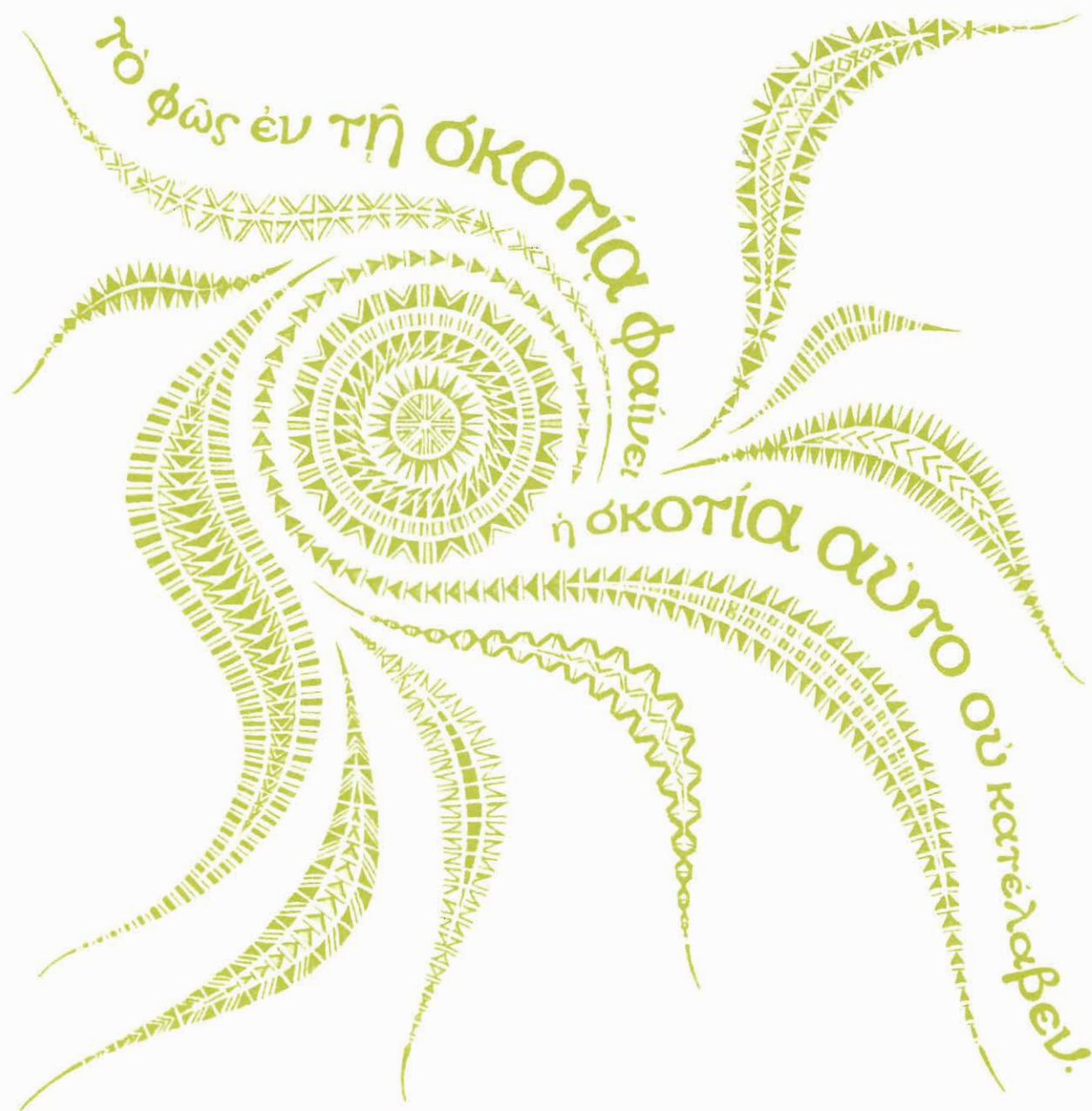


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About the cover: The Greek lettering in the artwork says "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). Watercolor by Kirsten Malcolm Berry. For more information about Ms. Berry see page 28.

Developmental Incongruence

When Directors and Directees are at Different Levels of Psychological and Spiritual Development

BY JANET K. RUFFING

As trainers and supervisors, we make efforts to select intern directors for our programs and practicums who are psychologically and spiritually mature and fairly well-developed. However, occasions will arise in which some of our intern directors are working with directees who are spiritually more developed; this is inevitable. Likewise, some of our intern directors will encounter directees who are far less spiritually developed. In this article, I will explore the issues that arise in supervision as a result of this developmental incongruence:

- What are the key struggles for the director?
- How has our tradition spoken to these issues?
- What are common responses to developmental incongruence?

- How is assessment required of the supervisor?
- Which skills may work when there is developmental incongruence in the direction relationship?

Some background on psychological and spiritual development will provide us with a foundation from which to explore these various points.

Psychological and Spiritual Development

Developmental theorists acknowledge that the adult American population is distributed among four or more stages and that many chronological adults will settle into one or another stage for many years or for life. Different theorists have addressed specific areas of human development: Erik Erickson (psycho-social development), and Robert Kegan (ego development). Jane Loevinger has also developed comprehensive theories of stage development and of stage change. Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan have focused on styles of moral reasoning, while James Fowler applied these theories to faith development. For readers unfamiliar with these theories, Elizabeth

Liebert provides a helpful presentation in her book, *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development and Spiritual Direction*. Other resources are listed in the bibliography.

For the purposes of this article, we will begin with the stage that each theorist describes as "conventional," although the terms vary somewhat. These conventional stages (most theorists describe one or two in their particular schema) have several key characteristics:

- an external locus of authority;
- an embeddedness in a group whose norms are determinative either as inflexible rules or as affective loyalty to relationships within the group;
- experience of God that is tied to external authority and best expressed by external sources;
- an inability to reflect on and articulate interior experience and to adjust their behavior in response to the insight gained through the reflection.

By contrast, the stages that follow these "conventional" ones are often referred to as "post-conventional" and are characterized in part by the following:

- a developing interior locus for authority;
- an appreciation of different ideas, thoughts, experiences;
- experience of God that is interior, intimate, and personal;
- an ability to reflect on interior movement and make changes based on that reflection;
- an ability to tolerate ambiguity;
- an ability to think paradoxically and symbolically.

People in conventional stages of development (seminarians and younger graduate students in ministry

training programs are often on this developmental plane by virtue of their age) will experience difficulty in respecting and supporting directees who are in a more developed stage. Whenever possible, these students should be screened out of a spiritual direction practicum. If, however, the decision is made to admit them, it may be possible to assign directees to these directors who are at the same or a less mature stage of psychological development. These interns may also experience difficulty in the processes practicum itself.

However, participation in group supervision often provides ample opportunity for them to learn from the more mature group members. The group can confirm both gifts and limitations relative to the kinds of directees their peers are capable of working with. The group can also offer experiential glimpses of the next developmental stage into which the director may move as a result of the "pacing" provided by the supervision experience. Elizabeth Liebert describes the effect of "pacing" (a concept developed by William Dember) in *Changing Life Patterns*, pp. 65-69.

Directors in post-conventional stages of psychological and spiritual development will be both "super-visible" and likely to undergo considerable development as a result of the effect of their more mature directees on them. These directors are the most desirable candidates for a spiritual direction practicum.

With directors in both conventional and post-conventional stages of development, it is desirable and helpful to explore how they respond psychologically and spiritually to their directees. Working knowledge of the various developmental theories can help bring certain issues to light more clearly and easily. The supervisory relationship provides a safe place for directors to reflect on experiences, consolidate skills, and hopefully become more adept in their responses. Effective supervision will help directors recognize when directees require referral because they present challenges beyond their capacity. Some

of these challenges will be so intense that they may initiate stage transition in the director.

Guidance from the Spiritual Tradition

Classically, spiritual directors are required to be "learned, experienced, and wise." I would like to look at three sources of tradition for insight into these three characteristics: scripture, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. In their book, *The Way of Spiritual Direction*, Nemeck and Coombs describe how a conventional mode of relating or practicing faith impedes spiritual experience and perceptions. Their starting point is the scriptural categories of *psychikoi* versus *pneumatikoi* from 1 Col. 2. Both profess to follow Christ, but the *psychikoi* do so at a distance — several steps removed from actual religious experience or a relationship with God in which they can truly be led by the Spirit.

The *psychikoi* discern reality according to external standards. They mistakenly measure their own spiritual progress, as well as that of others, by the degree of strict conformity to rules, regulations, customs and expectations of those in authority:

Cut off from the dynamic life of the indwelling Spirit, the *psychikoi* cannot discern reality by truly spiritual standards. Those things which are in themselves of God, from God, to God have become their gods. They remain blinded by idols. Unfortunately, many who profess to be good Christians, good religious, good priests (or bishops) are little more than *psychikoi* (p. 42).

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The classical literature about spiritual directors in conventional stages of spiritual development who attempt to direct those maturing in contemplation describes these directors with striking images. John of the Cross calls them a "blind guide" (LF3:62), "a coarse hand marring the delicate painting of the Holy Spirit" (LF3:42), a blacksmith who "knows no more than how to hammer and pound with the faculties" (LF3:43), and "barriers or obstacles at the gate of heaven" (LF3:62). In these well-known passages in *Living Flame of Love*, John of the Cross minutely describes just how directors, who themselves either personally lack the experience of contemplative prayer or lack the experience of the various ways God leads others, seriously harm their directees. He warns them:

Thus the director's whole concern should not be to accommodate souls to his own method and condition, but he should

observe the road along which God is leading them, and if he does not recognize it, he should leave them alone and not bother them. And in harmony with the path and spirit along which God leads them, the spiritual director should strive to conduct them into greater solitude, tranquility, and freedom of spirit. He should give them latitude . . . (LF3:46)

In contrast, the *pneumatikoi* "abandon themselves in faith, hope, and love to the inscrutable ways of the Spirit. They seek only to let God be God and to let the Spirit blow wherever he wills, however he wishes. Spiritual persons are always at the disposal of God in mystery, always loving, open, receptive, waiting on him with expectancy."

In guiding others, the spiritual director will thus be capable of loving directees with God's own love. She or he will have immense capacity to accept persons as they are, and will spontaneously respect the unique way that the Spirit is spiritualizing each individual. Consequently, both the director's presence and words to a directee will spring from the root of tested love (p. 42).

These rich descriptions correspond roughly to James Fowler's Stage Four or higher, "Individuating Reflexive," or to Loevinger's or Liebert's "Conscientious" stage or higher. In articles entitled, "The God Beyond" and "The Super-Ego God," John Shea notes that these qualities characterize an adult self, "an identity in mutuality of relating." This adult experience of God is often mystical and the person characteristically experiences a "God beyond the Super-Ego God." Shea identifies five aspects of this God of personal religious experience: a God as Thou; a God of Love; a God of Mystery; a God of Freedom; and a God of Community. While Shea is not explicitly using a multi-stage framework of development, he is essentially describing many characteristics of the divide between the controlling, guilt-inducing, rigid, critical "super-ego god" of an earlier stage of religious development and the crossing over into a God with whom a fully adult self may relate with confidence and love.

Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun and reformer who personally suffered from spiritual directors who misguided and misunderstood her, advised her nuns to look for directors who were both experienced in spiritual matters and learned. While John of the Cross preferred experience above learning, Teresa came to rely on learning instead. Together, they offer helpful clues for the supervisory process when neophyte directors or pastoral ministers discover their limitations spiritually, educationally, or psychologically.

Teresa discovered that the "learned" at least knew about mystical experiences they themselves had never experienced. Their breadth of cognitive knowledge enabled them to appreciate and respect something they had only read about and could reassure her that she was not the first to experience such things.

John, who was well educated theologically, apparently met many with book knowledge which they were unable to apply appropriately because their character defects blocked their freedom. Without personal post-conventional religious experience and the integration of the self around the core mystical experience, these arrogant and controlling directors imposed themselves between their directees and God's invitations to them. Without openness and docility to the Spirit, they became obstacles to their directees. Wise spiritual directors become so through their ability to learn from new personal and vicarious experiences. They have an ability to integrate personal life experience, spiritual experience, and their theoretical knowledge. This ability to integrate is also a characteristic of the post-conventional stages of psychological development.

Common Responses to Developmental Incongruence

What happens in relationships where the director and directee are at differing stages of psychological or spiritual development? In the case where a director is in a "conventional" stage of development and the directee in a "post-conventional" stage, I would like to look at two responses: envy and fear. In the case where a director is in a "post-conventional" stage and the directee in a "conventional," I would also like to look at two responses: frustration and anxiety.

Envy. In my experience some neophyte directors in every supervision group develop some counter-transferential envy of their directees' religious (mystical) experience. What might cause the envy? The

envy might be a manifestation of some directors' lack of ongoing response to God's initiatives. Directors may be neglecting personal prayer for any number of reasons and thus depriving themselves of the ongoing nurturance of relationship with God which is available to them but which they are currently avoiding.

Let's look at an example of this. Mary, the director, has been sensing some impatience within herself whenever her directee refers to the experience she had of God embracing her in the middle of a field during a period of intense meditation six months ago. Mary has been noticing that she gets a little fidgety and tries to "help" her directee by asking her what is going on in her prayer right now and telling her that it is not good to dwell too much on what happened in the past. The last time her directee brought it up, Mary realized that, after the session was over, she felt a little cheated that she hadn't had that kind of experience with God and she wondered why she hadn't. She is a little surprised by these feelings, and decides to bring the issue to supervision. With the help of her supervisor, Mary realizes that she has been avoiding her directee's experience and that she has also been avoiding God for quite awhile, ostensibly because she has been too busy. Thus, a psychologically mature director may envy the directee's maturing mystical experience. Through supervision, Mary may begin to undergo a similar development.

A second possibility is that a director's envy could reveal a form of narcissistic wounding particular to them. Its recognition and assessment as to its severity will play a crucial role in final recommendations for a neophyte director to continue in this ministry. If directors can learn to "fill the hole in the heart" created by this primal wound by moving toward God for sustenance and help rather than toward the self which is inadequate or toward some other relationship which could never bear the weight of this counter-transference, they may well be able to hold

steady enough in the direction relationship to be there for the directee. If the directors' wounds are too profound, the counter-transference will characteristically lead them to deflect attention away from the central religious experience of their directees and not help them respond to and integrate these experiences. They thus prove themselves incapable of fostering integrative spiritual development in their directees because their narcissistic wounding has resulted in a personality disorder. These supervisees should be discouraged from becoming spiritual directors.

From my perspective, envy can become a graced invitation to the director to pay attention to the spiritual dynamic happening within him or her. Thus, envy could lead directors to recognize the depth and intensity of their own desires for a deeper, more personal, or more pervasive relationship with God. If the desire can be named, directors can then claim their own desires and begin to address them within the context of their own prayer or spiritual direction.

Fear. Some directors in a conventional stage of development may become terrified by the mystical experiences of their directees and seek every way to control this in-break of God into the life of the directee by hedging it around with rules and practices which take precedence over God's self-revealing activity in the life of the directee. These directors are more at home with punishment, guilt, and control than they are with God's unconditional love, relatedness, and offer of liberation from every form of oppression including religious ones. They are patently unable to follow the leadings of God's Holy Spirit who blows where it wills and characteristically join their directees in resisting the Spirit's invitations. Such directors may also become frightened at their directees' moral choices and critical appropriation of their religious tradition. As their directees begin to negotiate individuation and the later stages of psychological development, directors may be unable to support this growth because they are afraid to risk

their own growth into freedom, into an internal locus of authority, and into moral ambiguity. The tendency of these directors will be to actually impede their directees' growth and to reinforce their directees' own fear in some of these situations.

An example which demonstrates both possibilities is John's experience with his directee. Leonora was a traditionally religious nurse who had begun to have visionary experience in her prayer. She was also a competent professional and recognized by her coworkers as exceptionally caring and generous at work. When she sought reassurance and spiritual direction from a priest-confessor, she was told to "try not to let this happen again." Leonora was confused by this advice, and at the same time unable to repress the mystical experience which was infusing her ministry with love. Her next director, John, easily recognized Leonora's psychological health and groundedness. Yet he was uneasy and somewhat frightened by Leonora's experience. Unlike the first priest, John did have the combination of education and experience which enabled him to accompany Leonora. In supervision, John was challenged to deepen his own prayerfulness. Leonora's mode of religious experience has some similarity to John's mother's. He, too, had had some earlier religious experiences which his seminary education had made him feel were inappropriate for him. He both envied Leonora's spiritual experience and feared something similar might befall himself. His supervision sessions encouraged him to put his own preoccupations aside and to remain carefully present to his directee's unfolding experience. As he did so, he was even more strongly able to discern the genuineness of Leonora's religious experience and to

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accompany her supportively as long as he resisted his own bias against the particular kind of experience his directee manifested.

Frustration. Directors who are more mature both spiritually and psychologically than the directee may experience frustration in several ways. When the gap between the two becomes more than one stage apart, directors are often challenged by a markedly different worldview and construction of religion and spirituality, one that is more limited

and rigid. From a place of greater freedom, this worldview can seem quite intractable as well as somewhat repugnant. Directors at a post-conventional stage of development may also experience frustration at the apparent lack of movement within the prayer life of directees who are quite comfortable with their conventional rote prayers and rituals.

Anxiety. Directors who are more mature both spiritually and psychologically than the directee may feel threatened by the directee's negative projections and judgments about their more individualized behavior and originality of views and feelings. These directors may be unwilling to let themselves be congruently seen, appear quite cautious, and generally feel anxious about a particular directee without knowing the exact cause. They may find it difficult to feel empathetic with the directee's rigidity, guilt, black-and-white thinking, and general intolerance. They subliminally fear becoming the target of such judgment. This underlying anxiety may impede their ability to both join with their directee supportively as well as gently to challenge.

The psychological and spiritual dynamics of spiritual direction are often intertwined, whether the issue

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be envy, fear, or frustration. A supervisory model that focuses only on the psychological dynamics could leave the director without an awareness that this envy may or may not be related to the director's own spiritual life. The supervisor must be able to recognize the object of the emotion as well as the emotion itself.

The Supervisory Experience: Assessment

In this section, I would like to look at what is involved in assessing a director's response when the supervisor suspects that his or her issues stem from this developmental incongruence.

From my perspective, potential spiritual directors need to have sufficient personal spiritual experience to be at home in the world of Spirit. They need to have experienced a spiritual awakening, entered the beginning stages of contemplative prayer and made a real, ongoing commitment to developing their spirituality. If they have known even brief moments of crossing over into silent contemplation or into an imagery prayer that they do not entirely control, they will be able to derive greater benefit from the supervision process related to spiritual development and their directees' growth in prayer. They also need to have some sense of psychological and spiritual development up to and including mid-life. Finally, they need to have an appreciative and sufficient grasp of the breadth and depth of their own spiritual traditions. In addition, I find it helpful for potential directors to do their own spiritual self-assessment using a modified version of George Fitchett's 7 x 7 model, *Assessing Spiritual Needs: A Guide for Caregivers* as part of their pre-practicum learning.

Supervisors need to explore both the knowledge resources of their directors as well as the intrapersonal dynamics in their directors which appear to impair their capacity to respect the directee's experience and to foster growth in freedom, trust, and surrender to God's activity. This exploration will, necessarily, examine directors' responses to spiritual experience. Concern about developmental incongruence manifests itself in noticing and reflecting on directors' freedom in the face of God's surprising manifestations in forms of religious experience unfamiliar to them and in their ability to be affected by a new manifestation of the Holy to respect such experiences in their directees.

Although, as Gerald May so aptly says in *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, "The human mind is an endless source of inventiveness when it comes to avoiding the implications of spiritual experience" (p. 85), persons whose spirituality is authentically post-conventional are ultimately more attracted to fresh manifestations of all-encompassing Mystery than fearful of it. In an article entitled "Unacknowledged Conflicts: Prayer and Morality," I also look at the split between a post-conventional experience of God in prayer and a conventional or super-ego ridden sense of God in the realm of moral decision-making.

To aid their own assessment and evaluation, a supervisor will find it helpful to listen for the answers to the following questions as they are revealed through a director's verbatims and dialogue:

1. Do directors characteristically deflect the conversation away from the concrete religious experience of their directees?

2. Do directors need to be in control at all times?
3. Do they demonstrate any functional ability to recognize spiritual dynamics, movements, attractions without interference?
4. Do they feel excitement about or show an ability to be drawn into religious experience?
5. Do directors ever experience uncanny or subtle spiritual experiences during a session? If so, how do they respond? What cognitive knowledge do they have about such reality? Is it limited to Scripture?
6. Are directors drawn only to moral injunctions and teachings?
7. Do they experience the beginning of affective engagement with the person of Jesus?
8. Are there any hints of the "spiritual sense" of Scripture illumining experience?
9. Do directors have any knowledge of classical or contemporary literature in spirituality which might help interpret this pastoral situation? Are they only familiar with one or two schools of spirituality which they confuse with the whole Christian "tradition"?

If a supervisor is able to answer "yes" to numbers 1, 2, and 6 and "no" to 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 relative to a particular director, he or she might consider developmental incongruence as the root of the director's issues.

The Supervisory Experience: Method and Skills

In this section, I would like to look at particular issues that arise from developmental incongruence and effective ways that supervisors can help directors grow through them.

Rigidity. If directors have the psychological maturity of at least the transition into a post-conventional

stage of development, the experience with their directees and with supervision may encourage stage-transition in directors spiritually and psychologically. If their psychological development is insufficient, the supervisor may have a difficult time because the rigidity of outlook in some directors will make it difficult for them either to recognize inadequacy or to remain relatively nondefensive in the supervisory relationship. In these cases, sometimes another "voice" from the tradition might enable these directors to get enough cognitive understanding to recognize that there is something more going on in the direction relationship than they are able to grasp.

Secondly, without contesting their directors' world-views too much, supervisors may be able to encourage them to employ the beginning skills in the helping relationship. These Phase I helping skills (a term coined by Gerard Egan in his book, *The Skilled Helper: A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping*) draw out the directee without contradiction or defense. These skills minimize the directors' expression of judgment and attitudes, and allow the directee to be self-reflective in a session. If supervisors help their directors carefully observe the directee's response to these basically Rogerian reflective listening skills, directors might begin to learn experientially how to empathetically enter into an experience of difference. For this to happen, supervisors will also have to employ these same skills in the supervisory relationship despite the inevitable frustration this is likely to involve. Supervisors, however, must be prepared for such directors to not "get it" and need to insist on the directors' use of the helping skills which will facilitate the directee without the directors' necessarily learning from the experience themselves.

Psychological Immaturity and/or Instability. It is also possible for directors to have considerable commitment to the spiritual life and experience in mystical or contemplative prayer without having the psychological maturity (stage development) or the

psychological stability (personality disorders or the untreated effects of addiction or dysfunctional families) to be able to sustain the interpersonal nature of the work of the spiritual director. Frequently, these deficiencies manifest clearly only over time in the supervisory relationship. Directors may candidly admit they themselves are still working on identity and are easily threatened by the more solid identity of their directees. Or narcissistic directors may be quite unable to cope with directees who mirror their own difficulties.

One of the greatest challenges for the supervisor is to recommend that directors not continue in a ministry requiring reliable stability in the helper. Spiritual and psychological development do not always proceed at an equal pace and there are many ways to help a director who is at a conventional level. But it is important to note here that the supervisory process works best when directors have achieved a post-conventional stage of development both psychologically and spiritually. With this modicum of psychological and spiritual freedom, they are able to foster a similar development in their directees. The process works less well when directors are in a conventional state of development. Supervisors need to be honest with themselves and with the directors they supervise when the supervision process does not appear to be working.

Fear and Frustration in Post-Conventional Directors. These directors will need to be encouraged in the supervisory process to locate the reasons for their frustrations and their fears and not allow themselves to be controlled by them. Once they can recognize the developmental grounds for the differ-

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ing perceptions, behaviors, judgments, and feelings of their directees, they can be encouraged to move toward a more empathic stance toward them. If they can remember how they felt and construed their lives from this earlier stage and remember how they eventually grew beyond it, they can more readily join their directees in confirming them where they are while inviting the next incremental steps in their development.

Another way to help directors develop this empathy is to ask them to consider how God views the directee and what invitation God might be extending to the director in this relationship. Without contacting this empathy from within, they will have great difficulty in staying with their more immature directees if they expect the director merely to confirm their self-worth and present stage of development. Again, supervisors' empathy and patience with their

directors who feel frustrated or judged by their directees will both model and encourage similar behavior in their directors. Here a mirroring and teaching model may be helpful.

If directors can shift their image of the relationship to one which includes incongruence in maturity or stage development, they are more likely to establish a safety and a trust that will enable their directees to risk new behaviors. The taxing nature of these relationships requires a greater capacity on the part of directors to be free enough and committed enough to place themselves at the service of someone else's process with little immediate gratification in the relationship. Directors' capacities for unself-centered presence and love toward their directees is tested in

these relationships. If they are to rise to the situation, they will need to sense their own deep spiritual sources for these behaviors in their own religious experience and in their accumulated experience with other mentors and guides. Conscious reflection on these internal spiritual resources in the supervisory conversation helps directors maintain their own conscious connection with God during their pastoral conversations and increases their ability to be patient with their own complex and mixed feeling responses to their directees.

Referral. After working with a director for a period of time in a situation where developmental incongruence is the issue, a supervisor may determine that the relationship between director and directee is not going to improve, that the chemistry is not going to change between them, that their relationship is a true hindrance to the directee's relationship with God: the director is simply not able to recognize and support the more mature development of directees into contemplative prayer and transformation. In these cases, a supervisor would be well to counsel the director to refer the directee to others and to grant them the freedom to seek the assistance they require.

Conclusion

Developmental incongruence is an important issue in supervision. Conscious awareness of the array of responses that arise when this incongruence exists between directors and directees in the supervisory conversation can both support and challenge directors. If supervisors are comfortable reflecting on and discussing these dynamics, their directors in turn may discover broader and deeper spiritual resources in themselves and respond more effectively to the invitations to spiritual growth their work with directees may evoke.

There is a requisite psychological and spiritual development required of those who expect to function as spiritual directors. Whenever possible, pre-participation screening should assess potential

directors' readiness to participate in the unique learning occasioned by the supervisory process. In some instances in which there is adequate psychological development but as yet inadequate spiritual development, reliance on cognitive learning and acquired counseling skills may enable directors to function without harm to their directees as long as they are under supervision. Supervisors' care, attention, and responses to their directors may invite and support their further spiritual development. ■

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A different version of this essay was published under the title: "Supervision and Spiritual Development: The Conventional/Postconventional Divide" in Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry 18(1997)95-107. The theme of the issue was Spirituality and Supervision. A number of the other essays in this volume would also be of interest to supervisors and trainers of spiritual directors.

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About Our Artists

KIRSTEN MALCOLM BERRY's (cover) creative business is called New Testament Images. The daughter of Presbyterian missionaries, Kirsten grew up in the Philippines. Decorative patterns on Southeast Asian fabric, basketry, and brass caught her eye at an early age. Other influences are Scandinavian woolen designs, Native American weaving, Hmong reverse appliqué, traditional quilts, and Byzantine mosaics.

Verses from the New Testament, written in Greek, are both themes and motifs for her work. She paints as the Spirit moves her, translating the abstract into the tangible, making the Word into flesh. Since she accepts no commissions, the artist has graciously allowed removal of the border, reduction in size, and reproduction in monochrome of "The light shines in the darkness" for the 1999 *Presence* covers.

Berry is based in Minneapolis, and has had solo exhibitions in her home state, Texas, Ohio, and North Dakota. In addition, she exhibited in group shows in New York, Illinois, Oregon, Florida, California, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and British Columbia. We welcome her to the pages of *Presence*.

FR. ARTHUR POULIN (p. 10) is a monk of New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, CA, USA, who seeks to explore in his art the presence of the sacred and the contemplative in creation.

ELLEN RICHARDS (p. 52) is a retired sociologist and English as a Second Language teacher in New Hampshire, USA. She has published articles in the *Concord Monitor*, and poems in *Voices from the Center: Selected Writings*, with poems forthcoming in *Cicada*, a haiku journal.