

DOCTRINAL SECTION

DE COLORES

You and Your Spiritual Director

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1. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE CURSILLO

I do not know what you thought of priests before you made the Cursillo. But I am sure that now you know them better and appreciate their work more. The Cursillo is, among many other things, an encounter between the priest and the layman. And both of them benefit from the experience.

One of the persons who attracted your attention more forcefully during your Cursillo was the Spiritual Director. His dedication, his friendliness, his readiness to listen, to help at any time of the day or of the night certainly impressed you. You talked with him about your problems, doubts, anxieties; and in him you found the light, the guidance and the strength you were looking for.

In the Cursillo you felt the need for spiritual direction; and you were happy to find it.

However, your Cursillo was made some months or years ago. Do you still feel a need for spiritual direction?...

I hope you do; because you need spiritual direction.

Spiritual Direction is the art of leading souls progressively from the beginning of the spiritual life to the height of Christian perfection.

"From the beginning...to the height"... In other words, spiritual direction is needed at all the stages of the spiritual life, and by all who are interested in attaining Christian perfection. By all, the beginners and the advanced!

"Leading souls"...; that is, showing the way, guiding, removing obstacles...

When you are a tourist, who shows you around? . . . When you are a student, who guides you in your quest for knowledge? When you have a legal problem, who leads you out of it? When you are sick, who points the way to health?

Why do the tourist guide, the teacher, the lawyer, the physician lead you? Why do you trust them?—Because they are experts in their respective fields, because they are qualified to lead.

In the Cursillo you made up your mind to pursue the high ideal of Christian perfection. You started a pilgrimage to heaven. You decided to live your spiritual life fully.

However, the attainment of Christian perfection is not an easy task; the way to heaven is full of obstacles; spiritual life is sometimes difficult to understand and to live.

You need an expert to lead the way. You need a spiritual director.

The rollos *Obstacles to the Life in Grace* and *Life in Grace* spoke to you about this. You were advised to have a spiritual director.

"The Cursillo technique" — writes Bishop Hervas — "imposes Spiritual Direction as an ordinary means to Christian asceticism" (*Leader's Manual*, 226).

This spiritual direction is needed in both the Cursillo Proper and the Post-Cursillo.

Your Cursillo Proper would not have been the success it was without spiritual direction. The rollos taught you many things; from the lay staff you learned much. . . . But where did you find the peace of mind, the interior happiness you sought? . . . — In the advice given to you by the Spiritual Director, in the absolution he gave you after your confession, in the Sacrament of the Eucharist which you received from his hands. . . .

2. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE POST-CURSILLO

There can be no Cursillo Proper without spiritual direction. And there can be no Post-Cursillo without spiritual direction.

Look at your Service Sheet. There you will find a list of practices of piety which you voluntarily imposed upon yourself. These practices of piety are means of perseverance in the Life in Grace.

The meaning and value of those practices of piety were explained to you in *Life in Grace*. Yet, there are still many things that you do not under-

stand about them, many questions that you would like to ask, especially if—as is often the case—you never practiced them before you made the Cursillo.

What shall I do when I do not feel like meditating? What books can I use for my spiritual reading? Can I compose my own Morning Offering and Evening Prayers, or do I have to follow the Guide Book? Is a Recollection the same as a Spiritual Retreat? Can the five decades of the Rosary be separated and said at different times?...

These and countless other questions have to be answered by the Spiritual Director.

However, this is not a matter of asking all the questions in a session or two or within a six-month period after the Cursillo; so that, once all the questions are asked and all the answers given, there will be no further need for spiritual direction.

You will never finish asking questions; and your spiritual Director will never be through giving answers.

You see, life means movement. Spiritual life therefore means spiritual movement of the soul towards God. And, as I said a while ago, spiritual direction leads souls "progressively"...

As you advance further and further in spiritual life, more questions—of a higher level and deeper meaning—will come to your mind: Do I have to use a book every time I make my meditation, or can I just think of God? What shall I do when I feel like shedding tears at the Communion Rail?...

And, as a Christian soul soars towards the heights of Christian Perfection, more questions: What is the meaning of complete detachment? Can I offer my life to God in immolation for the sins of others?...

And so on and on until that soul flies so high that it reaches heaven. Then, and only then, will that soul be out of questions and in no need of answers...

This is the natural process of development of the Service Sheet. The Service Sheet that you filled in the Cursillo House was only the beginning of your Commitment of Service to the Lord. What you took up on that day was a "minimum". But a minimum presupposes a maximum; and it is towards the maximum of Christian perfection that you should strive incessantly.

Your Service Sheet has to grow. Your spiritual life has to grow.

A young tree needs the care of a gardener to grow straight. A cursilista needs the care of a spiritual director to make sure that his spiritual life grows straight.

Believe me, without guidance the spiritual life of many a cursillista would easily grow in the wrong direction!...

Your spiritual growth demands that you keep your Service Sheet; and that you have a spiritual director to help you keep it.

As a Christian soul advances in spiritual life it increases its love, its dedication, its generosity.

Soon this soul feels that it can—and should—do more. That it has to lengthen its meditation, increase the frequency of Holy Communion, dedicate more time to the service of others...

In other words, a revision of the Service Sheet is in order.

When you filled up your Service Sheet at the Cursillo House you were asked to seek the advice of a priest. Now that you are thinking of revising it, you should also consult him. The reason is the same: His prudent and expert advice will help you avoid the over-enthusiasm of those who imprudently try to do more than they can and the sluggishness of those who are too lazy to do all they can.

Sometimes a revision is needed, not to increase the depth of your commitment, but to decrease it or to substitute one thing for another.

A cursillista who has never done any meditating, promises to meditate for one hour every Saturday. The first Saturday he struggles valiantly to keep his promise. But when the hour is over he sighs with relief and exclaims: "This is too much. I never thought it would be so difficult!"...

Of course it is too much!... That hour could have been divided throughout the week, ten minutes every day. But, again, in order to avoid changes without sufficient reason and imprudent substitutions, the change or the substitution should be done with the help and approval of a spiritual director.

If you are sick, aren't you expected to consult your doctor before increasing or decreasing the dosage of your medications or before substituting one drug for another?

Spiritual Direction not only helps you understand your Service Sheet better. It also contributes greatly to the keeping of all the other means of perseverance of your Service Sheet. Actually it is in itself a valuable means of perseverance in the Life in Grace.

Look around. Who persevere in the Post-Cursillo: those who never seek the advice, the guidance of a priest?... Who fall, who abandon the Cursillo: those who have a spiritual director?...

You also need Spiritual direction for the success of your apostolate. A cursillista is an apostle. But frequently the word "apostolate" is misunderstood, even by well-meaning cursillistas.

Some cursillistas seem to believe that all the apostolate they have to do is to take care of their own souls, ignoring the spiritual needs of their fellow men. Others are carried away by an overdose of enthusiasm and, engulfed in apostolic action, forget their family and professional duties. At times one comes across a cursillista who calls apostolate what is just the impulse of a temporary whim or the result of a misguided zeal.

The advice of a spiritual director will prevent such mistakes in your apostolate.

Be your own judge. Think for a while about what you were before: you made the Cursillo, what you wanted to be when you were in the Cursillo House, what you are now, what you would like to be in the future...; and then tell me: Can you do without spiritual direction?

"You know everything"; "you can take care of yourself"; "you know as much as any priest"; "you don't need a spiritual director"...—Be careful! This may be the voice of your laziness, of your pride, of the devil...

Nobody knows everything; nobody can take full care of himself; everybody needs someone else's advice! Haven't you noticed that physicians, when sick, rely, not on their medical knowledge, but on the knowledge of their colleagues?

The *do-it-yourself* theory is dangerous when applied to spiritual life. "Yes" — you say — "spiritual direction is good; but only for women"...—Really?... Therefore Christian perfection is only for women! How about that?

The Cursillo was invented for men. The Guide Book was written for men. And yet the Guide Book expects a cursillista to have a spiritual director. What does it say in the Examination of Conscience: "Was today your day to visit your spiritual director? When will you go?"...

The Service Sheet was also devised for men. And one of the things you are asked to report on at your Team Reunion is Spiritual Direction.

"I have enough spiritual direction when I listen to sermons in Church, or talks at the Ultreya, or conferences at seminars, etc."...—That is some kind of general spiritual direction which applies to all, or at least to many Christians. But you are an individual person with your own soul, your own faults, your own spiritual needs, your own vocation... No two persons are completely alike. This is true not only of the physical, but also of the spiritual world. You need individual, personal spiritual direction.

When you go to a doctor he does not give you a ready-made prescription, does he? Have you ever seen in a hospital a sign telling all patients to take this or that kind of medicine?...—Every ailment has its own causes and effects, and therefore its own diagnosis and treatment!

You need your own personal physician for the health of your body. You also need a spiritual physician (your own spiritual director) for the health of your soul.

3. HOW TO FIND A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

The Cursillo wants you to have a spiritual director, but does not give you one. You have to find one yourself.

"How do I go about finding a spiritual director?"...—How do you go about finding a personal physician?

All licensed physicians can practice Medicine; but not all are specialized in all the branches of Medicine; not all are advisable for all kinds of patients.

You don't choose a physician *just* because he is your provincemate or because he lives near your house, do you? When you are sick you look for the physician who can best take care of your health.

All priests can be spiritual directors. However, this does not mean that *any* priest is in a position to direct *any* soul.

You should choose as your spiritual director that priest who understands you well, who can lead you most directly to God, who can best help you in the task of attaining Christian perfection.

The Spiritual Director of your Cursillo introduced you to spiritual direction; but he does not have to be your spiritual director in the Post-Cursillo. He can, of course, if he is the one you need. But you should not expect him to be the spiritual director of all those who made the Cursillo with him. He simply does not have the time.

I understand your reasons for preferring as your spiritual director a priest who has made the Cursillo. He is familiar with Cursillo terminology; and you feel more at ease with him. But, remember, it is not at all necessary that your spiritual director be a cursillista. A priest is a priest — and therefore qualified to direct souls — whether he is a cursillista or not.

Your Spiritual Director can be a priest of the Secular (Diocesan) Clergy or from one of the many Religious Orders and Congregations that make up the Regular Clergy.

Your Parish Priest can — but does not have to — be your spiritual director. Whether or not your spiritual director should at the same time be your confessor will be discussed when talking about Confession in *You and Your Service Sheet*. There are other factors that you can take into account in the selection of a spiritual director. For instance, experience in the direction of souls, personal holiness, the fact that he is a friend of the family or a mem-

ber of a Religious Order for which you have a special predilection, etc. But don't forget that the *primary* consideration should always be your spiritual progress.

When you decide to have a spiritual director, the first thing you should do is to ask God for guidance. Then, keeping in mind the above-mentioned pointers, look around for one.

Once you have found one, ask him if he can be your spiritual director. Don't be surprised at this! It is not that a priest is choosy in the souls he directs. It is that spiritual direction imposes special obligations on a priest; and he should be allowed to have a say in this. Priests are usually busy people. Before accepting the direction of your soul, he must make sure of a few things: that he has the time to attend to you regularly, that he can take care of your soul, that you understand the basic principles of spiritual direction.

When he has said yes, you and he make a plan of action. You agree on when and where to meet and on any other thing that might be necessary for the success of your spiritual direction.

4 BASIC RULES IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

In Spiritual Direction there are some rules which should be always kept in mind.

You must be earnest in your desire to attain Christian perfection. You should never allow your spiritual direction to become a matter of routine; or your visits to your spiritual director, social affairs.

In order to guide you, your spiritual director has to know you. Open your mind and your heart to him. When you consult a physician you are not supposed to hide anything from him. In Spiritual Direction sincerity is of the utmost importance.

Your spiritual director expects you to have confidence in him, to trust him. It is taken for granted that a patient follows the treatment prescribed by his physician. It is also taken for granted that you follow the advice of your spiritual director. In other words, you must be ready to obey him as you obey your doctor. In your doctor you trust his experience and skill. In your spiritual director you trust his experience, his skill..., and the Holy Spirit who uses him as an instrument to guide you!...

I am not asking for the *blind* obedience of the person who says yes to things even without understanding them, who never asks a question, never raises an objection. Spiritual Direction is not a monologue. You can ask questions, discuss problems express your opinion; even argue with your spiritual director. However, do not forget that he is responsible for your soul, and that it is his duty to direct it in the way he thinks convenient.

Your spiritual director will at times ask you to do things that you do not like. He does not do that to hurt you; but for your own good. Follow his advice, as you follow the advice of your doctor when he prescribes bitter medicines or painful surgical or laboratory procedures. Don't you sometimes ask your children to do things they dislike?...

Your obedience will bear abundant fruit in the form of spiritual progress.

Whatever you tell your spiritual director he keeps secret. Please keep secret what he tells you. Do not go around telling other people what transpires in your visits to your spiritual director. If you have to talk about it, do not go beyond generalities that do not betray the privacy of your spiritual direction.

Go to a hospital to visit a newly-confined patient, and observe the behaviour of his visitors. You will notice in them a tendency to diagnose the case and to recommend treatments prescribed by their own doctors on some previous occasion. And, of course, there are as many diagnoses and prescriptions as visitors. A wise patient will listen politely to all this; and then follow the advice of his own physician. — Do not insist on prescribing for other souls what your spiritual director has prescribed for yours. It may not apply to them. Instead, advise them to have a spiritual director of their own.

When you are under the care of a physician it is not proper for you to call someone else. If the opinion of another physician is needed, let your doctor seek it. In other words, the patient has to be loyal to his physician.

You are supposed to be loyal to your spiritual director. Do not go from one to another. When you have one, stick to him. He knows his limitations. If he thinks that someone else's advice is needed, he will seek it. And, if necessary, he will advise you to consult another priest.

Of course, there are times when it becomes necessary for a patient to change doctors. In such cases he is justified in doing so. It may also happen that one day it will become necessary for you to change spiritual directors. When that happens, do not hesitate to do so. But before you do, please make sure that there is sufficient reason for it.

Here are some reasons which can be considered good enough to leave your spiritual director and look for another one: when it is obvious that he leads you in the wrong way; when you have lost your confidence in him and are unable to open up to him; when you find out that, instead of spiritual direction, all you and your spiritual director do is to waste time in useless conversation, etc.

However, you should also make sure that all this is not your fault. Because if it is, then it is not a matter of changing spiritual directors, but of changing your attitude. The best spiritual director in the world can do little, or nothing, if a soul refuses to cooperate with him.

If you have to leave your spiritual director, be polite enough to let him know of your decision. Do not be afraid to hurt his feelings. He will understand. You will hurt his feelings more if you just take a French leave. He should know that he is no longer responsible for your soul. Otherwise—thinking that he is doing his duty—he may unwittingly interfere with the progress of your spiritual life.

Whoever your spiritual director may be, there are some mistakes which you should avoid in your relations with him.

Your spiritual director is there to guide you; not to say Amen to everything you say.

He is expected to guide you; not the other way around. Let him have his own spiritual director.

He is your friend; but he is not your buddy. Don't let your friendship develop into familiarity. Since familiarity breeds contempt, you will lose your respect for him, and for his advice.

He is your spiritual adviser. He is not an adviser on financial or legal matters. You know that if he can help you and your family in these things he is ready to do so; but don't expect too much from him.

Your spiritual director is trying to lead you to Christian perfection. But he is not perfect. He is a man, with human weaknesses and faults. Be understanding!

5. "A FAITHFUL FRIEND"

The fact that your spiritual director is your guide does not mean that you cannot take a step without his permission, or that you have to visit him every week.

"This simply means"—as we said in *You and Your Post-Cursillo*—"that you should have a friend to whom you can go when you have a problem which you cannot solve, a question that you cannot answer...; when you are in doubt, when you do not know what to do"...

"A friend!... That is what your spiritual director is: a very special friend!

"A faithful friend"—says the Ecclesiasticus (6, 14)—"is a sure shelter, whoever finds one has found a rare treasure".

You have indeed found a rare treasure if you have found a good spiritual director. He is your shelter against the enemies of your life in Grace and a guarantee of faithfulness to your Post-Cursillo.

If you don't have one yet, look for one. You will not regret it.

Listen to St. Francis de Sales, a great director of souls:

Do you seek to take the sure road to perfection? Then look for a virtuous man to lead and guide you. Here you have the most important of recommendations.

(Quoted by *Leaders' Manual*, 261)

If all you want to do is to attend Mass on Sundays, go to Confession every two or three months and to Communion every two weeks, perhaps you do not need a spiritual director.

But is this all you want to do?... Haven't you heard Christ's invitation to follow Him "all the way"?... As a cursillista, are you not expected to "take the sure road to perfection"? If so, "look for a virtuous man to lead and guide you"; in other words, find a spiritual director, and let him guide you.

6. WISHFUL THINKING?

Not long ago I spoke about spiritual direction to a group of cursillistas. During the open forum, one of the cursillistas stood up and said:

Father, what you have told us about spiritual direction is really very good. That is how a cursillista should take care of his spiritual life. But in practice it is not always possible. Considering the large number of cursillistas and the shortage of priests in the Philippines, how can every one of us have a spiritual director? And what about the many other Christians who are not cursillistas, but who are also interested in spiritual direction? Where shall we find enough priests to direct so many souls?

Regretfully I had to agree with him. "Regretfully", I say, because it is indeed sad that, owing to lack of priests in this country, so many opportunities for spiritual progress are going to waste. It is a fact that there are cursillistas who cannot find a spiritual director. In this sense, much of what I have said in the preceding pages is perhaps "wishful thinking"...

If you are lucky enough to have found a spiritual director whom you can visit regularly, give thanks to the Lord; for that is a most valuable grace.

If not, at least try always to remember what the Cursillo taught you about priests; keep close to them. Look for them whenever you are in need of guidance. At the Ultreya or in some other place, the good Lord will somehow show you the way to a priest.

And don't forget to pray for more vocations to the priesthood, for more spiritual directors.