiritual nurture. Some suggest that as a result of

⁸ Peter Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction* (Harrisburg – New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2007), 93.

our technological and psychotherapeutic age, persons are seeking a sense of life's meaning grounded in the divine. The integration of psychology and theology "reveals a growing shift in attention to Christian spirituality and its potential role in clinical practice."⁹ Therefore, spiritual direction, with its holistic view of the person and its use of "soul talk," avoids compartmentalizing our psyche from our whole being sustained by the Triune God.

It is now expected that education in seminaries will comprise not only the academic, but also include the teaching and embracing of traditional spiritual disciplines. However, whether one be ordained or lay, it is not the training that makes a person automatically qualified to offer spiritual direction. A spiritual director is recognized by the community when people continuously seek that person out for spiritual guidance. It is commonly agreed that a person wishing to offer spiritual direction must be someone who is seriously committed to a life of holiness and whose life has God as his or her center. One cannot give to another what one does not possess. So, the spiritual director should be one who has sought to progress down the road of spiritual formation and who has struggled with the life of prayer and a surrendering of the false self. This process is never completed and directors would do well to recognize that they are not only mentors, but also pilgrims on the way. To be engaged in this inner journey towards God includes a willingness to learn the wisdom of scripture and the teachings of theologians past and present. And most importantly, since it is the Holy Spirit who is the true guide for each of us, spiritual directors acknowledge that they simply help another

⁹ Moon and Benner, ed., *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*, 8.

recognize the “inspirations of grace in his life . . . and to which end God is leading him.”¹⁰

Part II: Spiritual Direction: Purpose and Content

Spiritual direction is a relationship in which one person agrees to companion another person who seeks a closer relationship with God. Formal spiritual direction includes relationships that are clearly defined as spiritual direction with a separation of roles between director and directee. It therefore follows that the director is the person who is prepared to offer his or her self in the service of the directee by offering hospitality in the form of holy listening and prayerful conversation whose purpose is always to point to the Divine. For the purposes of clarity, the occasions of mutual and spontaneous spiritual guidance or companioning that occur between persons will not be considered in this project as representing formal spiritual direction because of the lack of stated role structure and sole intention of the relationship.

There are as many ways to describe the purpose of spiritual direction as there are spiritual directors. Though the numerous purported goals in spiritual direction are often described differently, it is helpful and necessary to distill the objectives in spiritual direction before there can be a discussion of the process that allows it to happen. In spiritual direction the primary goal seems to be intentionally seeking

¹⁰ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 85.

and responding to the presence and action of God.¹¹ But this goal actually becomes a process, a way of living into our dynamic relationship with God and each other. Therefore, if the goal is achieved in the *process* of awareness and response, then it is ongoing throughout our life. Perhaps it is best then to say that the purpose of spiritual direction is not some defined end, even if a perfectly good one such as “achieving a more intimate relationship with God” or “becoming more Christ-like.” These ends are what we may hope for, but it is the experiential process of the spiritual direction relationship itself that grows the fruit. Spiritual direction is “focused on one’s lived relationship with God.”¹² So, if one sets up an abstract goal, such as becoming a contemplative, achieving holiness, or a following a certain practice of prayer, one has forsaken the relationship and the work of responding to God by setting up one’s own criteria for success. For the individual who seeks to be with God, there are no definable goals; there is only the willingness to enter into relationship with God. Thus Jesus asks us to follow in these words, “If any want to become my followers, let them . . . take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34). Jesus concludes with, “Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?” (Mk 8:37).

So, entering into this relationship of spiritual direction with another lends itself for our transformation. With intention, we enter with others into the ocean of the divine where the Spirit of God hovers over the waters. And notice that there are

¹¹ Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York & London: Continuum, 2008), 19.

¹² Gene Barrette, “Spiritual Direction in the Roman Catholic Tradition” in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*, 56.

two words used in seeding the ground for spiritual direction: *awareness* and *response*. Barry and Connolly define spiritual direction as

help given to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God . . . and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas. Moreover, the experience is viewed . . . as an expression of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each of us.¹³

In other words, in spiritual direction there is a clear recognition and acceptance that God is "the ground of our being."¹⁴ So, half of the purpose of spiritual direction is contained in the single intention of the person to listen, notice, and increase awareness of God within: the indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit; the other half concerns living out the consequences, or our response to God's action within us. The process for any individual in spiritual direction would stop if there were no response on the part of the individual to God. If being in relationship with God is only for the sake of cultivating spiritual experiences, then there is no real relationship. In friendship, as in marriage, there is a shared moral purpose; and this is to attend to each other for the purpose of sanctification.¹⁵ There is a consent and purity of heart that we desire the good of the other. If spiritual direction is only for

¹³ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (Harper San Francisco: a Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1982), 8.

¹⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Vol: I* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 21.

¹⁵ Robert D. Hughes, III, *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life* (New York –London: Continuum, 2008), 347. In his chapter titled "Love of Friendship and Life in Community," Hughes insists that friendship is also at the heart of marriage and that "marriage is a form of vowed common life for the sanctification of the couple."

the experience of another or of God, then one is just *using* God or the other. When one sees the other only to be experienced, but not to be in relation, the 'I' makes the other an 'It.' "The world as experience belongs to the basic word "I-It,"¹⁶ as Martin Buber describes. In Martin Buber's relational mode of existence, the 'I – You' establishes the world of relation; "relation is reciprocity."¹⁷ If we accept Buber's basic 'I-Thou' as "spoken only with one's whole being"¹⁸ then a person who says 'Thou' to the Lord stands in relation to God. By response, then, we mean that we allow ourselves to become living pieces of clay that God, in her all-knowing hands, shapes into our truest selves with unerring fidelity. The sacred space that is created, whether in a one-to-one relationship or within a group, allows for, or should allow for, each person to know herself as God's beloved as Christ was the Beloved. "If there is a single factor that makes spiritual direction effective it is this: spiritual direction holds our shame at bay enough for us to see ourselves as God sees us in Christ."¹⁹ Thomas Merton wrote that spiritual direction "is a continuous process of formation and guidance, in which a Christian is led and encouraged in his *special*

¹⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou: A new translation, with a prologue and notes by Walter Kaufmann* (New York: Simon & Schuster, First Touchstone edition, 1996), 56. Walter Kaufmann, translator of Buber's "I and Thou" says that 'I – You' (*You* as contemporary substitute for *Thou*) "is celebrated." 18.

¹⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 58.

¹⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

¹⁹ Gray Temple, "Spiritual Direction in the Episcopal Church," in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*, 87.

vocation by the graces of the Holy Spirit”²⁰ who indwells the depths of our entire being.

In sum, then, the primary goal of spiritual direction is to aid the directee in intentionally seeking and responding to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The seeking and responding are verbs pointing out that spiritual direction is a process, and that the response is ultimately the responsibility of the directee. The director is present in the relationship to guide the seeker into awareness of experiences of God and to foster a person’s growing relationship with God. The content of spiritual direction is open to every aspect of a person’s life: prayer, work, family life, community life, leisure activities, failures, fears, hopes, and disappointments; but the content is always related back to seeking and naming the presence of God within his life. In a spiritual direction relationship there is a clear recognition that God is present as the third party in the relationship. It follows, then, that each person in the relationship must hold the fundamental faith that God is at work within the world and within all persons.

In conclusion, the pattern of spiritual direction between the desert monk and a novice or between an English mystic and a seeker was most often embodied in a one-to-one relationship. But later, in the cenobitical monasteries, spiritual formation for its members grew out of the community’s shared spiritual disciplines. Then various Christian denominations formed small groups for the explicit purpose of affirming and supporting an individual’s faith journey. In the past twenty-five

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation and What Is Contemplation?* (Wheathampstead – Hertfordshire: Anthony Clarke), 14-15.

years, with the increase in interest and practice of contemplative prayer and the heightened recognition of the spiritual dimensions of our lives, the need for spiritual direction has increased. In addition to the tradition of spiritual direction taking place between a director and an individual, there has developed a new format called group spiritual direction. The following chapter will explore the beginnings, structure, and process of group spiritual direction.

CHAPTER TWO

Group Spiritual Direction: What is it?

In 1979, the late, Gerald G. May, past Director for Research and Development at the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., published *Pilgrimage Home: The Conduct of Contemplative Practice in Groups* as “a resource for anyone who is engaged in helping others grow in spiritual awareness.”²¹ He notes how the Shalem Institute, begun in 1972, produced “insights, thoughts, and experiences”²² with spiritual formation. In describing the spiritual journey, May refers to the paradox that while there is a real sense of a solitary relationship and experience of the Divine, there is also the inescapable and ever present knowledge that without other people sharing our inner journey, it becomes meaningless. So, though we are alone with God, and our inner being is held within God’s being; “without other people, solitude would have neither perspective nor purpose.”²³ Hence, the Shalem Institute, formed for the purpose of ecumenical training in spiritual formation, began exploring spiritual formation in groups, a venture that evolved into group spiritual direction.

Rose Mary Dougherty, former Director for Spiritual Guidance at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Direction, wrote, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* in 1995. It describes almost twenty-five years of collaborative work in teaching the process and offering the fruits of spiritual direction. Dougherty presents one necessary and hence

²¹ Gerald G. May, *Pilgrimage Home: The Conduct of Contemplative Practice in Groups* (New York & Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), v.

²² May, *Pilgrimage Home*, v.

²³ May, *Pilgrimage Home*, 31.

foundational reason for entering into spiritual direction: Benedict's question to seekers who came to join the monastery, "Do you seek God?" She considered this God-seeking to be at the heart of spiritual direction and spiritual community: "Not only is spiritual community the ambiance in which spiritual direction occurs, but also spiritual direction is often the means through which spiritual community is most clearly recognized and claimed."²⁴ This is a critical insight, and it bears on the degree to which the spiritual community can reach the ideal community within the Trinity, a concept elaborated below in Chapter Three. Dougherty sees spiritual community occurring "where two or three are gathered in my name" (Mt 18:20). So, why the push for a structure and process for groups in which spiritual direction can happen? I think Dougherty is suggesting that the bond of spiritual community that develops when we share our common will to seek God is what nourishes our life of faith. She saw this in the sayings of Christ in the gospels and in the letters of Paul that will be delineated later, all of which spoke to the need to build-up one another in the name of Christ. "Our searching, our wanting is reflective of God's seeking us and God's dream for community planted in us."²⁵ Dougherty reflects on the forms of spiritual community succeeding the life of Christ in the early church, followed later with the vowed monastic communities, and then including all the present day forms of community within different Christian denominations such as the Jesuit Christian Life Communities, Cursillo and Group Reunion, Methodist accountability groups, and dozens more. But Dougherty sees the strength of spiritual community being present when

²⁴ Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York & Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1995), 7.

²⁵ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 13.

persons are brought together out of “respect for each others’ relationship with God.”²⁶

This perspective is what led her to create a contemplative group form of spiritual direction.

To continue with some basic questions and answers that will define group spiritual direction: its intention, structure, and process; and the essential elements that allow group spiritual direction to occur. Group spiritual direction’s intention is a deepening of the relationship with God for each member of the group and an honoring of the work of the Holy Spirit within the group. There is an understanding that it is the Triune God within each person who does the spiritual healing and growth. Through the vehicle of the group, the movement of the Holy Spirit occurs. The intention is to assist each other to become aware of and to respond to God’s invitation continually occurring within each person. This is not for ourselves only, but for the sake of God’s desire for us to love one another as revealed in Christ’s love for us. The intention does require a certain attitude and willingness on the part of the participants: “to enter into God’s prayer” for each other.²⁷ Dougherty summarizes the requirements encompassing intention as: “a shared desire for God, a reverence for the uniqueness of the Spirit’s manifestation in each person, and a willingness to be prayerfully present for one another during the group time and to pray for one another outside the group.”²⁸ In short, the intent of the group is to support one another’s relationship with God.

²⁶ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 14.

²⁷ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 14.

²⁸ “Introduction,” *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D., ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 7.

In addressing the structure of the group, Dougherty says that the process best happens in a group of four to five people, with three as minimum. For now it is sufficient to recommend that prospective members acknowledge a seeking of God, a willingness to share their spiritual journey with others, and a basic understanding of spiritual direction. One of the members always acts as the facilitator each time the group meets. The facilitator acts as a compass keeping the content and purpose of the group always pointing towards God. Depending on the individual's experience and familiarity with the process of group spiritual direction, there may initially be one group member designated as the facilitator. Later, as the group members become acquainted with the process, the role of facilitator can rotate to a different member for each meeting. The facilitator "functions as a time-keeper and as one who protects the climate of prayerful listening for the group."²⁹ If one person is in the role of facilitator as the group coalesces, she is not a director in the group, but shares fully in the rest of the process. Tilden Edwards, in his book, *Spiritual Friend*, suggests that there be "the clear leadership"³⁰ of a group director which would indicate the appropriateness of the facilitator's having some experience with spiritual direction.

The suggested length of time allowed for meetings was either a two hour session³¹ or two and a half hour session,³² being divided into various parcels of time depending on the exact method chosen by the group. The frequency of meetings really depends on the

²⁹ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 38.

³⁰ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (Paulist Press, 1980), 174.

³¹ Tilden H. Edwards, *Living in the Presence: Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 132.

³² Dougherty, *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 11.

decision of the group members. However, it is stressed that each of the members must be willing to make a commitment to an agreed length of time over which the group will meet, and make regular attendance a priority. In addition, it is suggested that the initial meetings be more frequent, say weekly, with the interval increasing to bi-weekly, and monthly for those groups that meet over the span of a year or more.

A process used by both Rose Mary Dougherty and Tilden Edwards, Founding Director of Shalem Institute, would include these components: silent gathering, the sharing of a participant, silence, response from the group, silence, and ending with reflection on time together or closure. Edwards also uses a prayer method for guidance into attentive silence and allows for a time of journal keeping and rest. An example of a two hour group spiritual direction meeting may go like this. People come in and greet each other, and enter into shared silence. Then the facilitator will invite someone to begin sharing when he or she is ready. The presenter then shares uninterrupted, for a limited time of ten to fifteen minutes. After the presenter is finished sharing, there is silence again for no more than five minutes. Then each group member can respond to the presenter. It is important that each member is given a turn to respond, or a member may choose not to respond. The only dialogue would consist of brief comments that the presenter might want to offer after all the members have responded. There is again a brief silence for the purposes of praying for the person who just presented. Then the process is started again until each member has presented. The ending group reflection time is not meant to go over the content of the sharing, but a time for observing what was helpful during the group process and what was not helpful in attending to the presence of

the Spirit within the group. Dougherty described this closing process this way, “It should be a gentle looking, and a noticing with God how the time together went.”³³

Of course, how a group divides up the time segments in the meetings determines the length of the meetings, and the time allowed for each person or just some of the members to present, is quite flexible. What seems to be critical for the support of the group spiritual direction process is the sequencing of the elements of silence, sharing, response, and then silence. This method tames the natural dynamics of group interaction that can subvert the group’s process and intention. The structure requiring shared silence and no cross talk eliminates the likelihood of the group falling into advice giving, problem solving, intellectualizing, and psychoanalyzing a person’s sharing. Silence practiced within a group seems to reduce the “tendency to have certain group dynamics occur such as developing a narrow group identity, establishing a hierarchy of group members, and struggles with issues of control and competition.”³⁴ Instead, in the silence there is created a space for attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit within ourselves and within the group. In reality, any response becomes a prayer offered for the other: “Prayerful silence nurtures discernment in group spiritual direction, just as it does in one-to-one spiritual direction.”³⁵ This contemplative attitude fostered by silence and holy listening for the other needs to occur in any spiritual direction relationship to invite the mystery of God’s

³³ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 53.

³⁴ May, *Pilgrimage Home*, 39.

³⁵ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 35.

presence and action. So, in silence “our fears and struggles simply simmer down,”³⁶ and we can begin to rest and relax into the presence of God and each other.

Another element essential to the structure and hence method used in group spiritual direction is intercessory prayer. Dougherty insists that “unless there is an active commitment”³⁷ by each member to hold the other in intercessory prayer during the meetings and between the meetings, group spiritual direction will be ineffectual. She defines intercessory prayer as each person’s prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the life of each member of the group. It is an attitude and a willingness to “enter into God’s prayer for ourselves . . . and for another.”³⁸ It is important not to see intercessory prayer as our petition that God “do” something in particular for this person, that some particular outcome is ordained desirable by God, the directee or the pray-er. In praying for another, it is important only to acknowledge that God desires to be in relationship with that person, and one prays that the person can enter into a creative, life-giving relationship with God, however that may look. There is no pre-decided will of God that needs to be determined, or uncovered. Rather, God’s ongoing relationship with each of us is being created continuously, and God “waits for us to join in.”³⁹ Thus we are God’s partners and the nature of creation is open and dynamic. Therefore in intercessory prayer, we pray that the other will be faithful in seeking a way to be loving and creative with God. “Behold I am doing a new thing. Even now it emerges. Do you not perceive

³⁶ May, *Pilgrimage Home*, 40.

³⁷ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 57.

³⁸ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 20.

³⁹ Don MacDougall, “Intercessory Prayer and Group Spiritual Direction”, in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 266.

it?” (Isa 43:19). Meanwhile, we suffer with them and bear with them their experience in God of “awakening, recognition, purification, surrender and transformation.”⁴⁰ To summarize then, the inclusion of silence and intercessory prayer distills “the intention to rely on God, to seek God actively, and to wait for God’s leading.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ MacDougall, “Intercessory Prayer,” 265.

⁴¹ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 2.

CHAPTER THREE

A Comparison of Group Spiritual Direction To Individual Spiritual Direction

Structure is the most obvious difference between individual and group direction since the setting for individual spiritual direction includes two persons, the spiritual director and the directee, whereas the setting for group spiritual direction includes three or more persons, thus allowing for the emergence of group dynamics. Before any discussion of group dynamics, it is best to explore first any significant changes brought about by the group versus individual structure. Most of these differences will pertain to the needs of the directee and his or her place in a relationship with God. But it is important to note that in any spiritual direction relationship there is creation of spiritual community. Spiritual community becomes a reality only if the persons are rooted in their desire to deepen their relationship with God. Therefore one-to-one spiritual direction and group spiritual direction both comprise spiritual community.

First let us now consider the directee whose needs may initially be met best by individual spiritual direction. There are events or periods in a person's life that may trigger a crisis in the relation with God or the foundation of faith. It may be easier to discuss and examine such an intense experience with a single director. This would be the case for the person experiencing a deep and unexpected change in spiritual awareness: "the stability and 'concreteness' of communing with one person allows for more time to determine where the directee really is."⁴² Also, the building of trust and confidentiality

⁴²Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 175.

may be a priority if this is the directee's first decision to explore his or her relationship with God. In addition, some persons may seek spiritual direction just to be sure they are on the right track concerning prayer or their thoughts on the nature of God. Or they may possibly be going through a period of restlessness and want to make sense of their experiences. In other words, for their purposes, a short term spiritual direction relationship would give the answers they need. In sum, individual spiritual direction consistently puts more focus on the individual directee, allows for more confidentiality, and a greater flexibility in the rhythm of interaction. And it is a most necessary option if this is the type of relationship to which the person is called. After all, the spiritual direction "begins with an invitation from God to be together."⁴³

By the same token, care should be exercised in forming a group for spiritual guidance. As stated earlier, prospective members should have a shared desire for God, a willingness to share their spiritual journey with others, and the understanding that the content of the group will be each person's awareness and experience of God. It follows that group members have shared expectations and be willing to adhere to the structure which supports the intent of listening to each other and the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that one does not have to decide between group and individual spiritual guidance. Those who are in great need of individual dialogue should stay in one-to-one spiritual direction, but they can also participate in a group simultaneously. The benefits in group spiritual direction include an exposure to a greater variety of faith experiences, the stimulus of mutuality of support from others, and the advantage of group accountability. In addition, some people may find it easier to share in a group setting. However, in order to be clear,

⁴³ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 18.

there are advantages and disadvantages both in one-to-one spiritual direction and in group spiritual direction. The main advantage of individual spiritual direction is that the directee receives the complete focus of the time spent in direction. The main disadvantage is the danger of dependency and diminishing returns by the influence of the director. The main advantage of group spiritual direction is that it more closely resembles a spiritual community “drawing a person into a larger sense of identity.”⁴⁴ This idea of a small group “reflecting the larger corporate nature of life and the Church”⁴⁵ will be given further explanation below. The main disadvantage of group spiritual direction is the danger of group dynamics becoming more important than paying attention to God; thus the group itself subverts the intention to listen to God.

The process, meaning, and flow of discussion will definitely have more variety in individual spiritual direction simply because there are no set parameters imposed by group interaction. Therefore any methods used such as silence, meditative reflection, questions, story-telling, prayer, and relaying of information are dependent upon the director and the directee. As stated above, the group process will need to be an agreed upon sequence or structure in order to inform the expectations of the group and provide stability for the intent.

In general, the intent of one-to-one and group spiritual direction is the same. Spiritual direction means companionship with another person or a group in which the journey of faith is viewed within the events of everyday life in order to grow in intimacy with God. Spiritual direction is a form of pastoral care provided through listening, prayer, silence,

⁴⁴ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 175.

⁴⁵ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 175.

reflection, and responding. It goes without saying that a life of prayer is a proper, central concern within spiritual direction, but only one aspect of our discipleship and service in Jesus Christ with others. It is a relationship in which one Christian assists another or a group assists each other in listening for the “footprints” of God in their lives, a process of helping people tell their sacred stories. Spiritual formation takes place when we are in solitude and prayer with God and also when we are in relationship with others. In both forms of spiritual direction, it is the relationships that become the vehicle of grace; God is responsible for healing and growth that occurs.

It is the relational, the being-in-relation, that will be further explored as the means in which the individual achieves personhood. This concept of personhood relates directly to the individual’s acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension of her life. Paul Tillich espouses that each individual has the potential for self-actualization. This self-actualization is contained within three processes: self-integration, self-creativity, and self-transcendence. Paradoxically, while the presence of the other does limit us, still, the only way for personal life to emerge is through encounter with another centered person. “Therefore, the self-integration of the person as a person occurs in a community, within which the continuous mutual encounter of centered self with centered self is possible and actual.”⁴⁶ In Chapter Three, the philosophy of personhood by John Macmurray, the theology of being as communion by John Zizioulas, the four forms of implicit love by Simone Weil, and life in community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer will point to the capacity of love towards all others to reflect most the divine community in the Christian Triune God.

⁴⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III, Life and the Spirit History and the Kingdom of God* (The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 40-41.

CHAPTER FOUR

Theology of Personhood, Friendship, and Community

In Relation to the Triune God

In 1982, William A. Barry, S.J., co-authored a book with William J. Connolly, S.J., entitled *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, often used as a text in classes and programs teaching about the ministry of spiritual direction. With the publication of *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God* in 2004, Barry sought to explicate further the theological foundation for spiritual direction and to extend the experience of God beyond prayer to include our encounter with God in all of life. Specifically, Barry begins with saying “the God Christians believe in is revealed in Jesus Christ” and that we must “take into account the trinitarian dimension of the encounter with God in this world.”⁴⁷ In particular Barry locates his support of spiritual direction as grounded within community, which all persons desire.

Barry bases this view on John Macmurray’s philosophy that all human beings have been invited into the “mysterious community which is the Trinity,”⁴⁸ and thus with one another. Macmurray, a late twentieth century Scottish philosopher, summarizes his two volume work, *The Form of the Personal*, published as the Gifford Lectures delivered in Glasgow in 1953-54, by saying: “All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship.”⁴⁹ Thus Barry offers, “The ultimate goal of all ministry in the church, and especially the ministry of spiritual direction, is the

⁴⁷ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 3.

⁴⁸ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 42.

⁴⁹ John Macmurray, *The Self As Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 15.

intent to foster community or friendship.”⁵⁰ The idea that all action should result in fostering community is based on Macmurray’s philosophy that “the one creative act of God”⁵¹ includes the world and the free actions of all human beings. Macmurray concludes that God has a single intention for this world, and that is for the world to reflect the ideal Trinitarian community found within the three persons in God. Since God created us as free agents, the attainment of God’s intention depends on our actions; so, for example, if we attune or align our intentions with God’s desire for oneness in community, we can see ourselves as co-creators with God. Christians believe that Jesus Christ Incarnate, the second person in the Trinity, revealed God’s intention that we are “united with Jesus Christ as sons and daughters of God” and are to be “in harmony with the whole created universe.”⁵² This Kingdom of God cannot be of this world because it is transcendent, though it is immanent in a present, but not fully realized condition.

Macmurray’s foundational thought is that personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons. Macmurray agrees with Emmanuel Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason” that it is wrong to imagine that we know by reason only, as in Descartes’ dictum, “I think, therefore I am.” Macmurray objected to the idea that self-reflection can encounter reality. “The Self who is just thinking is withdrawn from action and encounter with others or the world.”⁵³ On the contrary, Macmurray does not see the subject, the Self,

⁵⁰ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 5.

⁵¹ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 13. Macmurray proposes that all intentional action includes unintentional events. The world is not a complex process of events; to think this would mean that all action is predetermined, which it is not. “We can act only through the knowledge of the Other. We must therefore, as agents, think the world as a unity.” Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 220.

⁵² Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 17.

⁵³ Macmurray, *The Self As Agent*, 11.

and the object, the world, through a totally separate way of knowing. Instead, knowledge of the world is a result of our encounter with the world, our action. Action presupposes knowledge and increases our knowledge as result of that experience. Macmurray's philosophy of action precedes his philosophy of the interpersonal. The following excerpt taken from *Persons in Relation* sums up the thesis of Macmurray's philosophy of the Self as *person*:

The idea of an isolated agent is self-contradictory. Any agent is necessarily in relation to the Other. Apart from this essential relation he does not exist.

But further, the Other in this constitutive relation must be personal.

Persons, therefore, are constituted by their mutual relation to one another. 'I' exist only as one element in the complex 'You and I.'⁵⁴

In other words, without at least one You with whom I am in personal relation, I do not exist as a person, since persons are constituted by their personal relations. And this relationship is intentional, not just a matter of fact because of our existence.

For now let us to proceed with Macmurray's form of the personal and his answer as to why the form of the personal fails for each of us. Action taken by any person includes both positive and negative characteristics. The positive is our motivation to be in relation with the other, and Macmurray argues that this is what God intends. However, quite obviously, all persons experience disharmony, resistance, and obstacles in forming relationship with others. Macmurray believes this is because our motivation to be in

⁵⁴ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1961), 24.

relation “has a positive and negative pole which he identifies as love and fear.”⁵⁵ Ideally fear is subordinated to love centered on the other. Macmurray acknowledges that this bipolar personal motivation may seem simplistic, but it is based on our experience as newborn children. We humans are born completely helpless; human babies respond to and require the care and relation they receive from their mothers and fathers.

Immediately, the child is part of the You and I. Each child cares about being in relation with its loving caretakers. The child has the experience of the enjoyment of love, and the experience of fear for the self by the withdrawal of love. However, on reflection, these two dimensions of our lives, love and fear, are exactly what Jesus was addressing in teaching love of God and others while fearing nothing. The behavior we engage in as we encounter the world “is highly complex and diversified”⁵⁶ and often persons are not entirely aware of the motives of their action.

In his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ revealed how to live perfectly into love. Yet all human relationships are inevitably flawed due to the presence of unrecognized fear for our self and fear of the other. When fear is predominant, the person withdraws from the other into herself. Still, we must admit that our deepest desire is to be intentionally in relation with significant others, and secondly, our motivation in relating to the other contains two components, love and fear.⁵⁷ Macmurray believes that

⁵⁵ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 47.

⁵⁶ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 68.

⁵⁷ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 70. “Thus both love and fear fall within the personal relation . . . and fear, as the negative, presupposes love and is subordinate to it.”

mutuality is necessary for the personal, so “It follows that ‘I’ need ‘You’ in order to be myself.”⁵⁸

However, what an individual is searching for cannot necessarily be the ideal relation as much as embracing intentional relation, of offering to be in relation. This is a gift offered to another; it cannot be demanded nor can it be forced upon the other. “Be that as it may, the human situation is the daunting one of needing significant others in order to be oneself.”⁵⁹ The implication is that the individual I is dependent upon being in relation to a You in order to achieve personhood. Hence, all the songs with the same theme, I need you to love me, reflect much truth. The flip side of this song is “Can I love you”? Thus Macmurray will say, “We can therefore formulate the inherent ideal of the personal. It is a universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself.”⁶⁰ Macmurray believes that “religion exists to serve the personal.”⁶¹ In other words, the purpose of religion is to establish community as one in Christ. The concept of religion being in support of the community of persons is not new. The word *religion*, derived from the Latin *religio*, means to tie up, to bind, to connect. However, Barry’s intent is to discover the theological ground for spiritual direction within the Christian community. In Macmurray, he found philosophical support for *why* individuals need to be in community: for the development of their personhood. “Fear and egocentrism lead us to resist God’s action, and spiritual direction is a singularly appropriate ministry to

⁵⁸ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 69.

⁵⁹ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 49.

⁶⁰ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 159.

⁶¹ Christoph Schwobel, and Colin E. Gunton, ed., *Persons, Divine and Human: King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 127.

help us to overcome our fears and egocentrism.”⁶² But an even more central theological foundation for our drive to risk entering into community is “the mysterious presence of God who is always acting to draw us into community with the Trinity and thus with one another.”⁶³ Macmurray did not delve into the theology of the Trinity as the cause for our drive to be in community. He did, however, view religion’s proper function of establishing community and celebrating community as a response to the personal Other to whom we are all related: “Hence the Other is seen as the Creator and the one that can defeat the death which would express the victory of the forces of nature and our isolation from the community of the living.”⁶⁴ Based on Macmurray’s conception of the world as God’s one action, with God having a unitary intention for the whole Creation, then we are God’s created agents “with a limited and dependent freedom to determine the future.”⁶⁵ How do we speak of God’s one intent? “Christians believe that God’s intention is for all human beings to live as brothers and sisters in a community of faith, hope, and love, united with Jesus Christ as sons and daughters of God, our Father. . . .”⁶⁶

But do we experience God as Trinity? Based on Macmurray’s philosophy that persons are constituted by their relations, it follows then that in a mysterious fashion we participate in the life of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because our God is a personal God. God particularly and creatively offered to be in relation to us in the Person made flesh in Jesus Christ; and the person of Christ, through the gift of the Holy Spirit,

⁶² Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 5.

⁶³ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 5.

⁶⁴ Schwobel and Gunton, ed., *Persons, Divine and Human*, 128.

⁶⁵ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 13.

⁶⁶ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 17.

continues to be united with us. Thus we are invited into the relation of love that binds Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Examining the theology of John Zizioulas will help us further understand how the three Persons within God are themselves constituted by their relation to one another. John Zizioulas is an Eastern Orthodox theologian and Bishop of Pergamon, whose systematic theology of the ontology of personhood is rooted in the personal communion of the Trinity. It is interesting to note that Zizioulas's personalism has theological tenets similar to the twentieth century philosophies of Martin Buber and John Macmurray. "In Zizioulas's ontology, the person is ontologically unique, non-enumerable, 'communitarian and relational,' in such a way that the concept of 'person' is opposed to that of 'individual.'"⁶⁷ Critics of Zizioulas's ontology of the person say that in his scheme persons have no substance, but are merely relations, that our *being* shifts as our relationships change. But Zizioulas does not put relationship before *person*; rather *person* and *relation* are simultaneous. Zizioulas honors the particularity of each being as created by God the Father. In *Being as Communion*, published in 1985, Zizioulas tries to reconcile the One with the Many. For Zizioulas, communion means oneness and otherness. He views the Trinity as the ideal communion: the divine persons are truly One and yet are the source of their Otherness. Zizioulas does not deny the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ to the Father, but he gives priority to viewing the divine being from the perspective of divine personhood. Zizioulas rejects the idea that personhood is secondary to divine substance, "ousias." Just as the particularity or otherness of a human person is constituted by being in relation, so is God's being caused by the interpersonal relation

⁶⁷ Douglas Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishers Limited, 2007), 44.

among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Zizioulas agrees that it is important to see all three persons in the Trinity as one substance, but sees Personhood, the communion of persons, as the ontological source of their common substance.⁶⁸ The hypostatic identities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are relational, inseparable, and free.

The three persons of the Trinity are thus one God, because they are so united in an unbreakable communion that none of them can be conceived apart from the rest. The mystery of the one God in three persons points to a way of being which precludes individualism and separation.⁶⁹

Zizioulas connects the human striving for personhood with the personal communion of the Trinity in Christ's particular identity as the Son to the Father. Christ brings persons into communion because in him the two natures, human and divine, are united. Through baptism and "new birth" we are given the gift of personhood as Christ's person is eternal gift as the Second person within the Trinity, the Son to the Father. This is the meaning of the phrase in Scripture about being born "anew" or "from above" (John 3:3,7). In our own created beings and existence, achieving personhood unconditionally and in perfect love is not available. But through Christ's act of salvation, we are offered the opportunity to enter into a relationship with God as sons and daughters, and hence with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. The following excerpt taken from *Being as Communion* is an excellent summary of our inclusion into the communion of the Trinity:

Christology consequently is the proclamation to man that his nature

⁶⁸ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 17.

⁶⁹ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 57.

can be “assumed” and hypostasized in a manner free from the ontological necessity of his biological hypostasis, which, as we have seen, leads to the tragedy of individualism and death. Thanks to Christ man can henceforth himself “subsist”, can affirm his existence as personal not on the basis of the immutable laws of nature, but on the basis of a relationship with God which is identified with what Christ in freedom and love possesses as Son of God with the Father.⁷⁰

In essence, Zizioulas’s ontology of personhood argues that full humanity is granted as *person* in that each of us can participate in *koinonia* through the Trinitarian life of God. *Koinonia* refers to a special communion of love between the people of the Church created by the Holy Spirit. This divine-human *koinonia*, in Zizioulas’s view, is the result of the ecclesial identity the person receives from the church.⁷¹ This ecclesial identity is based on the ground-breaking notion that the church is a “communion of the Spirit.”⁷² “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). Literally, the Spirit is there to bind us, bring us together in one another.

Before we complete discussion of Zizioulas’s explanation of our being in communion with the Trinity, we need to address the Third Person of the Trinity, namely the Holy Spirit. More will be said in a later chapter relating the Spirit’s presence between persons within the church. Enough to say here, that through Christ’s person we now can obtain

⁷⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 56.

⁷¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 107. “Zizioulas’s most distinctive idea that permeates all of his theology and his view of the church is that of *koinonia*, communion.”, 106.

⁷² Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 104. A noteworthy development in the World Council of Churches, WCC, occurring in 1993 during the Faith and Order Conference of Santiago de Compostela, is the “emphasis on *koinonia*-theology . . . since there is a growing consensus that the church is a “communion of the Spirit.”

community in the Trinity, and we are brought into community by the action of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, we are hypostatically united with the Father; through the Holy Spirit we are united to Christ and to other persons. As Barry explains, “In the church the Spirit unites the person of Christ to the person of each believer.”⁷³ This is what Zizioulas describes as the “ontology of love”;⁷⁴ we participate in the relation of love that binds Father and Son together, and the source of this binding love is the person of the Spirit.

To move beyond describing Macmurray’s philosophical ontology of personhood and Zizioulas’s theological ontology of personhood, it would be helpful now to evaluate the role of the Church, indeed, of religion itself, in fostering transcendence of the human being from individual to person in relation. Beginning with religion, Macmurray asserts that religion is a universal experience: “no human society has ever existed without a religion of some kind.”⁷⁵ Therefore, religion is the result of a universal, common, but personal experience that makes us more than biological organisms. Religion is not just a function of culture and civilization, but is also the foundation for their growth. And finally, a religion’s purpose or intention is to be inclusive of every member of that society. Macmurray concludes that religion addresses the problem of human existence, and he deems the relation of persons in community as ultimate concern. Macmurray concludes that the persons in relation through the church are “a unity of persons as persons.”⁷⁶ The relation supersedes a biological or functional purpose. Tillich uses the

⁷³ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 46.

⁷⁴ Schwobel and Gunton, ed., *Persons, Divine and Human*, 15.

⁷⁵ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 156.

⁷⁶ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 157.

term ultimate concern with regard to the human question of being and non-being; this concern is put forth in and answered within the dimension of the spirit in human life.⁷⁷

Zizioulas concurs with this notion of personal relationship transcending existential being. He states, “The first and most important characteristic of the Church is that she brings man into a kind of relationship with the world which is not determined by the laws of biology.”⁷⁸ Zizioulas speaks of an ecclesial hypostasis, a new birth given by the Church in baptism. Human beings then receive the hypostasis of authentic personhood by inclusion in the Trinity of God.⁷⁹ Zizioulas also views the result of our adoption by God as extending our family to include all persons; thus man transcends exclusivism. Through the Church, the individual becomes a catholic person, a universal person open to the love of all others, thus surpassing individuality.

Before returning to Barry’s discussion of the ministry of the church, it is important to emphasize that in this world, the human experience of authentic personhood is never complete. We as humans cannot escape our biological or existential being. The essential quality of life is our potential of life in the spirit. The existential quality of life is our actual existence within our human nature which can lead to life’s ambiguities.⁸⁰ Our

⁷⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III*, 130. A further note with regard to the term ultimate concern: “Faith, formally or generally defined, is the state of being grasped by that toward which self-transcendence aspires, the ultimate in being and meaning. In a short formula, one can say that faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern.”

⁷⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 56.

⁷⁹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 56. “This adoption of man by God, the identification of his hypostasis with the hypostasis of the Son of God is the essence of baptism.” 56.

⁸⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III*, 12. “The two main qualities of being are essential and existential.” p. 29 “but life is ambiguous – there is an ‘actuality of being’; the existential biological human existence, and there is the “potentiality of that kind of being” which is given to us in our dimension of the spirit.”, 12.

ecclesial identity is linked with our eschatology, our final end. In the meantime, Zizioulas says that our eucharistic or sacramental hypostasis is given to us as we partake in the eucharist, an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual grace of our hypostatic union with God. In the eucharist, “Christ is parted but not divided,” and every communicant is the whole Christ and the whole Church.”⁸¹ So the eucharist manifests the ecclesial identity of the person, but it is a “movement” towards our hypostasis as sons and daughters of God.⁸² It is not completely fulfilled in this world; it is also our eschatological future person, of things hoped for. Indeed, the manifest function of the Church is to celebrate the communion of persons and to point to the community yet to be.

In concluding the above discussion, Macmurray’s first principle of persons in relation is that the ‘I’ exists as an individual, not as a person. When the I is in intentional relation with another, then the I and You become the source of the personhood of each. In our biological being, we are one of many such beings. But in our relational being, we become a particular person. Zizioulas also unites person and relation. For Zizioulas persons are also constituted in relation to one another. Zizioulas, like Macmurray, argues that the particularity of each person is created by the personal relation with the primary One. For Zizioulas, we are invited into relationship with the Trinity in and through Christ’s person and the sharing of the eucharist. Our diversity and our unity are affirmed.

For Western culture, the works of John Macmurray and John Zizioulas provide a strong counterpoint to our society’s excessive individualism and concern for the freedom of the individual. In Western thinking, the individual’s freedom is limited by the

⁸¹ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 60.

⁸² Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 62.

presence of others. But the presence of the other limits us only in that we cannot “take in” and use another person as if she were a thing. In fact, we cannot disintegrate another person’s centered being, although we can limit their freedom and even destroy the self.⁸³ In truth, we can be together and free just as the Trinity is in perfect communion and free. Zizioulas believed that there is no need of struggle for the individual to assert himself. On the contrary, the freedom of the person is enabled by relationships with other persons. Zizioulas argues, “for the community in which God includes us is the place in which our personal identity and freedom come into being.”⁸⁴ Zizioulas’s insight into the basis of human freedom dovetails nicely with Macmurray’s view that we are perfectly free to be ourselves when we are loved only for our persons and all fear is cast out. “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4: 18). Macmurray contrasts society, as organized around a function, with a community, as organized around a “unity of persons as persons.”⁸⁵ In such a relationship, the motive is heterocentric, meaning love towards the other, and it is mutual, meaning the other is the center of value. This discussion of the characteristics of a relation between persons brings us to discussion of the basis of friendship as defined in essays by Simone Weil.

Simone Weil, 1909 – 1943, was born in Paris; her family was Jewish, but she did not actively practice Judaism. She was gifted intellectually, as evidenced in her successfully completing her *baccalaureate es lettres* at the age of fifteen. She studied and taught

⁸³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III*, 40. “But there is a limit to man’s attempt to draw all content into himself--the other self. One can subject and exploit another in his organic basis, including his psychological self, but not the other self in the dimension of the spirit. One can destroy it as self, but one cannot assimilate it as a content of one’s own centeredness.”

⁸⁴ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 1.

⁸⁵ Macmurray, *Persons In Relation*, 157.

philosophy, but her heart and mind identified with the hardships and needs of the working class. In 1938, when she was around the age of twenty-eight, she had several conversion experiences connected with her visit to Assisi. In her words, she found “Christ himself who is Truth itself.”⁸⁶ In her spiritual autobiography, she also writes, “God produces himself and knows himself perfectly. Before all things God is love. Before all things, God loves himself. This love, this friendship of God, is the Trinity.” Once again, as seen in Zizioulas, the trinitarian love within God is put forth as the perfect friendship.⁸⁷

Weil believed that the four forms of indirect or implicit love of God are love of neighbor, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious ceremonies, and friendship. True friendship she thought to be “a personal and human love which is pure and which enshrines an intimation and a reflection of divine love.”⁸⁸ Thus love of neighbor is not as intimate as friendship, but rather embodies justice and charity towards all others with whom one comes into contact. Its creation requires study and “significant knowledge of ethics, law, politics, and social analysis of the conditions that produce the afflictions being addressed.”⁸⁹ Love of beauty places humans in awe of the creator of the world and a love of its order. A love of the universe aligns us correctly within the world, helping us to resist placing ourselves above or as the center of the world. We give up thinking we can control our lives and come to the realization that the world operates according to

⁸⁶ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 79.

⁸⁷ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 126.

⁸⁸ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 200.

⁸⁹ Robert Davis Hughes, III. *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2008), 283.

divine and natural law and is sustained by its Creator. To acknowledge the beauty of the world, to be drawn to it, to see it: this God has willed in us in order to catch our souls. The third form of implicit love, love of religious ceremonies and practices, attempts to come into contact with God who is “perfectly pure.”⁹⁰ Interestingly enough, it is in Weil’s love of religious practice that Macmurray’s unintegrated fear of the other can be placed. For Macmurray, “all human relationships are problematic; even those in which positive motivation dominates, unintegrated fear is also present that is damaging to the relationship.”⁹¹ This hatred and fear is the source of all evil.⁹² According to Weil, as finite beings, we are incapable of putting aside evil. Instead, we project evil directed to ourselves back to others. And this transference of evil continues and can increase sin and evil between people. Only Christ, as an eternal being of perfect purity, can and did deny the power of evil at the time of his crucifixion. Therefore, by participating in the religious practice of the church, persons can displace the effects of sin away from themselves. Once again, the ideal of the personal is found in the charity of the perfect communion within God. In God, there is no existence of the negative.

Finally, though, it is in Weil’s description of the quality of friendship that we find the characteristics of both Macmurray’s and Zizioulas’ quality of being in relation, including

⁹⁰ Weil, *Waiting for God*, 186.

⁹¹ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 48.

⁹² Schowbel and Gunton, *Persons, Divine and Human*, 130 – 1. John Aves addresses Macmurray’s source of “evil as being the result of the hatred and fear that arise when our love for the other is thwarted” and whether this is what is meant by original sin. Macmurray claims that “the child can only be rescued from despair by the grace of his mother.” Aves sees several problems with this explanation of evil; viewing evil as a result of a natural process of the mother withdrawing her care or of the mother not providing adequate care. First, this natural process removes the responsibility of evil from the human being; secondly, it denies that human beings have free will to choose to do evil “even in the face of love”; and thirdly, is there not a need for atonement, forgiveness, and revelation of love from God rather than “simply the revelation of the Mother continuing to love?”

mutuality, equality, heterocentric love, and preservation of autonomy. Weil regards the occurrence of friendship between persons as a gift from God. God's blessing is necessary because in this friendship there is no necessity, no quality of the one needing the other; and this quality of love given in freedom for the other is found also in the Trinity. Since only God is free from necessity, friendship in which each person honors the other's autonomy is gift. This concept of freedom in relationship is emphasized by Zizioulas in his statement that freedom is enabled, not restricted, by communion. Mutuality means there exists reciprocity in the relationship. There is openness to the other. This openness to the other is also an attitude that must be present in a group whose intent is to affirm the other in Christ. It is Macmurray's person being in relation with 'person.' Weil's inclusion of equality means that neither person consents to be subordinated to the other. Each one freely seeks the good for the other. For Weil, the double-sided motivation for wanting a relation of friendship is seeking what is good for the other and need of the other. A relationship dominated by necessity reduces each person to an object. In a sense, need of the other is the opposite side of the coin showing Macmurray's fear that a person has for himself. There is no relationship without some degree of need. Friendship "consists of loving a human being as we should like to be able to love each soul in particular of all those who go to make up the human race."⁹³ In Zizioulas' theology our persons are called into relationship through our participation in the trinitarian love of the Three Persons in God, and in Weil's theology, "Pure friendship

⁹³ Weil, *Waiting For God*, 206.

is an image of the original and perfect friendship that belongs to the Trinity and is the very essence of God.”⁹⁴

Before concluding chapter three, we should consider one more theologian who contributes pertinent and deeply felt theology about living in community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906 – 1945, was a German Lutheran pastor and a participant in the German Resistance movement against Nazism. He was one of the founding members of the Confessing Church, which stood in opposition to the nationalist church of Germany. In 1938, Bonhoeffer wrote *Life Together*, containing his theology of Christian community, based on the common life that he and his seminarians experienced. During the war, the Gestapo had banned Bonhoeffer from preaching, then teaching, and any kind of public speaking. Finally, Bonhoeffer was arrested for connections with the conspiracy to end Hitler’s life. He was executed in a concentration camp just a few months before the war ended. He is considered a martyr.

Bonhoeffer begins *Life Together* with a verse from Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”⁹⁵ However, according to Bonhoeffer, Christians should not just seek each other out. Rather, a Christian is called, as Jesus was, to live amongst all persons, even his enemies. To be of the Kingdom of Christ, one is called forth. Bonhoeffer says communal life with other Christians is a tremendous grace, but the faithful are not only to seek each other. God’s people are

⁹⁴ Weil, *Waiting For God*, 208.

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1954), 17.

scattered like seed “into all the kingdoms of the earth” (Deut. 28:25). So, as Christians, we are “to share God’s Word and sacrament.”⁹⁶

Christian community means “We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷ Accordingly, God has willed that we should seek and find his living word in the witness of another. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s word to him. This is certainly offered to every congregation when the priest gives the sermon. Another opportunity for creating a space for hearing the word of God would be in groups forming small spiritual communities. These small spiritual communities also give individuals a chance to enter into a personal relationship and to respond to one another. “The goal of all Christian community” is to “meet one another as bearers and bringers of the message of salvation.”⁹⁸

Bonhoeffer goes on to say that “not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ.”⁹⁹ It is on the same basis, our experience of God and our person in Christ, that groups in spiritual direction are formed. They are not formed on the basis of human need for social relations, nor are relations built upon the approval of individual characteristics. As Bonhoeffer offers, “the fact that we are brethren only through Jesus Christ is of immeasurable significance.”¹⁰⁰ Dougherty

⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 18.

⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25.

reported that within groups of purposes for spiritual direction, the persons experienced an increase in the presence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer writes a very similar comment when speaking of a community of brethren: “The more genuine and deeper our community becomes, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.”¹⁰²

Bonhoeffer continues with another insightful statement: “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality.”¹⁰³ In other words, do not enter into a Christian community and expect all relationships will be characterized perfectly by love and charity. This is not possible due to the limitations of human nature. After all, we are all sinners. To continue, Bonhoeffer asks us to view our relations with others through the lens of the spiritual reality of Christ’s love allowing us to be capable of honest, unselfish, but not perfect love. The following summarizes Bonhoeffer’s notion of Christian community: “The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship are in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.”¹⁰⁴

Towards the conclusion of his chapter titled “Community,” Bonhoeffer writes about the qualities of “human” love versus “spiritual” love. His discussion of the specific traits

¹⁰¹ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 55. “The group emerges no longer merely a collection of people who want to be present to one another. Instead, members experience themselves as co-participants in the Mystery of Love.”

¹⁰² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

¹⁰³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

bears close resemblance to Weil's qualities of friendship. First, Bonhoeffer sees the necessity of persons binding themselves together as a result of the Spirit of the Word of God alone. In purely human love, persons bind each other to themselves. In spiritual love, all "honor and dominion are surrendered to the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁵ In human love, "power and influence of a personal nature are sought and cultivated."¹⁰⁶ And just as Weil calls for loving detachment in friendship, allowing the loved one complete autonomy and keeping a distance from the other, so Bonhoeffer declares that in a "spiritual community there is never, nor in any way an immediate relationship of one to another."¹⁰⁷ This characteristic prevents one person from trying to absorb the other for her needs only, freeing the relationship of necessity. "Human love is directed to the other person for his own sake, spiritual love loves him for Christ's sake."¹⁰⁸ This kind of love is described in Bernard of Clairvaux's fourth degree of love, in which one loves all others purely through the love that God loves all others.¹⁰⁹ So, in essence, human love is full of desire; it "desires the other person, his company, his answering love, but it does not serve him."¹¹⁰ This does contrast with Weil's understanding of friendship in which one seeks to serve the good for the other. And correspondingly, just as in Weil, Bonhoeffer writes

¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Bonhoeffer, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. Commentary by Emero Stiegman. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995), 29.

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 34.

that where human love abounds out of necessity, personal hatred and distrust of the other can result.

And lastly, Bonhoeffer declares that spiritual love allows the other to retain his independence and “to leave him his freedom to be in Christ.”¹¹¹ Weil speaks of this also in friendship in which “each respects their right to desire direct union with God alone.”¹¹² Spiritual love then creates freedom of the other to live under the Word of Christ. Likewise, a group formed for the intent of spiritual direction has a responsibility continually to affirm that their fellowship is grounded in love of the Word, and not formed on the basis of the uniqueness of its individuals or its purported order and function. Rather, the group should “understand itself as being a part of the one, holy, catholic, and Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church.”¹¹³ Of course all human relationships occur within the intellectual, social, and physical bindings we have with others. Bonhoeffer says that it is the acceptance of this reality that allows for us to transcend the merely human quality by claiming God’s gift of spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood. Then we are bound together by faith: “Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” As Bonhoeffer would say, “Behold how good it is for brethren to dwell together through Christ --for Jesus Christ alone is our unity.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

¹¹² Hughes, *Beloved Dust*, 291.

¹¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 37.

¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 39.

In the first section of the next chapter, the scripture in the gospels and epistles will be explored, adding to the understanding of how we are to love each other in and through Christ. The second half of chapter four will be devoted to the *theoria* and *praxis* of the church in establishing this communion of love.

CHAPTER FIVE

Theological Foundation for Oneness in Scripture and Its Establishment in the Church

Part I: Koinonia in the New Testament

As we saw in the previous chapter, John Zizioulas uses the word *koinonia* to describe the communion of love realized in our “oneness in Christ.” *Koinonia* embodies a prism of words used to describe Christian community, such as: fellowship, communion, participation, and sharing. The idea of *koinonia* is first presented in Acts 2:42. Those hearing Peter’s sermon that announced Jesus Christ as the Messiah requested to be baptized immediately: “So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:41-41).

The concept of Christian fellowship will continue to be developed in scripture using Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels, and Paul’s and John’s themes of community and love in their epistles. Let us start with the Gospel according to John. In John 17:11- 26, Jesus says a prayer to Abba, Father, for his disciples. He looks up to heaven and says, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (17:11). Jesus continues, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one” (17:20-21). Jesus concludes with, “I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved

me” (17:23). Jesus prays his prayer for “oneing” in us. What exactly does this mean? As Stephen Smalley observes, “Jesus, in John’s portrait, is both one with the Father (10:30) and one with his church on earth” (16:28).¹¹⁵ Jesus prays for the disciples’ unity, and this prayer is known as the high-priest prayer, “because it portrays him as the intermediary between the heavenly world and the church.”¹¹⁶ John 17:11-19, gives the description of how the Father and the Son are mutually related, but distinct. This is the theme of true friendship, mutual in relation, yet allowing each other autonomy as persons. This type of relation, as Weil also believed, is only possible through God’s gift of Christ who restores a “sense of community between God and humanity, and within humanity.”¹¹⁷ Jesus’ words “so we may be one” are made possible in his Incarnation. Christ, then, becomes the ground for interpersonal relations in the Church.

The Gospel according to Matthew shows Jesus teaching the disciples about their relationship to him and their relationship to each other. Jesus says, “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master” (Mt 10: 24-25). Jesus taught his disciples and therefore us: do not put yourselves above God, but make yourselves like Him, loving others as He loves. And then again in Matthew 23, Jesus spoke, “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students” (v. 8). “And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven” (v. 9). “ The greatest

¹¹⁵Stephen S. Smalley, “The Gospel According to John,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 374.

¹¹⁶ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock. *The People’s New Testament Commentary* (Louisville . London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 345.

¹¹⁷ Robert W. Wall, “Community: New Testament Koinonia,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 1106.

among you will be your servant” (v.11). The message given is for us to serve others since we are all the adopted children of God and hence brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not to achieve our identity by being above one another. Besides, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed, “all our words fail quickly, but if we can speak out of the abundance of God’s Word,”¹¹⁸ we will be heard.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus taught that anyone could belong to this new community. Heretofore, the Jewish law held notions of membership that were tied to ethnic and social restrictions. But “Jesus extended the membership list to the outsider, the least, last, lame, and lost of Israel.”¹¹⁹ Jesus is welcomed into Zacchaeus’s house, and responds by blessing the tax collector and saying, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Mt 19: 9 -10). And Jesus reminded those of this inclusiveness by reading from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim
release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and
to let the oppressed go free (Mt 4:18).

We are called into a life of engagement with one another and to see all persons, those we know as friends, and those we know as strangers, as our guests. “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind” (Mt 14:13). Maybe today

¹¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 55.

¹¹⁹ Wall, “New Testament Koinonia,” 1105.

we are asked to include minorities, those of a different culture, social outcasts, those living in poverty, and those in prison. Matthew is the only Gospel to mention the church (*ekklesia*), a community in which persons can forgive and restore their neighbors (Mt 18:15).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul maintains that at baptism, one becomes a person in relation to the body of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:13) “Human distinctions are dismantled; an egalitarian community is formed, fulfilling the prophetic vision.”¹²⁰ Paul’s overarching metaphor is “the body of Christ.” Indeed, Paul goes on to develop this at length (1Cor 12:14-26), showing how each part of the body is needed and no part is less honorable than another. “Thus the church becomes Christ Himself in human existence, but also every member of the Church becomes Christ, and Church.”¹²¹ Paul maintains that this “ecclesial hypostasis”, to use Zizioulas’s phrase, given to the person at baptism allows one to cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15).

Since we are now the body of Christ, Paul believes that we are also in relationship to each other because we are in relation to Christ, the Lord. We no longer regard Christ just as human; Christ is the new creation, and so are we. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17). Because of this unity, we now share Christ’s ministry of reconciliation. “For He is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the

¹²⁰ Wall, “New Testament Koinonia,” 1106.

¹²¹ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 58.

dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14). Paul says that by one Spirit we are all given different gifts (1Cor 12: 4-11). In the communion of Christ’s followers, we offer our gifts. We do not lose our personality; we each become a ‘person.’ Community can carry diversity and unity. Paul says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). “The community’s unity in witness and in life, which is always jeopardized by its own diversity, it held together by a love for one another which imitates Christ’s love.”¹²² As previously noted, Paul’s metaphor for community was that of “body,” and therefore all the members of the body care for one another. This began at the start of Christian community, with members having equal partnership. The author of the essay on the subject of New Testament Community in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Robert W. Wall, suggested that the *koinonia* in the post-Pauline period was no longer based on “charismata and equality.”¹²³ According to Wall, when the concern for the institutions and the hierarchy of the church claim absolute ownership of the Spirit of God, then the Church is “impoverished” because it denies the “Spirit’s transforming work” available to all believers.¹²⁴ Wall does not deny that the shift to “institutional hierarchalism” may have been inevitable when Christianity grew from a “household to a social religion in the Greco-Roman world.”¹²⁵ But the shift deemphasized the equality of believers, and the particularity of each member to bear evangelical witness to one another. The more all members of the Church witness to a transcendent God, the more Church will refrain from becoming a merely social institution.

¹²² Wall, “New Testament Koinonia,” 1106.

¹²³ Wall, 1107.

¹²⁴ Wall, 1109.

¹²⁵ Wall, 1109.

The beginning of the letter to the Ephesians, speaks of the spiritual blessings found in Christ: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1: 3). Paul, then presents the saving plan of God: “God chose us . . . and destined us to be his children in accord with his eternal good pleasure . . . in Christ . . . to gather up all things in heaven and earth in him” (Eph 1:4-10). Just as Macmurray considered the creation of the world to be “one action,” scripture proclaims our being ‘one’ in Christ as God’s one intention for the world. God desires all human beings to live as brothers and sisters in a community of faith, hope, and love. We are united with Jesus Christ as sons and daughters of God, our Father, and in harmony with the whole created universe: “He has made known to us the mystery of his will” (Eph; 1:9).

Most scholars of the Johannine epistles agree the letters were written about 100 CE, approximately ten years after the gospel of John.¹²⁶ At this time, disagreement arose between two groups of Christian believers over the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. One group, more Jewish, denied that Jesus was the Christ and stressed his humanity. The other faction, more docetistic, denied the incarnation. The author of 1 John, whom scholars claim may be a Johannine Christian,¹²⁷ wished to emphasize the physical reality of Jesus in the flesh. Since, the Johannine gospel did stress the preexistence of the Logos with God, some taught gnostic beliefs that Christ was only spirit. Thus, 1 John begins with the writer reaffirming Jesus’ two natures: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at

¹²⁶ M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 743.

¹²⁷ Stephen S. Smalley, “The Letters of John,” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 379.

and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). 1 John:4 includes a plea for living in love together. The author is saying that those who claim to believe Jesus Christ should love one another. And this is made possible because:

God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only
Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love,
not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son . . . (1 Jn 4:9-10)

1 John concludes that because God is love, those who love God must love their neighbor also (1Jn 4:16). Perfect love, as we find in God, casts out fear. This statement anticipates Macmurray’s description of human love that will include fear, and Weil’s idea that friendship, as love freely given, is only made possible through God. “Gradually, we must learn that there is, ultimately, nothing to be afraid of for those who are united with God.”¹²⁸ Love of God and love of neighbor go hand in hand. In loving God, we are of God.¹²⁹ What God has done for us, giving us love, mercy, and forgiveness, we owe to others: “Thus God has taught us how to meet one another as God has met us in Christ.”

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Part II: The establishment of community within the church.

¹²⁸ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 107.

¹²⁹ Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) 50. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) deeply believed in the deity of the Holy Spirit and identified the Spirit’s dwelling in the human being. “To participate in the work of the Spirit is to identify God from within.” 193. Therefore, Symeon believed theosis, to be of God, was a result of loving God. “Do you love God? Then--do I dare say it--you are God” in *Ep. I Joan. 2:14, Patrologia Latina* 35:1997 as cited in Rogers, *After the Spirit*, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25.

If the basis of Pauline *koinonia* is indeed Christ, then it is not just companionship, nor is it synonymous for church or local congregation. As demonstrated in the scriptures, *koinonia* meant the union of believers with Christ, in the Spirit, and hence among one another. The church offers this communion through the eucharist and baptism. Hence, Zizioulas speaks of a sacramental hypostasis.¹³¹ He also speaks of an ecclesial hypostasis, a term Zizioulas explains further in his book, *Communion and Otherness*. He begins by speaking of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. However, Zizioulas does think that it is a mistake to conceive of Christ, the one, as having priority over the many. This is more Christomonistic, and leads to relating to Christ as an individual. Our theology is instead centered on the eucharistic body that is broken for many. Zizioulas believed the “body of Christ” should bring to mind the community of the many.¹³²

The union of the two natures in Christ was spelled out in the Chalcedonian Christology. Christ’s human and divine natures were not fused; Christ’s divine nature is not changed but keeps its otherness despite his taking on the nature of humanity. It is the Holy Spirit acting in the dimension of communion that allows for *unity* to be constituted by *otherness*.¹³³ Thus Zizioulas views spiritual mysticism as “always ecclesial and passes through the community; it is never an individual possession.”¹³⁴ In addition, Zizioulas believes that Christology must always be linked to pneumatology. “Christ is not an individual who is made many by the addition of him to the Church, for the Spirit makes

¹³¹ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 59.

¹³² John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 294.

¹³³ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 294.

¹³⁴ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 295.

Christ who he is.”¹³⁵ It is the Holy Spirit who links the Person of Christ with community. The freedom of the Spirit to give gift is always a new event. Thus the body of Christ is always *becoming* with participation and anticipation: “Man is caught up into this action that is Christ’s, but in Christ, man’s own action too.”¹³⁶ Zizioulas’s concept of ecclesial mysticism allows mystical experience to happen “between me and someone else.”¹³⁷ So it is not individual and self-conscious experience of the Divine, “but relationship that forms the basis of mystical union in the Church.”¹³⁸ This correlates directly to the teaching of scripture, which holds that “humans are saved not as isolated individuals but as members of God’s people.”¹³⁹

Given the nature of mystical experience within the Church, how do Christians, the laos,¹⁴⁰ actually experience “Christ’s love” among each other? Barry would say the answer lies in the notion of experience: “Because the church is a community of shared experience, it needs the ministry of a kind of spiritual direction that helps people to pay attention to the religious dimension of their experience and to share it.”¹⁴¹ In small

¹³⁵ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 10.

¹³⁶ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 11.

¹³⁷ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 306.

¹³⁸ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 307.

¹³⁹ Gordon S. Wakefield, ed. *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 241.

¹⁴⁰ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 11. Zizioulas states that, “The whole people of the eschatological Church are the glory of Christ. Christ makes his people one indivisible whole, the one many and the many one. This means that the whole people is ‘laity’ (laos), so that the laity is not defined by contrast with the clergy.” This is not to deny that the bishop and priests have a particular status in the bodily presence of Christ, but all are united to Christ in baptism.

¹⁴¹ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 103.

groups, this is how we can experience *koinonia*, if the foundation of the group is constituted by the intention of its members to become “friends in the Lord.” The purpose of the group would then honor “the growing, common understanding of *koinonia* as the deepest structural reality in the life of the people of God.”¹⁴² It is important here to recognize the role of the Spirit between Christ and church. In the words of John Zizioulas, “the church is ‘instituted’ by Christ and ‘constituted’ by the Spirit.”¹⁴³ In accessing the nature of the Holy Spirit, pneumatology is found to be “the very being of the Church.”¹⁴⁴ The Spirit’s mission is *koinonia*.

To get a better understanding of the relationship between spiritual community and church, a brief discussion of Paul Tillich’s distinction between these two entities will help. As noted above, Tillich agrees that spiritual community is created with the “love” of the Spirit. In order for the Spirit to be present, the community must consciously be based on the appearance of the New Being, in Jesus as the Christ. Tillich considers spiritual community to be the invisible essence of the visible church. The spiritual community created by the Holy Spirit is unambiguous. However, the visible church, embodied by finite human beings, allows for the existence of ambiguity, such as disintegration and estrangement. “The Spiritual Community is the community of faith and love, participating in the transcendent unity of unambiguous life. The participation is fragmentary because of the finitude of life, and it is not without tensions because of the

¹⁴² Hughes, *Beloved Dust*, 41. To be clear, Hughes views *koinonia* as a relational gift of the Holy Spirit. Its praxis, which results in fellowship, communion and common life, is realized in liturgical worship, receiving of the sacraments, and all ministries of the church which bring persons into relationship of love and charity.

¹⁴³ Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 110.

¹⁴⁴ Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 110.

polarity of individualization and participation, which is never absent from any finite being.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, the community of love can fail due to individual differences and distrust. But in spite of this possible failure, the church continues to offer the possibility of *agape* for “love in the churches manifests the love of Spiritual Community.”¹⁴⁶

Some would argue that a Christian community that focuses on the love of the other is unrealistic. While one cannot create an ideal community it is what all human beings long for: “We want to live without fear, or at least with our fears integrated and subordinated to our love.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, Barry believes that real religion is, first, a celebration of communion, a celebration of being friends in the Lord. This love for each other would then logically lead to love of all others, and “good works” would follow. So the primary purpose of the church is not to be a social agency for doing good but to enable spiritual community whose ultimate concern is participation and sharing in the love of God. Christian community is not for its own sake but for the sake of the world. Where *agape* love exists, the love is shared and is in abundance. This is because the source of *agape* is God himself. “Thus the problem is not that existence of a community of friends in the Lord will take away energy from Christian praxis.”¹⁴⁸ *Agape* towards another is not exhausting, but renewing, life-giving, and life-affirming.

¹⁴⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 172.

¹⁴⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 178.

¹⁴⁷ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 55.

Creation of this kind of community requires attention and work. But we have the raw material of God's creative love with which to work. It is the voice of fear that will hinder us from believing in and working towards our deepest desire of Spirit-inspired community. Instead, we need to make every effort to share the community of God that knows no boundaries. In Tillich's words, agape is the "reuniting affirmation of the other one in terms of the eternal meaning of his being."¹⁴⁹ This means that agape surpasses differences of political, social, economic, educational, national, and racial origin. And above all, our personal, problematic differences can be forgiven. In fact, Tillich views as the church's task "to introduce each new generation into the reality of the Spiritual Community, into its faith and love."¹⁵⁰ For Tillich, the primary task is not instilling the doctrines or history of the church. Nor is the goal to convert each person to some sort of religious piety. Rather, it is the experience of unconditional love from God and, through experience of genuine friendship, communication of the Spiritual Presence that counts. Understanding and participation go hand in hand: "There is no understanding of a church's life without participation; but without understanding the participation becomes mechanical and compulsory."¹⁵¹ The understanding grows as we grow in our love of God; it comes as we achieve maturity in our spiritual journey.

In *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God*, Barry is interested in establishing the theology of the ministry of spiritual direction. If we view the main function of the church as building up community, and if this community is necessarily based on our shared

¹⁴⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 178.

¹⁵⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 194.

¹⁵¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 194.

experience of God, then “the ministry of spiritual direction is formative of the religious community God desires.”¹⁵² All of life’s experience, at their deepest level, can be religious experiences. Sharing our “values, hopes, dreams, desires, and intentions”¹⁵³ with one another creates a unity of experience that keeps us moving towards the reality of God. Every experience of God is mediated by our senses, by our experience of interaction with the world. We may not always be aware that we are encountering God, but God is always active and present in the universe.

In assessing and reviewing the tradition of spiritual direction, the ontological foundation of personhood, and the role of the Church in manifesting the Spiritual Presence of the New Being, we now come full circle by returning to the question, “How best can we honor God’s presence and action within us and in the world?” Barry clearly believes that “God desires a religious community of shared experience of God’s own inner life.”¹⁵⁴ Before looking more closely at persons’ actual experience of group spiritual direction and the wider applications of group spiritual direction, I would like to address the hesitation and reluctance that have been voiced about substituting individual experience for religious belief.

Since God is immanent as well as transcendent, we can encounter God by encountering the world. All of our experience is multidimensional, and Christians believe that any experience can have a religious dimension. In *Experience and God*, John E. Smith attempts to interpret the concept of experience as something more than purely

¹⁵² Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 92.

¹⁵³ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 91.

¹⁵⁴ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 92.

subjective. Smith removes experience from the realm of the pure subjectivity by arguing that experience is not just something that happens in the mind, nor is it just a feeling. Instead experience is an objective encounter with something “outside” of the self. This idea of “I act” and therefore “I encounter” is very similar to Macmurray’s view of man’s active encounter with the world: “Thus, experience is the product of a complex encounter between ‘what exists’ and a being with consciousness.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, there is no human experience that is not an encounter, and all experiences are mediated through our senses, images, memories, and thoughts, in other words, through our biological, social, and psychological beings.

Historically, the revelation of God has come primarily with the astounding event of Jesus Christ, and also through the prophets and scripture. Some people would argue there is an incompatibility between the traditional, historical revelation of God and revelation of God in personal experience. Can humans really experience the totally Other? Smith argues, “Revelation in the religious sense does not involve something out of the ordinary . . . it is more likely that revelation would require not the suspension of human capabilities, but rather their participation.”¹⁵⁶ However, as already stated, experience is mediated through each person’s unique psychological, social, and cultural make-up, and a conscious experience is affected by prior expectations. Therefore, discernment is necessary. Smith states with regard to discernment, “In addition to the revelation of God, there is also is a revealed or authoritative interpretation of what has transpired.”¹⁵⁷ But

¹⁵⁵ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ John E. Smith, *Experience and God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 69.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, 70.

even this judgment of discernment is subject to human error; so essentially, “there is no way that human thought and experience can be excluded from the revelation situation.”¹⁵⁸

Smith answers those that are concerned about confusing interpretation of religious experience with a valid attempt to define the nature of God and religion. He explains that “Interpreting religion as a dimension of experience is not the same as interpreting God and religion by means of the concept of ‘religious experience.’”¹⁵⁹ In other words, the religious experience is not to be considered identical with the “religious object.”¹⁶⁰ Religious experience, which is a state of the finite self, is not synonymous with the infinite being, God.

Much confusion has arisen on this point. Without some form of presence in personal experience, God can have no meaning for an individual, but from this fact it does not follow that God or the religious object is identical with any finite experience.¹⁶¹

In sum, all revelation of God must be made intelligible by its being experiential: “The disclosure of God is a relational affair;”¹⁶² there is disclosure from God and there is encounter from humankind. For Christians, the ultimate historical and normative revelation of God is the figure of Christ. But this is not to say that with the historical

¹⁵⁸ Smith, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, 47.

¹⁶¹ Smith, 48.

¹⁶² Smith, 66.

Jesus all revelation has come to an end, for the meaning and presence of Christ's person is continually breaking into the consciousness of humankind. This consciousness is shared through the function of religion: "Religion is nothing if it is not established in the individual person, but it is equally lacking in substance if it is confined to the isolated individual."¹⁶³ Hence, the existence of the religious community remains a pervasive historical trait encountered in all cultures. Religious community itself represents an ideal relationship in that it transcends the usual social relations, and it is grounded in each individual's "loyal acknowledgment of a common framework for interpreting human life, a common faith in a religious object, and common tasks to be performed in the service of the ideal."¹⁶⁴

The Spirit is the one gifting the Spiritual Presence in the Spiritual Community of the Church. Thereby, each member of the Church has received the indwelling of the Spirit and is touched by the Spirit. As one theologian said, "we are shot through," our entire being permeated by the light of Christ. It is almost impossible not to encounter God in Himself or in others. In understanding and in grateful acknowledgment of God's "ocean of love," the best we can do is to be witnesses for each other. "Spirit is constitutive in the charismatic element of the Church. Spirit gives ultimate primacy to the most important characteristic of the Church. Spirit gives rise to life and ministry to all believers."¹⁶⁵ All forms of spiritual formation, whether prayer, worship, the sacraments, contemplation, study of scripture, reading the words of witnesses to God's love, spiritual direction-- all

¹⁶³ Smith, 158.

¹⁶⁴ Smith, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 114-115.

these actions are directed towards seeking and being aware of God's presence within us.

And whether God responds gently or comes crashing in, we need to tell of it, to honor it:

“Humble and honest sharing of experience will keep the community on the move towards the reality of God.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 93.

CHAPTER SIX

Group Spiritual Direction: A Model for Spiritual Community

Part I: A Review of the Theological Foundations

It is time to return to the *theoria* and *praxis* of group spiritual direction by delineating how it creates opportunities to experience the unconditional love of another. Barry recognizes the need to meet other people who share their Christian faith. This aids a person's development of faith in a loving, caring God. Some persons will have families that may introduce them to the church and its doctrinal beliefs, and a certain percentage of those people will have positive experiences that deeply root their personal identity within the church. However, many persons do not have this same experience. Barry claims that for each of us, God becomes "real" when we have experienced love from others as an adopted son or daughter of the Father in Christ with the Holy Spirit. Barry calls this the *affective principle and foundation*¹⁶⁷ which refers to the development of willingness to trust in God's love. People need this foundation to entrust their lives to God and "to realize the harmony of God's universe with each person having a role to play in God's loving intention for the universe."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God*, 61. Barry uses this concept of *affective foundation* in proposing that before a person can enter into a closer, more trusting relationship with God, he first has to have a positive affective experience of God's love. Barry is stating that this love from God is encountered most tangibly through others. It also has a lot to do with replacing a very negative image of an angry, demanding God. 60.

¹⁶⁸ William A. Barry, S.J. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercise*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 9. Before allowing a person to begin meditation on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, Barry considers it critical that the person has had "sufficient positive experiences of God, so that they desire to be united with God and to know God's dream for them in the universe," pp. 6-7.

I will now review the theological foundations for forming groups based on mutual love. Macmurray's philosophy proposes that persons are defined by their relations. The ideal community is one in which everyone cares for everyone else and no one cares for oneself alone. Macmurray calls this attitude and behavior towards others *heterocentric*. In Macmurray's ontology of personhood, the self is ideally consummated in relationships of genuine love. This thought could have tremendous impact on ordinary human relations. If there exists genuine love between persons, as in Weil's understanding of genuine friendship, then the love itself mirrors God's love for us. Therefore, love for a person is "not identified with their qualities, physical, social, moral, etc., thus rejecting or accepting the other on that basis."¹⁶⁹ Heterocentric love is not based on these "classifiable qualities."¹⁷⁰ In such a relationship, "one is not loved for *what* one is, but for the very fact that he or she *is* and not someone else."¹⁷¹ Only this kind of unselfish affirmation of the other gives rise to the ontological uniqueness of the other's *eternal* being. And isn't this the kind of love given to us by God, unbroken, and in spite of our unlovable qualities?

Of course, humans cannot love as God loves. In John Zizioulas's theology of being in communion, this inability is redeemed in the saving act of Jesus Christ who takes on our humanity, breaks the power of sin, and gathers us up into the Trinitarian love of God. For Zizioulas also, personhood is not about qualities or capacities of any kind. Personhood is about hypostasis, the *sacramental* and *ecclesial* hypostasis that is given to us through

¹⁶⁹ Schwobel and Gunton, ed., *Persons, Divine and Human*, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Schwobel and Gunton, ed., 46.

¹⁷¹ Schwobel and Gunton, ed., 45.

Christ, in the Church, with the communion of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Church can embody and point to the ideal loving relationship found within the Trinity of God, allowing its members to participate in God's love and love others through and for the sake of God's love. "The church is the act of God, actualizing communion and diversity, unity and wholeness, particularity and freedom for us."¹⁷² Therefore, through Creation, Christ, and the Spirit, humans have a way of fulfilling their drive to personhood; "the human being does come into a state of absolute ontological freedom."¹⁷³ There are some who question the notion of absolute freedom as freedom of love shared within the Triune God.¹⁷⁴ However, I believe this criticism wrongly supposes that Zizioulas is basing his personhood on freedom from necessity, i.e., uncompromised freedom. Zizioulas maintains the ontological distinction between divine being and created being. So while Zizioulas recognizes persons are never completely free from necessity, he believes that through communion and community in God, one can transcend necessity by loving freely. This does not occur on a continuous basis. Our fallen existence still applies. But the juxtaposition of freedom and otherness is given to us in the communion of the universal Church. As Tillich would argue, humans can never escape the ambiguities of life, but our essential being made in the image of God is unambiguous and eternal.

¹⁷² Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 2.

¹⁷³ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 60-61. "The freedom that is being spoken of here is not the simple freedom of choice." Such freedom of choice is a necessary derivative of our existence. Zizioulas says absolute ontological freedom is attained by our ecclesial hypostasis which gives us ontologically true personhood. This we attain by a "new birth," a "birth from on high" in baptism, 62.

¹⁷⁴ Knight, *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, 109. In Chapter Six, "Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas" by Douglas Farrow. Farrow argues that Zizioulas's having ecclesiology actually transform man's ontology, is not without its difficulties. He states, "he, (Zizioulas) in the service of ecclesiology, dares to present it as an ontology of personhood, an ontology which has at its heart . . . a concept of freedom through love: freedom through being as an act of *koinonia* with God in which all necessity is transcended."

Friendship and Christian fellowship are described with keen insight by Weil, and with delight by Bonhoeffer. Weil draws a picture of friendship that has a divine quality because it embodies justice, charity, mutuality, equality, yet preserves the loved one's autonomy. For Bonhoeffer, Christian community is created by sharing the word of God and the sacraments. And our love for another supersedes *eros* and becomes *agape* or spiritual love when founded on our love in Christ alone.

In the New Testament, *koinonia* within the church community is recognized as gift of the Spirit. "The Spirit is glory; Spirit is the entrance into the circle of Glory."¹⁷⁵ Paul says, "We are brethren in the Lord" (Phil 1:14) and "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). Jesus' prayer "that we all may be one" is portrayed in his life, and especially in his death, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12: 32). Jesus' community of *koinonia* is open to all; though not all accepted, everyone was invited to the banquet to share the breaking of the bread.

The Church is the fellowship of believers who hear the Word of God and have faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of all humankind. The Church is the assembly of believers, each bearing the spirit of Christ. We meet and love each other as Christ loves us. Christ continues to be revealed to us, the priesthood of the Church. This continued revelation of God, the personal and communal, must be celebrated, not by organizational structure, but by the enjoyment of the Spirit's gifts in one another.

Part II: How Group Spiritual Direction Embodies Spiritual Community.

¹⁷⁵ Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003) 108.

As we have seen, the essential ingredient for fostering spiritual communion between persons is recognition of the “face and person of Christ” in each other. We accept each other on no other grounds of discernment. It is given to us to know by Christ that we all are One. This is what the Church professes each Sunday at the eucharist, this is what we profess each time we pray together, and each time we meet to bring about the kingdom of God. But how do we really name and share our experience of God and how do we really learn to love personally? Certainly, there are forms of authentic guidance that the Church provides every day. These include the rite of reconciliation, either corporate or private, baptism, corporate worship, guided retreats and quiet days, sacramental use of the arts, reading and study of scripture, and the guidance available in prayer and discernment groups, and pastoral counseling. These are all good structures provided by the Church, and recently appreciation for spiritual guidance in the form of a spiritual companion or director has grown. We hear the sermon, we hear our prayers, and we hear how we can help others. But where does one become a person in Christ to another? Spiritual companionship provides “long-term, faith-grounded, tested, and intuitive person-to-person conveyance of the heart of Christian awareness.”¹⁷⁶ The simple Sunday worship and educational hour can still leave people hungry for a place to have the opportunity to affirm and explore their personal relationship, experience, or resistance to God. Remember, our personhood, our identity, our eternal being, is constituted by relationships of genuine love, by agape, in *koinonia* of a spiritual community. We are loved by another in Christ because we *are*. Such friendships do not require spiritual masters, just attentive and faithful companions. However, in his discussion of group direction, Tilden Edwards

¹⁷⁶ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 101.

does suggest that the group have “clear leadership” of a particular “group director,”¹⁷⁷ in other words, a facilitator knowledgeable of group direction format and intent.

Certainly, we can receive this type of love intermittently in a prayer group, in a lectionary group, in a Bible study, in worship, and when we are alone with God. But the intention within a group formed for spiritual direction is to offer this love each time the persons meet and to continue this love in intercessory prayer for each other outside of the group. There is no other purpose but to love one another and to share experience of God. As expressed in the title of William Barry’s book on Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, we are “letting God come close,” and we do this by becoming close to each other. This does require love without fear, without fear for our self: “For community is a matter of intention . . . the opportunities for celebration, sharing, and reconciliation strengthen the motivation of love and help exorcise fears and overcome resentments.”¹⁷⁸

As we noted in Chapter One, Rose Mary Dougherty significantly says, “Not only is spiritual community the ambiance in which spiritual direction occurs, but also spiritual direction is often the means through which spiritual community is most clearly recognized and claimed.”¹⁷⁹ Now if spiritual direction whether group or individual, is a shared desire to name our experience of God, then its intention is in direct alignment with how we recognize and participate in spiritual community to the fullest: “We cannot attain the deepest desire of our hearts, union with the Triune God, apart from human community, and that human community has to be universally inclusive, at least in

¹⁷⁷ Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, 174.

¹⁷⁸ Barry, *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God*, 53.

¹⁷⁹ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 7.

intention.”¹⁸⁰ Dougherty sees the strength of spiritual community being present when persons are brought together out of “respect for each others’ relationship with God.”¹⁸¹

If the intent for group spiritual direction is in place, that is, to support one another’s relationship with God, how then do we invite the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit? In short, what are the ways to nurture the gift of *koinonia*? In Chapter One, I mentioned that the basic process of the group occurred in the following sequence: silence, sharing, silence response, and then silence. Each group will decide on how to divide the time segments. On reflection, I believe the elements of shared silence, shared religious experience, and holy listening are needed to allow space for God to enter. Shared silence is traditionally the beginning of each spiritual direction meeting.

Within each of us there is a silence
a silence as vast as the universe.

We are afraid of it . . . and we long for it.¹⁸²

This is how Gunilla Norris begins in her book, *Sharing Silence*. She goes on to say, “Silence reveals. Silence heals. Silence is where God dwells. We yearn to be there. We yearn to share it.”¹⁸³ Norris says that in the silence we are revealed. How can this be? Because the silence acknowledges our very being, and the words that come out of the silence are very powerful. I became very intrigued with silence upon reading a book

¹⁸⁰ Barry, *Spiritual Direction*, 57.

¹⁸¹ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 14.

¹⁸² Gunilla Norris, *Sharing Silence: Meditation Practice and Mindful Living* (New York: Bell Tower, 1992), 9.

¹⁸³ Norris, *Sharing Silence*, 9–10.

noted by Thomas Merton in *Thoughts in Solitude*. The book, *The World of Silence*, was published in 1948 by French philosopher Max Picard. Picard believed that Silence was an autonomous phenomenon.¹⁸⁴ Silence is not simply the absence of language, Silence *is*. His intention for exploring silence was not to privilege silence over language. Rather, he wished to better understand the nature of silence and its relation to the word. Basically, Picard says that if one agrees to participate in and acknowledge silence, one does it for the “sake of language.” “Language and silence belong together.”¹⁸⁵ “There is no beginning to silence, and no end.” Silence is like “uncreated, everlasting Being.”¹⁸⁶ Picard says that time increases in silence. This has been the reported experience within centering prayer and shared silence; there seems to be a fullness to the time in silence. Could this fullness of presence be God? To some, being in silence is totally useless. And according to Picard, silence cannot be exploited, it just is. “Yet there is more help and healing in silence than in ‘all the useful things.’” “Silence is holy uselessness.”¹⁸⁷ Picard, a Roman Catholic Christian, thus gives support for finding God in the silence. “Here in silence is Holy Wilderness, because the wilderness and the building of God are one.”¹⁸⁸ I think we can deduce from Picard that language has more healing and truth if not separated from silence, which is the dwelling place of the Divine Being. “It is the spirit

¹⁸⁴ Max Picard, *The World of Silence* (Wichita, Kansas: Eighth Day Press, 2002), 15.

¹⁸⁵ Picard, 16.

¹⁸⁶ Picard, 17.

¹⁸⁷ Picard, *The World of Silence*, 18-19.

¹⁸⁸ Picard, 19.

that legitimizes speech . . . in silence, the creative activity of spirit goes into it, precedes it.”¹⁸⁹

Group spiritual direction, like individual spiritual direction, is a contemplative practice. It is contemplative because we are opening a space to listen to God and a space for reflective listening to each other. Contemplative practice is grounded in silence. In order to accept and move into silence, one has to understand that it is a conscious way to make space for God. Then the silence itself becomes a prayer. Stillness within yourself and silence within the room affirms the intent to be open to God’s guidance. Persons who have been involved in group spiritual direction and long periods of shared silence reported that they found it was the periods of silence that most supported their sense of spiritual community and that they most enjoyed.

There is a saying that God’s first language is silence. Silence is required to hear God’s still, small voice. One woman who was a member of a spiritual direction group stated that shared silence felt like she was coming home: “I felt nurtured and accepted. I grew in my understanding of God and myself. The peace and the silence felt like home. It created a space to let God be God.”¹⁹⁰ Gerald May reported that participants in groups who shared silence “describe a deep, clear sense of love which transcends the interpersonal give-and-take with which they are so familiar in their daily lives.”¹⁹¹ A readiness for prayerful silence begins with a longing for God. Therefore, it follows that a

¹⁸⁹ Picard, 24.

¹⁹⁰ Tom Adams, Ken Clansky, Rosemary Eyre-Brook, and Anne Lippe, “Reflections on an Eight-Year Journey,” in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, ed. Dougherty, 32.

¹⁹¹ May, *Pilgrimage Home*, 38.

group formed to affirm one another's longing for God begins with silence. There can be a brief prayer offered as the group enters into silence, but then there is prayerful silence for God and for each other. This silence at the beginning of a group should be long enough to center and rest in the silence; centering prayer allows for twenty minutes. "Giving group members a taste of deep, prayerful silence is one of the greatest gifts a group leader can offer. It is also one of the greatest challenges a group leader faces."¹⁹² Changing one's perception of silence may help one enter into silent, contemplative prayer. Instead of emptiness, it is full of God's presence. And as one enters into a deep silence, it is good to devote some time to cleaning out the clutter by letting thoughts go, one by one.

Silence also plays a role in prayerful listening. Listening deeply comes out of silence. This is the reason that silence is kept for at least five minutes after a person has shared and before anyone responds. In the silence, one can continue to listen and also to wait on God's listening. Then in this time of silence, a response or offering to that person will come not just from the member, but from God also: "We make space for God's Spirit to speak within us."¹⁹³ The attentive listening actually is a form of unselfish love towards the other. It is non-judgmental; we seek to understand and to know in order to love. It is like we are listening "to the person speaking and we are also listening for God's Spirit guiding and directing our thoughts and responses."¹⁹⁴ In this act of deep, holy listening given as gift to another, we really are giving love towards the other with no "benefit" to

¹⁹² Margaret Benefiel and Susan Skillen, "Silence: Opening Space for God," in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 270.

¹⁹³ Benefiel and Skillen, "Silence: Opening a Space for God," 273.

¹⁹⁴ Benefiel and Skillen, "Silence: Opening a Space for God," 273.

ourselves. We listen for another as we know God listens to each. Faith-filled listening is foundational to spiritual direction. Unless the director and the directee, or members in a group are willing to place their faith in God's Spirit as present within themselves and the events of their lives, spiritual direction cannot happen. Silence supports the listening and responding.

After the initial period of silence in group spiritual direction, then one person begins to share something of his or her experience of God that seems important for that meeting. This should take no more than ten to twelve minutes. Each is allowed to speak without interruption. As discussed earlier, all of life experiences can have a religious dimension. And we can invite God to enter into any aspect of our life. What is important is that in sharing, the person is seeking to become aware of how God is present, praying for God's deeper presence, or how to respond to God's presence. Whatever material of life the person's shares, her intention is to become aware of God's loving response to her. These experiences can be "places of suffering, confusion, or joy that have been the entry point for their prayer."¹⁹⁵ There are numerous possibilities for the content of what may be shared. It would only be inappropriate if the content were not shared with the intention of seeking God. The directee has to assume responsibility for his or her life with God, and for the appropriateness of the sharing.

After a person has shared, and there is a time again for shared silence, each member of the group may request permission to ask a clarifying question, or a member may give a response to the sharer that was given in the silence. What is important is that the group not be drawn into problem solving, group therapy, advice-giving, comparing of

¹⁹⁵ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 82.

experiences, or “shop-talk.” This is why dialogical or cross-talk is not supported within the structure. Collective silence, reflective listening, and humble faith-sharing are fundamental to the spiritual direction process. “When individuals take seriously the responsibility to stay grounded in the Mystery of Love, a group can give itself to the process of group spiritual direction.”¹⁹⁶ Being prayerfully present to God is what differentiates spiritual community from all other types of community. The community whose ultimate concern is seeking the Spiritual Presence is therefore a community in which self-integration of a person is supported. This is the “continuous mutual encounter of centered self with centered self.”¹⁹⁷ So the contemplative process in group spiritual direction is cumulative. The members must be committed to attending to the ongoing process of the group as it emerges. Each member assumes the belief that God often chooses to minister to us through the sharing and support of others.

Finding genuine *koinonia* community can provide a beginning for people to explore their “lived relationship with mystery”¹⁹⁸ or it can be a source of profound conversion. Reconnecting and nurturing our spiritual lives with others is a powerful antidote for the individualism of current Western culture, and it provides mutual accountability against spiritual deception.

Part III: The Wider Applications of Group Spiritual Direction

¹⁹⁶ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 55.

¹⁹⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 40-41.

¹⁹⁸ Liv Ellmann, “Tending to Spirituality in the Workplace,” in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 174.

One of the earliest applications of group spiritual direction generated at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Bethesda, Maryland resulted from an effort to provide support for spiritual directors. This peer group formed so that those in the ministry of spiritual direction could focus on their growth and abilities as spiritual directors and receive guidance from their peer group. These peer groups basically used the format of prayerful silence, holy listening, and reflective responses. The intention of the group is to increase awareness of God's presence in each member's ministry, prayer experience, and faith life. Obviously, it is easy to facilitate these groups since the members are knowledgeable about spiritual direction. But what about forming groups for spiritual direction in which the members have diverse backgrounds and degrees of religious experience? In forming such groups it is quite necessary, initially, to have a facilitator who can implement the process and keep the group on track. However, the following examples will show the wide variety of settings in which spiritual community can be created, and such groups do not even have to be called "group spiritual direction"!

The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction lists some of the diverse settings for group spiritual formation: parishes, discernment committees, clergy gatherings, workplaces, teen groups, seminaries, prayers groups, homeless shelters, and dream groups. In *Spiritual Direction in Context*, published by Spiritual Directors International, the settings include women's and men's spirituality groups; groups designed for those in later life, health care, rural settings; and for those who are impoverished, suffer from dementia, or who claim to be homosexual. In *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, Felicia McKnight writes about the importance of intention and the wide variety of forms that spiritual direction takes:

The literal name that each group chooses will vary, depending upon the context in which the group rises. In the prophetic recognition of the internal intentionality of the group, and in the creative naming of the reality that is occurring, group spiritual direction comes into being in one of its numberless possibilities of form.¹⁹⁹

Forming small groups within a parish for the purpose of attending to each person's awareness of the presence and action of God in life can be of great benefit to the larger community. Often the members of this group will also be members on other church committees, and they will begin to bring contemplative elements of group spiritual direction into other community gatherings. Frequently this means introducing prayerful silence at the beginning of the meeting, or it may include a brief meditation and opportunity for each person to share some way in which he or she recently experienced God. This allows for members of any group to become aware of "the Spirit as the living ground of each person and of the group's movements, then the truest kind of spiritual community appears."²⁰⁰

For clergy, forming groups for spiritual direction is an excellent way to come to appreciate deeply the spirituality of others and find support for themselves. One clergy facilitator in a group of six male clergy reported "a continuing grace from the clergy group experience" especially of his own spiritual deepening from "their disclosures and

¹⁹⁹ Felicia McKnight, Mary Ellen Murphy, SC, Paulette Lauren, and Christine Phoenix-Green, "Group Spiritual Direction: Intentionality and Diversity," *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, no. 3 (September, 1995): 31.

²⁰⁰ Tilden Edwards, Foreword, in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 3-4.

discernments.”²⁰¹ Another group of clergy was facilitated by a lay woman trained and mentored by staff from the Shalem Institute. One member reported rather poetically, “The group is a regular interval for ‘breaching’ into consciousness and speech whatever God has been doing in the depths, like a whale breaking the surface.”²⁰²

Liv Ellmann, serves as adjunct faculty in Seattle’s University’s Executive Leadership Program and founded SoulTenders to support people in the workplace in finding God or the Mysterious Other in all things. When entering into a corporate setting in which one cannot assume Christianity, she is cautious about using the word spirituality or even God, but instead may used refer to “exploring our lived relationship with mystery.”²⁰³ And why shouldn’t spirituality be allowed to enter into the workplace? Would it not be wonderful to have an hour once a week to create a space to see and meet the Mysterious Other in our colleagues and in ourselves? As Ellmann believes, “it frees our creative spirits”²⁰⁴ and “helps us to ask how am I making the world a better place?”²⁰⁵ My guess is that the result of this work is also helping people connect with their deep desire to be in relation that transcends functionality within the workplace.

It seems that understanding and participating in the process of group spiritual direction would be very helpful to seminarians who are being trained to be spiritual leaders. But

²⁰¹ Don Kelley, “Learning with a Clergy Group,” in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 144.

²⁰² Lois Lindbloom, “Group Spiritual Direction with Clergy,” in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 159.

²⁰³ Liv Ellmann, “Tending to Spirituality in the Workplace,” in *The Lived Experience in Group Spiritual Direction*, 174.

²⁰⁴ Ellmann, 175.

²⁰⁵ Ellmann, 172.

the immediate benefit of being a member in such a group is that it creates a place to share the intensity of emotions and spiritual growth that occurs during seminary training. In “Spiritual Direction with Seminary Students,” Jane Vennard interviewed twelve Protestant seminarians and received some insightful comments on what they were seeking in spiritual direction. In general, there is a desire for creating a space “for us, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, where we can breathe deeply the goodness of God and help us to remember and live with the mystery of God.”²⁰⁶ An Episcopal priest on the faculty in a small East coast seminary actually designed a course in group spiritual direction called “Seeking God.” The seminarians’ positive experience in this class of spiritual formation led this faculty member to recommend a stronger balance between academic priority and occasion to be in a reflection group practicing “skills of prayerful listening to self, others, and God.”²⁰⁷

As is apparent in most church settings, women more than men, are apt to become involved in a small group for purposes of shared relationship and inner work. I guess this is because traditionally women are in charge of the family and its relationships, and men are in charge of going out into the world and “getting business done.” There are many reasons for differences in cultural roles, but the bottom line for men is to not show your vulnerability or your pain. Thus group spiritual direction for men can be specially structured and conscious of “men’s experience of feelings, fatherhood, sexuality, and

²⁰⁶ Jane E. Vennard, “Spiritual Direction with Seminary Students,” in *Spiritual Direction in Context: A Spiritual Directors International Book*, ed. Nick Wagner (Morehouse Publishing, 2006), 43. Vennard is called to ordained ministry of teaching and spiritual direction in the United Church of Christ and is adjunct faculty at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO.

²⁰⁷ A. J. van den Blink, “Group Spiritual Direction in Seminary: How I Came to Teach a Course in Group Spiritual Direction,” in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*, 231.

love.”²⁰⁸ The truth, it appears for men, is that most have not come to grips with “forgotten or repressed grief”²⁰⁹ and have not developed a capacity for interiority. However, these tendencies are not to be judged, only understood in order to offer proper guidance for the inner journey with God.

In the area of health care, for patients and their families, and for the health care staff, there is a real need for opening a space for the Spirit of God’s healing and strength-filled grace. The chaplain offers pastoral care to the patient and family and the staff too. However, the spiritual care of the staff can be made more intentional and more fulfilling by creating groups of personnel that meet once a week at lunch for reflection on and affirmation of the mission of health care and how each person responds to this call in work. Gordon Self, a Benedictine oblate, chaplain, and staff member at the Caritas Health Group in Alberta, Canada, started a group for spiritual nurturing of the hospital staff. He reported in an article titled, “A Little Soul Work Does a Hospital Well,” that not only did “individual staff members feel more renewed, the ultimate fruits of the Spirit are seen in quality patient care.”²¹⁰ By attending to the well-being of the staff members, energy was transformed into a more focused commitment. After her work in developing spirituality in the workplace, Liv Ellmann began integrating spirituality and palliative health care in Pasadena, California. She believes that “Group spiritual direction adapts to

²⁰⁸ Donald Bissom, FMS, “Melting the Iceberg: Spiritual Direction for Men,” in *Spiritual Direction in Context*, 35.

²⁰⁹ Bissom, 32.

²¹⁰ Gordon Self, “A Little Soul Work Does a Hospital Well,” in *Spiritual Direction in Context*, 92.

the environment and community gathered. In a corporate, health care, or congregational setting the process will adapt to meet the needs and language of the group.”²¹¹

Jane E. Vennard, author of *Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats* and *A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice*, also uses a form of group spiritual direction called contemplative supervision. The structure of this group spiritual direction is used primarily for discernment of call or vocation. It very closely resembles the compassionate observer method (COM) which is another group structure for the purpose of contemplative discernment. In fact, the model is highly structured to provide safety for the presenter. The COM was evaluated by Nancee Lea Martin-Coffey as the subject of her Doctor of Ministry project submitted to the School of Theology at the University of the South. In both Vennard’s and Martin-Coffey’s model, the group includes a presenter, a timekeeper, three or four responders, and the remaining are compassionate observers. The time segments are very precise, and the roles of group equally well defined. Vennard has recently included in the contemplative supervision model a fifteen to twenty minute segment of time for the responders to ask questions. The presenter is free to speak from his or her heart about any issue, story, or other experience. The timekeeper offers an initial prayer and watches the time. The responders’ questions and responses are bracketed by silence. The compassionate observers are there to pray and “witness with compassion the interaction between the responders and the presenter,

²¹¹ Liv Ellmann, Feb. 16, 2009, personal electronic mail to author.

and to be reminders of the presence of the Spirit.”²¹² This structure of group spiritual direction “is an opportunity to turn to one another with listening hearts.”²¹³

On a broader basis, group spiritual direction actually creates a small spiritual community, a network of relationship offering connectedness in living with others, instead of isolation. You might call it “communal spiritual direction,” in which the Spirit of God speaks to individuals and to the community as a whole. “People within small faith communities inspire one another to maintain a rich prayer life, to delve into the word of God, and to reach out in diverse ministries.”²¹⁴ For spiritual directors, knowledge of group dynamics and shared leadership skills will enable the development of small spiritual community which is the basis of group spiritual direction. “The small community is a new way of living, a new way of seeing, a new way of being, a new way of community life as a community of believers in Jesus Christ.”²¹⁵

Ann Kline reiterates the essential ingredients for spiritual direction, group or individual: sharing experiences, reflective listening, silence, and response. There is an experiential difference between individual and group spiritual direction. In individual direction, the focus is more on God’s presence and action within the one directee. In group direction, the focus “serves to emphasize God’s intimacy with us.”²¹⁶ Group

²¹² Nancee Lea Martin-Coffey, “*Out of Silence: The Compassionate Observer Method of Contemplative Discernment*” (DMin project, School of Theology, University of the South, 2008), 9.

²¹³ Jane E. Vennard, March 21, 2009, personal electronic mail to author.

²¹⁴ Helen Marie Raycraft, “Spiritual Companionship within Small Christian Communities,” in *The Lived Experience*, 106.

²¹⁵ Raycraft, 106.

²¹⁶ Ann Kline, “Raising Holy Sparks,” in *The Lived Experience*, 88.

spiritual direction provides a sense of interconnectedness: God, whom we seek, is primarily found in relationship with others. In relations within a group, we have the gift of the many being there for us, and so we gift each other with our varied, yet mysteriously wonderful experiences of God.

Conclusions

There is a rich tradition of spiritual direction in Christianity, a tradition of attending to another's experience of God. Historically, spiritual direction has occurred in a relationship between a spiritual director, who offers guidance for the spiritual journey, and the directee, who seeks to deepen his or her relationship with God. However, in the mid-1970s, the Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation in Bethesda, Maryland, developed a format for group spiritual direction that also offers each group member an opportunity to share experiences of God and to discern what is authentically of God and what is not.

Subsequently, several books and many articles have been written explaining the format and intent of group spiritual direction along with information reported from such groups about their experience of group spiritual direction. In general, persons have affirmed a deepening of their faith and a more intimate relationship with God as well as an enjoyment of Christian fellowship within the group. Theologically, these groups are based on being companions in Christ, the same foundation for individual spiritual direction.

Macmurray's philosophy of persons being constituted in relations of love towards all others offers support for the God-centered relations established in spiritual direction

groups. Zizioulas also holds a theology of personhood being established in relation: in relationship with the Trinity in and through Christ's person and sharing of the Eucharist. Simone Weil, in her writings about friendship, proposed that true friendship had a quality of love that is a gift from God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's description of Christian community gives further images that the source of our love for others is given and received through our relation together in Christ.

The New Testament emphasizes that we are persons in communion as the body of Christ in the church. Jesus Christ desires us to be one as he and the Father are one. The Holy Spirit is sent to bind us together. We are to love each other as God loves us, freely, openly, and without fear. The church is the place to establish this fellowship of *koinonia*, which becomes the deepest reality of our life together, our shared experience of God. One common benefit of spiritual direction is a development of trust in a caring, loving, personal God and an ability to discern our response to God.

In conclusion, relationship based on our identity as "one in Christ" seems to fulfill both our yearning for God and our desire to love and be loved by others. Perhaps our Christian tradition of spiritual direction now needs to embrace more fully the practice of group spiritual direction. Not only does this format allow spiritual direction to be available to more people, but the structure of group spiritual direction also lends itself to teaching and practicing love towards others.

"Spiritual direction is about relationship. Indeed, all of our lives are about relationships—with God, with our self, with our families, with the church, with those we love and those we find hard to love, even with the earth, and our place in the universe."

²¹⁷ Richard Gillard's hymn, "The Servant Song," reflects the spirit in which group spiritual direction takes place: "I will hold the Christ-light for you, in the night-time of your fear. Won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too."²¹⁸ In the group spiritual direction relationship, the members become a sacrament to each other, a sacrament meditating God's presence. This new form of ministry may provide another "holy communion" for persons within the church.

²¹⁷ Marian Cowan, CSJ, "The Ministry of Spiritual Direction: Conversations about Life in the Light of Faith," <http://www.liguorian.org/liguorian08/MinistryOfSpiritualDirection.html>, consulted on March 27, 2009.

²¹⁸ Richard Gillard, "The Servant Song," in *The Faith We Sing: Pew Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), no. 2222.

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