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**SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: A TOOL FOR THE SPIRITUAL
GROWTH OF THE LORETO SISTERS OF KARINDE
STUDENTS' HOUSE IN KAREN, NAIROBI, KENYA**

**An Integration paper submitted to the Institute of Spirituality and
Religious Formation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
certificate in Spirituality**

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STUDENT’S DECLARATION.

I, the undersigned, declare that this integration paper is my origin work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a certificate in spirituality. This work has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited and acknowledged.

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Date

This Integration paper has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor:

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PART ONE

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE PAPER

1.0. INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore the understanding of spiritual direction among the Loreto Sisters according to their constitutions, look at the challenges they face in regard to spiritual direction, propose ways of making it effective and present a general conclusion. It will include other units taken during the spirituality course at Tangaza University College in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation at the certificate level. It will give an overview of the researcher's understanding of spiritual direction and how she has integrated it in her life. A variety of courses were undertaken and all were meant to transform one by integrating them for one's spiritual growth.

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters), is an international Congregation which was started by Mary Ward in 1609. The Loreto sisters follow the Ignatian Spirituality and follows the constitutions of the Jesuits based on the female perspective. Spiritual direction is a very important component in the Ignatian Spirituality and in the life of the sisters. All sisters are encouraged to have a spiritual director. It is recommended that the sisters should have direction at least ones a month or as need be.

The Ignatian tradition of discernment is essential. It underlies all our decision making and enable us to face and review our choices with freedom and trust, in the context of the Institute's mission, the greater good and the gifts we have to offer. In so doing, we also realize the importance of prayer: "Prayer is as essential as the air we breathe. It is the way we acknowledge God and creation in all its glory and wonder; it is our constant source of discernment and wisdom and strength in

the ministry.”¹ Personal prayer draws us into an intimate relationship with the one who has called us to this way of life; an intimacy that led Mary Ward to refer to God as a parent of parents and friend of all friends. We are nourished by daily meditation, through which the message of the scriptures comes into dialogue with our lives. “The dynamic of the spiritual exercises is foundational to our way of life and is basic in times of serious decision making. In the Examen, we reflect on God’s goodness through the course of each day acknowledging our gifts and our frailty. Keeping God before our eyes, we are led to reflect on our experiences and to discern the movement of the spirits within so that we may go forward in freedom.”² Our desire for God and God’s desire for us are expressed in the annual retreat, regular spiritual direction and times for reflection. Through this, we seek to deepen our relationship with God.

1.2. AIM OF THE STUDY

Being a student in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation at Tangaza University College, and having had some inputs on spiritual direction, I would like to explore the understanding of spiritual direction among the Loreto sisters and find out how effective it has been in their spiritual growth. I would also like to integrate what I have learnt in my spirituality courses. Finally, I shall propose some ways (recommendations) of making the process of spiritual direction better.

1.3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The following are the specific objectives of the paper;

1. To investigate the understanding of spiritual direction according to the constitutions of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary;
2. To find out the challenges facing the Loreto Sisters regarding spiritual direction;

¹ THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, 295.

² THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, 296.

3. To propose some strategies for the improvement of the process of spiritual direction.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the questions guiding our paper:

1. What is the understanding of spiritual direction by the Loreto sisters?
2. What are the challenges facing Loreto Sisters in regard to spiritual direction?
3. How can spiritual direction be made more effective?

PART TWO

THE UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AMONG THE LORETO SISTERS IN THE KARINDE STUDENTS' HOUSE IN KAREN, NAIROBI

2.0. INTRODUCTION

Part two discusses the understanding of spiritual direction by the Loreto sisters at *Karinde* students' house in Karen, Nairobi. It also discusses other units learnt in the spirituality course and how to integrate them in the daily life. It is a wholistic approach of integrating which is taught in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation at Tangaza University College.

2.1. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

“Spiritual direction is the help given by one Christian to another, which enables the person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.”³ According to Dr. Jude Chisanga, in his course of Spiritual Counselling and Formation, spiritual direction is also referred to as spiritual counselling. It is also called spiritual accompaniment. It is docility to the Holy Spirit. One has to free oneself from blocks and obstacles that prevent one from listening to the Spirit of God. It also frees us for God and for other people so that after experiencing God, we can then reach out to other people. It is not problem solving but it is about sharing one’s life with a director.⁴

Spiritual direction is about the discernment of the spirits. There are two spirits at work in a person’s life. These are the good and the bad spirits. One has to distinguish which spirit is at work by being attentive to the movement of the spirits in him or her. The spirit of God is the consoling voice that

³ WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 8.

⁴ Cf. JUDE CHISANGA, *Spiritual Counselling and Formation*, classroom notes.

always encourages us to continue on the right path. In the course of spiritual discernment, Dr. Tim Lockwood taught us that the evil spirit keeps on suggesting discouraging statements which put us down. You have to discover from which spirit the inspirations are coming from. God wants the best out of us, to give us life and not destroy it.⁵

Human sexuality is an important aspect in spiritual direction since a human person has feelings, emotions, desires and he or she is also relational. According to Fr. Dominic Mwanzia, in his course of Human Sexuality, it is the power of sexuality that drives us to relate with God and others. It is through our sexuality that God also communicates to us through our feelings, emotions and aspirations. Consequently, self-awareness is important so that we are able to understand what is happening in our lives. God Himself is relational and would also want us to relate with one another so that we can live as a community. It is through the power of sexuality that we can be able to relate with God as loving persons. If we do not experience some deep personal loving relationships, we might not be able to relate to God as a loving Father. Our spirituality informs our sexuality so that we are able to live morally upright lives.⁶

2.2. IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual Direction is important for the deepening of the relationship between God and the directee. According to William Barry, “Spiritual direction helps with the development of one’s relationship with the Lord.”⁷ The agents most immediately involved in spiritual direction are the Lord, directee and the director. The relationship between the director and the directee can be crucial for the development of the relationship between the directee and the Lord. Directors do not create

⁵ Cf. TIMOTHY Lockwood, *Spiritual discernment*, classroom notes.

⁶ Cf. DOMINIC MWANZIA, *Human sexuality*, classroom notes.

⁷ WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The Practice of Spiritual direction*, 31.

relationships between God and their directees but they try to foster such relationships. For this reason, God is the real spiritual director.

William Barry tells us that God is a mystery, the wholly other that we cannot know or name in any adequate fashion. He does not need anybody to help Him relate to His people, so the director helps the directee to develop a relationship with the Lord. But what do we mean by the relationship with God? We mean something that already exists even when the person is not aware of it. I am a creature even when I am not aware that God is my creator. God knows me as His son or daughter even when I am not aware of Him as Father. Our faith tells us that God continually communicates with us whether we know it or not, by continuously creating and redeeming us. He shares Himself with us even when we do not know that He is doing so.⁸

2.2.1. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOSTERS A CONTEMPLATIVE ATTITUDE

As spiritual direction fosters a contemplative attitude, we now ask: What is contemplation? When he wrote some spiritual exercises, St Ignatius of Loyola proposed that a person looks at Jesus as he appears in the gospel events and let himself become absorbed in what he is like, what he cares about and what he is doing. According to Fr. Remigius Ikpe, in his course on Prayer and Spirituality, contemplation therefore, starts when one stops being totally preoccupied with his or her own concerns and lets another person, event or object take his or her attention. Contemplative prayer then means paying attention and being absorbed in the person of Jesus, in God, or in biblical persons or outstanding Christians.⁹ According to William Barry, a contemplative attitude grows from such a prayer and if it does, it allows one to find some ease and spontaneity in paying attention to God as He reveals Himself in the scriptures, creation, one's life and the life of the world.¹⁰

⁸ Cf. WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The Practice of Spiritual direction*, 32.

⁹ Cf. REMIGIUS IKPE, *prayer and spirituality*, classroom notes.

¹⁰ Cf. WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The practice of Spiritual direction*, 48.

There are two difficulties which have to be overcome for us to have this kind of contemplation. The first one is caused by prior categories which make it close to impossible to see or hear any other person in his or her own right because we have relegated what we see in a glass. The second has to do with our tendency to look inward rather than outward, to be absorbed by our own concerns and not the others'. Contemplation is therefore an experience of transcendence that is forgetfulness of self and of everyone and everything else, except the contemplated object. Spiritual directors sometimes have to work long and patiently with people to help them reach the point of being able to forget themselves.¹¹

The core of spiritual direction is spiritual discernment.¹² It is actually discernment which helps us with a criterion for the evaluation of spiritual and religious experiences during the process of spiritual direction.

2.2.2. CRITERIA OF EVALUATING A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Discernment of spirits is being able to recognize and admit differences; distinguish one situation from another instead of seeing them similar. We need to pay attention to the following in the discernment of the movements of the spirits in spiritual direction:

1. Compare an experience which you are doubtful about with another which you are sure is from God. Remember the pattern of the one which you were sure about. What aspects of that experience indicate that it came from God?
2. Look at the quality of the dialogue in prayer.
3. Peace: It is a quiet sense of inner freedom. It is not the absence of strong feelings since we need to pay attention to them. To know if the turbulence is from the Lord, we need to ask ourselves if we have presented it to Him.

¹¹ Cf. WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The practice of Spiritual direction*, 48.

¹² Cf. JUDE CHISANGA, *Spiritual Counselling and Formation*, classroom notes.

4. Fruits of the Holy Spirit which are love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control do not come singly but as a combination.
5. The developing of the sense of the reality of God as someone who is not within our control: It shows in prayer when the directee experiences surprise or anxiety when the Lord appears in a new way. We cannot control God, he does whatever he wishes with us.
6. We need to ask: Is it like God? Is it what Jesus would do? If God was in such a situation, what would He do or say.
7. The interior life has to show itself in the exterior, for example, generosity in helping others and doing work for others is a sign of the Holy Spirit or willingness to listen to the superiors.¹³

2.3. CONCLUSION

Spiritual direction is an important tool for our spiritual growth since it entails sharing with the spiritual director on how God has been present and at work in our lives. The spiritual director assists the directee to be in touch with the movement of the spirits in him or her so as to distinguish which spirit is at work (either the Holy Spirit or the Evil Spirit). It helps us to make proper decisions by establishing the will of God in our lives.

¹³ Cf. TIMOTHY LOCKWOOD, *Spiritual discernment, Classroom notes*.

PART THREE

CHALLENGES FACING LORETO SISTERS REGARDING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

3.0. INTRODUCTION

Although spiritual direction is an important tool for our spiritual growth, some challenges come up since the bad spirit is also at work. They may be in the spiritual director or the directee. This part discusses some possible challenges experienced during spiritual direction by Loreto sisters of *Karinde* students' house in Karen, Nairobi.

3.1. THE CHALLENGES FACING THE LORETO SISTERS

3.1.1. Resistance

Relationships do not develop smoothly. There is something in us which resists change and development and wants us to remain the same. At the same time, there is something in us which wants us to know more about the other and is bored by sameness. These two desires clash and bring conflict and resistance. Resistance is a critical element in the development of every interpersonal relationship. We can relate this conflict to the movement of the spirits. The evil spirits try to thwart the movement of the good spirit. For example, prayer can be attractive and absorbing and suddenly go dull. The person feels that nothing is happening and gets discouraged.¹⁴

3.1.1.1 Signs of resistance

The following are some of the signs of resistance:

1. **A constant cheery approach to prayer:** This is a sign that we are blind to a certain aspect of life. We are not allowing God to change us. We insist on reacting the same way to every event and change whereas some are going to be our taste and some not our taste because God is different from us;

¹⁴¹⁴ Cf. WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The practice of spiritual direction*, 80.

2. Repetition of the same response e.g. constantly, accusing ourselves of lacking faith or not being humble enough;
3. Falling asleep in prayer can mean tiredness but can also be resistance to meeting God;
4. Doubts about the reality of prayer or of the ever-knowing God.¹⁵

3.1.1.2. Sources of resistance

The following are some of the sources of resistance:

1. Fear that one will lose the relationship with God;
2. Fear that I shall lose myself; that I shall be swallowed up in the immensity of God;
3. The specific self-God image a person has: Some see God as disliking pleasure or happiness and they fear that God will punish them with some demands of self-denial;
4. Fear that God might ask them to give up some things;
5. The relationship between the director and the directee: This too will be conditioned by self-other images and therefore liable to distortion.

3.1.2. Transference

Transference is the distortion of the reality of the director. It is a reaction based on the assimilation of the director to an image derived from one's childhood. It can be positive or negative.¹⁶

3.1.2.1. Positive transference

This occurs when the reaction has some positive effects, for example, a directress, a woman who is twenty years older than the directee, a young man, perceives the director as a good mother and hence behaves like a dutiful son to her.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. TIMOTHY LOCKWOOD, *classroom notes*.

¹⁶ Cf. TIMOTHY LOCKWOOD, *classroom notes*.

¹⁷ WILLIAM. A. BARRY – WILLIAM. J. CONNOLLY, *The practice of spiritual direction*, 157.

3.1.2.2. Negative transference

If the effects of the reaction bring negative effects then it is negative transference, for example, a directee who sees a harsh father in the spiritual director. This can hinder the process of spiritual direction. Transference reactions towards spiritual directors are inevitable and are some of the usual vehicles for resistance in the process of contemplative prayer.

3.1.2.3. How to recognize some transference reactions

Transference reactions betray themselves by the intensity and inappropriateness. The spiritual director does not deserve the intense love, intense anger or intense dependence which the directee feels towards him. Transference can also be marked by strong ambivalence. The directee both depends on and condemns the director almost at the same time. It can also be suspected when the directee spends most of her or his prayer time and spiritual direction time on the relationship with the director.

3.1.2.4. Signs of possible transferences

The following are some of the possible transferences:

1. Some missed appointments;
2. Silence;
3. A grudging and bare description of how prayer and life is going on;
4. Argumentativeness.

3.1.2.5. Counter transference

Counter transference happens when the director carries over or transfers unfinished business from his or her past life to the present situation. It can happen when the director's personality is put to the test. The director might find that with certain directees; they are brought face to face with their own relationship with the Lord and His tendency to resisting the relationship. For example, a priest director hears from a woman directee that she experiences in her prayer a strong anger directed to the hierarchy of the Church, priest and

also God. She tells him and he gets very upset and accuses her of lack of humility. The priest responds in inappropriate way.¹⁸

3.1.3. Selectivity

The great mass of information which inundates our consciousness far exceeds our capacity for assimilation. Our ability to absorb sensory input is sorely limited. Out of everything which comes to us, we quite naturally select what to be in accordance with our personal interests, needs and preferences. Selectivity becomes manifestly negative when choices are made on the basis of prejudice. This can affect spiritual direction if the director concentrates on one area of the difficulty of the directee.¹⁹

3.1.4. Inadequate balance between firmness and gentleness

Firmness without gentleness on the part of the director results in gruffness, harshness and severity. Such a director will “break the crushed reed or quench the unwavering flame” (Isaiah 42:3). This behavior has devastating effects on the directee since it tends to depersonalize. The harsh director becomes the accusing voice which sees no good in the directee.²⁰

3.1.5. Hesitancy to take risks

Reluctance to take risks can be from a desire for certitude, fear of making mistakes, pride etc. and this can stifle the Spirit. The basis of spiritual direction is complete abandonment into God in openness and receptivity. Risk is not necessarily opposed to prudence.

3.1.6. Unrealistic expectations

Some directees expect and demand immediate results. They think of spiritual direction as a problem-solving device and expect the director to have a ready answer for every difficulty. When the answer does not come immediately, they become frustrated, impatient and insecure.

¹⁸ Cf. TIMOTHY LOCKWOOD. *Classroom notes*.

¹⁹ Cf. FRANCIS KELLY – MARIE THERESA, *The way of spiritual direction*, 119.

²⁰ Cf. Francis Kelly – MARIE THERESA, *The way of spiritual direction*, 126.

3.1.7. Pride

Pride operates when directees cling obstinately to a god of their own making, whether this be their opinions, attitudes, self-image or their rugged individualism. Spiritual pride is particularly obstructive of the listening process.²¹

3.1.8. Legalism

A legalistic attitude which accentuates external conformity with the slavish performance of some accepted religious practices greatly obstructs the listening process. Legalists become slaves of law and mistakenly equate holiness with success in fulfilling the dictates of the law.

3.1.9. Personality disorders

The spiritual director should take into account what is taking place in the directee's life, which is emotional and psychological realms. There are some blocks which prevent one to advance in the emotional, spiritual and psychological growth, for example, a person bound by phobia or a widow by bereavement. These blocks will hinder spiritual direction.

3.2. CONCLUSION

Challenges are part of life and help us to grow, if we look at them positively. They are real and can hinder one's relationship with God. Spiritual direction is therefore, important so that all blocks which hinder us from listening to God could be removed so that we could be free for Him. Challenges could be overcome with proper help from a spiritual director.

²¹ Cf. FRANCIS Kelly – MARIE THERESA, *The way of spiritual direction*, 132.

PART FOUR

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION MORE EFFECTIVE AMONG THE LORETO SISTERS OF KARINDE STUDENTS' COMMUNITY IN KAREN, NAIROBI

4.0. INTRODUCTION

Part Four deals with ways in which spiritual direction could be made more effective so that it could be a tool for spiritual growth. If well offered and appreciated by the directee, spiritual direction could help one to deepen one's relationship with God and be able to relate well with self and neighbor. Spiritual direction is done but still it could be made better for better results.

4.1. PROPOSED WAYS OF IMPROVING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR THE LORETO SISTERS OF KARINDE STUDENTS' HOUSE IN KAREN, NAIROBI

4.1.1. The sisters could be taken through some lessons/workshops and seminars, for them to understand what spiritual direction is all about.

4.1.2. They should also be taught about spiritual discernment so that they could be able to discern well which spirit is at work in their lives. This will help them to know which materials to take for spiritual direction. Being from the Ignatian background, the sisters should also be helped to deepen their spirituality, which is very rich in discernment.

4.1.3. They should be encouraged to read their constitutions regularly to be in touch with what kind of life they are supposed to lead.

4.1.4. Spiritual directors should be well trained and should have had enough experience in the spiritual life so that they could be able to guide others in the right way.

4.1.5. Directees should be encouraged to deal with their own issues so that they do not bring them to spiritual direction.

4.1.6. Spiritual Directors should also not compromise their work but be able to stand firm and challenge the directee gently. Directors should maintain confidentiality so that directees could have trust in them for a relationship to develop.

4.1.7. The sisters should be supported by their community so that a good environment is offered for them to grow and be able to reflect on their own experiences.

4.1.8. The sisters should also be encouraged to take personal responsibility for their spiritual growth and hence ask for any help needed.

4.1.9. The sisters should also be responsible for their safety and speak out against any abuse, especially sexual abuse.

4.2. CONCLUSION

Loreto sisters at *Karinde* students' house, even though they might be facing some challenges in spiritual direction, could overcome them if spiritual direction is offered to them in the right way. Therefore, if well implemented, spiritual direction could help us to address the above-mentioned challenges.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

Spiritual direction is the help given by one Christian to another. It is a help which helps one to deepen one's relationship with God. The relationship between the director and the directee affects the relationship between the directee and God. The director helps the directee to develop a deep relationship with the Lord. The directee is assisted to be receptive to the movements of the spirits in his or her life. The directee is helped to develop a contemplative attitude so that he or she could be able to contemplate on God and not on issues. Spiritual direction entails all aspects of a human person. There are some challenges which are associated with spiritual direction but through spiritual direction one is helped to deal with them.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual direction is a very important tool for spiritual growth. It requires one to be open to God through the director, believing that God is the true director. Loreto sisters are true and faithful to spiritual direction but the process could become more effective among them. The challenges which they face could be overcome by being faithful to spiritual direction. The knowledge about spiritual direction is important for one to know what to take in that process.

RECOMMENDATION

The course in spirituality has been very helpful and I would recommend that all Loreto Sisters of *Karinde* students' house be taken through it. The course had many units, which integrating them has helped me to grow in many ways, too numerous to mention! I recommend the Institute of Spirituality to continue offering such courses for they are of

great help. I also recommend that Loreto sisters should continue taking personal responsibility for their own integral growth.

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