The Role of the Study of Religious Experience in the Ministries of Spiritual Direction and Chaplaincy

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Dissertation

THE ROLE OF THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE

MINISTRIES OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND CHAPLAINCY

By

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THE ROLE OF THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE MINISTRIES OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE AND CHAPLAINCY

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.......................................................................................................................... vi

ABSTRACT.......................................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter

I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING .............................................................................................. 1
   Hypothesis ................................................................................................................................. 12
   Method of Investigation .......................................................................................................... 13
   Research Design ....................................................................................................................... 16
   Experiential Sources of the Study ............................................................................................ 17
   Textual Sources of the Study ..................................................................................................... 19
   Limitations ................................................................................................................................ 30
   Definitions ................................................................................................................................. 33
   The Significance of the Study .................................................................................................... 38

II. TRAINING PROGRAMS: ATTENTION TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN
    SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TRAINING AND CLINICAL PASTORAL
    EDUCATION ............................................................................................................................. 41
    Overview: The State of Spiritual Direction Training in the United States ................................ 43
    History of Clinical Pastoral Education: Origin and Founding Source ..................................... 46
    CPE Verbatim Analysis in Terms of Religious Experience .................................................... 48
    The Spiritual Direction Verbatim Analysis in Terms of Religious Experience ....................... 52

III. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN PASTORAL CARE SOURCES
    Three Exemplary Historical Sources of Pastoral Care in Terms of Religious Experience ........... 61
    Two Contemporary Pastoral Care Sources in Terms of Religious Experience .......................... 65

- Spiritual Guidance Sources and Their Relationship to Religious Experience ........................................ 71
- Other Contemporary Spiritual Guidance Formation Sources ................................................................. 77
- Historical Sources for Models of Spiritual Direction ............................................................................. 83
- Ignatian Glossary of Terms .................................................................................................................. 92
- Women Mystics as Models of Spiritual Guidance and Sources of Religious Experience ..................... 94
- Hildegard of Bingen ............................................................................................................................... 104
- Further Historical Sources toward a Contemporary Approach to Spiritual Direction ......................... 112
- Conclusion to the Models of Spiritual Direction .................................................................................. 119

### V. Literary Sources: Amplified Considerations of Religious Experience ........................................ 123

- The Scarlet Letter .................................................................................................................................. 125
- Lying Awake With the Analysis of the Religious Experience in the Literary Sources .......................... 128

### VI. The Context of Ministry: Attention to Religious Experience in the Daily Work of a Hospital Chaplaincy ................................................................. 137

### VII. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 152

### APPENDICES

- Appendix A ............................................................................................................................................. 158
- Appendix B ............................................................................................................................................. 163
- Appendix C ............................................................................................................................................. 169
- Appendix D ............................................................................................................................................. 171
- Appendix E ............................................................................................................................................. 174
- Appendix F ............................................................................................................................................. 178
- Appendix G ............................................................................................................................................. 181

### BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................................... 182
## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACPE</td>
<td>Association of Clinical Pastoral Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Clinical Pastoral Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACC</td>
<td>National Association of Catholic Chaplains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDI</td>
<td>Spiritual Directors International</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDTI</td>
<td>Spiritual Direction (Training) Initiative</td>
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THE ROLE OF THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE
MINISTRIES OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND CHAPLAINCY

(Order No. )

Georgia Gojmerac-Leiner

Doctor of Ministry
Boston University School of Theology, 2011

Major Professors: Claire Wolfteich, Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation and Co-Director of the Center for Practical Theology;
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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the importance of a multi-disciplinary consideration of religious experience for the training and ministry of hospital chaplains and spiritual directors. The author, a lay Roman Catholic chaplain in a Massachusetts community hospital, discusses selected literature relevant to the study of religious experience—drawing predominantly from texts in spirituality studies and also illustrative works in pastoral care and literature—in dialogue with a concrete context of hospital chaplaincy. This sketch aims to identify important insights about religious experience and begin to demonstrate how multi-disciplinary study of religious experience can enrich the training and practice of hospital chaplains and spiritual directors.
CHAPTER ONE
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Problem

As a student enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Program at the Boston University (BU) School of Theology I was required to participate in a Supervised Ministry internship. Since I was already in ministry as an experienced board certified healthcare chaplain I decided to enroll in a spiritual direction internship. I knew that the training in spiritual direction or guidance would complement my work in the ministry of chaplaincy well. As I began the internship of spiritual direction I quickly realized that the religious experience was the content of the practice of spiritual direction. However, there were no didactic sessions planned or the resources provided for the study of the religious experience in the program. Religious experience was a topic which I felt needed further exploration.

It took a year to complete the internship in spiritual direction and at the end I was awarded the Certificate of Completion. It was the semester following my completion of the Supervised Ministry component that a course entitled, Religious Experience, was offered by Professor Wesley Wildman at the BU School of Theology. The course was interdisciplinary in its approach to the religious experience. I considered the offering of this course following on the heels of my internship to be quite serendipitous. Yet I concluded that the study of the religious experience should be planned intentionally. The
absence of the study of religious experience hindered the acquisition of a spiritual
direction language, and a language to speak about God.

In the Religious Experience course I learned about the many resources for the
study of the religious experience, including the work of the British zoologist turned
religion researcher, Alister Hardy, whose work I will be using for this study. Bringing my
learnings to my own work I realized that religious experience can be viewed in different
ways dependant not only the discipline from which we look at the religious experience
but also on one’s tradition, formation and the “triggers” of the experience.

This thesis will highlight the accounts of religious experience from a sample of
multi-disciplinary sources as my work requires me to draw from a variety of disciplines
in order to be helpful to my clients. Among the resources I will use is the book of essays,
The Handbook of Religious Experience¹ and Alister Hardy’s scientific approach to the
study of religious experience in his work, The Spiritual Nature of Man.² I will draw from
the field of spirituality studies, particularly the study of the mystics and literature in
spiritual direction.³ For an example of contemporary scholarship on the study of religious
experience I will use the book, Religious Experience Reconsidered, by Ann Taves.⁴

¹ Ralph W. Hood, Ed. The Handbook of Religious Experience (Birmingham, AL: The Religious
Education Press, 1995).

² Alister Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience


Lastly, I will bring these various literatures into dialogue with my own knowledge about religious experience learned from my work with clients as a chaplain and a spiritual guide.

I will also draw from two literary works, each set in the times of the cultural and technological shifts in the American society. First I will review the account of religious experience in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, which is written in the nineteenth century, a period of time considered to be the American Renaissance, when writers and others flourished. Hawthorne uses his visionary insights to critique the dark aspects of the religious experience influenced by the Calvinist morality of the early New England settlers. He gives us a study of a woman would-be-mystic trapped by the religious norms of her time. And yet there are aspects of Hawthorne’s novel that apply to the religious experience of the people today. Judgments, shame, guilt or other negative emotions, for instance, still play a role in our existence and therefore in how we experience things, including religious things.

The second literary work I will review was published recently. *Lying Awake*, by Mark Salzman, describes religious experience in its traditional setting of a monastery.

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6 I learned about the American Renaissance when I was a graduate student in English at the University of Virginia in the 1970s. During the American Renaissance period works such as *Moby Dick* and *Walden* were written. The “religious” movement was away from the Calvinistic morality and toward Transcendentalism. Hawthorne and his family converted to Catholicism. The term, “American Renaissance” was coined by the scholar F. O. Mathiessen, with the publication of his, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press 1941).

Salzman gives us a study of a would-be-mystic as well, a woman entrapped by the romantic notions of religious experience only to be disappointed by the ordinariness of religious life when she discovers that her visions of God were caused by an illness. The new twist is that Salzman incorporates the technological advancement in the medical sciences into the religious life story. He brings the magnetic resonance imaging techniques of the brain to critique religious experience. The dark and the ordinary aspects of religious experience found in these two authors, Hawthorne and Salzman, are germane to my thesis that religious experience, in as much as it is an experience of being human, can have negative aspects and is found in the ordinary as well as religious life.

The spiritual guidance training program in which I participated taught that “religious experience is the experience of God.”\(^8\) I intend to complexify that statement, showing how religious experience is varied and always reflects a human dimension and character. Another tenet in my spiritual direction internship program was that because religious experience is of God, and God is good, religious experience is also good. I will again show how a more complicated understanding of religious experience is important, for if religious experience is a human experience then it can be both good and bad. I work almost entirely with lay clients and I have found that what they refer to as religious experience can have a positive or a negative effect upon them, depending on their image of God and on what “triggered” the experiences. A few examples of “triggers” or

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\(^8\) This claim was made by Sr. Joan McCarthy, the director of the Spiritual Direction Initiative, Campion Renewal Center, Weston, MA, 2006-7.
“antecedents” of religious experience in Hardy are, “participation in religious worship, prayer, meditation, relaxation, illness and the death of others, and crisis in personal relations.” The negative aspect of religious experience can also arise from misunderstandings or a lack of spiritual growth. Not only is it true that the religious experience can have traumatic effects on a person, which I will describe in my discussion of work experience, it also does not have to be ecstatic. In his study of religious experience Hardy critiques William James for tending “to select the more exceptional, and at times the truly abnormal, examples in order to illustrate his psychological arguments concerning different aspects of the subject.” While Hardy encountered ecstatic examples of religious experience, he found that “a larger array [was] of more normal patterns of feeling and behavior.” Thus, Hardy’s work changes how we look at religious experience. Because our religious experiences are human experiences they tell us something about ourselves as human beings. As human beings we embrace organized religion, for instance, because it gives us a sense of community. Having a sense of belonging can be comforting. At the same time we may be conflicted if we do not agree with everything about the religion of the community we belong to. The religious experience resulting from the person’s inner conflicts may not feel as though it is of God.


11 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 32.

12 Ibid., 32.
Or if of God then the person may feel that God has abandoned them, which is not a good feeling. The thinking that religious experience is good because it is of God can alienate a person who does not feel that they are getting “the good” from the participation. I will describe this religious alienation or disconnection when I describe the story of Hester Prynne in the literary accounts of religious experience in Hawthorne in Chapter Five, and in discussions of the context of hospital chaplaincy in Chapter Six.

In Hawthorne’s portrayal of Hester Prynne we see the difference between her private behavior or acts and the social response to those behaviors and acts, beginning with her love-affair-considered-adultery, her nurturing of her child and her handling of her sentence or punishment for her “crime.” The inner triggers of guilt are different from the outward triggers of punishment. Both ‘guilt’ and ‘punishment’ have religious connotations. Sexuality, for example is a private matter to the individuals involved, such as the lovers Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in the Scarlet Letter, yet we see how sexuality is intertwined with public morality and influences the individuals’ religious and psychological well-being.

On the positive side of this argument, there is, for all of us, a difference between the social and the private self, and therefore between the communal worship and the solitary appeal to God. While we may not be able to control how others treat us, we can make peace with our inner conflicts. As the private individuals we can channel our thoughts, feelings and needs to a higher power in private through prayer. Then the prayer is the trigger for our subsequent religious experience or of the experience of God, and it
is brought upon us via our own responsibility. We can pray for forgiveness of a loving and a merciful God. However, the demands of a community for us to behave a certain way, or our perception of the demands, and our failure to meet the community’s standards, may result in the community’s passing judgments upon us. The judgments can then cause a disconnection between us as the individuals and the community, and from God. We may not wish to ask for forgiveness of a community or a society if they hurt us. This would be especially true if we behaved as expected but the community or family betrayed us. In either case the disconnection from the community, family and God can be very painful and even traumatic. The examples I will share from my work will include situations from a variety of disconnections between people and God.

The disconnection is the trigger for the unpleasant religious experience. In the *Scarlet Letter* the community deals harshly with Hester Prynne. She in turn sees God as dark and foreboding. The community’s actions trigger her negative imagery of God. In the lives of my clients it is often the case that their families deal with them in detrimental ways. The adverse actions of parents toward their children can trigger the children’s formulations of negative images of God. Their religious experiences become unpleasant for them. This new way of thinking of the religious experience as being triggered is a result of my newfound familiarity with Hardy’s study of the spiritual nature of being human. The “triggers” are grounded in us as human beings. We experience the impact of religion through our sensory, cognitive, behavioral, relational and developmental processes. Hardy shows that there are many triggers to religious experience. I realize that
the activities of seeing the chaplain or a spiritual director or guide can serve as the
triggers for the hopeful, healing types of religious experiences for the clients. The client
usually greets the chaplain with the words, “I am so glad to see you.” Also, the
gratification of providing pastoral counseling or spiritual guidance can trigger the
religious experience for the chaplain or the guide with a ‘sense of purpose behind the
events,’ of the “Cognitive and affective elements” category of Hardy’s.\(^\text{13}\) To reiterate, the
triggers suggest that religious experience is indeed grounded in us. This is very different
from Taves who believes the religious experience is ascribed by the person after the fact
or after the experience.

In my dual roles of a spiritual guide and a chaplain I continuously assess my
clients’ triggers, the quality of their relationships, and their religious experiences. My
background in pastoral care chaplaincy and spiritual guidance helps me to determine
whether I should focus on pastoral counseling or spiritual guidance. If spiritual guidance
is needed we may focus on one’s prayer life and the images of God. In chaplaincy I have
a more open agenda. I may blend the two approaches if needed. My contemporary
pedagogy of religious experience leads me to conclude that it can be both human and
divine and good and bad. If we experience God, it is understood that we do so as humans
not as Gods. Saint Augustine and Saint Theresa of Avila maintained that knowing God
and knowing one’s self are co-dependent. Understanding this can facilitate how we talk
about God. However, those who have not studied theology may have had transformative
experiences but do not describe them as *conversion* experiences since, for whatever

\(^\text{13}\) Hardy, *Spiritual Nature of Man*, 27.
reason, they do not have the language to talk about God. “Conversion” in the Christian tradition means a total giving of one’s self to God through a deep conviction or faith in a loving, benevolent God. Conversion, because it entails a shifting of projection of values from human onto the divine aspect, is in Hardy’s terms a cause of religious experience. A cause is deeper than a trigger. Conversion, the lives of the saints and the mystics are a rich ground for a discussion of religious experience which will follow in the chapters on sources and reviews of literature.

We have an example of the conversion shift in values in Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his Autobiography. He changed from being a soldier and a lover to being a contemplative religious person and serving “the Lord” and “Our Lady,” and from reading romances to the reading texts about the lives of Christ and the saints. Unable to find lasting happiness in his carnal pursuits, Saint Ignatius turned to God and found joy. He felt drawn to “serving the Lord.” Ignatius traded his love of women for the worship of “Our Lady,” and from fighting for the king of France to serving God.

For all these saints like, Augustine, Ignatius and Teresa, what led them to God were the aversions to, and regrets about, their past behaviors. Many people in my experience convert from their negative images of God to positive ones. In trying to understand the actions of the saints, it is important to analyze their experiences in the context of the times in which they lived. While they drew exclusively from the traditions, we live in a modern world. That is why we should acknowledge that leaving the broader

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or the multidisciplinary, consideration of religious experience out of the formation programs of spiritual direction and chaplaincy keeps the student uninformed. For instance, when the director of my spiritual direction internship, Sr. Joan McCarthy, said that religious experience is the experience of God, God is good and therefore all religious experience is good, she skirted the discussion of it. I believe in the goodness of God and realize the potential of religious experience to have good and healing effects in our lives. However, I also believe that the discussion of religious experience need not be taboo, or forbidden to talk about as having both pleasant and unpleasant perspectives. Religious experience can be used subversively. For example, a political system can shape the religious experiences of one of its members in a very different way than the system in which religion is used for altruistic purposes. The same can be said of families. Families too have systems of beliefs that can affect their children through religious experience for better or worse. Educators can have a life-long affect on the attitudes of their students toward God and religion. This is all a useful knowledge in my work.

Given the chance that religious experience can be experienced unfavorably, I believe we should study it as an artist studies her subject before she paints it. We must examine whether our knowledge of religious experience in pastoral care ministries matches our client’s needs or experience. I find that my clients, whom I have already identified as lay, meaning that they are not clergy or religious, need help talking about

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15 Joan M. McCarthy, Director, Spiritual Direction Initiative (SDTI) (Campion Renewal Center, Weston, MA, 2006-7). SDTI began at Saint Stephen Priory in Dover, MA. When the Priory was bought by Boston College, the SDTI moved to the Campion Renewal Center. Presently it continues at the Saint Joseph Retreat Center in Cohasset, MA. The Program that is the focus of this study took place at the Campion Renewal Center.
God and about their religious experience. This is particularly true of those who may have not been raised in a religious household or stopped participating in organized religion or individual spiritual guidance after confirmation.

Looking at religious experience with a critical eye we might wonder whether religious experience is the same as the experience of religion. An example of this can be found in family dynamics. In many cultures based on the Judeo-Christian tradition, children are taught to respect their elders, and their parents in particular, as that is one of the Commandments handed down by Moses. If a parent abuses their son or daughter, sexually or otherwise, the child will no longer be able to respect the parent, but at the same time they will feel guilty for disobeying an important Commandment. Let us say that a young woman, traumatized by her parent’s abuse, comes to me as she tries to do the right thing and to sort out her emotional life, her relationships to her parents and to God. Then as a spiritual guide and a chaplain I can offer her that God assumed that her parents would be good to her when God gave that Commandment. She can become enlightened and change her perceptions about God, or religious experience. She may then “convert” to a more positive image of God. But if I insisted that God is good to begin with, I may have alienated her further.

In summary, drawing from the studies of religious experience from a variety of sources and disciplines is useful for broadening and deepening our understanding of the experience. Identifying the triggers of religious experience helps us to define the meaning of religious experiences. Hardy’s work in particular helps us see how religious
experiences emanate from us as human beings and how they leave us feeling. We experience things as religious through our family tradition, our behavior, cognition, senses and the situations we find ourselves in, such as illness, places of worship, the prospect of death, alienation and so on. Experiencing God through religious experiences can have a positive or a negative effect on us. A person can turn to God and gain a healing through his or her religious practice or experience when they fall ill and meet a chaplain in a hospital. Attending a communal worship or seeking a spiritual director or guide are examples of more intentional ways of pursuing one’s relationship with God at all times, whether sick or well.

In light of this, I propose to examine how the chaplains and spiritual guides are equipped to journey with others, whether they have studied religious experience, and how their training programs prepared them for their ministries. I then will discuss selected literature relevant to the study of religious experience to identify important insights, and finally I will bring those insights back into dialogue with the context of hospital chaplaincy and spiritual guidance.

**The Hypothesis**

The framework of my hypothesis hinges on the view of God as encompassing humanity in all of its multidimensional aspects, the pleasant and the unpleasant, the learned and the as yet not learned, the superstitious and the enlightened, the communicated and the silent, the chemical basis of life and the spiritual basis of life, and
so on until we reach a sense of the wholeness of life as far as our minds can reach. It is by admitting that God is “all” that we can claim for the religious experience to be a part of our experience of God. Another way to say this is that, yes, God can be found in the religious experience because God is present in everything.

If we do claim that every experience can be explained in terms of God then every experience can be explained in terms of religion. In that case religious experience has to be explored in a multi-disciplinary nature. To this point I will only offer a small sample of sources that will illustrate the points of my hypothesis.

**Method of Investigation**

This is a qualitative type of a study in which I am the participant observer. I reflect critically on my practice of ministry, and so am deeply in dialogue with contexts of ministry as I draw upon the textual materials from several disciplines that address religious experience. As a practitioner in the fields of pastoral care and spiritual guidance I describe the helpfulness of the knowledge gained about religious experience to my work. I present a broad representation of resources because as a clinician the broader my knowledge is the better I can minister to the clients who come from different backgrounds and possess different levels of education. My philosophy is to meet and minister the clients where they are.

I have composed a number of fictionalized case or character studies aggregated from my professional knowledge and experience to show and to analyze the types of
human concerns and predicaments I find in people due to their particular type of religious experience. In each character creation the analysis addresses the goals of my study or thesis, which are to show the positive and the negative impacts of religious experience upon a person, and to broaden the thinking about the nature of religious experience in order to better meet clients’ needs. In Chapter Six I will present these compositions. The situations I develop show a mix of the types of the religious experiences. The story of “Martin” gives an example of someone who has developed a well-functioning, positive relationship of God. In other instances I will show how it is possible to achieve transformation through the intervention of a spiritual guide or a chaplain. The analysis show how I minister in these situations with care to restore the shattered image of self and God. I will discuss how the events in people’s lives shaped their religious experience. I will bring Hardy’s technique of classifying the nature of the religious experience to my reflection. My sense is that illness exaggerates a person’s religious experience in either direction, positive or negative. The clients who have a positive feeling about their religion do not need a healer, though they may need to examine their idealistic views. I am there for the broken at any stage of their journey. My comments will reflect how religious experience wounds a person, how I respond to them, and how she or he grows or heals as a result of being open to learning something new about their experiences through the facilitation of the spiritual guide or a chaplain, or a combination of these roles.
My methodology incorporates the verbatims as a part of my sources for this project thesis because they are the important teaching/learning tools in the formations of the ministries of chaplaincy and spiritual guidance. The verbatim analysis will point out that the client’s religious experience is assumed but not specifically addressed. The verbatim formats from each of the training programs of chaplains and spiritual directors or guides can be found in the Appendixes B, C, and D. The comparison will show that the chaplaincy training guidelines cover a wider range of concerns of a client than the spiritual direction formation programs. I want to stress the importance of academic studies and well-designed bibliographies to the training of the spiritual guides and chaplains programs. While experiential knowledge of visiting patients and directing clients are integral to training as a chaplain and a spiritual director, continuing education through the academic studies are invaluable to gaining new insights into the existing body of knowledge, experience and tradition.

Undergirding the participant observer model of investigation is the use of theological reflection method in ministry developed by the Whiteheads. It is their method which promotes the usage of experience, tradition and culture to shed light on a given situation and gain new insights for our theory and practice, or praxis. Similarly I reflect on my own experience in ministry of spiritual guidance and chaplaincy, and on their adaptations in the contemporary culture. Also included are appendixes of the

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conversations I have had with the leading spiritual director/author William Barry, and the Executive Director of the Spiritual Directors International Liz Budd Ellmann.

**Research Design**

- Academic Sources
- Written and verbal exchanges with the spiritual director and author William Barry, SJ, and Liz Budd Ellmann, Executive Director of Spiritual Directors International
- Discussion of the Formation Programs for the Chaplains and the Spiritual Guides and Verbatim Format Analysis
- Fictionalized cases relevant to the context of hospital chaplaincy to illustrate the types of religious experiences addressed in this context and the role of chaplain and spiritual guide

The transcription of the **verbatim** format used at the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Program, Campion Residence and Renewal Center, Weston, MA, can be found in Appendix B. The program was accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), located in Decatur, GA. My reason for choosing it is that it was the best adaptation of the guidelines, provided by the ACPE, of four programs which I trained in, Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, both in Boston, MA, and the Holy Family Medical Center in Methuen, MA, and the Campion Residence and Renewal Center, Weston, MA. The verbatim reflects the emphasis on self awareness and growing edge(s). I have made only minimal changes to

\[17\] See Appendix B
the wordings. I added the Ethical Concerns section. Although we did discuss ethical concerns at Campion there were no written guidelines in the verbatim format. The awareness of ethics in medicine has grown over the last decade and a half, and an understanding and knowledge of ethical principles is now a part of the Standards and Competencies of the national chaplaincy certifying bodies, including the National Association of Catholic Chaplain, Jewish Chaplains, Protestant and other faith groups, and Buddhist chaplains. This is why ethical concerns are now included in the verbatim analysis and I composed and added a sample of guidelines.

**Spiritual Direction Verbatim Sample**

I present two samples of the spiritual direction formation programs. One is from the Spiritual Direction Initiative at Campion Renewal Center in Weston, MA,\(^{18}\) and the other is from the Haden Institute Spiritual Direction Training in the Jungian, Contemplative Christian Tradition in Flat Rock, NC.\(^{19}\)

**Experiential Source of the Study**

I have held the position of the Coordinator of Catholic Pastoral Care Services and Hospital Chaplain at the Emerson Hospital (Concord, MA) since 2001. In this capacity I minister to people of all faiths. Emerson Hospital is a community hospital which serves the needs of the sick in Concord and in the surrounding communities, consisting of 25

\(^{18}\) Appendix C

\(^{19}\) Appendix D
towns and totaling in the population of more than 300,000 individuals. It is a 177-bed facility which provides advanced medical services. A non-profit organization, the Hospital was founded in 1911, and has grown in its association with more than 280 primary care doctors and specialists on the active medical staff. Together these physicians provide everything from acupuncture, anesthesiology to a variety of surgical procedures such as bariatric, orthopedic and vascular. The hospital is well known for the “community feeling,” created by the kindness and friendliness of its caregivers. The Hospital has a state-of-the-art Birthing Center and special care nursery and an excellent cancer center, known as The Bethke Center.

As the sole in-house chaplain I have a rich ministry and provide a continuum of care for all ages and varieties of concerns. I see people mostly by referral. The referrals can be for supporting birthing parents or blessing their newborn babies into the world, to providing empathic listening presence and feedback, encouragement in a myriad of circumstances to people of any age, including chronic and acute disease and end-of-life concerns. I improvise situational prayers from my heart and imagination and provide traditional prayers for the sick, prayers for grieving what has changed forever, and prayers of commendation for the dying. Using my own spiritual assessment skills as a chaplain I have often determined that the course of my intervention should follow the precepts of a spiritual guide. That is, I consciously bring God into the dialog. I would not have been able to do so had I not also had training in spiritual guidance/direction because

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20 Emerson Hospital, Concord, MA, emersonhosp.org; Note that the Hospital’s Web Site is often under construction and the Chaplain information can vary.
I would not have known where certain types of conversations may lead. I also could not have done so without the complement of my academic studies in spirituality. In spiritual guidance instances I have helped clients examine their relationships with God in revelatory ways. Revelatory means that the clients discovered something new, something helpful in their awareness of and relationship with God that shed light on previously impenetrable concerns. They achieved this through their willingness to stay engaged in the process of spiritual guidance. Spiritual direction training is helpful in identifying resistance and transference in our pastoral relationships, both potential barriers to a person’s inner growth.

The Chaplaincy/Pastoral Care Program was established at the Emerson Hospital in 1991 through a collaborative of parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston and the Hospital Administration. Under “Support and Other Services” the Emerson Hospital Web Site lists “Chaplain,” stating that the “Emerson Hospital offers the services of a chaplain to its community of patients, families, and staff. Our belief is that it is important to uphold a person’s spiritual practice during an illness. For that reason the Emerson Hospital Pastoral Care/ Chaplaincy provides a board certified healthcare chaplain to its community of patients, families and staff.”

**Textual Sources of the Study**

The textual sources presented here are drawn from the years of my academic studies and research which have companioned my work life as a hospital chaplain and a
spiritual guide. The texts I selected speak to the interdisciplinary and human nature of the religious experience and are not meant to be exhaustive in the field of the religious experience. My goal was to include texts that would point to the link between current understanding and practices of spiritual direction and pastoral care chaplaincy and historic traditions of Christian spirituality and pastoral care. This is why I draw from the wisdom of the long tradition of the Christian spiritual tradition as well as from the genre of literature and contemporary sources in spiritual direction and pastoral care. I consider my multi-disciplinary approach to be deepening rather than diffusing the meaning of the study. The selected literature covers the areas of religious experience, spiritual guidance, and pastoral care. These areas correspond to the concerns of the ministries of this study, described in the **Statement of the Problem**.

**Religious Experience Sources**

I adapt a multi-disciplinary approach to discussing the meaning of religious experience in my thesis. The *Handbook of Religious Experience* by Ralph Hood, a collection of essays by a variety of authors exemplifies the idea of the interdisciplinary perspective or the “broader considerations” of religious experience. The “broader” refers to look beyond the Scriptures and the spiritual autobiography for the signs of religious experience.

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The book is divided into seven parts. In the first part the authors describe the six major religious traditions, Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhist and Hinduism. The second part is about the *Broader Context of Religious Experience*. Here the essays are about philosophy and religious experience, the sociological context of religious experience, and phenomenal psychology and religious experience. Part three introduces the three depth psychologies of Freud, Jung and the object relations theorists. Parts four and five delve into developmental, cognitive, affective and behavior theories, and the role, attribution and attachment theories. Part six alludes to gendered religious experience as the essays addresses the “Body and Religious Experience,” and the “Feminist Theory and Religious Experience.” The last part, part seven, addresses the “Religious Instruction and Religious Experience,” and the “Facilitation of Religious Experience.” The facilitation refers to a kind of religious experience that may be induced by the psychedelic drugs, and by spending time in isolation tanks. The idea of the “facilitation of religious experience” is related to Hardy’s idea that religious experiences have triggers. But Hardy’s triggers are of “normal” types rather than ecstatic or exotic.

*The Handbook of Religious Experience* lists hundreds of index terms describing religious experience but God is indexed by less than a hundred of them. Religious experience as an experience of God is not listed though there are references to awareness, perceived presence, visionary revelation, and generous references to the images of God. The images projected unto God are both positive and negative based upon how the people imagine God acting in their lives, and the attributes they give to God. The attributes can
make God appear to be a punishing God or a God who heals through chaplains and spiritual guides, as is the claim of this thesis.

The *Handbook of Religious Experience* presents religious experience in the context of the major faith traditions and applies a wealth of contemporary theories from the field of psychology to the religious experience. But a forerunner of modern psychology and religious experience observer, William James, introduces the *Varieties of Religious Experiences*\(^{22}\) earlier. James found that not all religious experience can be classified in the category of a single image of God. James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* is a ground-breaking work on the subject. At the same time he accentuated the ecstatic type of religious experience. Just as the hagiographic texts demonstrate how confessors in the Christian tradition recorded the spiritual lives of those who, usually the women mystics, professed their experiences of God to them\(^{23}\), so do James, and later Hardy, record the religious experiences of their client-participants. There are important differences between the mystics’ testimonies of religious experience and James’ and Hardy’s findings of the religious experience. We find in the mystics a desire to intentionally imitate the life of Christ. As a result they often welcome suffering as Christ suffered. In James and Hardy we find vignettes of isolated mystical and religious

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\(^{23}\) Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff. *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. This is an anthology of medieval women’s visionary writings from the early church through the fifteenth century. While some women may have been taught to write, others told their stories to their confessor who in turn recorded them. This practice has invited the hermeneutic of suspicion to itself.
experiences. I will mainly focus on Hardy. Hardy’s examples of religious experiences are for the most part optimistic.

Sir Alister Hardy was a professor of zoology from 1946-1961 at Oxford University. He founded the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford and was its first director from 1969-1976. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Biology of God*. It is this work, *The Spiritual Nature of Man* that is germane to this project. The basis of Hardy’s religious experience classifications is a collection of about 4,000 testimonies about religious experience. His usage of “man” instead of human, for instance, is consistent with his times. One of Hardy’s twelve categories or classification of religious experience is, “Antecedents or ‘triggers’ of experience.”

This category has the longest list of items and illustrates the ways in which religious experience is triggered. Some of the most common examples of these triggers are, “natural beauty, participation in religious worship, prayer and meditation, music, visual art, literature, drama, films, sexual relations, depression, illness.” I would add that a major source of religious experience is the life of the religious. Others have reported that spending time in nature feels spiritual (religious) for them. What stands out in Hardy is that nature can be a “trigger” for religious experience. The idea of there being a “trigger” behind the religious experience suggests that there is room for pondering about a deeper reason behind the immediate release or trigger of the experience deemed religious.

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25 Ibid., 81-103.
What Hardy also found is that illness is a trigger for, but not a cause of, religious experience. Hardy’s book title suggests that man (sic) is by nature spiritual. The fine distinction between “trigger” and “cause” lies in that trigger is associated with an automatic reaction to something that happens when an opportunity presents itself, while cause implies a reason beneath it regardless of opportunity presenting itself. Another way to understand this is by seeing the difference between having a reaction (something immediate) and a response (done after reflecting). Hardy comments on this in “Triggers and Consequences,” a chapter in his *The Spiritual Nature of Man.*

Hardy states that “the state of illness would appear to present the opportunity for the spiritual change to take place, rather than be in itself the cause.” He gives the following example which brings up other points about the relationship between illness and religiosity. First the example of someone’s illness triggering a spiritual or religious experience:

I was abroad in the mountains alone in a Pension that I had made friends with one of our four missionaries staying there. I went down to visit my doctor who took me at once to a surgeon—they both suspected cancer and advised immediate operation. I was to go to the Nursing Home next day and because of the trains had to leave the Pension at midday. I only had time to put my affairs in order and had no time for fearful anticipation but I did tell my missionary friend. She asked if she might tell the others and said, “We shall pray for you.” After the rush I had had getting off I dreaded the long time of waiting alone in the Home for the operation. To my surprise on getting into bed I immediately found myself surrounded by almost tangible warmth, light and blissful peace and lay and basked in this really heavenly state for some hours. I had no fear of the operation at any time. It was only afterwards that I realized it must have been the prayers of my friends supporting me.

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26 Ibid., 81-103.

27 Hardy, *Spiritual Nature of Man*, 92.
What we can observe in this case is that the man was alone (perhaps lonely as well) except that he made friends with a missionary and thus was no longer alone but rather felt connected (not lonely). The coincidence or serendipity of the “missionary” is interesting. Would anyone else have had the same effect on the man? The man noticed that he had no time to even feel afraid, but he found time to tell his missionary friend about the newly discovered illness. I would say that the connection through friendship was also a form of religious experience though the man interpreted to be a social function of being human. The man also allowed his friend to tell the other missionaries which shows his trust in them. The telling, the trusting, the sharing one’s story, is also a function of faith. Trust is another word for faith. There may perhaps be a deeper cause than a trigger to the man’s reaction to being told that he was going be prayed for. He did not realize how meaningful the gesture of prayer was going to be for him because of the rush he was in and of the dread (dread is actually intense fear; perhaps the man was numb to fear?) he had of a long wait alone in the Nursing Home. But once he had an opportunity to relax, catch his breath the revelation about the prayer came to him. Relaxation comes to us when we return to our breath, when our breathing returns to its own rhythm, no longer obscured by fears, et al. The innate ability to relax, to come to one’s breath, could also have aided the trigger of his religious experience. He felt an almost “tangible warmth” perhaps like a touch of someone’s hand. Our body temperature is regulated by our breathing. Through the awareness of the warmth of his own body he came to no longer feel alone. The warmth could also be interpreted as an “afterglow,” the
glow remaining after the light is gone, or the feeling that follows a mystical experience, also followed the man’s realization that he was being prayed for by the missionaries. This afterglow was with him for “some hours.” He had no fear, or the feeling of being threatened. He now had the courage (the opposite of fear) to face his surgery. He attributed the whole experience to the prayer of his friends which is why Hardy considered it a “triggered” religious experience.

The italicized words are terms of assessment I identified and listed for the man’s spiritual state. Hypothetically we could have a client come to us who is not in touch with his feelings the way that Hardy’s man was, and had no happy coincidence of having a friend who offered to pray for him as he faced a long waiting time before the surgery would take place. We would have to gain the client’s trust by being attentive to his or her feelings. We might ask, “What are you feeling, what are you dealing with, or what are going through?” Then we must be ready to listen deeply and empathetically. Our question could trigger the client to name some feelings if we have gained his or her trust. Then we would need to decide how best to work with the person in order to help her or him become aware of the feelings involved and how best to cope with them. If in the course of the conversation it became clear that the person has some faith, we could bring their concerns to prayer and the person would inevitably (from my experience) say, “Thank you, I feel better.” They may not be able to put into words what they mean when they say, “I feel better.” But as a religious brother, friend who practices Zen said, “It is better to realize the sense of the Holy….than to explain it.” So it is better for the person to
realize the feeling of wellness than to necessarily explain it. This reading of the Hardy case study is one example of how one can develop a spiritual assessment on one’s feet. When I present cases from my own participant-observer resource I will show how we minister to the client who tells us what they consider to be their experience of God.

I have already observed that an encounter with a pastoral minister, i.e. chaplain and/or spiritual guide, can also be a trigger for religious experience. A man just recently told me that he became courageous as soon as I walked into his hospital room because of the projections and respect he has for my profession as chaplain. The understanding that it is safe to share one’s religious experience in the presence of a chaplain is a trigger for sharing. A ninety year old patient confided in me as a chaplain about his regrets for not having developed a religious practice of his Methodist mother “as she found so much comfort in it.” This was in part because his much younger wife did not value religion. The wife told me that religion is nothing but a way for people to behave like sheep who follow their leader without thinking. Another woman related to me how she prayed the Rosary the entire time that she spent in the MRI machine to help her to cope with her claustrophobia. “Faith is A one,” a woman said when asked how she coped. A young man who was undergoing chemotherapy for cancer had a vision of being in a bubble with a butterfly on top of it. He fixed his gaze on the butterfly and this occupied his attention, made him feel safe and hopeful. A man who was a soldier in Vietnam reported that while sitting on a log, a large bug, ”like a June bug,” he said, buzzed in his ear. A bullet whizzed by as he tilted his head to the side, missing him and hitting the tree. In each of
these cases the person shared their experience as something that helped them get through a difficult time or avoid death, something profound but not necessarily understood by them. I see a variety of “triggers” of religious experience consistent with Hardy’s findings in these situations. What the people above all had in common was a difficult time in their lives but their “religious” experiences are of a different ascription. God was not explicitly mentioned. Praying the Rosary, saying Hail Mary repeatedly, did suggest a Christian faith in God, but watching a butterfly was more akin to the soothing effects of the natural world. The distraction of a bug buzzing in one’s ear was seen by the man as possibly God talking to him, asking him to move his head out of the way of the bullet. He was not consciously thinking that it was God until he reflected on the experience with me.

Another type of description of religious experience that is fascinating is articulated by Abraham H. Maslow, a multidisciplinary psychiatrist who wrote about religious experience as “peak experience” in his book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature.* Maslow equated the mystical with the experiential. He feared that “organized religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experiencer (sic).” He said “that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found one’s daily life, in one’s neighbors, friends, and family, in one’s back yard, and that travel may be a flight from confronting the sacred—this lesson could easily be

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lost. To be looking elsewhere for miracles is to me a sure sign of ignorance that everything is miraculous.”

Seeking a peak experience through prayer creates “dry times” when prayer does not seem to provide the feeling of “high” that Maslow speaks about. On the other hand, this may just be an ordinary experience of prayer. The book which I review, *Lying Awake*, is about a nun whose peak experiences of God ceased with the cure of the illness she had, and about her getting used to the ordinary experiences of God.

Other scholars, such as Wesley Wildman at the Boston University School of Theology, place the mystical experiences in the realm of the phenomenal. The *Handbook of Religious Experience*, edited by Ralph Hood, presents a compilation of essays form a variety of organized religions, suggesting that the world religions, with their rites and rituals, public and private worship, et al, are all ground of religious experience. *The Handbook* also examines the philosophical, sociological and phenomenological as well as the psychological orientation and perspectives religious experience. What James may have described as “abnormal” about the religious experience is defined as *anomalous* by Berenbaum, Kearns and Raghavan. Anomalous does not mean abnormal but “uncommon or irregular.” The anomalous religious experiences can be caused by trauma

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30 Ibid., 333.


or be induced by substances of various types. It is beyond the scope of this study to fully address this type of experience.

One of the most recent studies of religious experience, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* by Ann Taves,\(^{33}\) asks whether religious experience is *sui generis* or an *ascription* to a special kind of experience. She makes the case for the ascription type. But regardless she agrees that religious experience is a way of meaning-making.\(^{34}\) This simply means turning to God for help in a time of need. Boisen,\(^{35}\) whom I cover in the *History of Clinical Pastoral Care* in Chapter Two, also thought that religious experience is a way of making meaning of life some seventy years earlier. Many others thought this long before either Boisen or Taves.

**Limitations**

In my work I follow the healing ministry of Jesus and minister to everyone who wishes me to see them. While I have the openness to seeing everyone, because my seeing them is not about me but about their concerns, there are clients who prefer to see someone of their own belief system. The context of ministry that I will discuss, then,

\(^{33}\) Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered, a Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13, where Taves uses *ascription* to mean that “religious” may be what is attributed to experience rather than the experience actually being religious.


pertains to the religious experience of persons of different faiths struggling with some challenges and trying to use their religion for making meaning of, or coping with, the challenges they are facing, or rectifying the past hurts and perceptions. I believe that everyone faces challenges at some points in their lives whether they are the challenges of an illness or some other causes, such as war, and family and interpersonal relationships. The setting for doing my work of the interpretive healing of the individuals’ religious experiences is mainly a community hospital. Most often the visits or counseling sessions take place at a patient’s bedside though I also see clients in my office or at the parish setting. I use “clients” instead of patients to describe the people whom I minister to. The study will touch upon the anomalous religious experience but it will be beyond the scope of this study due to its length to discuss the nature of the anomalous religious experience in depth. Another way to study religious experience is through magnetic imaging of the brain. Presenting these studies is also beyond the scope of the length of this thesis. I will limit the presentation of the findings from the neuroscientific studies of the imaging of the brain to the sources reviewed in the Literary Sources, “Lying Awake,” chapter four.

While this thesis will analyze several verbatim formats, it will not survey every possible form of a verbatim design. There are many improvisations of verbatim-formats in the spiritual direction training and clinical pastoral education programs (CPE). The CPE verbatims follow a core set of guidelines developed by the Association of Pastoral

\[36 \text{ See the “Definitions” section for the definition of this term.}\]
Care Educators (APCE) in order to achieve certain standards and competencies.\footnote{37 See Appendix A, NACC Standards and Competencies for Chaplain Certification.} This participant-observer has trained in four different CPE program models with four different CPE supervisors and four different verbatim-formats. As an interviewer of candidates for chaplain certification I have encountered dozens of other examples. For my study I am selecting what I think is a model format for interns because it maximizes the analysis of the pastoral encounter on many fronts. While verbatims are standard practice in the CPE programs not all of the spiritual formation programs use them since they have no agreed upon standards and competencies to meet. I will compare the example of the Spiritual Direction Initiative (SDTI) verbatim I participated in to the Haden Institute’s.\footnote{38 The Haden Institute of Spiritual Direction Training in the Jungian, Contemplative, Christian Tradition, Fall 2010. Flat Rock, NC.} Although the SDTI had a Jungian component in its didactic portion, the Haden Institute seems to have a stronger claim on the Jungian approach, as can be seen in the title of their program, “Spiritual Direction Training in the Jungian, Contemplative Christian Tradition.”

It will be beyond the scope of this project to make recommendations for the pastoral and spiritual formation of the ordained ministers. The training programs of the ordained ministers are not a part of this study because they are designed with a different purpose in mind, which is that of a pastor in a parish setting.

**Definitions**
Altruistic—derived from altruism, meaning “unselfish concern for the welfare of others.”

Anomalous religious experience—is a complex type of religious experience. It can be a result of ingesting a substance, or occur during the states of reduced awareness. It can have a phenomenological dimension and be either voluntary or involuntary. Usually it is considered irregular or uncommon but not abnormal.

Ascription—Ascription here means that the word religious is assigned to an experience rather than the experience being in essence religious; See: Sui generis.

Body – The body is an organic whole, composed of skin, bones, tissues, tendons and fat, organs for breathing and keeping rhythm, and systems of glands and blood circulation. Each organ and system has its own intricacies of operation and between the organs there is communication triggered by inner and outer influences. The brain is packed with neurons, the flesh with veins, cells and tissue. Our senses allow us to see, hear, touch/feel, smell and taste. Our genes are the key to our health and our understanding and capacity for meaning-making. The body, as a system of systems, processes all we eat, think and experience.

Cause—the cause for something is essentially the true reason for it. The cause may need a trigger to become evident. For example, we may pull out some weeds from the garden. Although the weeds came out as a result of our pulling, the reason for pulling out the weeds was to allow the desired plants to grow. See also: Trigger

Chaplain—See: Pastoral Care Chaplaincy

Empathy—being able to see one’s self in the place of another and to minister to that person from this type of an inner space. It means utilizing one’s own experience of loss, for example, without sharing about it, but using it as a means of understanding of and providing support to another.

Experience of God—theologically speaking the experience of God is the same as of one’s self since we find ourselves only when we have found God. Existentially, the experience of God is finding ourselves at home in an experience of vastness and intimacy of creation all at once. Mystically the experience of God is when there is no division between our bodies and our spirit, when we can heal ourselves by faith.

God – God is a word for something we have no words for according to the mystics. God is the supreme being of the Scriptures. Many images or descriptors of God can be drawn from the Scriptures such as a creator, rock, shepherd, mother, father or a small whispering sound. God is a presence conjured by us to be our life sustaining
companion, especially at a time of need. God is an all-encompassing “being” within which we live if we believe in God.

Growing edge—growing edge is found in whatever new things the minister needs to learn to be able to minister to others. Defensiveness of a minister in training is an example of a growing edge. Learning how to listen to constructive criticism smooths the ragged, growing edge of defensiveness. The importance of growing out the ragged edges is in that the minister will be able to “diagnose” defensiveness in their client. The importance of noticing defensiveness, or another form of resistance, is in that it can be a barrier to growth or healing psychologically and spiritually.

Hagiography—This is complex term. It does not mean, “false writing” but it may mean theoretical rather than experiential writing. I am including it here as a type of religious experience in which a “saint” tries to live in imitation of Christ. According to the essay on Hagiography in The ORD: On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies, “Hagiographic works must sometimes be used with extreme caution, recognizing that they reveal more about the religious and cultural world of their authors than about the lived lives of their subjects. When reading works of hagiography, it is important to keep in mind that the primary aim of the authors was not to compose a biographical record of the saint, but rather to portray the subject as an exemplar of Christian virtue. Hagiographers also sought to show how the saints themselves had imitated such norms, particularly those provided by the life of Christ and previous saints. Just as they encouraged their audience to imitate the example of the saints, so too they employed the literary models offered them by the Bible and by earlier hagiographic works. Stories, themes, and motifs were repeated from the life of one saint to that of another, each hagiographer adapting a traditional pool of material to the needs of the narrative at hand. Hagiographers even went so far as to repeat phrases and whole passages verbatim from earlier works.39

Healing Presence—See Presence

Hermeneutic of suspicion—Hermeneutic refers to how we interpret a text. When we add the word, “suspicion,” we introduce another way of interpreting; we don’t take an interpretation at face value but approach it with caution.

Lay, laity—In a recent publication of the “C21 Resource: Grace and Commitment: The Vocations of Laity, Religious, and Ordained,” Fall 2010, Julie Hanlon Rubio wrote that, “in American usage, lay person means someone who is ignorant of the

area under discussion, who is out of the field of action.”\textsuperscript{40} The laity historically has been defined as the opposite of the ordained. I agree with Rubio that this definition is out of date. With so many of us “lay” educated to a greater degree than many of the ordained, we can no longer be seen as uninitiated. The lay, though not ordained can be holy and knowledgeable as they are. Lay Catholic Christians are a priestly people by baptism not by ordination.

\textit{Meaning making} – Meaning making is as natural for people to engage in as it is for a spider to weave a web or for a bird to sing. It is what we can do. Unlike the birds, we can change our songs. The degree to which we accept a ready-made meaning or pursue new constructs differs among us as each of us has a unique set of genes, ancestors, cultures and experiences. Many people make meaning out of life by turning to religious practices and other belief systems.

\textit{Minister}--The word minister, which means both a servant and a master, implies a symbiotic, or mutually beneficial, learning and teaching, giving and receiving relationships. This definition is used in this project to describe both chaplain and a spiritual guide regardless of ordination. Another way to think of the “servant-master” relationship is by employing the “wounded healer” metaphor used by Henri Nouwen.\textsuperscript{41} Every healer was once wounded, Nouwen claimed. The wounded who has healed can now be a healer to another who is wounded. The wounded healer and master servant relationships are not ones of power but of empathy.

\textit{Pastoral Care Chaplaincy} – The word “pastoral” is not only a literal view, a kind of a poem or other genre of literature, or a description such as of a pasture with livestock, or of a meadow of clover and wild flowers, or a wheat field, or another site of farm life, but a paradigm of the ground of provision of nourishment. A wise counsel is spiritual nourishment for the one in need of it. A department of agriculture sticker reads, “No Farms, No Food.” As we can see in the parable of the Woman at the Well, people have spiritual needs beyond the biological needs but are represented by physical, or that which can be perceived of by the senses. Pastor does not assume the character of a particular person but is a paradigm of a provider, caregiver or a guide. People are never literally sheep so they do not need a literal shepherd as sheep do but people do sometimes need encouragement or counsel, or a minister to serve them and a guide to companion them. Pastoral care is used here as it encompasses the work of a chaplain trained on the \textit{clinical}


pastoral education model as alluded to in the text. Chaplain is someone attached to a chapel, or a keeper of the cloak of Saint Martin. The word chaplain originates in the medieval ages but its modern model was crafted by a Protestant Christian minister or pastor and educator, Anton Boisen, and has been adapted by the Catholic Christians as well as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist other groups. While being true to the faith of one’s formation, chaplains are trained to serve or minister with openness to everyone one, regardless of faith. See also: Presence.

Presence—the presence of a chaplain or spiritual guide is the presence of God in a sense that they are triggers for a client’s sharing of their story. The story can be intimate, painful, secret, challenging, doubting, one of anger or anything else in the endless array of human predicaments. Mary’s presence at her Son’s crucifixion can sometimes be an emblem for the chaplain who witnesses traumatic events without being able to change the outcome of what is happening. A presence is empty of an agenda but ready to receive and to hold the content of the one story of the one she ministers to. Other types of presences are empathic listening presence, healing presence, servant presence, non-threatening presence.

Prophetic-- Joel Schorn, an author and editor living in Chicago writes that, “Prophet does not mean one who predicts what is to come but refers to the Greek word prophētēs: “one who speaks for another….In Hebrew scripture prophets spoke for God….Most discussion of prophecy in the New Testament comes from St. Paul, though prophets show up in the Acts of the Apostles, which calls some of them people who “encourage and strengthen the believers” (Acts 15:32)” U.S. Catholic, vol. 74, 11, (Nov 2009), 41. This is the sense in which chaplains and spiritual guides are “prophetic” in this project.

Practitioner— This encompasses a variety of professionals exercising their training and includes those who heal in spirit.

Religion—Religion is a belief system drawn from the Sacred Scriptures and traditionally centered in God. There are many types of religions and some are greatly influenced by the culture of a people who adapted it. Religious institutions, such as churches and schools are hierarchical organizations and hold their members, lay and ordained, accountable to specific missions and tenets.

Religious Experience—on the organizational level religious experience takes on the form of many religions and denominations and their ritual practices. Religious educators, leaders, spiritual directors and theologians claim that religious experience is an experience of God. Religious experience can be an experience of God, but an experience of God is not exclusive to religion. We can experience God in the faces of people we love, in nature, in music, in art, in the sciences and in space travel. Spirit – This is a word that comes from the Latin meaning breath, life, courage, heart, vigor and so on. Spirit can
be good or evil depending on the intention behind one’s action. For example someone can act kindly or be “mean-spirited.”

**Spiritual Direction** – See: **Spiritual Guidance**

**Spiritual Guidance** — Spiritual guidance is a ministry in which one person helps another to develop and maintain their prayer life and or concept, image or awareness of God. The one guiding helps the other define God’s role in her or his life.

**Spiritual Guide or Director**—this is a mature person of faith called and trained to be present to a client who has come to them with some concern, are looking to develop a prayer practice, to form a relationship with God, or something greater than themselves in his or her lives. The person/client may be going through a difficult time of transition, have interpersonal conflicts or need to make an important decision. They may lack a direction in life, self esteem or even an identity. The guide or the director provides an empathic, listening, healing presence and feedback as appropriate, guiding, showing rather than telling the client what to do. The guide assumes the best about the clients who have come to see her, treating them with respect and compassion.

**Sui generis**—means “in and of its kind, altogether unique; unduplicated.”

**Trigger**—trigger is the immediate manifestation, not the “root cause,” of an experience. It is a means by which the cause manifests itself.

**Verbatim**—verbatim is a literal, word-for-word transcription of a conversation in an encounter. In cpe the verbatim takes into consideration the appearance of the person, the setting of the encounter and the awareness of what is going on (emotionally) in the minister as well as in the client. The verbatim is an important reflective exercise. As a teaching/learning tool the written verbatim is brought to one’s group of peers for process, e.g., for comments and suggestions. The challenge for the presenter is to be able to hear the peer responders without being defensive. If he or she acts defensively, this is a growing edge or opportunity to grow in awareness of one’s feelings and behavior. The verbatim trains the minister to be awake during the visit, meeting or encounter with her or his client. She or he must be awake and alert to as many things as possible that are going on in the pastoral encounter.
The Significance of the Study of Religious Experience in the Ministries of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Guidance

This study comes from my experience as a clinician, “working in a clinic,” in a dual role of chaplain and spiritual guide, from my internships for those ministries and from my academic studies. My academic studies, including the study of religious experience, have enhanced my ability to work as a chaplain and spiritual guide. I can now minister to the patients with a greater degree of comfort, freedom and awareness. I work with eleven priests and have been in conversation with a few of them about this project. I spoke with the executive director of the Spiritual Directors International who also is interested in seeing my work. In addition, my chaplain colleagues are interested in the relationship between spiritual guidance, chaplaincy and religious experience. The study can be a resource for formulating spiritual assessment tools. Using Hardy’s classifications we would document “sensory or quasi-sensory experiences,” “cognitive and affective elements,” “dream experiences,” “triggers,” and “consequence experiences.” These categories, which could be thought of as the sources of religious experience, enable us to conceptualize the experience as emanating from the human beings’ life situations. From our understanding of these concepts we could tailor our responses to our clients. Whether we carry the sense of the items of spiritual assessment in our heads or as actual forms, they help us focus, listen and give feedback to the person before us. Using a spiritual assessment tool is the key to determining one’s response to the client and to the intervention needed. Since assessments are taken from the general and brought to the

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specific situation, they should always be adjusted to the individual persons. Through specific cases this study will demonstrate how the study of religious experience helps us listen and receive a person’s story of what may be classified as religious experience.

For those who are interested in chaplaincy and spiritual guidance this study will compare the professions for them. The chaplaincy in this study is board certifiable profession. It is a profession situated within the interdisciplinary healthcare team. As a profession it garners a living wage paid by the health care institutions or by the local archdiocese. Spiritual direction or guidance is, by contrast, a ministry dating back to the origins of Christianity. Present day spiritual direction draws from the Christian spiritual traditions but also borrows from contemporary social sciences and from the clinical pastoral education model which trains the chaplains for their work. The training programs in spiritual direction do not lead to certification. Instead they can lead to personal growth, academic degrees or certificates of completion. I will offer the Spiritual Directors International executive director’s reasons for not having published guidelines for the spiritual direction formation programs later in the project.

This study has the potential to add to the authority of the chaplains. A current brochure from the National Association of Catholic Chaplains asks, “Is God calling you to be a Catholic Chaplain?” The brochure describes personal attributers which may help one to consider the call. In the list of a chaplain’s responsibilities is to “serve as a resource for ethical and end-of-life decision making, providing spiritual support and guidance.” Thus the study will advocate the professions of chaplains and trained spiritual
directors or guides and challenge them to think more expansively about their ministries. The more we learn the better we can guide or counsel our clients beyond the challenges they face while respecting where they are emotionally and spiritually.

This study will manifest that the training in spiritual direction enhances and complements the clinical pastoral education training of a chaplain, and that extensive chaplaincy training leading to board certification could make better spiritual directors. I have already elaborated on the limitations of defining religious experience as the experience of God as being unequivocally good. I have offered that religious experience is both human and divine. Human because it arises out of a human cognition, circumstances and personal relationships, divine because the person believes that the experience is caused or inspired by God outside of and independently of them. The difference between human and divine, or the profane and the sacred, is required for this kind of thinking about religious experience. These qualities coexist, albeit in tensions, in us as human beings. As I draw from a sampling of disciplines and genres this study will enable me to make the case for the value of the study of religious experience. Hardy created a comprehensive classification system for sorting out the elements of religious experience. In my work with clients I accept that religious experience is whatever a client tells me it is. But I will also continue to work on my own understanding of religious experience as a minister with a professional and a lay perspective.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRAINING PROGRAMS: ATTENTION TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TRAINING AND CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION

Training Programs in Spiritual Direction and Chaplaincy as Sources of the Study

I have already introduced my spiritual direction training experience in the Statement of the Problem section. The settings for my ministry as a chaplain intern were the tertiary Boston, MA hospitals, the Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and the general or community hospitals, the Newton-Wellesley Hospital (Newton, MA) in association with the cpe program at the Campion Renewal Center (Weston, MA) and the Holy Family Medical Center (Methuen, MA).

Verbatims were used as learning tools for counseling in both of my CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) training and in the spiritual direction training programs. The verbatims used at the facilities above uniformly addressed a set of concerns. The CPE verbatim included a client’s diagnosis and main concern, the pastoral opportunity at hand and any observation about the client or their immediate environment. This is followed by the verbatim of the pastoral visit or encounter. This, in turn, is followed by an analysis of the visit. For the client or patient the content is analyzed from the psychological, sociological, theological and ethical perspectives. The chaplain is asked to give an account of what the visit was like for him or her in terms feelings, attitudes, ethics and theology. The chaplain is asked to reflect on his or her strengths and weaknesses and on
the religious faith and emotional dynamics in the pastoral relationship. Neither of the verbatims asks the minister in training to see religious experience apart from the assumption of God.

By contrast, the spiritual direction verbatim is much less elaborate and begins by asking for a brief account of the client or “directee,” and for the reason why the spiritual director in training is presenting this particular verbatim. The word-for-word transcription of the spiritual direction encounter follows. But the analysis is limited to identifying the strongest feelings, strengths and weaknesses of the director in training, and the movements and counter movements between director and directee. Whenever we look at feelings in a black and white way as here by inciting the “strongest feelings” and the “strengths and weaknesses,” we invite tensions and conflict. Addressing pleasant and unpleasant, the light and the shadow feelings would be more effective. Lastly, the spiritual direction verbatim asks whether the director would do anything differently next time and what insights they gained.

Not all spiritual direction training or formation programs I researched use verbatims as teaching/learning tools. Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation uses “real play” and reports. Oasis which is modeled on Shalem also does not use verbatims but requires integrative papers written about particular spiritualities, “i.e. Benedictine, Franciscan, Carmelite, etc…. and another type of integrative paper on one’s practice of

43 Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 3025 Fourth Street, NE; Suite 22; Washington, DC 20017.

44 Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development, 49 Deerfield Road; Camp Hill, PA 17011.
spiritual direction with others.” They have come to the conclusion as I have that there are many different types of spiritualities to consider when we design a program that trains spiritual directors or guides. Still, the emphasis on acquiring self-knowledge for the purposes of being an empathic listening presence and responder does not seem to be a strong point of the programs. But CPE which is standardized and can lead to professional certification of chaplain ministers has adapted the verbatim as one of its effective teaching tools, with particular attention being paid to the “growing edges” of a person.

Overview: The State of Spiritual Direction Training in the United States

When I emailed Liz Budd Ellmann of the SDI (Spiritual Directors International), to ask whether the organization provided some standards or guidelines for the spiritual direction programs, she answered that she “would be delighted to talk to me about this topic” and that “it would be easier to speak by telephone.” The following is a paraphrase of our telephone conversation: Ms. Ellmann stated that there are “no published guidelines as to what constitutes a training program. Rather, she stated that,

- the guidelines are organic
- the various ecclesial authorities govern what constitutes a training program
- the Spiritual Directors International should not duplicate what the ecclesial authorities may already be doing

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45 Oasis, “Guidelines for Our Community.”

46 See Appendix E
She did not provide any evidence that the various ecclesial bodies ever come together to discuss commonalities in the way they provide spiritual direction to those who seek it. This is in stark contrast to the premise of the clinical pastoral education programs. A subgroup of the members of the professional chaplain organizations, such as the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains, calling themselves the *Spiritual Collaborative*, agreed to abide by the same set of standards and competencies regardless of denominational differences. Provisions are made for the chaplains of each denomination to acquire proficiency in articulating the current theology of their own faith. The prospective chaplains are required to earn at least a master’s level degree in their respective traditions. These are the requirements for the certification as a chaplain in addition to the 1,600 hours of clinical pastoral education training.

Ellmann said that the focus of the training programs in spiritual direction is on “the people who are seeking spiritual direction.” She said that she sees the role of the Spiritual Directors International as assisting the individuals with the formation such as, “what kinds of questions to ask” when looking for a program. She made the statement that there is a “crossover” among the groups of the “religious” and the “therapists.” One group wants more psychology in their practice because they already have theology, while the therapists ask for more theology since they already have the psychology piece. Each person seeking formation determines their own needs. She called this “the seeking stage.” She strongly suggested that spiritual directors cannot be trained but only called by God or
asked to do this ministry by their particular ecclesial authority. This is akin to what some claim about art, poetry, music, dance and other creative arts. Yet all of these are disciplines situated within accredited academic programs, abiding by common standards.

My belief is that “a calling” is not enough to qualify someone to do something that requires a skill, such as how to work with people. One person may feel “called” to be a doctor or another medical professional. Another person may feel “called” to be an astronaut or a nurse. All of these “callings,” along with spiritual direction, need to adhere to standards and competencies. However, many spiritual directors or guides provide their services free of charge and do not consider it a “profession,” merely a ministry. This can minimize the ministry and make it seem like a luxury, something good but not necessary to do. Yet when we are in some kind of crisis we turn to the spiritual directors and expect them to know as much as any other professional knows about their respective fields.

Based on what Ellmann stated, the responsibility rests with a potential directee to determine if a director is a good fit for them. But this is a lot to ask of a person if they are in some kind of a crisis.

In light of the lack of identifying the best common practices in spiritual direction training programs, the verbatim at the Spiritual Direction Initiative seemed to be a simplified version of a CPE type, with additional questions pertaining to spiritual direction or guidance. The conclusion I draw is that the directors of various spiritual direction formation programs model their verbatims on those used by the centers where they were trained.
Clinical Pastoral Education: Origin and Founding Source

Anton Boisen rode the wave of history when he founded a new way of training ministers. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) followed on the heels of the Flexner Report. Here is a citation from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Department of Pastoral Care and Education, giving a most concise and cogent historical perspective of the Clinical Pastoral Education I know of. It states,

In the 1920’s theological education began to be profoundly reshaped by the medical model of education, which itself was being transformed in response to the renowned Flexner Report of 1910. Theological education, which was at that point almost entirely academic, theoretical and forensic, began to change just as medical education was changing. Pastors began using the mentorship approach to learning “at the bedside” in contact with living persons and their problems.48

Anton Boisen was a Protestant minister who was hired as the hospital chaplain by the superintendent of Worcester State Hospital, Worcester, MA, where Boisen had also been a mental patient. In his case the formation as a minister and the experience of having been hospitalized as a patient provided Boisen with insights into religious coping. It was during his time as a patient in a mental hospital that he discovered the value of religion in coping with a crisis. Throughout his work, The Exploration of the Inner World, Boisen asserts that an illness, in his case specifically mental illness, is a “problem-

47 The Flexner Report was prepared by Abraham Flexner with the support from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The Report caused the Standardization of the American Medical Education. JAMA, http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/291/17/2139.full

48 University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Department of Pastoral Care and Education, Web Site, http://www.uams.edu/cpe/training_programs/cpe_history.asp.
solving experience.”49 He was so deeply religious that he saw his illness as an opportunity to grow spiritually while others may interpret their illness as having been abandoned by God. Thus he speaks of “a religious experience” as a way of solving difficult problems of life.”50 Religious experience for him is not a direct experience of God but of an idea of God.51 Another way he defines religious experience is as a mystical experience. “This experience of union with the divine is probably the matrix of all religion,” Boisen wrote.52 However, the aim of religious experience is not God for him, but rather “the important question is always the result attained in terms of the richness and fullness of life which is to be found through living in harmony with that which is enduring and universal in human experience.”53 He does not deny the existence of God but proposes that we create God out of our need for meaning. In these explorative ways religious experience was an antidote for the “cataclysmic” effect of his illness upon Boisen.

Boisen’s life and work are rich resources for any project describing the nature of pastoral care chaplaincy because of Boisen’s own religious experience. He transcended the challenge of his illness by seeking meaning through his religious beliefs. Because he is a founding “father” of CPE and personally suffered a mental breakdown, he knew


50 Ibid., 70.

51 Ibid., 53, 209, etc.

52 Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World, 80.

53 Ibid., 208.
firsthand how difficult it can be to deal with disturbances of one’s mental and emotional life. The process of meaning making he underwent was for him akin to the religious conversion. It is in that sense that the psychological catharsis was a religious experience for him.

As a founder of CPE, Boisen also coined the term, “living human documents.” The term is packed with implications for ministry. One of the interpretations of the meaning of the phrase is that the minister is to look upon the patient as someone with a story of his or her life. At the same time, they are an organic, dynamic human being, still developing, growing, evolving, affected by their unique circumstances. “Living” means being capable of change, transformation and gaining new insights into one’s existence and the context of this existence and its conditions. The patient should not be seen as static personality or approached with an agenda of one’s own but be prepared to discover the patient’s own agenda and concerns. The minister, meaning the chaplain, must approach the patient with an openness to meet the person wherever he or she is and minister to them in that emotional and literal “place.” This practical approach to pastoral care makes the chaplain very much a practical theologian. That is, she brings established theories and practices to her ministering to the living human beings in their particular situation and the context of their experience.

**CPE Verbatim Analysis in Terms of Religious Experience**
The verbatim format which I will discuss was used by the Campion Renewal Center and is based upon the ACPE (Association of Clinical Pastoral Educators) guidelines. Verbatims in other programs that I participated in, Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, both in Boston, MA, and the Holy Family Medical Center in Methuen, MA, varied their formats somewhat but all were accredited by the ACPE. The directors at the Campion Renewal and CPE Center, Weston, MA, designed their entire program based on the national accreditation guidelines. They were particular about the concerns to be covered and clear about their expectations of the participants. We were to follow the verbatim guidelines faithfully in order to cover all of the Standards and Competencies set forth by the accrediting body. In this procedure there was very little that the chaplain could miss about the pastoral relationship he or she encountered.

The goal of the verbatim was not only the presentation and analysis of the patient or client but also of one’s self. Because it is standard requirements of the chaplains to know and to understand themselves, all of the CPE Programs conduct didactic sessions on being human. My supervisor at the Campion Renewal Center, David Boulton, specialized in the Jungian theories of human development and functioning. In a lecture on the concept of the “shadow,” or the negative aspects of the selves, he said, “Selfhood cannot be achieved without accepting things we don’t like about ourselves as well as what we like about ourselves, and all the sides of us are united in God.” This statement too summarizes my thesis. Father Boulton taught us about the concepts of the ego,
persona, mask, archetypes, anima, animus, and all the sorts of knowledge we needed in order to understand and analyze our thoughts, actions and behaviors in the patient-chaplain relationship in a healthy way. When we accept what we do not like about ourselves, or our religious experience, the shadow aspects of ourselves and our experiences cease to have power over us. It will be well to remember this when I discuss the Scarlet Letter and show how Hester Prynne accepted the very bleak circumstances of her life.

The CHAPLAIN ANALYSIS, the understanding of the emotional dynamics of the pastoral relationship did not only apply to the patient/client’s feelings and emotions but also to the person of the chaplain. This tandem analysis trains the chaplain to be honest with her or his self. It also keeps the balance of power in the pastoral relationship in check. That is, we should not make our patient/client feel that we have power over them. If they perceive this power they may not feel free to express themselves which could keep them from growing and learning from their experiences. This is why it is important for the chaplain to be aware of any transference, such as parent-child or pastor, as the Campion verbatim indicated. Wanting to feel powerful may be a chaplain’s own growing edge.

The Campion verbatim asks the chaplain to “continuously attempt to understand his/her religious faith” in the ANALYSIS above. The question of religious experience may be implicit in this. But since the supervisors left nothing to ambiguity they would have made the requirement to address the patient’s or the client’s religious experience
explicit if they were aware of its importance. I am asserting the importance of religious experience to be a part of the chaplain’s training experience. The more general approach is described in the Theological Concerns of the verbatim for the patient/client when it poses the question, “What appears to be this person’s relationship with God?” This is a question that a spiritual guide would use as well. In my CPE training I learned much about identifying a person’s feelings, affect, and their main spiritual concerns. Without incorporating my extensive one-to-one visits with clients, group process, verbatims, theological reflections and individual supervision of CPE, into my spiritual direction training I would not have felt prepared to provide spiritual guidance. CPE teaches more about spiritual concerns than spiritual direction training does about pastoral care provision. Because of their arduous preparation the board certified chaplains can more easily give spiritual care to their clients than the spiritual guides can give guidance to the sick. But because the ministries of chaplaincy and spiritual guidance overlap, the spiritual formation programs would be justified in requiring at least two units of clinical pastoral education training. The CPE chaplains and the spiritual direction interns could also have joint didactic sessions and verbatim discussions. This would give them both an opportunity to understand where they overlap and where they are different from each other. They could also discuss the meaning and role of religious experience from different perspectives.
The Spiritual Direction Verbatim Analysis in Terms of Religious Experience

Examining the Spiritual Direction Initiative (SDTI) verbatim, See Appendix C, question by question we can see that the verbatim first asks the spiritual direction intern to identify his or her strongest feelings toward the directee during the interview and immediately afterward. While the question implies that the intern should be aware of her feelings, it could also lead to confrontation. The question is clearly modeled on CPE, but since spiritual direction or guidance is a contemplative, prayerful practice, it would have been more appropriate to ask a question such as, “What were you contemplating as you encountered your directee?” Or, “Was your agenda to talk about God?” Other questions could have been, “What kinds of things did you listen for? Did it seem that you had to choose to which items to respond? Why did you choose to respond to that particular item?” Feelings are the domain of CPE, but the CPE verbatim first asks the intern to ground the self in the pastoral situation by providing some factual information and then some observations. In CPE verbatim the next step is to honestly analyze one’s own self. If the supervisor and the peer group to whom the verbatim is presented feel that there are things the presenter is avoiding, the group asks questions of the presenter. The presenter can then see for herself what she wanted to avoid, what the growing edge was, and accept it. Factual and physical appearances influence our feelings and perceptions. But the SDTI did not hold seminars of substance on self-knowledge as did the CPE programs. While I spent four years becoming a board certified chaplain, it took only a year to receive a certificate of completion as a spiritual guide. Some, such as the director of the Spiritual
Direction International, argue that the training in spiritual direction is supplemental to the profession we already hold as we wrote at the beginning of this chapter. While attempts were made to address the human development, behavior and ethics, they were not held up to any standards by which we could evaluate their effectiveness.

Referring back to the Spiritual Direction verbatim presented in the Appendix D, we can see that the second question on the verbatim analysis asks the intern to analyze his or her “personal strengths and weaknesses” during the spiritual direction session. This is heavy work which would have been difficult to do while focusing on one’s directee. The question might have been fleshed in order out to provide more guidance and a better learning opportunity for the intern.

The fifth question, SDTI Verbatim, Appendix C asks whether something different may have been done. This suggests that some growth could occur from the encounter but does not directly ask about one’s growing edges or the “hang ups” that might be keeping the intern from growing spiritually. Our hangs ups can keep us from being present to God or to a directee. Ignatian spirituality was a large part of my SDTI program. The supervisors might have capitalized on the notion of ‘disordered attachments’ to help us address the dilemma of the growing edges and hang ups. Saint Ignatius speaks of the ‘disordered attachments’ in very first Annotation to the Exercises,

‘spiritual exercises’ is the name given to every way of preparing and disposing one’s soul to rid herself of all disordered attachments, so that once rid of them one
might see and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one’s life for the good of the soul.\textsuperscript{54}

Since we are learning from the Ignatian tradition we might spend time examining the concepts such as the distorted attachments and find a psychological basis for them. In this way the tradition can have modern applications with authentic roots. Pursuing this line of thinking, in the practice of spiritual direction or guidance, we must likewise be ‘disposed’ or open to hearing God’s will in what we want to say to the person we are guiding while keeping an eye on our own inner processes.

The questions on the spiritual direction training programs examples seemed to have been borrowed from the CPE model, but without the CPE model elaboration, and seemed to have been arranged randomly. Question three, Appendix C, asking about noticing “any Religious Experience in the person’s day or prayer” suggests that the person prayed. If we do discern that the person has been praying, what should we do about it? The spiritual direction encounter is considered to be a prayer in itself so are we not praying together? The follow up question, “is there any Religious Experience described in this verbatim” could be rephrased to read, “Is there any experience of God in this verbatim” since religious experience is defined as an experience of God by the program. But rephrasing the question would produce different answers. Unfortunately, for some of my directees religious experience means, “I went to parochial school and the nuns were tough on me.” The assumption cannot be that the directee will speak according

to pre-written dialog format. The training needs to prepare the spiritual director for the surprises in the responses of the directees. In the CPE verbatim it is the area of “Theological Concerns” that provides an opportunity to discuss God, religion church, nature, and so on. “Theological Concerns” is a broader term and allows the spiritual direction intern to anticipate a broader set of responses. This is another example in favor of the academic studies being a part of the training program. The academic studies help the lay person, the non-religious and non-ordained, to have access to the same information as the ordained and the religious have, and enables them to be proficient in their spiritual formation and be able to speak about God and religious experience.

The advantage of the CPE verbatim over the SDTP is the question in relation to finding out about the religious experience is, “how does the [sick] person relate his or her religious belief to his/her sickness/dilemma?” This practical approach teaches the chaplain to be attentive to the role of religious experience in the client’s life. There is an element of spiritual guidance embedded in such teaching. The question could be adapted for spiritual guidance by asking, “How do you relate your religious beliefs to what is going on in your at this time?” Otherwise the reason for the client’s seeking spiritual guidance can be very difficult to ascertain. The client may come to us to understand God’s role in their lives, but she or he may have a resistance to talking about God and or religious experience, especially if they equate God with religion. In spiritual direction “God is an assumption,” the educators stated. There may need to be some explanation about the difference between God and religion.
Question number four on the SDTI verbatim sample asks about “Movements and/or Counter movements” in the client or one’s self. Again, the assumption is that the direction of the movements is either toward or away from God. Identifying these movements is essential to the practice of spiritual direction. This is again evidence on the extent of the role of academic studies in preparation to the provision of spiritual guidance. The “movements and counter movements” referred to here are amply described by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. The *Exercises* have greatly influenced today’s spiritual direction practices as the Jesuit Fathers, Barry and Connolly have been central to the modern movement of spiritual direction.

The Spiritual Direction Initiative verbatim specifically asks about the presence of “religious experience.” But the problem is that religious experience was not well defined on the verbatim or in the spiritual direction training program. As a chaplain and spiritual guide I am interested to know what constitutes religious experience. This could be many things if we take time to examine it. I will present the historical perspective of religious experience in the chapters following. One conclusion I draw from the historic perspective is that religious experience was common to the lives of the monastics or the religious who lived in the monasteries. Although any one can have a religious experience anywhere, we still associate being spiritual with the retreat centers, the former residences of the monastic and religious. What we cannot allow is the thinking that God can only be experienced by special people who attend retreats. Or that religious experience as the experience of God is granted only to those who receive spiritual direction. Anyone can
have a religious experience whether or not they have chosen a religious life or have an upbringing in faith. Hardy’s collection of data has shown that. My experience confirms this.

According to my spiritual direction supervisor religious experience was the experience of God, and this was true for the mystics. But I was struck with the limitations of thinking of God as solely a religious experience. This thinking placed the answer beyond questioning. Relegating God to religion and implying that every religious experience is good since God is also good was disturbing. While religion is a context for speaking about God and worshiping God, we should try to see God in and outside of religion. Because God can be experienced in nature, music, art and human relationships, this illustrates the folly of boundaries. Religion as a basis for organizing and controlling communities and societies is different from the religion that sustains the soul and fosters individual freedom. Howard Thurman, for example, writes of this in his work, *A Strange Freedom.*55 In it he describes the inner freedom of the slaves who derive their strength from their faith in Jesus. Their “Christian” masters justify their behavior toward the slaves by thinking of them as less than human. Religion that is used for organization can hinge on dogma and use codes of behavior punishable by religious or social (public) law. Jesus preached that the court of law was different than the mercy of God. People who are my colleagues are different from me and organize the meaning of their lives differently from each other. Compassion is found in religion. But healthcare providers may see

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themselves as compassionate caregivers regardless of religious affiliation. They thus organize the purpose and meaning of their lives in terms of their work as caregivers, and around pleasurable activities. These may include biking, golfing, casino gambling, running, skiing, around concerns for the other such as helping the victims of natural disaster, or family. Their religious experiences may be peak experiences which Maslow described.

Generally speaking it is difficult to talk about God in spiritual direction even by those who desire to participate in it. The directee, or the person seeking spiritual guidance, will begin by talking about their concerns and lapse into expressing their opinion about things that do not directly relate to their immediate concerns. Talking about God requires focusing. This “focusing” is achieved through practice. Spiritual direction training should teach this as well. This teaching could be done by looking at the studies of religious and interreligious dialog. Seeing how the Zen practice of zazen, sitting meditation, relates to focusing, may help some view and define religious experience. I have been practicing zazen for over seven years as a part of my doctoral studies with support from the Spiritual Formation and Church Life program. This practice gives me immense confidence in focusing, silence, compassion and detachment. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop this further. Eugene T. Gendlin’s work on focusing is also helpful in observing what we experience.

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56 Boston University School of Theology, The Center for Practical Theology, Project for Spiritual Formation and Church Life, Claire Wolfteich, PhD, Director.

As I draw this section, “Spiritual Direction Verbatim Analysis,” to a conclusion I make the following observations. God and religion are difficult to talk about. In thinking about “religious experience,” “experience” is more easily defined than “religious.” Experience is a conscious awareness of what we are going through, or have gone through physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our sensual and cognitive abilities, including our memory, enable us to bring the experience to our conscious minds. In the process of interpreting it we can choose to identify something specific as being of God but we may not know on what basis. The mystics had their visions and the immediacy of experience. Mystery is a good word for God, but it is still only a word. While we can create a belief system of a religion we cannot create God. As a further articulation about God as religious experience the supervisor said, “God is an assumption.” By saying that God is an assumption she meant we assume that God exists. Thus assuming that God exists we may be making an effort to stay faithful to our assumption rather than to God. If God is an assumption, and religious is an ascription for a type of experience as Ann Taves proposes, then we realize that religious experience is an experience of the self as making meaning in God, that there are not two of us. The self who is the seeker of God becomes one with God. If we need to cultivate faith in God for the sake of self-identity, which is what Petroff found to be true of the mystics, then religious experience is perhaps only

58 “The ascriptive model claims on the contrary that religious or mystical or spiritual or sacred “things” are created when religious significance is assigned to them. In the ascriptive model, subjects have experiences that they or others deem religious.” Taves, Religious Experience Reconsidered, 17.

an experience of a human being looking for God. Yet unless we have a strong sense of self we may not be able to accept the paradox that there is only the One, the One that is God incarnate. I grasp this concept in a reading from the Gospel of Matthew 3:13-17. In this reading Jesus, the divine person of God, needs to be baptized by John, a man. John feels unworthy to baptize Jesus, but Jesus tells him, “Allow it.” The baptism needs to be performed in order for the prophecy of Jesus as Messiah to be fulfilled. This Reading contains one paradigm of the human and divine blending together in the incarnation.

There is more to religious experience than thought processes. Religious experience is evident in actions, such as performing a baptism or allowing it to be done. This is why ways of knowing other than cognitive or mental, such as body language (physical action or gesture), subconscious thought, sensual (based on our five senses) and intuitive ways, have an important role in our understanding of experience of our clients. When the clients share their stories and experiences with the chaplains and the spiritual guides, it is because the clients want to know what name to give to what they experience. The clients who have years of experience meeting with a spiritual director are well versed in talking about God, while those who are new to it may feel somewhat uncomfortable. As a chaplain and a spiritual guide I can be present to the client in whichever role is more helpful to them. In any case, the study of spirituality is important to our understanding religious experience.
CHAPTER THREE
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN PASTORAL CARE

Three Exemplary Historical Sources

The title above could easily be rephrased as, the “Pastoral Care in the Context of the Religious Experience.” Pastoral care has been intertwined with the Christian spiritual and religious tradition since its beginnings. As I state in the Limitations section, my mission is to follow the healing ministry of Jesus. Jesus first followers heeded His teachings of caring for one another, and urged all of the Christian brothers and sisters to do likewise. Pastoral care has been about not only the personal relationship with God and spending time in the communal prayer, but also of loving one’s neighbors, feeding the poor and healing the sick. One of the earliest orders was founded by Saint Benedict.

“Around the year 500,” writes Basil Pennington, Benedict of Nursia wrote a Rule for Monks. In his Rule or the guidelines for the lives of the monks, Benedict wrote, quoting from the Scripture to show the precedent for what he is saying, that the

Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ, for he said: I was sick and you visited me (Matt 25:36) and what you did for one of these least brothers you did for me (Matt 25:40). Let the sick on their part bear in mind that they are served out of honor for God, and let them not by their excessive demands distress their brothers who serve them. Still, sick brothers must be patiently borne with, because serving them leads to a greater reward.61

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This passage speaks to the importance of caring for the sick. It asks of the sick to not misunderstand the care giver brother as a personal servant to him, but rather to understand that care of the sick is a service which honors God. This dignifies the servant of the sick. And yet, we must understand that a sick one must be treated with patience as the sick one’s cognition and behavior, and this is a modern projection, are altered by the illness. This is what we try to achieve as chaplains, to be a non-anxious, healing presence to the sick. The root of this pastoral impetuous is in the religious experience of the early Christians. Yet we operate on the modern day psychological theories of human cognition and behavior. Without bringing the inter-disciplinary knowledge to pastoral care we may not be able to appreciate the whole of the approach to caring for the human being.

The formation as a minister to the sick takes place when we study historical texts. These texts have wisdom in the messages that may be not carried over through time unless we continue to study them. For instance, in my role as the hospital minister I present myself as a servant. But to a patient who does not know that I serve in “God’s honor,” or out of love and compassion, I may look “subservient.” A patient told me once, “Don’t underestimate yourself, and don’t make yourself into a servant.” This patient misunderstood my role. There is an absence of the teachings of the tradition among the Christian, and this is only natural but at the same time the servant relationship is a basic principle of the Christian faith.

There are three parts in the passage above that Saint Benedict wrote. One is that taking care of the sick is a first priority in the communal life; two is that the sick person
must understand the true role of the care giver, and the third is that no matter what the attitude of the sick might be, the care giver must remain patient and considerate. Because of the third message of the command to tend to the sick, for example, the contemporary chaplains must pay particular attention to finding ways of caring for their own needs, such as the need to mend after being misunderstood in the servant relationship. There are many other kinds of misunderstanding for the Catholic chaplain of the female gender. Her clients can be suspicious of her as some sort of an impostor since traditionally chaplains are associated with the ministry of the ordained, and women cannot be ordained. It is difficult as a woman to not come back to the lack of ordination for the women in the Roman Catholic Church. But this cannot be a distraction from performing one’s calling.

In the next example of the history of pastoral care, I continue to show how pastoral care has been interwoven with the religious and the ordained. In this example we see a spiritual friendship between a bishop and a lay woman turned religious, Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. The Bishop was Jane’s mentor and spiritual guide. The pair provided spiritual guidance in person and through letters. But more to the point of pastoral care, after some discernment together, Francis and Jane co-founded a new religious order, the Visitation of Holy Mary.  

The Visitation of Mary order had no particular formal structure until later when it became enclosed. It “was [initially] established as an institute for women who were

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drawn to a life of contemplative prayer but who might not be suitable candidates for existing religious communities because of their age, health and temperament.”\textsuperscript{63} The pastoral impetuous of the Salesian and de Chantal spirituality was to be gentle with those they visit. Their spiritual guidance approach of “not to instruct but to appeal through the whole person through their vital center, to make Jesus live by winning the heart through persuasions and gentle encouragement,”\textsuperscript{64} is very much in tune with how we want to approach the clients we minster to as the chaplains and spiritual guides. The mission of Jesus is at the center of the Visitation, as it is at the core of my hospital ministry. The gentle yet “persuasive” way of encouragement is what is often needed to be brought to the bedside of a sick person whose faith is being weakened by the uncertainty of the outcome of an illness.

Jane de Chantal wrote many letters of spiritual direction or guidance to the Visitants, the members of the Visitation of Mary. Insightfully she wrote,

Never be astonished at the faults of the community or of any individual Sister, for to be shocked at our Sisters’ faults, to pick them apart, examine them, to get all upset about them is the sign of narrow-mindedness which has no insight into human frailty, and very little charity or forbearance.\textsuperscript{65}

Today we learn how to be self-reflective and aware of our feelings and emotions, and the role they play in our being present to the clients we minister to. But we bring knowledge from the various fields of study to our experiences to help us establish the

\textsuperscript{63} De Sales and de Chantal, \textit{Letters of Spiritual Direction}, 47.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 261.
best practices in pastoral care and spiritual guidance. Despite the wealth of texts and years of experience, we can still go back and retrieve the wisdom of pastoral care in the Scripture, and the early adapters of that Wisdom.

**Two Contemporary Pastoral Care Sources in Terms of Religious Experience**

Personal relationship with God through some spiritual practice, the care of the self and the care for the fellow human being are still the parts of the ministers’ callings. I have said that to be pastoral we must minister to the person where he or she is. This means that we consider his or her physical, emotional, spiritual and social circumstances before we prepare a response to him or her.

When we speak of the pastoral care we must consider the context in which we minister as well as individual human beings. John Patton’s *Pastoral Care in Context*, deals with the importance of “context” of ministry. Context can encompass the awareness of the type of an institution in which we work. If we work in the context of a general hospital with a homogenous population, our approach will differ from that of our colleagues in the tertiary urban hospitals where numerous cultures are represented by diversity among patients. The context of a nursing home will be different than either of the two types of hospitals and vary more with ethnicity, education and social status of the “elders”. The context of the psychiatric milieu will require a different set of skills and awarenesses than working with Alzheimer’s patients. But physical and the geographic

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contexts are not the only types. Patton also means to say that the “context” is of ethnic and communal in nature. The feminist, womanist, African-America, Indian American, Hmong, and so many other ethnic, social and religious are a part of the many of the contexts Patton wants us to be aware of. God and the community with a religious affiliation are a given to his idea of context, so much so that he does not index the terms. They are part of the fabric of his thesis. He is not concerned about the person’s religious correctness but about their basic needs and rights as human beings. He wants their needs to be addressed by pastoral care, their emotional and the physical as well as the religious and spiritual needs. He wants to dispense with the myths of race and gender, such as for example, the inferiority of people of color and of women. The human aspects of pastoral or religious experiences are important for Patton. While God is the builder of the community in Patton’s philosophy, Patton wants the people of the community to care for each other. In that respect Patton humanizes God who works through one person to help another.

The weakness of Patton is that his work remains theoretical. In theory he is right when he discusses suffering as something that can transform us. But alleviating one’s suffering is easier said than done. It is understandable that Jane de Chantal would not have brought psychology or sociology to her direction since these fields did not exist in her time. But in our time we must give reasons, must bring knowledge from the wider sources to understand religious experience and to provide pastoral care.
Patton believes, for instance, that “Pain is something that happens to us. It is a result of being hit, hearing an unkind comment, being disappointed. It is a consequence of a loss, a death, a tragedy. Suffering, in contrast, ‘does not happen to us; we choose to suffer.’” Some of this statement is true but my clients would disagree that they choose to suffer. Some things that we learn, such as this example, we have to unlearn in order to be helpful to our clients. First we must be with the person in their suffering rather than explain to them that they are choosing it. We learn to be with a person by learning how to be with ourselves. This takes an inter-disciplinary approach plus experience and the reflection on the experience.

Resources in Pastoral Care have grown rapidly since Boisen and Patton, and broadened to cover a great variety of pastoral context. Based upon my studies, most of the sources in pastoral care promote the awareness of the social needs of the people of gender, color and cultures. An example of this besides Patton is the book, Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology. Other sources are clinical in nature, such as the various works of Robert Wicks, who writes prolifically for both the professional and the general audiences. His two-volume dictionary of essays on pastoral counseling provides insights into specific concerns of mental health and. These works do not discuss religious

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67 Patton, Pastoral Care in Context, 145.
experience *per se* but analyze the images of God, grace, shame and sexuality for example.

*Will and Spirit, Care of Mind, Care of Spirit* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*, are authored by Gerald May. I place him in the pastoral care resources because he addresses pastoral concerns from the psychological perspective. He was also a spiritual guide and could be placed in spiritual guidance resources of this project. He provides an encouraging attitude for those in need of pastoral and spiritual care. May brings the sources from the Christian tradition, such as the saints and the mystics, to his profession as a psychiatrist to his overall approach to ministry. He draws upon some of the same sources as this thesis. To amplify on just one of May’s texts in terms of religious experience, the *Dark Night of the Soul*, in it May preserves the Carmelite meaning of the “dark night of the soul” from being taken simplistically or negatively to being understood as something mysterious and unknown rather than sinister or evil. “It is instead profoundly sacred and precious beyond all imagining.”

In terms of the religious experience the meaning of darkness as something “precious” comes across as a romantic notion. The interpretation that suffering of any

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72 May, *Dark Night of the Soul*, 67.

73 Ibid.
kind is only happening on the spiritual level is what makes it possible to see it as a good thing. Then there must be a denial of physical pain. Hypothetically the pain and suffering would be related to the unpleasant kinds of religious experiences according to my thesis. A ‘dark night’ would seem an unpleasant religious experience which can be understood as a transformative experience only after the fact of the experience, after the ‘dark night’ is over. If as a spiritual guide and a chaplain I meet the client when she or he is in the midst of the dark journey, then the first step must be to acknowledge how lost the person feels. If I am successful in my guiding the client then she will discover her own transformation. In the final analysis my thesis of the religious experience as pleasant and unpleasant is consistent with May’s analysis of the “dark night of the soul.” I too allow for the possibility of transformation. A client can become transformed by reading May, by meeting with him or in my case, by my facilitation. If we believe in God, then no one really transforms entirely on their own. What might seem like doing it ourselves we actually accomplish by turning to God if not to another person. This is a relational type of religious experience.

To summarize, my reviews of Patton and May show their different styles of pastoral and spiritual care. Patton draws from the perspective of the communal, congregational life and advocates for pastoral care to address the social needs of persons. Pastoral caregivers care for persons in their contexts, social and spiritual.
May draws from the spiritual tradition as a psychiatrist. He brings the psychological perspective to some of the difficult spiritual writing. His tone is one of encouragement for the persons in need of emotional and psychical guidance and support.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE STUDY OF SPIRITUALITY: INSIGHTS INTO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND REASONS WHY THE STUDY OF SPIRITUALITY MAKES IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Spiritual Guidance Sources and Their Relationship to Religious Experience

*The Practice of Spiritual Direction, by William Barry and William Connolly*[^1] is an often used text in the modern day spiritual direction formation. This was one of the three exclusive texts required in the Spiritual Direction Initiative (SDTI) in which I trained. The other two works used at the SDTI at Campion were, *Looking Into the Well*, by Maureen Conroy, R.S.M.,[^2] and *Praying our Experiences*, by Joseph Schmidt, F.S.C.[^3] *Looking Into the Well* is a how-to guide for the formations of the spiritual directors and supervisors. It consists of sections and bullets rather than the solid text most books usually employ and thus does not lend itself to a summary. The book briefly alludes to religious experience describing it as what it is like to feel the presence of God.

*Praying Our Experiences* validates experience as ground of prayer and suggests that finding words for what we are going through is prayer. Reflecting on our experience is also a form of prayer. The author encourages us to see God in every experience. If God


is in every experience then at least some aspects of religious experience might be
disturbing as well as “good.”

I found it limiting to have only these three texts as the assigned reading. Further,
there was no time built into the schedule to discuss these works in a meaningful way. As I
researched a few other spiritual direction training programs I found that their reading
requirements were far more extensive.

Barry and Connolly state that religious experience is essential to spiritual
direction. In the chapter, “The Centrality of Religious Experience” they refer us to Peter
Berger’s *Sacred Canopy*77 and *A Rumor of Angels*.78 Berger’s works resonate for them
with Karl Rahner’s theology of transcendental. They say that “ultimately the inquiring
subject comes to the judgment that the existence of God is the priori possibility for his
own existence as an inquiring subject.”79 Barry and Connolly say that religious
experience is the same as the experience of God. That would mean that God is the same
thing as religion. But God is bigger than the meaning of God found in religion. We have
discussed earlier that God can be found in nature, art, et al. They say that it has always
been the case that Christians “grounded their lives on their experiences of God,”

The focus on religious experience which we see as helpful, and even necessary,
for spiritual growth in our time is not a new phenomenon in the history of
spirituality. It is as old as Christianity itself. From earliest times dedicated

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Christians have grounded their lives on their experiences of God and the conscious relationship which developed from attention to that experience. The literature that reflects the belief and practice of the Christian people at different points in their history often encourages the acceptance of religious experience and of the dialogical life that can develop from it.\(^{80}\)

These authors are saying that we should accept religious experience on faith as the Christian people always had, that we should model ourselves upon them. But this would entail further reading not assigned by the SDTI. The Spiritual Direction in the Christian Tradition spans two thousand years and many, many spiritualities.

In the citation above what might Barry and Connolly be referring to when they speak of the “new phenomenon in the history of spirituality in the 1980s as?” What kind of “attention” is it that enables a state of consciousness that produces the experience of God or recognizes it as such? If the attention is the practice of a \textit{meditation} then Hardy would say that meditation is one type of a “trigger” for the experience of God. There are many triggers for what people may define as religious experience. Yet Hardy’s “provisional classification of the elements found in the accounts of religious experience”\(^{81}\) categorizes these experiences as being in the realm of the senses and cognition, which gives the experiences a psychological dimension. When Barry and Connolly speak about the “literature that encourages acceptance of religious experience,” then they are again suggesting that the literature is the trigger, or the inspiration, for religious experience. Literature composed in the context of religion may not be

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\(^{80}\) Barry and Connolly, \textit{The Practice of Spiritual Direction}, 21-2.
\(^{81}\) Hardy, \textit{Spiritual Nature of Man}, 25.
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denominational. In this context how do Barry and Connolly define religion? The answer is that they do not offer a definition of religion nor of spiritual direction. They say that spiritual direction is something we have inherited from the past. But how we view tradition can “change with the times.” Some of the causes of the changes of the times can be technological and some social. Some religious traditions, for instance, those which do not allow the ordination of women into the priesthood, or require them to cover their bodies and faces when in public, appear foolish to the modern world where women work as surgeons and astronauts. In their discussion of the usage of the term “spiritual direction,” Barry and Connolly write, “It is, besides, firmly entrenched in the tradition and is more widely and spontaneously used than any term that has been proposed to replace it.”

The word tradition remains undefined in the Practice of Spiritual Direction and the reader is left assuming that the tradition they are referring to is Christian.

Nonetheless, within the Christian tradition of spiritual guidance there is a variety of spiritualities, such as Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, and Salesian. Ranft provides such a work on a variety of spiritual traditions at least for women. We can only assume that Barry and Connolly are referring to the Jesuit tradition since they are Jesuits. But, Saint Ignatius did not use the term “spiritual direction”. In his recent lectures at the Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry, and in his writings, a

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82 Barry and Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction, 11.


84 Professor Sheldrake lectured in a class, “Ignatian Spirituality,” given at the Boston College School of Ministry and Theology from January through April 2009.
foremost Ignatian scholar in spirituality, Philip Sheldrake, pointed out that although much of contemporary spiritual direction work is influenced by Saint Ignatius, Ignatius never used this terminology. Professor in spirituality at the Boston University School of Theology, Claire Wolfteich, similarly uses “spiritual guidance” when teaching about this form of ministry, her course being entitled, “Spiritual Guidance in the Christian tradition.” When we speak about the Christian tradition we must speak of in the plural. We need to acknowledge the official and the unofficial or denominational Christian traditions, the tradition represented by saints and by those who are not particularly sanctioned by the Church. We need to acknowledge the Eastern and the Western Christian traditions, the kataphatic and the apophatic, the gendered or the male and the female traditions. Implicit in these differentiations is a variety of religious experience. I believe at least some reference needed to have been made by Barry and Connolly to this, or additional reading should have been assigned in the SDTI program.

The criticism here is more about the limited reading required by the spiritual direction training initiative program than about the Practice of Spiritual Direction the book. More recently Barry and Connolly published a “Revised and Updated” edition of their original book the Practice of Spiritual Direction.86 I have met with Father Barry to discuss the topic of religious experience in his first book. He advised that the new edition


treats religious experience differently. What he offers now is that there is a “religious dimension to our experiences.” In other words, all experience may have a religious dimension. (For the summary of my conversation with Father Barry, and of the discussion of his revised chapters see Appendix B). Briefly, the chapter that was called “The Centrality of Religious Experience” in the first edition is now called, “The Centrality of the Religious Dimension of Experience” in the new edition.

Other spiritual direction formation programs, such as Oasis in Pennsylvania (modeled on Shalem), Shalem Institute (now located in Washington, DC) and Haden Institutes in North Carolina, ask for a predisposition on the part of the applicant to their programs to “a complement of academic studies” and extensive reading bibliographies in their spiritual formation programs. This supports my argument for the inclusion of the academic studies into the spiritual formation programs, and particularly including attention to studies of religious experience.

The chapter in the Practice of Spiritual Direction titled, “Fostering the Contemplative Attitude, “offers the key for the interpreting the difference between spiritual direction training and clinical pastoral education.” It is the fostering of the contemplative attitude that distinguishes spiritual direction formation from the pastoral care education. The practice of contemplation could be a well-spring for religious experience, or a potential trigger found in Hardy’s category of “Antecedents or triggers of

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 Barry and Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction, 46-64.
experience,” where he also places meditation. In my dual role of chaplain and spiritual guide I adapted the contemplative attitude into my practices.

**Other Contemporary Spiritual Guidance Formation Sources**

While Barry and Connolly can inspire philosophical discussions about the existence of God and of the religious experience, many other writers in the field of spiritual guidance use the language of metaphor when speaking about God and religious experience. They also show us that religious experienced can be gendered, which I will discuss further when I discuss the mystics. Examples of such writers are, Gratton, Fischer, Guenther, Ruffing, May, Daugherty, Fryling, Siff, Addison, and so on. (See: *Bibliography* for complete citations.) In terms of looking at how the metaphorical approach relates to the nature of religious experience I will focus on Gratton’s *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* and Fischer’s *Women at the Well*.

First, let us look at the *Women at the Well*. The title is in itself a metaphor based on the passage from John’s Gospel, 4:4-30, where Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus greets her and asks her to give him a drink. She is surprised that he would even talk to her since she is a woman, a Samaritan and does not have the same belief

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89 By *gendered* I mean that because of their gender, sex, women have had a particular kind of religious experience that’s different from those of men throughout the history.


system. Jesus tells her that if it had been the other way around, where she asked him for water, he would have given it to her. He turns the situation into a teaching moment, telling her that he is talking about “living water,” using water as a metaphor for eternal life. She “challenged” him and he did not rebuke her but patiently gave her another metaphorical explanation of the meaning of the water that transcended the literal. The thirst he was referring to stood for an inner thirst which would be quenched by an inner well, “leaping up to provide eternal life.”

Jesus accepted the Woman for who she was as a person and what her life experience had been. This is something every chaplain and spiritual guide must be able to do. The Woman had had five husbands and was currently living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus did not rebuke for that. Instead, after she asked for the water Jesus gave it to her. His disciples though surprised to find Jesus speaking to the Woman also did not rebuke her. She left freely to tell the people of her experience. On her word they went to meet him as well. This could be called “tradition in the making.” The metaphor Fischer chose can serve as an example of the religious experience. The passage happens on two levels, literal and figurative. This is often the nature of religious experience. We see something mysterious in the mundane, sacred in the profane, God at work for the human being.

Fischer extends the Scripture as a metaphor to women today. No matter who they are they are welcome to receive guidance and healing for whatever ails they may have. Fischer chose this passage to invite all women to embrace self-worth and human dignity.
Jesus who is God showed that he did not discriminate against women. Religious experience which is not inclusive of women is only half an experience of God. In her work Fischer is not engaging in theories of the existence of God but in showing God at work. This is an example of experiencing belonging through the tradition of passing down the story of Jesus. The sense of belonging, connectivity, defines the religious experience in this case. Receiving the story with one’s whole being, intellectually, sensually and emotionally leads us to grasp the spiritual meaning or a religious experience. Fischer provides other ways of triggering religious experience, such as through reflective exercises, giving names for God,\textsuperscript{92} prayer, guided imagination.\textsuperscript{93} I have questioned whether all experiences of God or religion are good. They can only be good if we leave out talking about the unpleasant. Fischer wrote, “Books on spiritual direction seldom talk about violence against women.”\textsuperscript{94} Although much more work has been done raising the awareness of the spiritual dimension of violence against women since Fischer’s book, it is nonetheless true that women suffered in the past and still do in the present due to physical or intellectual abuse of those who misuse their power. In the complexity of many truths’ co-existing at the same time we have to say that religious experience is both good and bad. My studies have shown me that God is bigger than any one religion or religion or religious experience.

\textsuperscript{92} Fischer, \textit{Women at the Well}, 69.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 154.
We continue the discussion of the metaphorical method of talking about spiritual direction using *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*. Here Gratton is not trying to lay the groundwork for a method in spiritual direction as Barry and Connolly did, but from the perspective of her experience of providing spiritual direction to women. She too brings a multidisciplinary perspective to her work. She is a psychologist, a professor of spirituality, and a spiritual guide. Her approach is a response to the women’s specific spiritual needs. As a healthcare chaplain, spiritual guide and a student of religious and spiritual experience I respond to the clients’ immediate needs. This means that something from the experience of God may be helpful to the person who has come to ask for my help but I am not limiting or compartmentalizing my approach to solely talking about God. I address whatever the concern may be since my clients may have a broader set of concerns. For Gratton the aim is the “recovery of the mystery that is hidden in God.”\(^95\) In the case of Gratton it is the conditions in which women find themselves that interests her. She focuses on the specific topics of “power, anger, violence against women, and women’s spiritual legacy.”\(^96\) These qualities too, are classified in the mystery of God. Are they good, as every experience of God is good? It is an intricate message to receive that God is in one’s suffering since it implies that God descends to our level. When God descends to our level, God is humanized. The revelation of God’s presence to us must be accompanied with our grasping that while we are helpless God is not helpless. Rather,


\(^{96}\) Ibid., 3.
God is compassionate to us in our helplessness. If what we are experiencing leads us to suffering, can not the suffering lead us to God in the “classic” sense of some of the mystics’ willingness to suffer for God? The difference between someone suffering at the hands of another is that it is not a choice. Some of the women mystics welcomed suffering of an illness, for example, in imitation of Christ.

In the section, “Historical Sources for Models of Spiritual Direction,” we will encounter a number of mystics. In the mystic Hadewijch of Brabant’s poetry we will also encounter the harshness of love. This is different form thinking that suffering necessarily has a higher purpose. In particular we have evolved away from thinking that there is a spiritual validity to suffering at the hands of abusive spouses, for instance, and toward aspiring to seek justice for those who have suffered as a result of abuse. If God inspires us to do justice, then the experience of God is an experience of justice. If we want give to the religious experience its due, then we must accept that it is far too intricate not to be thoughtfully studied for a variety of dimensions. If we equate religious experience to the experience of God then we must say that it is as complex as God. Gratton’s metaphorical approaches to talking about God expand the conversation about God. Her metaphors for God can be applicable on a more general level as well, since most of us undergo some traumatic change in our lives, whether it is through a mid-life crisis, an illness, an accident, a loss of a loved one or being uprooted by moving.

Gratton too, as well as Barry and Connolly, draws from the fields of social sciences, specifically from psychology. Jung’s influence on her is evident when she
discusses theories of the mind and personalities. Although she does not directly draw upon the studies of religious experience, her content feels like authentic religious experience. She does not attempt to provide philosophical arguments to convince us of the existence of God. This has been done by others. She uses more than just her intellectual gifts to talk about God and spiritual direction. The simple act of using her senses and feelings, her intuitive gifts and her intellectual gifts imbues her material with a convincing argument. The list above is consistent with the basis for Hardy’s classifications. For instance, in Chapter Nine, “Belonging and Communion,” section, “The Vision Handed Down in Liturgy,” the metaphor she uses for God is “the immense field of divine compassion.” She believes, as I do that our clients need someone, a spiritual guide, to help them develop a language to talk about God. Fischer demonstrated the same to be true in the discussion above. Gratton admits that spiritual guidance is a complex process as well. The following paragraph exemplifies her feelings and tenets,

In the immense field of divine compassion, countless small life fields are interwoven with each other. When human hearts deepen through some kind of contemplation, there emerges in them an intuition of human oneness prior to all separation. Spiritual nurturers of many traditions—Hindu and Sufi as well as Christian—convey strong sense of humanity as a “communion of saints.” In each religion’s communal story, there is a way of handing on from generation to generation this transforming perception of universal solidarity in the Mystery. We do not learn such wisdom on our own. We receive it from someone else. 97

The wisdom “we receive from someone else…” Here it is merely using a collective personal pronoun of “we” that makes her point personal and inclusive. Once someone points at us we can tell our own story and when they helps us to place the story

in the context of a bigger picture, or in the wisdom of the Scriptures, we can begin to understand ourselves in relationship to ourselves, to others, and to the tradition we belong to. This tripartite approach is at the crux of spiritual assessment in pastoral care and chaplaincy work and can also serve as one for spiritual guidance.

In the absence of the published, standardized guidelines for the training or formation programs in spiritual direction, I offer a discussion of what might be the elements of the guidelines or standards of spiritual direction located in the historic sources, such as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a selection of the women mystics and a variety of spiritualities based on religious orders charisms.

**Historical Sources for Models of Spiritual Direction**

**Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)**

While the sources discussed in the previous section represent some of the important works in the contemporary approach to spiritual direction, the historical sources below will help us to know where the contemporary ideas come from. When Barry and Connolly make the claim for “the tradition” as discussed above, this section will illustrate the possibilities they might be referring to. When in their chapter on religious experience they claim that religious experience is evident in the tradition, and do not cite their sources, this section will rectify the situation. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius are well known to Barry and Connolly as Jesuits. But here I will make known through a number of specific examples the contribution the *Exercises* could make.
to the spiritual guidance formation. The *Exercises* are an example of a well organized approach to spiritual guidance in the Christian Spiritual Tradition. In the *Exercises* Ignatius gives instructions as to how they should be “given” so that others besides him could “give” them. Philip Sheldrake has made an important contribution to our understanding of the *Exercises* and their use in spiritual direction.

In his lectures Professor Sheldrake stated that “there are no rules on how to be a spiritual guide, or director.” In fact in his chapter, “St. Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Direction,” in L. Byrne’s, ed., *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, he warns that “we must be very careful about uncritically removing certain items from the texts of the Exercises in order to construct a model for spiritual direction in the widest sense.” At the same time he has given evidence of the possibility of creating a model in the same chapter, and also invited those of us participating in his lectures to “outline and comment on the model of spiritual guidance illustrated in the Spiritual Exercises.” This means that while he believes in the adaptability of the Exercises, he does not accept simply that *anything goes*. Any adaptations must retain the following items as compiled collectively by the participants. These items could then be used for developing a set of guidelines that may eventually lead to standards and competencies for the spiritual directors.

- Pace—the pace refers to the readiness of the one who is taking the Exercises or is in guidance; they have the freedom to progress at their own pace from week to week
- Respect for the person—assume the best about them

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- Order and process—are related to the life of Christ, upon whom the Exercises are based and again the pace at which the one taking the exercises is able to move along the stages of the Life of Christ

- Christ-centeredness—the Exercises are based on the Life of Christ, which is divided into his early life, ministry, his death and resurrection

- Mission—to serve the Lord

- Detachment—refers to “disordered detachment,” as when we are attached to values that do not lead us to God

- Flexibility

- Respect for experience

- Horizon of discernment for choice

- Independence vs. dependence

- What profits a person

Compared to the extensive guidelines of the chaplaincy programs this list is short but it could be developed and serve as the basic guidelines for training spiritual directors in the Ignatian tradition. Using the Annotations and Paragraphs to support this idea I will provide a discussion toward building a model of spiritual direction. It would be interesting to see how many of these kinds of guidelines are already in use by the various spiritual direction internships, and how they compare to the standards and competencies of chaplaincy (See Appendix A for the list of standards and competencies required by the NACC). However, this is beyond the scope of this project.
Annotation #1, Listening

To begin with, a fundamental qualification of a spiritual guide is the ability to listen and respond to what is being said or heard. Listening to God is the other side of talking to God. It is a part of the conversation, ‘colloquy’ or communication between one’s self and God. The relationship between the guide and the seeker is one of ‘colloquy’, conversation or prayer among themselves and God. Or putting it another way, in as much as the Annotation #1 stipulates that “spiritual exercises’ denotes every way of examining one’s conscious…. of praying vocally and mentally, and other spiritual activities,” the seeker’s examining of his or her conscience vocally in the presence of a guide merely by speaking about their lives, their thoughts, feelings and experiences session to session is a colloquy.

Annotation #2, Standing Back

Annotation #2, a spiritual guide may or may not give something to the seeker to meditate on, but if she does, she must not give too much information about the scripture or other resource to meditate on, so as not to preclude the seeker’s enjoyment of discovering things for his or her self. In other words, do not turn guidance into “teaching.” However, some teaching may have to be done if the person is a beginner.

Annotation #3, Noticing Affect

Annotation #6 advises the ‘director’ of the importance of looking for affect in the one taking the exercises, or adaptively in the one who has come for guidance. The guide should be particularly aware of any feelings of desolation or consolation and guide the
seeker appropriately, recommending staying with the emotion and praying through it. If
the seeker shows no affect this is a sign for the guide to ask about prayer life. But the
guide should not be too direct and say, “You have a flat affect.” In the same vein
Annotation #7 advises the guide not to be harsh on the seeker who is reporting negative
feelings but rather be “gentle and kind.” The approach would be to ask questions such as,
what do you need? And, what attracts you?

Annotation #4, Abstaining from Leading the Seeker during a Meeting for Guidance

This caveat is found in Annotation #15 which asks the retreat giver, and by
extension the spiritual guide, not to manipulate the one who is on retreat, or in guidance,
one way or another into preferring this or that thing, lifestyle or goal, but to stay neutral,
in the sense that an old fashioned scale is neutral or balanced when its pointer is in the
middle. The pointer is in the middle when the scale has equal weight amounts on each
side.

Annotation #16

Annotation #16 continues this type of advice by adding that the reason for
neutrality or balance is so that “Creator and Lord may work more surely in His creature.”
This annotation already asks for discernment or wisdom in our desiring something that
may not be ordered, or may not be God’s desire for us.

Annotation #17

Annotation #17 places importance on the guide’s knowing what the seeker desires
or is going through, not for her own curiosity but in order to be helpful, perhaps
suggesting a prayer method. Guidance based on these annotations would be of a spiritual guide who does not give the spiritual seeker directions for the road but actually accompanies the seeker on the road, allowing them to notice what is happening within them, to discover the journey.

Annotation #18, Assessment of and Respect for the Seeker

While Annotation #18 might seem probing it provides more of Ignatius’s practical advice. It is truly important for the guide to assess the extent of the seeker’s understanding and openness to the process and dynamics of the spiritual guidance. In addition the guide should assess their client intellectually, emotionally and psychologically. If the guide does not assess the person’s level of understanding they may diagnose a client’s needs. For example, if a person who is just joining the RCIA at the local church wants to know about God and you know that her religious experience is limited, you as the guide will need to be patient with her as you find yourself explaining very basic things.

Adaptability of the 19th and 20th Annotations

The 19th Annotation which is created for a “person who is taken up with public affairs or necessary business, and is someone who is educated or intelligent,” can serve most directly for the spiritual guidance model as it has broad coverage of a variety of people and is meant to be ongoing in lieu of the weeks of the Exercises. For instance, a
daily *Examen* would be recommended by the guide as well as daily prayer practice to the person who is in an ongoing spiritual guidance. Prayer and experience would be major topics of spiritual guidance sessions as mentioned above, as they are indicative of affect. And then drawing upon Annotation #20 the guide would make the suggestion to the one seeking guidance to make at least on silent retreat per year away from the hustle and bustle of their lives just to catch up with their breath and God in the silence.

There are more opportunities to be with God when one is away from people and noise. When we live and work in settings that produce what some call “noise pollution,” we might find it difficult to hear God’s voice. In my own setting, which is a hospital, there are public announcements, fire alarm tests, nurses’ intercoms, vacuum sweepers or floor washers whirring, intravenous drip machines beeping, people talking and TVs blaring. Any or all of these noises and voices can be competing with my and the client’s voices when I come into a room to meet them. Getting wound up with running down hallways, walking up and down the stairways, working around others and machines, at the end of the day I long for rest. All this is to say that a guide must have good boundaries, know when she is tired and rest, and to develop rituals to help her start her day, function throughout the day, and to close her day. She must know to care for herself if she is to have good insights into, and a grasp of, the seeker’s life in order to be helpful

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*The Examen*, or the Examination of Consciousness, is an Ignatian prayer practiced at the end of the day. The purpose of it is to grow closer to God. The five points of the *Examen* are, recalling that one is in the presence of God, giving thanks to God for God’s many gifts, examining how one has lived that day, asking for forgiveness, and offering a prayer of hope and recommitment. From a pamphlet on “Ignatian Spirituality,” by Charles J. Jackson, SJ (Jesuit Conference, 1616 P Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036-1420).
to her. This is one example of how the guide is required to be able to respond and meet the seeker however she or he interprets reality.

Annotation #1, Dual Responsibility of Guide and Seeker

The second portion of the Annotation #1 is meant for the one who is seeking guidance. It is incumbent upon the seekers to realize that they have to be honest with themselves in order to participate in the spiritual guidance relationship. They need to understand the difficulty of the process of getting the “soul to rid herself of all disordered attachments, so that once rid of them [they] might seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one’s life for the good of the soul.”

Discussion should take place about the meaning of guidance in their lives. The guidance relationship could also be called a covenant relationship. Just as there is an agreement between the giver of the Exercises and the one who is taking them, a written agreement could be prepared between the guide and the seeker in a spiritual guidance relationship. The one in seeking guidance should agree to things listed below, or something similar. The agreement might list such things as:

- Staying open to the process and dynamics of spiritual guidance
- Noting feelings and thoughts throughout the spiritual guidance relationship
- Sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences with the guide so that she can reflect them back to the one on guidance
- Making the daily Examen and practice other forms of prayer as much as possible

100 Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, 121.
- Agree to cultivate the awareness of God as a third presence in the guidance relationship
- Respecting boundaries
- Keeping in mind that the spiritual guidance is not psychotherapy
- Growing in comfort of silence at times to allow God to speak
- Being free to express discomforts as well as comforts arising in the sessions
- Accepting the responsibility for one’s own feelings

Ignatius continuously points out that the one taking the retreat must be aware that the purpose of the retreat is to gain freedom “from any ill-ordered attachment.”¹⁰¹ This goal would be adapted by the spiritual guidance model proposed here. The reciprocal response by the guide would be to be respectful of the seeker, #22, “so that the [guide] and the [seeker] may collaborate better and with greater profit…. “The guide must also “be more ready to justify than to condemn a neighbor’s statement.” The guide would clarify what was being said by asking follow up questions, such as, “Could you say more about it? Or, “What do you mean when you say…?” Ignatius’s attitude here is consistent with the Gospel portrayal of Jesus who said that he came not to condemn but to save (John 12:47).

The Principle and Foundation

In the best model of Ignatian Spiritual Guidance the guide would have integrated the *Principle and Foundation*, Paragraph #23, into her own life as a part of her preparation for spiritual guidance. The guide would give it to the one who comes to her

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¹⁰¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 129.
seeking guidance. The Principle and Foundation, as well as ridding ourselves of disordered attachments, are really about accepting God’s will in our lives over our own will. I define God’s will as being open to possibilities in one’s life rather than trying to control one’s future experiences mentally. We can accept God’s will and role if we accept and trust that God’s creativity and wisdom are infinitely broader and reliable than ours. The goodness of God extends even to those things which we might not think are good because God is operative in everything. To be consistent with Ignatian way of respecting the pace of the person seeking guidance, it would be up to the individual person, their freedom, to determine their readiness to integrate the Principle and Foundation into his or her life.

If during the four week Exercises the one taking them brings the Principle and Foundation to their first week when they focus on sin and dysfunction of the created world, then in spiritual guidance, which may only take place monthly, the directee would take the Principle and Foundation home and live into it gradually.

**Ignatian Glossary of Terms**

The spiritual guide would need to be knowledgeable in Ignatian terminology in order to provide spiritual guidance in the Ignatian Tradition. The following Paragraph Numbers have in them examples of Ignatian terms and concepts Ignatius used:

- 101 Contemplation on the Person of Christ is recommended for the Second Week of the Exercises. The same could be recommended to the one in spiritual guidance as often as possible.
136 Two Standards – the two standards are Christ and Lucifer. This Paragraph would be helpful when explaining to the seeker of guidance about their inner struggle, how to tell whether something is from God or not, and how to avoid temptations leading away from God.

149 Three Classes of Persons – this paragraph helps the guide to form explanations about imagination and using it to understand ‘discernment’. One’s imagination would be very helpful when talking about discernment and getting rid of attachments.

165 Types of Humility – freedom through humility is emphasized here and can serve for guidance about our ability to rely on God rather than ourselves, self as that is more Christ-like.

169 Election – this is crucial to making big and small choices and decisions about the direction of one’s life.

230 Contemplation for attaining love

233 This paragraph describes asking for **Interior Knowledge** in order to be able to love and serve His Divine Majesty above all else. Interior knowledge lies within us.

234 Giving of one’s all to His Divine Majesty - Offering of one’s all to God exemplifies the freedom from attachments and importance of giving gratitude. The prayer of offering one’s self to God is recited here, “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding…” Meditating on these words can be very healing. The idea of giving all to God is a feeling of trust and abandonment rather than getting rid of one’s self.

235 Seeing God in Everything - This paragraph is as central to Ignatian theology and spirituality as is the Principle and Foundation. It articulates how “God dwells in creatures—in the elements, giving being, in the plants, causing growth, in the animals, producing sensation and in humankind, granting the gift of understanding—m and how He dwells also in me, giving me being, life and sensation, and causing me to understand. To see how He makes a temple of me, as I have been created in the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty.”
236 The image of God as “a person at work” is one we can all relate to. Just as we work for our livelihood so God works on our behalf on the cosmic level. We are co-creators with God in God’s creation. This could be very encouraging. The menacing is charged with energy and awareness of God-with-us.

313-327 – These paragraphs would have to be looked at very carefully in order to formulate an explanation about discernment. Discernment for Ignatius seems to have been a mitigating spirit, a sifter and a synthesizer of feelings, thought and experiences so as to make wisdom and wise-decision-making possible. It helped him connect dots as light between the stars, which helps us to name them.

316 Consolation - a gratuitous sense of happiness, i.e.; of God’s presence.

317 Desolation – a hopelessness experienced perhaps as the opposite of consolation, or feeling separated from God

330 Consolation – the important thing to remember that only God gives us consolation – this is a way to tell that our “good” feeling is from God

332-335 - These paragraphs give help regarding challenges when one is more advanced in their spiritual practice/life

336 Consolation without a cause – although consolation is from God, if it is without cause, given gratuitously, we must scrutinize and discern its origin on an ongoing basis.

Women Mystics as Models of Spiritual Guidance and Sources of Religious Experience

Although the women friends of Saint Ignatius expressed a desire to have a parallel
Society of Friends of their own and to participate in the *Exercises*, Ignatius did not include them. But other women, as well as men, founded other religious orders and had the desire to guide others on their spiritual journeys. One such founder was Clare of Assisi (1196-1253; Italy), who preceded Ignatius by several centuries. Clare of Assisi exhorted her directees to imitate Christ. Clare used the mirror as a simile for “imitation Christi” in her letters of spiritual direction to Agnes. Clare urged Agnes to continually study her “face within it.” Using this approach suggests a deeply contemplative model of spiritual direction.

I present a number of other brief sketches from Ranft’s work of some of the remarkable women mystics whose guidance styles I think are already in use by spiritual directors and guides. But my goal is to give credit to them as individuals and to create a reference source for the reader. The collective spiritual guidance styles of the women mystics could become part of the basis of the formal guidelines for spiritual direction formation programs along with the Ignatian tradition. Following the chaplaincy model each spiritual director would be trained to minister to those of different faiths from their own but maintain expertise in their own.

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In the work, *A Woman’s Way, the Forgotten History of Women Spiritual Directors*, Ranft explores how the women “directed” others over the centuries. Ranft claims that although the practice may not have been called “spiritual direction,” it was a form of what we now call spiritual direction or guidance. Her thesis is that historically the women wanted to guide others out of their own convictions that suffering can be transformed if we can come to understand its meaning. Interestingly Ranft draws upon the work of an Auschwitz survivor, Viktor Frankl, to convey both the profundity of suffering and the will to transcend suffering. She brings to her thesis Frankl’s work on logotherapy, a therapy rooted in optimism. I view optimism is a secular meaning of the sacred word *hope*. Ranft’s estimation is that the common thread to all of the women she presents in her book is the desire to lead the “directees” to happiness which they themselves found in God. By “happiness” Ranft may also mean the life-giving aspect of the experience of God. The mystics imitated the lives of the saints before them. Theirs was a direct experience of God, either through visions or actions. Their experience can be interpreted as religious experience as they were experiences of the divine. Ranft discusses the difficulty of expressing the meanings of another era in our time. She offers some equivalents of language to speak about “spiritual direction,” such as “guidance through letters and visions.”

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104 Alister Hardy shows us that in the modern world having visions is one of the most common ways to explain religious experience. Out of his “first three thousand records received there were no fewer than 544 examples of visions sent in by those who felt them to be of a religious nature.” Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 32.
One theme she feels unequivocally about is that women have been doing spiritual direction with authority from Jesus, beginning with “the woman at the well” to the present day without interruption. In fact, Ranft is confident that, “It is a woman’s understanding of the meaning of the resurrection that is at the origin of Christianity … Christianity itself—formally begins with Mary Magdalene.” Her list of women from Jesus’ historic time and shortly thereafter is extensive and includes, Anna, Susanna, Joanna, Tabitha, Lydia, Prisca and Aquila. For Ranft being prophetic, bearing witness, providing a personal example, action as well as words can constitute forms of guidance. She traces the spiritual activities of women from antiquity to the modern era, where she leaves off. She believes that only history can sort out which modern persons and ways of spiritual direction or guidance are the important in times to come.

Ranft’s scholarship details women’s spiritual direction throughout history but my main goal is to look at just a few of the many women mystics whose writings are extant from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. We will never know if and how the non-religious or ordained, the working class contemporaries of the mystics practiced their faith as we have none of their writings.

Chapter 4, “The Great Medieval Directors,” and Chapter 5, “Late Middle Ages: Direction Comes of Age” are the most relevant for this study. Some of the women have not been beatified and thus may not be considered conventional or mainstream mystics or religious. But their expression of faith seems consistent with those who are

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105 Ranft, A Woman's Way, 12.
106 Ibid., 67-107.
considered to be the mystics in the Christian tradition as a whole. Hadewijch of Brabant is one of these types of mystics

Hadewijch of Brabant (1st half of the 13th century, Antwerp)

Although almost nothing is known about Hadewijch of Brabant’s day-to-day life, we know that she lived in the first half of the 13th century. She was an educated beguine who wrote in the vernacular language. She is memorable for her creativity and welcome of suffering for Love who is an allegorical term for God. As an example of her originality, she speaks of Love as having seven names, such as “chain, light, live coal, and fire; and dew, living spring, and hell.”

Speaking of Love’s name “chains” Hadewijch writes

Her chains, when learned of, are fully welcome
As anyone has experienced them well knows.
For Love, midway withdraws our consolation
But comforts us again in our worst griefs.
Her chains encircle me within so tightly
That I think I shall die of pain;
But her chains conjoin all things
In a single fruition and a single delight.
This is the chain that binds all in union
So that each knows the other through and through
In the anguish or the repose or the madness of Love….


Hadewijch’s model of spiritual direction consisted of letters, visions, and poems in couplets and stanzas. Today, spiritual direction incorporates poetry as well. Her poetry would challenge anyone’s vision of a sentimental God. As we do today, she guided by request only, but in her case she mostly guided young beguines. She claimed she did this out of the duty to help. She asked her directees to remember that God is their true spiritual director. Her direct personal experience of God is evident in her writings and she demonstrates her willingness to suffer for the love of Christ. She stresses that it is one’s responsibility to know one’s self and that the purpose of life is to reach one’s full growth potential. Her three step process to growth is through the three “maidens,” as she employs courtly vocabulary of her time, 1) Holy Fear who examines one’s perfection, 2) Discernment between one’s self and minne (Love), and 3) Wisdom. She emphasized the role of free will and at the same time the enjoyment only that which is in accordance with Love’s, or God’s will. She uses the word minne to mean Love, God and Divine Love. The way to come to know what she is advising is through contemplating Jesus’ life. In this respect she is the forerunner of Saint Ignatius whose 30-day retreat directs one to contemplate one’s life in Jesus’ life, passion, crucifixion and resurrection. It is because Jesus suffered that we must suffer. Hadewijch emphasizes suffering even more strongly than some of the other women mystics. Ranft explains that Hadewijch has much to say to us today because she spoke directly to the human condition. She pondered the

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109 Ranft, A Woman’s Way, 68.

imponderable: suffering, the role of reason, the need for love, free will, and what it means to “remain a human being (Letter 29).”

Hadewijch knew her scripture well as a source of religious experience, or an experience of God, and taking her contributions all together a model of spiritual direction could be developed for today that might rival St. Ignatius’s. Hadewijch was, like Ignatius, or more strongly, willing to accept the passions of life in their harsh and their romantic manifestations.

The Holy Women at Helfta

Of the four holy women of Helfta, Gertrude of Hackenborn, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Mechthild of Hackenborn and Gertrude the Great, two, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Gertrude the Great are remarkable but Ranft does not spend much time on them. Petroff’s *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature* offers a broader perspective on the extent of the authoritatively the women communed with God. This is especially evident in Mechthild of Magdeburg’s book, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead,* which exhibits an unrestrained relationship with God. The experience of God for her is her creative expression, in poetry and dramatic writings. The style of dialoging with allegorical aspects of self, the prose and the poetry are liberating for her

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111 Ranft, *A Woman’s Way*, 73.


relationship with God and therefore of religious experience. The body has a role as well as the soul. When we think of Hardy and his cognitive and affective elements of religious experience we see a sense of joy, affection, purpose, and integration in Mechthild’s relationship to God. She can only dance if she is led by the Lord, she says.\footnote{Ibid., 219.} God is her director and guide. In her directness with God she is enabling a directee to approach God freely as she is free to do. To follow one’s free will and God’s will are common themes embodied by Mechthild. She is highly literary and her creative work shows how literature, in her case poetry and dramatic work, can be a source of religious experience of a life-giving type. She would make an encouraging spiritual guide.

*Gertrude the Great, 1241-1298; Germany*

Saint Gertrude the Great models a well educated woman’s approach to God. Her contemplative writing expresses the “procession and return,” the underlying principle of the mystical tradition, with her lines, “I return Thy graces to Thee, as a stream returns to its source.”\footnote{Petroff, *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 224.} She describes her daily prayer practice and her inability to pray at times. This honest admission of experiencing a dry period in her prayer is a model too, and an example of desolation. She uses her imagination and also teaches us how to pray from the heart. Ranft says that Gertrude wrote her book, *Book of Special Graces*, as a form of
spiritual direction. She emphasizes free will, as do the other mystics, as the only way to achieve true happiness.

Ranft writes of numerous other mystics who guided others, such as Angela of Foligno, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal, Teresa of Avila and others up to the present time. She stops short of including more contemporary guides, allowing the passage of time to sift, assess and ensure their contributions to spiritual guidance. Although a useful resource, Ranft’s book serves as a helpful introduction to the historic women spiritual directors but Petroff better develops the personalities of the women and the themes of their spiritual practices and aspirations.

In the *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*, Petroff writes that achieving union with Christ through hardships and self-denial was especially important to women since they could not be ordained and achieve this union through the act of consecrating the Body of Christ. In the twelfth century Elisabeth of Schönau is reported to have had a vision of Mary the Mother of Jesus as a priest. In another vision Elisabeth beheld “the apocalyptic woman clothed with the sun.” She was neither Mary nor the Church, but the “sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus” weeping over the inequity of the world,” specifically of the inequity of ordaining only men to priesthood. 116 Elisabeth of Schönau does not seem traditional if by traditional we mean conventional. But she can be appreciated by the men and women at the present who either feel called to the priesthood or support women’s ordination.

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Petroff’s work, like Ranft’s is an anthology but covers only twenty eight in women’s and men mystics and their (auto) biographies. Some women wrote their own stories but others dictated them to scribes. These writings can be called hagiographies in that they describe saintly lives aspired to by the women. (For a definition of “hagiography” see the Definitions section.) Petroff identifies three historical “moments” in the span of time she covers. One is of the role of women as originators of new movements and as religious leaders and devotional writers. Another is the specific leadership role of women in St. Boniface’s mission to Christianize Germany in the eight century. “The third historical moment is the period of the first Beguines in the Low Countries,” with Marie d’Oignies credited as the founder of the movement. The Beguines, also known as “the sisters in between” of the secular and the religious lives, were particularly controversial because their movement between the lay and the religious life. “They desired flexibility of commitment and life-style, so that there would be the possibility for active charity in the world as well as for solitary contemplative existence when the need arose.” Because of their “flexibility” they attracted heretical groups that were on the rise in Europe at that time.

The writings presented by Petroff can be understood as examples of religious experience if we say that religious experience is the experience of God. However, the writings are often critical of the official church’s stances on religious matters. If we

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associate religion with the church then religious experience is not of God but of people and their interpretation and adaptation of God. Petroff presents the writings of the mystics as autobiographical and describes this “autobiographical impulse” as the process to self discovery and the meaning of one’s life. Hildegard of Bingen, for instance, had visions as a child but did not come to define herself through them until late into her adult life. For her becoming a monastic, living the life of the religious, was the process of self-discovery. Her understanding of herself and the meaning of her life unfolded through her unmitigated, direct relationship to God. If we make the claim that religious experience is the process of creating an identity for ourselves and making meaning of our lives through God, then Hildegard’s way of life constitutes religious experience. Because of the extensive availability of Hildegard’s writing and the scholarship on her work, including the book-length work by Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, I present a more detailed analysis of Hildegard. This source review gives us a more complete picture of the Saint in terms of both spiritual direction and religious experience.

**Hildegard of Bingen**

Hildegard of Bingen was born in 1098 at Bermersheim bei Alzey, and lived in a time when it was acceptable to *tithe* a child to the church. Though some of her siblings went into religious life or served in the church without being “tithed.” There is a

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119 Ibid., 22.

Scriptural precedent for dedicating one’s child to God in 1 Samuel 1:11. Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to God as a way of saying “Thank you,” to God for making his birth possible. But she offered her beautiful prayer to God not to the Church. Thus, the example of Hannah was not a paradigm for tithing. The practice exercised by Hildegard’s and others’ parents was a religious practice in the socio-economic sense. “Monasticism often served as a place of refuge for the handicapped children of wealthy parents.” But Hildegard came from an aristocratic family and her aristocratic roots helped her politically when she took stands against the Cathars (a heretical movement) and against the appointments of schismatic priests by the emperor Barbarossa. Religion and politics were very much intertwined in Hildegard’s times. It stands to reason that some of the religious experience was political not spiritual, i.e., formative in Christ.

Hildegard’s journey toward becoming a monastic began early in her life. She began to have visions at the age of three, but when she surmised that this was not the norm, she may have felt different from others and perhaps feared ostracism. She kept her visions to herself and only shared them for the first time at age forty-three. Her visions were a form of religious experience at the onset and she embraced them as such in the process of making meaning of her life.

In 1106, at the age of eight, Hildegard was given to the anchoress Jutta of Sponheim, a holy woman who was connected to the Benedictine monastery of St.

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122 Ibid., 12-3.
Disibod. Jutta provided Hildegard with religious education and instruction in reading the Psalter in Latin. A monk named Volmar was also her teacher and later became her life-long friend, confidant and secretary. Both Jutta and Volmar knew of Hildegard’s visions before they were committed to writing. After Jutta’s death, Hildegard was elected abbess, though she was referred to by honorific titles such as mater, domina and sponsa Christi, and that the ordinary title abbatissa appears only once in the documents addressed to her by the emperor Frederick Barbarossa 1153.\(^\text{123}\)

As a female monastic Hildegard is said to have followed the Rule of Benedict, and if so, then she would have led an austere life, which would have suited her spirituality and her reformist character. The Benedictines held prayer times, Divine Offices, around the clock. As Psalms and Scriptures were recited Hildegard would have been able to learn Scripture by heart. The Benedictine spirituality is strongly based on ascending the twelve steps of humility, The Rule of Benedict, “Chapter 7, Humility.” After these particular twelve steps “the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear (1 John 4:18)”\(^\text{124}\) Although the way of life in a Benedictine convent may have been austere, it also allowed generous rations of food and wine and Hildegard was apparently criticized on both fronts.

\(^{123}\) Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 6.

\(^{124}\) The Rule of Saint Benedict in English, Ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 38.
As Hildegard gained respect her correspondences broadened to popes, emperors, prelates, abbots, abbesses, priests, monks, and lay people. She was a spiritual counselor, a physician or a theologian depending on the need of her correspondents. (xxii) But mostly she claimed authority in spiritual matters.¹²⁵

As a woman, Hildegard needed to develop even a deeper sense of humility than was required as a Benedictine since during her lifetime there was another law adapted by the twelfth century society based on Timothy 2:12 that “no woman is to teach or have authority over men.”¹²⁶ At that time it was only through visions that a religious or intellectual woman could gain a hearing. This created or defined “gendered religious experience.” But since “visions” were an authority-giving form of religious experiences, Hildegard’s visions are central to her influence as a female monastic in the context of her times. In her time, Catherine of Sienna took her authority directly from God to criticize men, even a pope, as I had discussed above in the Spiritual Direction Models.

“In order to come to terms with her God-given authority Hildegard needed to reconcile it with her gender in a strictly theological fashion.”¹²⁷ She was required to share the view of the women’s inferiority to men at least publically. Although she might also have suffered from her own implausibility, or might have been ashamed of being a woman, she justified the inferiority and frailty of women by saying that “God is perfected

¹²⁵ Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 32.
¹²⁶ Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 34.
¹²⁷ Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 35.
in weakness.” The second thing she did is to accentuate the feminine aspect of the divine.\textsuperscript{128} It could be that she claimed herself to be “a poor little woman,” as a way of protecting herself from being excommunicated from the church and have no place in the monastic cosmology. Today women of the same tradition still remain in the church though they may disagree with some of its teachings.

Despite the barriers she encountered as a woman monastic, Hildegard had the support of the monks, especially her scribes and biographers, Volmar, Gottfried and Guibert Gembloux, her family and friends, and the local churchmen. Basing his comment on \textit{Scivias} (Hildegard’s illustrated work describing twenty six religious visions) the monk Guibert said that Hildegard “has transcended female subjection by a lofty height and is equal to the eminence not of just any man but of the very highest.”\textsuperscript{129} There is a paradox here unique to the gendered religious experience. Despite Hildegard’s frailty as a female she is “equal in eminence to the very highest [of men].” Among her supporters was also her contemporary, the Cistercian monk St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose counsel she sought while writing \textit{Scivias}, and who was instrumental in getting Pope Eugenius III, also a Cistercian, to grant Hildegard an “apostolic license” to keep writing her \textit{Scivius}. \textit{Scivius} comes from \textit{Scito vias Domini, or Know the Ways of the Lord}. However, Bernard endorsed her gifts with reservations at first in 1147.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 35
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 2
\textsuperscript{130} Newman, \textit{Sister of Wisdom}, 8-9.
The themes in Civias are God as divine majesty, Trinity and Creation (Vision II, from Book II, On the Blessed Trinity). Her favorite themes seem to be the “centrality of Incarnation,” which may be likened to Bernard’s Christ centered spirituality, and the “necessity of spiritual combat.” As she felt the downward pull of the flesh and oscillated between “a joyful affirmation of the world and the body, and a melancholy horror of the flesh and its master, the devil.” If we take the three main traditions of Christian Mysticism, contemplation, theo-centrism and intellectual speculation, we can see how Hildegard differs from Bernard. While he is in the category of the theo-eroticism, having written eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, Hildegard is outside of the male models of mystics; hers is an experiential spirituality based on what she saw and heard; she is a seer. As a Benedictine mater (mother) she could also be a contemplative. She is more than that; she is a prophet, a poet, a composer, an illustrator, a physician of sort, a preacher, a reformist. Her God is also beyond all names. There seems to be a wealth of material that has yet to be mined from her prolific writings, and that could have practical, reformist applications, such as her tenet that Mary is the source of the Eucharistic body. Hildegard’s teaching “that a priest is—and therefore should be—like Mary,” could serve as a basis for why women can be priests in the Catholic church.

131 Petroff, Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature, 153.
132 Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 16.
133 Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 21.
134 Ibid., 194.
135 Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 195.
though she didn’t carry it that far. Presently in the Catholic Church religious experience is an experience of oppression for some.

While Hildegard appears to have been fiercely independent, Bernard of Clairvaux did have some influence on her with his “School of Charity.” However that did not make her like him. He was skilled in rhetoric while she wrote in an obscure language. He used “charity,” as a Love persona to get some of his harsher teachings across.\(^{136}\) When Hildegard strove to articulate the “feminine divine,” she turned to the Biblical wisdom literature and focused in particular on the virtue of Caritas, which is where Bernard’s influence comes in. For her, “Caritas the mother replaces God the Father in welcoming the prodigal son back home.”\(^{137}\) Barbara Newman writes, “Bernard’s influence on Hildegard is nowhere clearer than in her treatment of Virtue.”\(^{138}\) But she also cautions in the footnotes that his influence on her should not be exaggerated (Note 90).\(^ {139}\) Newman further shows by citing and exchange between Bernard and Hildegard that their correspondences also contain Bernard’s asking Hildegard what fault she finds with his

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 76.


\(^{138}\) Ibid.

\(^{139}\) Ibid.
Hildegard names the faults as, “presumption, instability, hypocrisy, and schism.”

Thus, more than Bernard, the books of Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, [which] enjoyed” popularity in the Middle Ages, influenced Hildegard. The main gender difference in the religious experience between Bernard and Hildegard is in that he could have a university education and Hildegard was “home schooled.” She received her education from private tutors, and from her visions discussed earlier.

In addition to Scivias, Hildegard’s two other works are Book of Life and On Activity of God. In the Book of Life God is a winged man and she refers to God as “vir,” from whom all strength emanates, and fire animates the world in which there are vices. In On Activity of God, Hildegard constructs nine cosmological visions. Her scheme is that the world is a God-centered, divine milieu. In this world the human being holds the place of honor as the image of God, and third, that the most important activity in life is the salvation of the soul. As for cosmos, this is a vast and complicated “lesson;” the whole created world is like a book, a picture, and a mirror for us.

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140 Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 77.
141 Ibid., 78.
142 Ibid., 42.
143 Ibid., 18.
144 Newman, Sisters of Wisdom, 19.
145 Ibid., 20.
experience of God is beyond religious experience unless religion incorporates as much into itself as Hildegard is willing to.

Towards the end of her book, *Sister of Wisdom*, Barbara Newman questions whether there is anything in Hildegard that could only have been done by a woman. Newman is not convinced that this is so. But for me the importance of Hildegard’s works is not whether they could only have been done by a woman, but that what she did accomplish was accomplished by a woman despite the challenges of her gender and times. The point is that her strategy for achievement was modeled on her gender and the social expectations of that gender. She needed to see through the barriers if she were to succeed. She took authority from God in order to express herself. God was not threatened by her gender as a man may have been.

**Further Historical Sources Toward for a Contemporary Approach to Spiritual Direction**

I have claimed that the life of the religious is a major source of study of the religious experience. This does not mean that the religious experience of the religious and the ordained is more important or valid than that of the laity, but that the religious and the ordained have set a historic precedent for religious experience. Since that is the case, I propose another way of designing the spiritual direction guidelines, by using the specific spiritual traditions, such as Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan and Beguine. Toward that goal I present brief reviews of works dealing with the types of spiritualities. This
exercise does not preclude an additional design of spiritual direction based upon the
religious experiences of the laity. But this is beyond this project. To resume the
discussion, the essay, “Spiritual Direction in the Benedictine tradition,” by Leclercq, in
The Traditions of Spiritual Guidance146 is of interest for the further understanding of
Hildegard of Bingen. The spirituality Leclercq describes is based on the passage in
chapter 73 of the Rule of St. Benedict, “where he uses the vocabulary and the notion of
‘guidance’ on the path that leads to God. St. Benedict refers his reader to the scared
scripture and to the tradition preserved in the writings of the ancient monks.”147 This is a
very basic premise of spiritual direction. The essay adds that preaching and being a role
model for others are valid ways of spiritual guidance. We know from Ranft and
Newman148 that Hildegard preached and exhorted clergy to live the values they preached.
Two of the essays in this little collection in The Way are about women spiritual directors,
mainly Theresa of Avila and Evelyn Underhill.

In his Spiritual Direction in the Dominican Tradition Ashley149 makes the
welcome point that Dominican tradition is but one of the many Christian traditions. St.
Dominic of Caleruega, Spain, 1171-1173, is the first founder of the Order, but Catherine
of Siena, 1347-1380, is considered the second founder. The book is about a number of

147 Ibid., 16.
Dominicans who helped to shape the tradition, such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, but Catherine is of most interest as a woman doing spiritual guidance. The Thomist tradition is important however, because it is from him that the Dominican tradition derives at four dimensions of human behavior,\textsuperscript{150} physical, biological, ethical and spiritual. The modern additions to the developments of the Dominican spiritual direction are psychology, the human person and sexuality, and the individual and the communitarian dimensions. Catherine of Siena adapts the four levels of the human person as analyzed by Aquinas.\textsuperscript{151}

Other topics covered by Ashley are, “Nature and Grace,” “Created in God’s Image,” “Fallen Human Nature,” “Grace and Free Will,” “Christian Perfection,” and “Imitatio Christi et Mariae.” “The Needs and Goals” of spiritual direction are all discussed from both historical and modern perspectives. The Dominican tradition considers all aspects of the person in direction. If a directee is having health or sexual problems these problems become the concerns of the spiritual direction relationship. However, it is best to refer such cases to another appropriate professional for counseling.

\textit{Spiritual Direction in the Dominican Tradition} is an interesting work for its contributions to our understanding of Meister Eckhart’s “detachment.” But Ashley does not go deeply enough to explain, for instance, Marguerite Porete’s influence on Meister Eckhart. Ranft points out also that it would be well to trace Hadewijch’s and Hildegard’s

\textsuperscript{150} Ashley, \textit{Spiritual Direction in the Dominican Tradition}, 33.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 55.
influence on Eckhart. Ashley treats Catherine of Siena respectfully as a founder of Dominican’s women’s order, but Ranft better presents Catherine’s contribution to spiritual direction. Catherine of Siena is particularly clear about how to be a good director when she directly poses her questions of concern to God and receives direct guidance from God. Catherine’s three concerns as a spiritual director were: 1) how to judge the dark and light places of being for directees; 2) how to discern what constitutes true or false sessions; and 3) how should she go about suggesting penance. God replies that she was to not judge any directee, nor focus on their penance; this was not a chief concern of spiritual direction. It is the gladness of the soul that signals good spiritual direction experience. God directed her to take up compassion and leave the judging to God.

God also told her that she must arise above her senses, have both the light of reason and the light of faith. As Hadewijch before her, Catherine imparted the importance of self-knowledge as this was a key to happiness. Self-knowledge was important to awareness of one’s behavior, including the tendency to sin. God’s will was always an aid in helping Catherine to determine the success of her direction. One of the directions Catherine was given by God was a call to foster the communal orientation of spiritual direction. She instilled in all Christians that they owe each other love, counsel, prayer and both spiritual direction and material assistance. Catherine’s model of spiritual direction would then be based on self-knowledge, free will, *imitatio Christi*, and communal

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152 Ranft, *A Woman’s Way*, 84.

153 Ibid., 88.
responsibility as well as individual relationship with God. She was a celebrated, powerful spiritual director with bountiful authority, demanding the same kind of behavior from the king of France as everyone else. She was a director’s director, directing Raymond of Capua, her confessor and future Master of the Order. Eventually their relationship turned reciprocal.

One of the Three Spiritual Directors For Our Time\textsuperscript{154}, in the book of that title by, is Julian of Norwich, 1343-1413; England. The other two, which I will not focus on, are Walter Hilton, and the author of the Cloud of Unknowing. The anchorite is named for the church she was attached to, and her existence is confirmed by a directee of hers, Margery Kempe. Julian is known for her desire for sickness in order to experience the passion of Christ. She received her “showings” in several installments but did not write them until she was in her thirties, the age of Christ when he died. The author claims that Julian is not directing anyone in her book but that she is herself being directed by Christ. But Ranft disagrees and explains that Julian’s livelihood depended on providing spiritual direction and asserts that the Showings is the book of her spiritual direction for others.\textsuperscript{155}

The Three Spiritual Directors for Our Time describes Julian’s theology of a loving God and her image of Jesus as a mother, but it does not attribute a model of spiritual direction to Julian. Ranft, on the other hand, cites Julian saying, “Everything that

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\textsuperscript{154} Julia Gatta, Three Spiritual Directors for Our Time (Cambridge Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1986). \\
\textsuperscript{155} Ranft, A Woman's Way, 93-7.
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I say about me I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation.” Julian shares her showings out of love and her spirituality is deeply rooted in the paradoxical relationship between the personal and the communal, the love of God and the sin of [man]. Both Ranft and Gatta agree on this point. Julian’s important spiritual contribution is the portrayal of Jesus as Mother. This mother is not a disciplinarian but “Mother Love.” Julian’s teaching on Jesus-being-with-us, and her acknowledgment that the search for happiness is accompanied by “unreasonable depression and useless sorrow” connect her to Catherine of Siena’s iteration of a “dark space,” and to the “spiritual desolation” alluded to by Hadewijch. Julian is one of the most encouraging of guides with her urging that all manner of things will be well. She too confirms Ranft’s point that the goal of spiritual direction is to transcend suffering.

*Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet* is a work on contemporary spirituality. This is a helpful text whose title alludes to the Christian mystical past and attempts to define present spiritual direction. It gives us a lens through which to look back on the work of the mystic’s ways of guidance before the term came to exist. The definition they offer is, “spiritual direction: an interpersonal relationship in which one person assists others to reflect on their own experience in the light of who they are called

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156 Ibid., 95.

157 Ibid., 96-7.

to become in fidelity to the Gospel.” The authors discuss the role of a director’s presuppositions and biases in the spiritual direction relationship. My comment is that a “bias” could actually be a type of tradition or expertise, such as Dominican, or possibly “Hadewijch-an,” or one adapted by a Jungian analyst. It would reflect a learned or an inspired way of direction without the negative implications of “bias.”

Dyckman and Carroll state that the most important work a director can do is to help her directee become who she is and to know what it is she wants at the deepest level of her being. In other words, self-knowledge is all important for the contemporary guide as it was for the guides throughout the Christian history. This booklet reminds us of the role theodicy plays in spiritual guidance. Looking back to the high medieval period we see that suffering, a topic of theodicy, was to be embraced. We do not encourage people to accept their suffering in our times but sometimes that is the only choice and we should choose it out of our free will if we are to be true to the mystics’ ways; or even if we want to be happy.

The mystics speak of the importance of discerning and doing God’s will consistently. The authors of Inviting the Mystic address the question of how does one know God’s will? They approach the answer by looking to see whether a person views God as being on the outside of them, predetermined, or inside of them, coincidental with one’s deepest desires. They believe that the will of God is within ourselves and we will know this when we know ourselves. This paradoxical explanation is not unlike St

159 Dyckman and Carroll, Inviting the Mystic, 20.
Augustine’s telling us that we know ourselves in God: to know ourselves is to know God and vice versa; another way of “process and return.”

The above authors address some of the problems a person can experience in his or her prayer life, their spiritual practice. So does Gertrude the Great. Prayer can feel too routine or rigid, the supplicant may be trying too hard to pray, or is self-absorbed, or persisting in behavior which causes him or her to feel guilty and the guilt can separate a person from God. Their recommendation to a person of prayer, as a spiritual director must be, is to develop a sense of trust, cultivate gentleness, overcome fear (Hadewijch’s process was to start with the Maiden of Holy Fear), focus on God, know how to listen, be authentic, forgiving, be able to reconcile opposites (paradoxes), and love others with a universal love (Catherine of Siena). As Catherine of Siena claimed God telling her, the spiritual director must be compassionate not judgmental.

**Conclusion to the Models of Spiritual Direction**

Two interesting women absent from all of the texts above are Marguerite Porete,\(^{160}\) burned at the stake in 1310, and Elisabeth of Schönau, a visionary of the early 12\(^{th}\) century. Marguerite’s direction is difficult though not much more so than Hadewijch’s. Both of these women were deeply ascetic and contemplative in their spiritual practices. They seem to me to be traditional mystics but they do not seem to be the conventional or mainstream types of mystics. Elisabeth of Schönau is unique in that

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in her visions she sees Mary the Mother of Jesus as a priest. Marguerite Porete was a prescient mystic who chose to burn at the stake rather than recant her beliefs about the soul. The self had to be annihilated in order to be close to God. Her religious experience, if the experience is understood as one of God, can be described as annihilation of the soul, or self-donation of the self to God. In Saint Ignatius that was acceptable. He phrased it differently; see below. Porete’s verses, especially starting with line five below, “Take from me all which pleases you” resemble Saint Ignatius “Principle and Foundation”:

Beloved, what do you wish from me?  
I contain all things which were,  
And are, and shall be,  
I am filled by all things.  
Take from me all which pleases you:  
if you desire from me all things,  
I will not deny.  
Say, beloved, what do you wish from me?  
I am Love, filled with the goodness of all things:  
What you will, we will.  
Beloved, tell us plainly your will,” 161

Saint Ignatius’s lines of the “Principle and Foundation” 162 and of his Prayer in Exercise 234, state,

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me. 163

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162 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 130.

163 Ibid.
The self-donation to God theme runs throughout the experiences of the mystics. Although there are many spiritual guidance traditions with many fine distinctions, what they all have in common is the love of God and the willingness to submit to God’s will. The citations immediately above from Porete and Saint Ignatius exemplify that we cannot attribute certain credit exclusively to anyone for any particular idea since they all express the common theme regardless of the exact time during which they lived and wrote. If we want to imitate their lives and the life of Christ in the present day, we must contemplate achieving the same goals. The Holy Scriptures and the works authored by saintly people are the common resources for the mystics of all times. Values such as discernment, freedom, creativity, visions, can all be named as ways of experiencing God and as inspiration to guide others on their journey to God.

Many of the women claimed their spiritual guidance authority directly from God not from an ecclesial authority as the executive director of the present day Spiritual Directors International suggests. I describe my conversation with her later on in the project. Their experiences of God came from identifying themselves with Jesus, and arose from the Christian way of life they chose to live, modeling their lives upon Christ, suffering, loving and caring master and servant. Christ, as both divine and human, enabled them to experience both the divine and human dimensions of religious experience. Theirs is a *sui generis* rather than *ascriptive* religious experience. I simply claim this based on the discussion of my readings of the mystics’ themes above. The mystics intentionally chose to identify themselves with the passion of Christ and to live
their lives in the imitation of Christ. In that intentionality their experiences have the religious dimension at the onset rather than post experience. This is comparable to a person who is raised in a particular faith can also claim the experience as their original knowledge. They always have a choice of embracing or challenging their upbringing but any experience becomes a part of their identity even if later denied or reframed. One’s Christian identity becomes organic to the self. That identity remains even after a person converts to another religion though their former practice becomes dormant.

The religious identity of the lay can be as strong as the religious identity of the religious and the ordained. When religious experience is not experienced solely by the religious or the ordained, it is still an experience of God. Unlike in the times described we now have lay peoples’ accounts of what they call experiences of God or religious experiences. We may come to interpret these experiences differently through feelings and emotions. These feelings and emotions do not necessarily inspire us to go live in a monastery but we can still serve God as the “lay.” The lay are no longer considered as more ordinary of less uninformed than the ordained in the matters of faith and their relationships with God.
CHAPTER FIVE

LITERARY SOURCES: AMPLIFIED CONSIDERATIONS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

While we have a solid Christian spiritual and religious tradition rooted in the Holy Scriptures and practiced by the mystics and others, I have claimed that there are many ways to define religious experience. While the scholarly studies demonstrate the concepts and behaviors attributed to God by people, the genre of literature too makes its own contribution to the study of religious experience. The ability of the creative writers to cogently describe religious experience through their development of compelling characters in the secular context as well as the religious ones, adds a dimension to our understanding of religious experience of the lay people as well as the religious. Both authors were a part of my academic studies during my years as a doctor of ministry student.

The two authors I present write from their imagination as they present religious experience from the perspectives of several disciplines. Both write from the contexts of their times and both have historical perspectives. Hawthorne\textsuperscript{164} presents the negative aspects of the religious experience. Salzman\textsuperscript{165} writes from the romantic perspective of spirituality, or religious experience in relation to modernity and the practice of sophisticated modern medicine. What follows in the case of Hawthorne is a powerful


story of two lovers who broke the religious morality of their times. It is set in the seventeenth century Boston among the early immigrants to America, but it was written in the nineteenth century, during the American Renaissance. The citizens of seventh century Boston were God-fearing but not particularly Christian in their lack of forgiveness. As Christians, the citizens who sat in judgment of Hester Prynne could have modeled their treatment of her on the healing mission of Jesus. When Jesus encountered a woman who committed adultery He invited those who were without sin to cast the first stone at the woman. On reflection the people in the parable changed their minds about stoning her.

The main character of the *Scarlet Letter*, through her acceptance of the humility of punishment, eventually earns the status of a saint. She is compared to a “modern” mystic and a saint by the author. Due to the rich reflection on moral values the novel, the *Scarlet Letter* has been critiqued widely by theologians, psychologists and other scholars in the edition cited below. The story teaches us about shame, guilt and forgiveness, three major aspects of the world religions and therefore of religious experience. Adultery, the sin committed by the characters, is still looked upon negatively and is often a cause of divorce among couples. The religious experience of the divorced Roman Catholics can feel particularly alienating as they can no longer receive the Eucharist. Chaplains and spiritual guides encounter such people over and over in their work.

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166 *NAB, John 8: 1-11*
The Scarlet Letter

This case study in point is a nineteenth century classic in the American literature, *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne describes a group of people who portray God as dark, punishing, shaming and guilt causing. The socio-political construct in the novel of the people in the seventeenth century Boston, Massachusetts, used certain aspects of God to keep a social or moral order. The story is about an adulterous relationship between a protestant minister, Arthur Dimmsdale, and a beautiful young woman, a recent immigrant from England. The adulterous relationship comes to light when the beautiful young woman gives birth to a baby girl and no father is present. The town official immediately accuse her of adultery and place her in jail with the baby as they try to extract from her the name of the man she committed adultery with so that they can both be appropriately punished. The young woman refuses to identify the father. She is Hester Prynne who emigrated from England to escape her much older husband whom she did not love. The husband, Roger Chillingworth, tracks her down and appears to her in the moments of her standing on the town marketplace where the scaffolding was erected, and where she was brought to be ridiculed and sentenced for her crime. The man responsible for deciding Hester Prynne’s punishment and fate is none other than her lover, the Reverend Master Dimmsdale. He chooses the most lenient sentence for her. Hester has to live in shame wearing the scarlet letter “A” for Adulteress, for life, and be shunned by everyone in town, including children. Arthur would be plagued by guilt.

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Chillingworth entraps Prynne into revealing her lover’s name. It then becomes his mission to torment Dimmsdale. The wounding duplicity of being a revered minister on the outside, and a devious liar on the inside rubbed in like salt into the wound by Chillingworth causes Dimmsdale so much guilt that he becomes ill.

The lovers Hester and Arthur are both punished for doing something defined as forbidden in the eyes of their society. Adam and Eve were punished for eating of the forbidden fruit. This “original sin” was taken away through the birth of the new Adam, Jesus, born of Mary, who was without sin. Yet the Calvinist Christians did not integrate this into their society. They did not employ the teaching of Jesus who forgave the adulterous woman and saved her from being stoned (John 8:1-11). Hawthorne as a Christian writer chose to highlight this contradictory usage of the attribute of God. If people are punished vengefully then they can believe that God is the cause, which can sully religious experience. In this case God remains good but this is not immediately known to the person who is experiencing the punishment. Hester Prynne accepted her punishment with a Christian attitude of humility to such a degree that those who had shunned her and abused her for years called her a saint and an angel. At the same time she remained depressed and feared a dark God. Arthur died of grief and guilt. The parents were redeemed by their child, whom Hester called Pearl. Hawthorne used the name “Pearl” because she was gained at a great cost (Matthew 13:46) to her parents. While Hawthorne created a saintly Hester Prynne, he too was looking forward to a time when
human beings might evolve away from causing suffering and creating the images of a punishing God.

Hester Prynne was driven to live outside of the town in a little cottage. There she sewed, embroidered and tatted garments and adornments for the town’s people to wear. She made a living that way. She homeschooled her daughter and raised her as a single parent. Her reclusiveness recalls a life of a hermit, or a cloistered nun. Hawthorne intended to give dignity to Hester’s life by likening her existence to that of a religious. He likens her routines to the ritual prayer schedule and observance of silence in a monastery. A monastic life is assumed to be a source of religious experience.

While Hawthorne’s novel gives us a dark historical perspective of religious experience, Rick Salzman gives us a modern perspective of religious experience through an adaptation of a historical setting with his novel *Lying Awake*. The book has none of the Calvinist harshness but it is modeled on an orderly and congenial example of a monastic life. Although the monastery houses a Carmelite Community of nuns in the present day, their daily life resembles the life of the religious described in the *Rule of Benedictine* in the fifth century. The book has a contemporary setting and the magnetic imaging plays a role in determining the source of religiosity in the human brain, which makes it possible to hypothesize that religious experience may have a biological trigger. If the hypothesis were true then the debate whether religious experience is *sui generis* or *ascribed* would be moot.

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**Lying Awake**

*Lying Awake* is a book about a Carmelite nun, Sister John of the Cross, named for one of the original Carmelites and protégés of Saint Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross. Sister John, formerly “Helen,” was abandoned by her mother and raised by her grandparents on a chicken farm in Ohio. It was there that the smell from the chicken coops triggered her headaches. Later on at the convent it was the smell of cleaning agents that triggered her headaches. Water pouring down into the sink could trigger vertigo for her.

As a school girl, Helen attended St. Ina’s parochial school. One of her teachers, Sister Priscilla, nurtured and encouraged her in her self and in her faith. Helen eventually entered the convent of Joseph of Carmel on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California. It was when she was commissioned into religious life that she took the name of John of the Cross.

Sister John had a special gift of poetic vision accompanied with headaches, migraines and vertigo. It was during these head-aching episodes that she experienced her treasured, vivid experiences of God. She struggled with the pain and incapacitation for many years. The sisters became concerned and encouraged her to rest and see a doctor. But because she assumed that her experiences were from God she was willing to accept the pain that came with them as a good mystic might. The “gift” of visions enabled her to write prayers and poetry and thereby making money for the Convent. Her book was popular enough to merit a second printing and was a source of income for the sisters.
Sister John had an internist whom she had been seeing for many years but he told her that there was nothing to be done for her “migraines.” As her illness progressed, the sisters, especially Sister Emmanuel, a former nurse, became adamant that Sister John see a specialist. She finally saw a neurologist, Doctor Sheppard, who diagnosed her as having temporal lobe epilepsy. For purposes of clarification, temporal lobe has two locations in the brain, one above each of our ears. It is reported that Feodor Dostoevsky also had this type of epilepsy, along with Socrates, St. Paul, Vincent Van Gogh and Teresa of Avila. Doctor Sheppard indicated that this epilepsy was of a psychological rather than physical type, and therefore not as devastating. He recommended that Sister John undergo surgery assuring her that it would alleviate her suffering. But if she chose to have the surgery, it has medically been proven that she would no longer be able to have those special experiences of God. The latter part of the book is given to Sister John’s trying to make a decision whether to have the surgery and feel better, or not have surgery and continue to experience her intense experiences of God and suffer. She could also hear in a special way the individual sisters’ voices as they sang in the choir.

Sister John thought, “If the surgery were to take my dream away, everything I’ve gone through up to now would seem meaningless. I wouldn’t even be able to draw inspiration from the memory of it; I couldn’t face that desert again, not this late in my life.” Sister John decided to have surgery after an all night vigil the Sisters kept with

169 Salzman, Lying Awake, 50.

170 Salzman, Lying Awake, 138.
her.\textsuperscript{171} She did not want to become a burden to them. They would have to have had taken care of her as she spent more and more time in the infirmary. This would also have been against the religious life principle of “God first, others second, me last.”\textsuperscript{172}

The surgery was a success. Sister John’s life went on in the convent but life seemed dull after epilepsy.\textsuperscript{173} She questioned her faith more but did not think of leaving the convent. She found that everyone else had doubts, the sisters and Dr. Sheppard as well, and that this was okay. She had a long examination of her conscious while recovering in chapter, “October 15, Teresa of Avila, Virgin and Doctor” and realized that she saw her epilepsy as spiritual favors and a sense of “paradise.” The Living Rule (the name of one of the sisters) told her, “Everything we learn about God leads to a deeper mystery. Hard to accept sometimes but we have to keep going.”\textsuperscript{174}

\textit{Lying Awake} is a sensitive portrayal of the communal life of the cloistered nuns. Attention to small detail is everywhere, from the small birds, to the sound of the bell. In the aspects of the ritual, the daily tasks, struggles and relationships are emphasized between the sisters. Everyone among the group of nuns was given a distinct character and role despite the required uniformity of dress and behavior.

Salzman spent six years writing the book without succeeding until he retreated to a writer’s colony, a retreat like setting. This more than subtly suggests that the spiritual

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 142. \\
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 126. \\
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 169. \\
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 169-75. 
\end{flushright}
nature of the setting released his creative and imaginative energies. There he wrote from scratch and completed *Lying Awake* relatively quickly. His labored efforts seem to explain the book’s beautifully sparse presentation.

A scholar writing about religious experience may interpret that the process of writing *Lying Awake* was a religious experience for its author. The attention Salzman pays to the details of the religious life seems, in turn, to have been written for a practitioner of a Christian spirituality. Although the book can be read without such qualifications, at least some knowledge about the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office, the life of the religious, the Liturgical Calendar and the Saints name days and celebrations, can help to illuminate the structure of the book for the reader. The chapters, for instance, are named for the Feast Days, such as Saint James, Apostle, on July twenty-fifth, Transfiguration, August sixth, and days in the “Ordinary Time,” times between the Baptism of the Lord and Lent, and the Body and Blood of Christ (Spring) and Christ the King, which falls just before Advent. Prayer sentences, adaptations of Psalms or other traditional Christian prayers are interspersed throughout the book. These kinds of details are found in the writings of the women in the Petroff book, *Medieval Women Mystics Visionary Literature*. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, the oldest and best organized liturgy of the hours from the sixth century served as model used for Divine Office by the Carmelites. Thus Mother Mary Joseph, the nun who “epitomized the highest ideals of contemplative life was called, “The Living Rule.”  

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The book portrays a world structured by religious life, a world within the world, both isolated from the conventional culture and accepted and tolerated by it. Meaning-making for the cloistered religious lay in withdrawing from the world. In terms of Berger’s *Sacred Canopy*, the religious internalize the “objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine [their] subjective structures of consciousness itself.”\(^ {176}\) The religious life is communal and revolves around constant ritual providing meaning as well as order,\(^ {177}\) making daily life orderly and free of the fear of chaos.\(^ {178}\) Vicariously, the cloistered convent life helps to legitimate religion even for those who are not religious. The convent helps to keep the “cosmic frame of reference.”\(^ {179}\) The sisters too, have their own authority, such as a stubborn faith and looking at life in a positive way. “What other way is there [except for looking at things in a positive way],” asks the Living Rule.\(^ {180}\) Earlier in the thesis Ranft observed the positive attitudes among the women mystics she described in her work *A Woman’s Way*.

All of those gifts of poetry, of visions, of spiritual favors came at a price for Sister John. The diagnosis of “temporal lobe epilepsy” nullified the meaning of paradise she found in them. (We do not know whether some of our mystics who had visions may have


\(^ {178}\) Ibid., 27.

\(^ {179}\) Ibid., 33.

had this condition). Sister John’s mystical experiences seemed true to the classic definition of someone who seeks union with God. She believed that her “anomalous” (Cardeña), experiences were experiences of God. The disappointment she felt, and even guilt, when she found out that she had a medical condition is greatest in that it erodes her meaning and purpose of life. She had to become “ordinary” just like the in-between times on the liturgical calendar. But the ordinary time is not supposed to be less exciting or less meaningful, just ordered differently.

Sister John’s anomalous, religious or mystical experiences fall in the category of “Biological Markers” type as proposed by Wulff. Wulff wrote that “the first clues to the possible neural origins of mystical experience came from research on epilepsy, which has long been associated with religious preoccupations and sometimes with remarkable religious experiences.” This is consistent with Salzman’s characterization in Lying Awake. Indeed, Sister John had “a small meningioma—about the size of a raisin—just above [her] right ear.”

Although Sister John of the Cross ceased to have the headaches, and the ecstatic visions that formerly accompanied her headaches, after the removal of her tumor, she did not leave religious life. She remained cloistered in the convent and even mentored novices. Thus the temporal lobe may be responsible for religious experience regardless of

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182 Cardeña, Varieties of Anomalous Experience, 405.

183 Salzman, Lying Awake, 68.
a tumor. A tumor merely causes the pain which makes the experiences seem more intense, and, if one is already religious, the pain makes him or her turn to God to ease the burden of pain. To reiterate, the temporal lobe has two locations on the brain, one above each of our ears.

Would a person who is not already religiously inclined have associated the visions she had accompanied by headaches with experiences of God or see the visions as a form of religious experience? There is no answer to that question at this point. But it would stand to reason that since “all” people have temporal lobes that they are at least perhaps capable of experiencing a religious experience either first hand or through an intercessor, such as a chaplain or a spiritual guide. Another way to explain the possible universality of religious experience is to say that if one human being can have a religious experience, or their experience can have a religious dimension, and all human beings are of the same species, then all human beings can potentially find something religious in their experiences.

The way that Hawthorne and Salzman reach into our imagination with theirs through our absorption of the stories they write for us, they also, like the chaplains and the spiritual guides, facilitate our experience of something religious. They put us in touch with our thoughts and feelings, and sometimes memories or experiences, about God and religion. These thoughts, feelings and memories can be a mix of pleasant and unpleasant. Reading fiction as well as prayers can be a trigger for religious experience. As a people capable of religious experience and of God, we may find our identity in our faith. But
identifying with characters such as Hester Prynne or Sister John of the Cross we may also deepen our faith. In addition, their experiences may help us grow spiritually and emotionally. In particular we may learn how to have the humility to forgive from Hester Prynne. And how to have the humility to accept that our visions of God were perhaps based on some disease. And yet we grow developmentally in our religious experience, and continue to live a religious life or live the lay life however that is religious.

Examining how the lay live, or adapt into their lives the religious practice or component would be yet another possible thesis topic to address beyond the scope of this one. But Hester Prynne is an example of a lay woman practicing what she feels is a moral or a religious behavior.

The fictional accounts of religious experience enrich our understanding of the religious experience through the authors’ authentic portrayals of human nature. Although the nature aspect of being human is most obviously evident in the body, its organs and the senses, the inner vision or the imagination are also the parts of human nature. It is the lens of the imagination that enables us to see what is invisible. Authors of fiction, though not exclusively, are endowed with this way of seeing. The imagination is endemic to our sense of freedom even when in bondage. Theresa Avila’s *Interior Castle*, mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, and Viktor Frankl’s concentration camp experience give evidence to this claim. Frankl wrote about his experience in his work, *Man’s Search for Meaning*.184

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There is an adage “there are no atheists in the fox holes” which refers to soldiers in battle where they are vulnerable to being shot to death and this presumably makes them believe in a God to whom they can pray for protection, at least temporarily. Field chaplains, chaplains not connected to a church or a chapel, were first commissioned in France to accompany the soldiers in battle. The chaplains would provide prayers of intercession for them as well as the Sacraments. Much the same adage as above is used to claim that the sick too are triggered to turn to God. Made vulnerable by an illness, they come to realize that they have no control over their lives and this leaves them predisposed to prayer and trusting a power bigger than they are. Hospital chaplains are assigned to hospitals to work with the interdisciplinary teams providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance to the patients or clients, to pray with them as needed. The religious experience seems to be tied to life and death situations. Death is an unknown and causes us to use the farther or mysterious reaches of the human mind. Metaphors help us to cope with the mysterious. God is such a metaphor.
CHAPTER SIX

THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY: ATTENTION TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
IN THE DAILY WORK OF HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY
AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

In this chapter I present some examples of the religious experience which I encountered as the participant observer for this study. These fictionalized accounts enable me to reflect on my observations while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of particular clients. Hence, it is important to emphasize that these fictionalized accounts do not represent particular persons.

My process of writing fictional cases is not unlike Hawthorne’s and Salzman’s using their imaginations to create characters in order to tell fictional stories of people’s real concerns. Salzman, for instance fictionalizes a case of frontal lobe epilepsy. Although this is a real disease, and somewhere there is a real person who has this condition, we have no access to that knowledge. In this way creative writing allows the authors to write about human predicaments and dilemmas for learning purposes.185

As a poet and a writer I employ a similar creative writing technique when I write about what I know about religious experience from my experience of working with clients in the context of the hospital ministry. While the material is true to life, the stories are not of the specific individuals. If we can identify with the material in some way, then it is due to objective correlative, commonness, empathy or the reciprocity of feelings and

experiences among the human species. I will write the first example in order to illustrate a circumstance of a person who has a relationship with God and is well versed in the language of spiritual direction. The language of spiritual direction is one of metaphors and parallel meanings. It is also the language of parables which we learn from the Scriptures.

Note that I assign names to my fictional cases to make them more personal and to inspire compassion in the reader towards those who suffer from any kind of illness or separation from God.

**Martin**

I will name the character of this story “Martin.” Martin is a middle aged man who is facing some orthopedic surgery. Generally people like to wait to have this surgery until they are a bit older than Martin because the orthopedic replacement hardware does not last forever, and may wear out before the person gets “old.” They then have to have the surgery redone or live with the pain of a worn out repair.

Martin was having some apprehension the day before his surgery. He knew that he’d have to be put under anesthesia and give his body over to the medical staff. He had trouble trusting. He knew also that his wife would be worried. He noticed that having heard the doctor’s explanation that there is a small percentage of a mortality rate with the procedure, that she had become very pensive. She will also miss him while he is away at the rehabilitation hospital as they are very close and have no children.
Martin was home alone the day before the surgery and had a lot on his mind. He tried to relax however and went out onto the porch when he realized that a bird somehow had flown in. Confused, the bird smashed itself against the screen even while Martin propped the door open for it to exit. The bird was too frightened to trust him. He motioned it to fly to the door but the bird tried to break out through the screen. He withdrew into a corner and tried to convey to the bird that he would not harm it as he tried to guide it out the door. Soon he began to see himself as the bird and his fearful thoughts were jumping from one scenario onto another. In one scenario he isn’t waking up from the anesthesia, in another he feels a lot of pain which will never cease. But in his patient caring for the bird he saw how others will care for him. Although he will be out for the surgery, the surgical team will be awake and taking care of him. He also saw how God cares for him even when he helplessly and blindly rebels like the bird. As he embraced the thoughts of God’s protecting him Martin began to feel a sense of security and protection, and a sense of guidance. The trapped bird was he. The experience was a parable for him. Martin was having a religious experience with cognitive and affective elements in it. First he was aware of his fear and then he saw a sense of purpose behind the event of the bird flying in. He then gained a sense of security and protection and was more at peace as he faced surgery.

Next I am presenting the circumstances of a character I am naming “Frank,” who is also not a particular real person. Frank gave “None Stated” for his religious preference but at the same time asked to see the chaplain. People who declare themselves as “None
Stated” are the second largest group on the hospital census. Frank’s declaration of “None
Stated” for his religious affiliation illustrates a common experience in my work, and it
has to do with theodicy. What kind of a God would allow thus and such a horrible thing
to happen?

Frank

“Frank,” the fictional person of this tale, served as a rescue soldier in the Second
World War. He saw bodies of dead and barely alive people stacked on top of each other
like worthless matter. He was horrified. His religious experience was of a cognitive and
affective type. What he perceived of was a God who does not care for God’s own people.
God’s abandonment of God’s people alienated Frank from the God of his perception and
therefore from his religion. The detachment from his religion is also in the category of
cognitive and affective religious experience. A person like Frank who has stopped
practicing his or her faith a long time ago, when asked if they are truly “None Stated”
often still identify with some religion. Often the religion is Catholic given the northern
hemisphere geographic region. Frank told me about his wife and how she died of cancer
and this was another nail in the coffin as to why he no longer practiced his religion.

The type of a person like Frank likes to joke to make light of their afflictions.
They pretend that they do not dwell on the past but it is clear that they are not able to
forget it. They are affected by their losses. This type of religious experience does not
allow for true growth. For Frank there was little or no development. He stuck with his
conclusion that horrible things could not happen unless God wanted them to happen. He believed that God could prevent the bad things from happening to people if “He” wanted to. In a case like this I ask if the person could re-imagine his thinking, to go beyond his decades old conclusions. I would ask a person such as Frank what made him think that God committed the atrocities or caused the death of his loved one. Then I suggest that the question might be, “What kind of people could have done such terrible things” or “Why is death so random, so non-discriminating that even the little children must die of a disease?” This is often an eye opening experience. It is a moment of truth, and a developmental religious experience. This kind of experience brings about a conversion for the person. Slowly he or she accepts prayerful support. I tell such a person that as humans we can’t really understand God, God being beyond our comprehension, but perhaps we could try to comprehend people. This type of reasoning strikes a chord with a person who is ready to re-evaluate their thinking. I also offer that if God gave each person his or her own will then they can use it to do what they want; he or she can even do things against God’s will. God is of our own making. People like Frank appreciate the willingness of the chaplain’s coming to see them as they feel undeserving of spiritual support. They are ashamed to pray at the time of need because they do not pray when they are well. But they can readily admit to feeling “enlightened” and eventually accept the blessing of transformation.

This fictional case supports the definition of “religious experience is an experience of God” only to the extent that God is a product of an inadequate theological,
spiritual, religious education. If we base our construct of God on the Biblical writings we cannot help but notice that Job as a human being describes God as one who gives life and takes life away. But that is his, Job’s, construct of God not God’s of God’s self. We do not have God’s understanding of God’s self since we are not God. Having this understanding of the human construct of God helps us to attribute the responsibility for the atrocities people commit to people. This allows the possibility of our turning to God in our helplessness as human beings who are biologically classed as animals.

The idea that God is of human imagination is the reverse of humans having been made in the image of God, translates well into ministering to others. When I minister to someone in my role as a chaplain I do so using my imagination and empathy, or placing myself in the situation of the patient rather than by equating my position to be the same as theirs. My role is so small in the scheme of the patient’s total care, yet it is pivotal in their overall spiritual development. This is also an example of the role and the value of the academic studies, including the studies of religious experience. Although I believe that our own first-hand experience of life in all of its complexity are extremely important to our development, I also believe that we can learn much faster from the array of literature of wise scribes, scholars, secular and theological. Both components are essential. The academic studies serve for me as resources, allowing me to bring to my reflection, studies and the constructs of God in Scriptures and in people’s lives. It is true however that there are times when people can transform on their own and there are times when they are “clients” who need help.
To pedagogically summarize this case of the fictional Frank it was the combination of the CPE training, the academic studies and my own experience of receiving as well as giving spiritual guidance from a trained spiritual director that enabled me to minister to him. The studies of religious experience have allowed me to examine it and find that it is an experience of being human. I am reminded of Dorothy and her friends in the story of the *Wizard of Oz*, an allegorical work in which characters journey through great lengths to see the Wizard. The Wizard would grant them all they needed to be better people, animals and creatures. Each of the Characters in the *Wizard of Oz* story had their own idea or an image of Oz, just as people may have about God. Some of the images, such as “a terrible beast,” are not positive. While God remains a mystery, Oz turned out to be just a man “making believe.”

“I thought Oz was a great Head,” said Dorothy.
“And I thought Oz was a lovely Lady,” said the Scarecrow.”
“And I thought Oz was a terrible Beast,” said the Tin Woodman.
“And I thought Oz was a ball of Fire,” said the Lion.
“No: you are all wrong,” said the little man. “I have been making believe.”
“Making believe!” cried Dorothy. “Are you not a great Wizard?
“Not a bit of it, my dear; I’m just a common man.”
“You’re more than that,” said the Scarecrow, “you are a humbug.”
“Doesn’t anyone else know that you are a humbug?” asked Dorothy.

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In the end, although just a man, Oz ingeniously, creatively and thoughtfully helped the characters obtain what they were seeking. The Tin man received a heart, the Scarecrow a brain and the lion received courage, in this elaborate dream story. \(^{188}\)

Interestingly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also states that God is not “in man’s image,”

In no way is God in man’s image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective “perfections” of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband. \(^{189}\)

I note that “God” could have been used instead of “He” at the beginning of the second sentence. Also, the parallel between mother and father is incomplete. The last sentence after the colon could have read: “those of a mother *and wife* and those of a father and husband.”

As the examples of “Frank” above, the next one is also a creative rendition of my deep reflection and insight into a loss, again based on my extensive work as a chaplain and spiritual guide. It tells a story of “Every-Mother,” in a sense that “real” mothers might find themselves in it. It shows the profound difficulty of living and dealing with the loss of a child. All of the words are mine, including the quotes. The story, though

\(^{188}\) Ibid., 72-75.

creative, comes from the depths of my empathy with my clients and is written almost as a sermon.

**Every-Mother**

In our attempts to make meaning of our deepest hurts and losses we must look inside ourselves. This can most keenly be felt in our looking at a mother, who has lost a child, a being who was just beginning to be known. The loss of her child resulted in the loss of her sense of her own identity. For nine months she has been growing into who she was becoming as a mother, preparing for the arrival of the most precious gift in her life. After giving birth she had bonded with her baby and found the ultimate meaning of life in giving and nurturing life. She could no longer do that when abruptly the child fell ill and died. She looked for the signs of God in the silver lining of a dark cloud in the “sky”. Where the light peered out of the dark cloud is where God’s eye was located. She watched it close. As God’s eye closed, her baby died. Momentarily she associated this with God’s letting her down, but as she looked to herself she found Job’s answer *there* (within) from her own Christian upbringing. She thought, as her body dissolved in helpless tears, “God gives, and God takes away.”

190 How powerful is God. In the hours, days, weeks and months to come, as helplessness annihilated her, sorrow consumed and anger rose up within her she sank to the depth of grief, settling in a profoundly deep well.

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190 *NAB, The Book of Job 2:21.*
When she could sink no deeper she was at home, resting there in the depth of her grief, where she felt reunited with her little son whom she let down.

Years later someone in a CPE setting said to her, “you have found God in the darkness.” These are words of Psalm 139 tell us that “even dark is light to God.” Light and dark are the same to God. This is an example of theological reflection, of bringing one’s life experience to the Holy Scriptures and the tradition which carries them forward. This form of religious experience can help us heal spiritually. It is an experience of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition through the ministry of a chaplain. This kind of religious experience is classified as one having “Cognitive and affective elements” in that it demonstrates a sense of presence of God, a sense of integration and a sense of guidance, vocation and inspiration.¹⁹¹ This religious experience is clearly painful. In this example the “Every-mother” did her own work of healing through her training as a minister.

The next example is of a fictional character named “George,” and is also an instance of religious experience in the category of “development of experience,” in the subgroup of “experience in relation to others.”¹⁹² In George’s experience this was also an example in which depression may have been the trigger, as it often is, of the negative image of God…

¹⁹¹ Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 27.

¹⁹² Ibid., 27.
George

“George” can be a person of any age, and his experience could easily be of a woman who also suffered from mental illness and needed to be hospitalized. This person may also have considered suicide. Although this kind of a person requested to see the Chaplain, he or she is often reluctant to talk about religion and spirituality because of his or her “fundamentalist” and “Evangelical” formations or leanings. I always need to reassure such clients that I can deal with their story.

We could be sitting at a table and the client may be very uncomfortable. He or she may ask about the chaplain’s work and about her religious background. This person is reassured to hear that the chaplain is a board certified healthcare chaplain and open to seeing everyone. To the patients this means that I am “non-sectarian” or “non-denominational” or just “Protestant.” This is something I have to deal with internally but does not have a bearing on my ministry. We are not after the facts at this junction. After some patient, empathic listening on the part of the chaplain and guide, the person and client grows comfortable, draws the chair closer and leans on the table. The chaplain can transmit or make the transference of nervousness as well. The important thing is to be aware of one’s feelings and still function.

Someone like George comes to the point where he explains that he no longer practices his religion very much at all, and has not been praying either. I may ask him whether he might consider praying in a new way. I give the example of bringing the
reason for one’s hospitalization to one’s prayer. George might want to know how this prayer might go. I often explain that it helps if we have an image of the God we pray to, that we know whom we are addressing. Since prayer is addressed to someone, it is good to know who. Someone like George might became thoughtful and say that it is hard to think in a new way if you feel that you’ve been “brainwashed” into believing in a certain way. I would voice my agreement and ask whether he might be willing to try. The clients will usually want to try to pray in a new way. That would be their small conversion.

Let’s imagine that after the prayer George articulated a disciplinarian image of God, a God whom he has failed and is now “cast aside” for failing, for not obeying all of the edicts his former minister tried instilling in him. George finds it reassuring to ask the chaplain whether she believes that God is Love. I would answer affirmatively and suggest that it is important to have a “personal” relationship with God. If he asked why it is so important to have a personal relationship with God I would offer that in a personal relationship with God he does not have to rely on someone else, such as his former minister, to mediate between him and God. For the sake of this story we could say that George’s minister either imposed his or her own image of God onto his mind, or George perceived it that way. In any case, the experience was detrimental to George’s faith in God. People in George’s position often feel that their illness is a punishment for disobedience. The chaplain’s pastoral support and spiritual guidance had the potential to affect behavioral changes in a person like George, and to help him grow spiritually by creating a forgiving rather than punishing image of God.
I next compose “a lay” of a character who speaks of the pain and the trauma of having been abused. I name her “Carrie” though I have never had a client named Carrie.

**Carrie**

“Carrie’s” character represents the problems real and common enough in a subset of problems in our society. One of the common problems with religious experience that I encounter is that people stop growing spiritually. The reasons can be that they stop tending to their spiritual growth of their own will after confirmation, that no one else takes responsibility for their spiritual development, or that their experiences turn them away from the faith they were formed in. The character of Carrie represents a person whose relationship with God failed due to her family dynamics and her problems of illness and addictions. She represents a person from a dysfunctional family, betrayed by her boyfriend and feeling abandoned by God.

Of course, my belief is that we abandon God rather than God abandoning us. But when I minister to anyone, I suspend my own beliefs so that I can minister to the person where she is. Carrie’s is a particularly sensitive story.

It is most difficult to be with such clients knowing that I too feel helpless for them. Moreover, any help I may give them I may never have an opportunity to follow up with them to see how they are faring. My thought processes are, how could they think that Jesus or God would ever abandon them, Jesus who allowed His self to be crucified for us? Did He not give our bodies dignity? But the situations are not about me, but about
the deeply hurt and disturbed persons, and so young. I realize that they want me to say something in response, give them answers. I use the technique of asking them to slow down with their deep but rapid questions of me and to allow us to begin reflecting on them one by one.

When the person agrees to slow down I use my next technique of asking how she prays. In this fictional case Carrie responded that she just tells God, “Here I am again, asking for your help” When I guide her to pray the words for what she feels “now”, she says that she has not known how to do that. But then she begins to see. I realize that prayer sometimes helps people and sometimes not. Someone like Carrie would have to learn very quickly in order for the prayer to help her cope, but she did seem to understand that speaking openly to God, talking to God as she would to a trusted friend, and to allow for silence and listening for God to answer was a valid way of prayer. Then again generally speaking, “Telling things” to “God” seems to be easy for many people to do, but not all know how to listen for God to answer them. This may indicate that God has to be “someone,” a human-like presence with powers transcending those of a human. But we are capable of transcending our problems just as we are. The challenge is to access this ability by whatever means possible without further harming ourselves through our behavior, such as self-medicating with alcohol consumption, or taking “street” drugs, not prescribed by a physician. In the studies of the anomalous religious experience there are examples of substance induced religious experience. (See “Definitions”)
I believed that clients like Carrie listen to me. Although young, or because they are young, they could learn anything, and quickly. Often I do not see these clients again. Thus I recite passages from Isaiah for them, such as, “Fear not, I am with you,” and, “See, I am doing something new. Do you not perceive it? I make streams flow out from the desert.” I offered as many encouraging passages that might help them to change their behavior as I could think of, hoping for some of them to resonate with her. I am reassured when I literally see their ears lift and their faces relax, their deep eyes dry, at least for the time being.

Religious experiences like Carrie’s are usually based on a limited religious education that did not teach that Jesus does not abandon those who believe in Him. I encouraged such clients to continue to grow spiritually and in every other way. For some reason some people do not realize that they have to continue to grow spiritually as well as psychologically and physically. Spiritual education does not happen all at once and once for all.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In making the case for the importance of the study of religious experience to the ministries of spiritual direction and chaplaincy I have presented a variety of sources of the study. The religious life of the consecrated brothers and sisters, including many mystics, is a rich ground of religious experience. Religious experience is an experience of God, but although God is good, I have shown that not all religious experience is good. Religious experience can cause a person much hurt.

Religious experience is also human because it is experienced by us as human beings. Our bodies, cognition and senses are the conduits for all experience, including the religious type. I have taken the work of Alister Hardy to my analysis of the case studies I chose for this project. I showed how his work helped me to articulate the nature of religious experience as being human, or attributable to the senses, behavior cognition, human development, dreams and triggers. Religious experience can be triggered by the certain events and circumstances in our lives. One of my CPE supervisors identified just four basic feelings to guide us in the making of our spiritual assessment of a client. “Was the client mad, glad, sad or afraid?” Based on an answer the chaplain could unpack the story behind the feeling and thereby help the client.

This supervisor asked this of us as we presented a verbatim or a theological reflection to the group. The technique of determining the affect of a person as a key into
their main concerns parallels Hardy’s classifications of religious experience. In particular the classification “Cognitive and affective elements” demonstrates this.

The psychologists were still in the process of developing theories of religious affect when the *Handbook of Religious Experience* went to press. I reviewed the

**Religious Experience Sources.** The theoretical approaches to the religious affect help us create spiritual assessments of a person who is in a crisis situation of some kind, whether the crisis is due to an illness, abuse, loss of a job, or loss of a loved one.

I have shown that my programs of preparation for the dual role and profession of a chaplain and a spiritual guide have served me well. I have presented and analyzed the teaching tool, the verbatim, of the chaplains and spiritual guides. I am drawing the conclusion that the CPE programs design the verbatim in a way that maximizes learning because they are bound by standards and competencies of certification. But the spiritual direction training programs’ verbatim format is somewhat simple and abbreviated because there are no formal guidelines to abide by. The professional organization, Spiritual Directors International, does not wish to be responsible for formulating guidelines for what might constitute a professional in the practice of spiritual direction. Because chaplains receive a more systematic education based upon a comprehensive set of standards and competencies, I have found that they are better served by their professional organizations. Due to the scope of the CPE requirements the board certified chaplains can be better in providing spiritual guidance than can the spiritual directors providing care in a health care setting. A dimension which both CPE and spiritual
direction training programs could add to their curricula is in the historical perspective of spirituality and religious experience. The historical records of Christian spirituality are dominated by writings by the educated and the religious. Presently with a more broadly educated public and a changed ecclesial context, the amount of knowledge about religious experience is not dependent on living a consecrated life. The lay professional are capable of serving God in all manner of vocations as well as the ordained can if those in the position of hierarchical power agreed to it.

I have presented the research into the nature of religious experience from the historical perspective. My conclusion is that we need to appreciate the mystics for their contributions to the present day spiritual practices, including what we now call “spiritual direction.” However, we also need to think of religious experience as something that ordinary people experience in their ordinary lives, in their houses and in the ordinary nature preserves and walking trails. Practically all of the people I meet and counsel or provide spiritual guidance for are lay people. I work with the lay experience of God, of religion and of spirituality. Not only are the religious holy, not only are the retreat centers’ grounds holy, but the lay are also holy and where they live and work is holy. The hospital is a holy place and “a healing temple” if we consider how much prayer accompanies the medical care of the hospitalized persons throughout the country and the world. We need to acknowledge that the laity experiences God as well as the religious and the ordained. I have identified negative aspects of religious experience, fleshed out in the descriptions from my context of ministry in Chapter Six. It is evident that religious
experience has historically been attributed to the life of the religious and the ordained. The mystics fashioned their lives on the life of Christ and on the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. But the Beguines, “the sisters between,” desired to live in two worlds, the world at large, where the lay people lived and the world inside the monastery walls. This was considered heretical in their time.

The human body is the site upon, in and around which, the drama of life takes place. Throughout the evolution of religious experience has been a part of embodied life. According to Hardy’s classification of “Antecedent or “triggers” of experience,“¹⁹³ sexual intercourse can trigger a religious experience. By extension giving birth can be a religious experience, and therefore being born is a religious experience. Religious experience has been so much a part of human beings that Ashbrook and Albright in their book, *The Humanizing Brain*, pick up on what neuropsychologist Rodney Holmes theorizes, which is that,

hominids since the Neanderthals have been *Homo religious*—creatures in search of meaning and significance. Currently the evidence of the neurosciences is leading us, not away from, but toward asking about the kinds of meanings humans make. For many, the cry for meaning becomes a cry for God. We are not bound simply in our senses. Humanity’s connections are cosmic.¹⁹⁴

Creative writers still locate religious experience in the monastery settings or in the monastic life as they imagine it but they bring a new dimension of scientific progress to the religious experience. Social scientists such as Abraham Maslow and theologians such


as Zeni Fox have been promoting our seeing the experience of God in the life of the laity. The church consists of mostly lay people. What is common is also holy. The neuroscientists take it even further and say that we are genetically wired to be religious.

Jean Francois Millet (1814-1875), a great French painter blended the themes of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures with the nineteenth century rural life in France in his paintings. In a recent exhibition of Millet’s work at the Boston, MA, Museum of Fine Arts, it is evident that he made the “everyday” his subject matter. He is quoted by a curator as having asked, “Who would dare to claim that a potato is inferior to a pomegranate?” His sensitive painting of a few pears on a plate becomes a beautiful sensory experience, and an example of art as religious experience.

Heeding the results of this research would change how we think about religion, God, experience, and religious experience. We should think of God not as a monopoly of the religious and the ordained, but God as found among the people of all walks of life. This God is impartial. I find this in the Scripture too. It is by how we conduct ourselves in the world that is important. Peter, the Apostle said, “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.”


196 See Appendix H.

The aim of this study was not to delve into the advances of magnetic imaging and into what these techniques may tell us about ourselves and the dimensions of religious experiences. But God may not merely be located in the temporal lobes in our brains, located behind and over our ears, but in the DNA of all things, capable of reproducing in a myriad of ways.

For now the study urges the ministers who would be chaplains and spiritual guides to learn well from their traditions, academic studies, from the sciences, and from the supervised ministries in both of the areas, the clinical pastoral education and spiritual direction internships. The study urges the chaplains and spiritual guides to encourage their lay clients to embrace responsibility for their experiences of God. The chaplains and spiritual guides should treat their clients as the living human documents capable of experiencing God wherever they are in their lives. These recommendations could only have been made after looking at the religious experience from several dimensions of academic studies just as an artist looks or studies his or her model.
APPENDIX A

In this Appendix I include the entire set of NACC (National Association of Catholic Chaplains) Standards for Ethics, Certification, and Renewal of Certification. The same requirements are common to all of the various denominations’ certification boards. Although the entire set of Standards and Competencies, Mission, Vision and Values, as well Ethics of the Organization runs for many pages, I include only the specific section for chaplain certification interviews begins in Part Two, Section 300, Certification and Renewal of Certification of Chaplains.

National Association of Catholic Chaplains
Part Two, Section 300
Standards for Certification and Renewal of Certification of Chaplains

301 Qualifications of Professional Chaplaincy

The candidate for certification must:

301.1 Provide documentation of current endorsement or of good standing in accordance with the requirements of his/her own faith tradition.

301.2 Be current in the payment of the professional association’s annual dues.

301.3 Have completed an undergraduate degree from a college, university, or theological school accredited by a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (www.chea.org), and a graduate-level theological degree from a college, university, or theological school accredited by a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Equivalencies for the undergraduate and/or graduate-level theological degree will be granted by the individual professional organizations according to their own established guidelines.

*Graduate-level theological degree
The NACC defines a graduate-level theological degree as a graduate degree in theology, divinity, religious studies, pastoral ministry, pastoral studies, or spirituality.
301.4 Provide documentation of a minimum of four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Commission on Certification and Accreditation (USCCB/CCA), or the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (CAPPE/ACPEP). Equivalency for one unit of CPE may be considered.

302 Theory of Pastoral Care
The candidate for certification will demonstrate the ability to:

302.1 Articulate a theology of spiritual care that is integrated with a theory of pastoral practice.

302.2 Incorporate a working knowledge of psychological and sociological disciplines and religious beliefs and practices in the provision of pastoral care.

302.21 Demonstrate an understanding of scripture, current theology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and Catholic Social Teaching.

302.3 Incorporate the spiritual and emotional dimensions of human development into the practice of pastoral care.

302.4 Incorporate a working knowledge of ethics appropriate to the pastoral context.

302.41 Demonstrate an understanding of The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.

302.5 Articulate a conceptual understanding of group dynamics and organizational behavior. (Standards Part Two, Section 300, November 2007, Page 2)

303 Identity and Conduct
The candidate for certification will demonstrate the ability to:

303.1 Function pastorally in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries of others.

303.2 Use pastoral authority appropriately.

303.3 Identify one’s professional strengths and limitations in the provision of pastoral care.
303.31 Demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective.

303.4 Articulate ways in which one’s feelings, attitudes, values, and assumptions affect one’s pastoral care.

303.5 Advocate for the persons in one’s care.

303.6 Function within the Common Code of Ethics for Chaplains, Pastoral Counselors, Pastoral Educators and Students.

303.7 Attend to one’s own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

303.71 Articulate a spirituality grounded in a relationship with God, self, and others.

303.8 Communicate effectively orally and in writing.

303.9 Present oneself in a manner that reflects professional behavior, including appropriate attire and personal hygiene.

304 Pastoral
The candidate for certification will demonstrate the ability to:

304.1 Establish, deepen, and end pastoral relationships with sensitivity, openness, and respect.

304.2 Provide effective pastoral support that contributes to the well-being of patients, their families, and staff.

304.3 Provide pastoral care that respects diversity and differences including, but not limited to culture, gender, sexual orientation, and spiritual/religious practices.

304.4 Triage and manage crises in the practice of pastoral care.

304.5 Provide pastoral care to persons experiencing loss and grief.

304.6 Formulate and utilize spiritual assessments in order to contribute to plans of care.

304.7 Provide religious/spiritual resources appropriate to the care of patients, families, and staff.

304.8 Develop, coordinate, and facilitate public worship/spiritual practices appropriate to diverse settings and needs.
304.9 Facilitate theological reflection in the practice of pastoral care.

305 Professional
The candidate for certification will demonstrate the ability to:

305.1 Promote the integration of Pastoral/Spiritual Care into the life and service of the institution in which it resides.

(Standards Part Two, Section 300, November 2007, Page 3)

305.2 Establish and maintain professional and interdisciplinary relationships.

305.21 Demonstrate the ability to build peer relationships for the purpose of collaboration and active participation in the creation and maintenance of a healthy work environment.

305.3 Articulate an understanding of institutional culture and systems, and systemic relationships.

305.4 Support, promote, and encourage ethical decision-making and care.

305.41 Demonstrate skill in facilitating decision-making based on an understanding of culture/ethnicity, gender, race, age, educational background and theological values, religious heritage, behavioral sciences, networking, and systems thinking.

305.5 Document one’s contribution of care effectively in the appropriate records.

305.6 Foster a collaborative relationship with community clergy and faith group leaders.

306 Requirements for the Maintenance of Certification
In order to maintain status as a Certified Chaplain, the chaplain must:

306.1 Participate in a peer review process every fifth year.

306.2 Document fifty (50) hours of annual continuing education. (Recommendation that personal therapy, spiritual direction, supervision, and/or peer review be acceptable options for continuing education hours.)

306.3 Provide documentation every fifth year of current endorsement or of good standing in accordance with the requirements of his/her own faith tradition.
306.4 Be current in the payment of the professional association’s annual dues.

306.5 Adhere to the Common Code of Ethics for Chaplains, Pastoral Counselors, Pastoral Educators, and Students.

307 Standards for Appeals of Certification Decisions
The individual seeking an appeal of a certification decision:

307.1 Has a right to a timely and complete review of a negative recommendation.

307.2 Has access to a certification appeals panel free from conflict of interest, and panel members shall not have participated in the original recommendation.

307.3 Submits a written request for an appeal based on the grounds that such recommendation was an alleged violation of the Standards and/or Procedures.

307.4 Accepts the decision of the Certification Appeals Panel as final and binding for the association.
APPENDIX B

Campion Renewal Clinical Pastoral Education Center

Verbatim FACE SHEET Format

Pastoral Placement: Hospital Date: (Typed)

Chaplain:

(Patient’s) Date of Admissions: Service: (medical, surgical, oncology assistance to homeless, etc.)


Admitting Diagnosis to Hospital/Circumstance of Pastoral Visit:

Factual Information:

Patient’s/Client’s Initial Concern: (The emphasis is on “initial.” Out of what need or concern did he/she initially relate to you?)

Pastoral Opportunity:

Supervisor: (Full name of your supervisor)

OUTLINE FOR NOTE WRITING: (Write on the right half of the page, leaving the left side for the supervisor’ comments)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (Any overflow of “factual” information above)

PLANS: (Plans are meant to help you prepare for the visit they are not to be carried with you as a rigid agenda)

OBSERVATIONS: (Describe the person so others can visualize him/her. Note mood, attitude, clothing, surroundings, etc.)
THE VISIT

Give the Verbatim Account of what took place:

1. The conversation
2. Little incidents, pauses, interruptions
3. Any details as they occur during the visit
4. Preserve all transitions so the report will be a unified whole
5. Reserve all judgments and interpretations for the ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS:

THE PATIENT/CLIENT:

Psychological Concerns:

How would you assess the person’s level of emotional availability? What are the person’s conflicts, needs and personality strengths, (purposefulness, honesty, ability to laugh at self)? To what extent does the person recognize them? Are his/her responses appropriate?

Does the person appear “out of touch” with reality of what is happening? If defenses appear to be in place, how would you describe them? How does the person view his/her present life circumstance/illness?

Sociological Concerns:

How does this person appear to be affected by his/her sociological background, e.g. culture, job, education, family, economic status, political thinking? How do these sociological factors affect the person’s sickness/dilemma and healing? How does the
person relate to the community, to family, friends, to the facility and staff and to you, the chaplain?

Theological Concerns:

What appears to be this person’s relationship with God (i.e., loving, punishing, distant, close and personal, nature?) What appears to be the quality of the person’s religious faith, spirituality? What are the person’s religious/spiritual resources and are they utilized: prayer, sacraments, nature, worship, AA support group and Steps, the chaplain? Does the person have a relationship with the institutional church? What meaning does he/she find in life? What is it that makes the person want to become well/go on living/or prevents dying in hope and with peace? What are the theological issues involved? How does the person relate religious beliefs to his/her sickness/dilemma? How do you as chaplain view the person’s primary growing edge(s)?

Ethical Concerns:

(Note: as stated above I added this concern based on my cpe experiences at the other hospitals, specifically at Brigham & Women’s and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, both in Boston, and on my experience working as a board certified chaplain.)
Is the person treated with respect regardless of their status or ability to pay the cost of medical care? Is his/her refusal to treatment based upon their religious beliefs respected? If a patient/client is unable to make his/her own decisions is their health care proxy or
other spokesperson acting in the patient’s/client’s interest? Does the person have all the necessary information to make sound medical treatment decisions? Is the person’s autonomy honored? Are there any issues of justice? Are the doctors treating the person with beneficence and do they provide care without violating the principle of non-malfeasance and professionalism?

THE CHAPLAIN:

In order to be of the greatest possible help to the person, the chaplain must continuously attempt to understand his/her religious faith and emotional dynamics in the [pastoral] relationship.

Analyze your visit in terms of your strengths and weaknesses. What are your honest feelings toward the patient/client? How do these affect your relationship? What is your understanding of the type of relationship you are establishing with him/her, (ex., parent-child, brother-sister, casual friends, problem solver, pastor? What appears to be the person’s projection into you (role, gender types, former associations with clergy persons, religious types?) How are these helping or hindering the relationship? What needs of yours is the person meeting or not meeting? What do you see as blocks in your ability to minister to this person (ex. Patient/client’s physical appearance, your own feelings of inadequacy, a reminder of another person in your life about whom you have feelings?) What resources do you feel you have available for use in your ministry to this person (ex., Have you ever felt lonely, depressed, missing a loved one, etc.) What growing edge(s) are you aware of in yourself as a result of this visit?
PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES:

What are your Pastoral Plans if you were to visit this person again? What are your short term and long term range goals in light of your ANALYSIS of the person’s psychological, sociological, theological and ethical concerns? How do you hope to foster his/her emotional, social and spiritual development?

GROWING EDGE

Growing edge does not mean a simple enlargement (as when a city grows.) The Growing Edge of Faith does not refer to how many authors we have read – but whether or not we are in the process of integration of our life experience. It is this that contributes to the Growing Edge of our Faith.

The Growth is not a simple change – it is not mere alteration like, “it’s growing dark” or waves are washing up on the beach which in its own way causes a definite alteration. Growth always involves an element of loss – though not a net loss. A mature person grows out of many childhood patterns, extreme attachment to mother; “over belief” (in everything that father says.) If we are healthy we discard these things – we lose them.

Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies,
   It remains only a single grain;
       But if it dies,
   It yields a rich harvest.
Anyone who loves one’s life loses it…  
And will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:24)

The grain is shown in the realization of a single purpose. The main purpose of a person’s life may develop – even though we lose in physical strength – in the graceful lightness of childhood and in many other respects. The main purpose, nevertheless, is attained and this purpose supplies an element of continuity with the past throughout all the changes that occur.

This partial loss is a metamorphosis. “The child is always in the adult.” It in no way implies a total elimination of our past. Such an endeavor is unhealthy and attempts to do it an unnecessary frustration and contributes heavily towards a crisis of identity. Conscious response to a GROWING EDGE is involvement in a HOLY TASK. 
APPENDIX C

SDTI, Spiritual Direction Initiative, Verbatim Sample

VERBATIM

Page 1:
Your Name: (Meaning the Spiritual Direction Intern’s name)

I am presenting this directee now because…

Pages 2, 3, etc.: verbatim account of part of a session: Sample:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIALOG</th>
<th>DIRECTOR’S REACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>L1</strong>* Hi, Sam, come on in.</td>
<td>Happy to see Sam!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 Wow! Is it ever cold out there! (He sits down)</td>
<td>Sam seems nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 How are things going, Sam?</td>
<td>Eager to get engaged!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 I’ve been feeling mighty bad lately. (looking depressed)</td>
<td>curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3 I am sorry to hear that. (pause)</td>
<td>Why did I say that? He can feel bad!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 Since Joyce left, things haven’t been the same.</td>
<td>Oh! He hasn’t moved since our last meeting. Why am I disappointed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*L=Linda, S=Sam (My clarification)

Final Page

1. What were your strongest feelings toward the directee during the interview and immediately afterwards? In each case, what caused the feelings?

2. What personal strengths and weaknesses were you aware of during the session?
3. Did you notice any *Religious Experience* in the person’s day or prayer? Please indicate this. Is there any *Religious Experience* described in this verbatim? Where?

4. Where do you notice Movement and/or counter movement in directee and yourself?

5. Is there anything you would do differently now? If so, what?

6. What “insights” (felt knowledge) have you gained or has been reaffirmed about God? Spiritual Direction? Religious Experience? Spiritual Growth? Life Experience? Yourself as a directee or as a person?
The Haden Institute Verbatim Sample

Spiritual Direction Verbatim and Case Studies

Each student is to write two Spiritual Direction reports, one of which must be verbatim. The other report may be either case study or verbatim. Both reports will be presented to your small case study group. Below are the directions for writing the verbatim and case study.

WRITING A CASE STUDY AND/OR VERBATIM

The case studies and verbatim reports in Spiritual Direction offer the opportunity to observe a relationship at a particular moment. Group review of case studies helps us continue to gain insight into the nature and experience of direction by means of discussion and discernment. The case study and verbatim reports should be two pages or less of single-spaced typing. Names, places and identifying traits about the directee should be changed to disguise the identity of the person described in the case study. Number the case study copies you hand out to your group so that they can all be collected after the discussion to guard confidentiality.

Content of the Case Study or Verbatim [one page in length]

A. Description of Case Study
Describe the particular encounter, setting the event in context. Describe what happened and your response, including as much detail as possible in the limited space.

**OR**

**B. Description of the Verbatim**

**DIALOGUE REPORT; A PORTION OF THE INTERVIEW**

Divide your paper in half lengthwise. On this side, record a significant amount of the dialogue, indicating “X” (directee’s name) and “Y” (your name). Include gestures, pauses, and feelings of the directee that you noticed. Try to keep in touch with the flow of the conversation, and note any transitions and how you respond to them. Try to be as detailed as possible. Record this interview as soon as possible after the actual meeting.

**Personal background and spirituality of the person directed [1/3\(^{rd}\) page length]**

In addition to biographical facts and a general description of the person, this section should include highlights of your understanding of the person’s spirituality and faith. This might include a description of his/her spiritual and/or prayer life, his/he relation to and involvement or non-involvement in the church or spirituality group, his/her relation to other people, and any significant dreams. How is God known by this person? In what way is the person growing spiritually? What are the main blocks to further spiritual growth and change?
Self Assessment [2/3rds page in length]

A. This section should be critical (both positive and negative) self-assessment of this session with the directee. In what way were you an instrument of God’s grace or did you enable him/her to see the working God in his/her life? If, so, why so? If not, why not? Were there any helpful dreams in the process? What Transference, Counter-Transference did you observe? What questions might the group discuss that would be most helpful to you?

B. Reflect theologically on your overall work with the directee. What spiritual and/or Biblical movements and themes did you notice? What have you learned that will be helpful to you in the future spiritual direction sessions?

C. How would you describe your over-all feelings during and after the interview? Where were you moved the most?

D. What strengths did you show? What may have been weaknesses?

E. What theological/God issues arose: the mystery of suffering in this person, the grace of being accepted by God/others, self, the image of God at work in one’s life, etc. Where were you most aware of God’s presence?
APPENDIX E

This Appendix consists of my letter to William Barry, his email response, our brief conversation and my comments on the revised chapter in his, The Practice of Spiritual Direction.

Letter to William Barry

9 Union Street
Natick, MA 01760
leiner@comcast.net

Rev. William Barry, SJ
Campion Renewal and Retreat Center
319 Concord Road
Weston, MA 02493

November 4, 2010

Dear Father Barry,

I am a D Min candidate at the Boston University School of Theology, in the midst of writing my thesis project. My topic is about the role of the studies of religious experience in the ministries of chaplaincy and spiritual guidance.

I am writing to ask you if you might be willing to talk to me about religious experience some time. I live in Natick. It is an easy drive to Weston and I would love to be able to meet with you. Campion is very familiar to me as I had clinical pastoral education there with our beloved David Bolton. My spiritual direction internship also took place at Campion with Sr. Joan McCarthy. I met with Sr. Maureen Casey for spiritual guidance on the premises for many years as well.
The Office of Health Care Ministry of the Archdiocese of Boston has arranged a retreat with you at the Campion Center for chaplains (and spiritual guides) like me, on Wednesday, December 1, 2010 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. I will be participating in this. Although I would be glad to make an appointment with you any time, might it be possible to see you on that day?

Thank you,

Georgia Gojmerac-Leiner

William Barry’s email response

From: Willam Barry [mailto:wbarry@jesuits.net]
Sent: Friday, November 05, 2010 4:29 PM
To: leiner@comcast.net
Subject: Your letter

Dear Ms. Gojmerac-Leiner,

I just got your letter. Why don't we meet at the end of the day on Dec. 1? All the best.
Bill Barry, S.J.

My Response to Barry

From: GGL [leiner@comcast.net]
Sent: Friday, November 05, 2010 9:00 PM
To: 'Willam Barry'
Subject: RE: Your letter
Thank you. I have it on my calendar and will look forward to speaking with you.

Georgia

A Brief Analysis of Chapter 2, in Barry and Connolly’s, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*


The revised chapter, “The Centrality of Religious Experience,” begins on page thirteen. Starting on page twenty-two through the end of the chapter, page twenty-eight, every time that “religious experience” had been used in the first edition, “religious dimension of experience” is used instead in the revised edition. The grammar of the text reads as,

> The focus on the religious dimension of experience, which we see as helpful, and even necessary, for spiritual growth in our time, is not a new phenomenon in the history of spirituality. It is as old as Christianity itself.” The only revision throughout the chapter is that every time the first edition used “religious experience” the revised edition uses “religious dimension of experience.”

Although Father Barry readily agreed to meet, our meeting was brief and he spoke very guardedly. He mentioned that “a philosopher, Smith,” used the term “the religious dimension of experience.” My Google search found that John E. Smith was a philosopher of religion who taught at the Yale University. His work, *Experience and God*, was

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originally published in 1961 and reprinted in 1995 by the American Philosophy Series Number 3. In 1997 a book called, *Reason, Experience, and God*, was subsequently published by the American Philosophy Series. In this collection of essays, Neville observes that Smith’s religious dimension of experience depended on maintaining a distinction between the holy and the profane. Neville wrote that Smith’s, “religious dimension of experience has to do with acknowledging grounds and affirming purposes of life in the context of the holy.”

I believe that it would be contrary to Barry and Connolly to see the possibility of the religious dimension of experience only in the “holy.” In the tradition of Saint Ignatius God could be found in the “profane” context as well. Thus their adaptation of the “religious dimension of experience” must be seen somewhat differently from Smith’s. Their adaptation must mean that all experience has the potential to have a religious dimension. I see the meaning of this phrase in the context of Maslow who urged that the holy is in the ordinary. The human, the ordinary, or the all are substitutes for the secular, the irreverent or the “profane.”

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200 Colapietro, *Reason, Experience and God*, 77.
Dear Georgia,

I would be delighted to talk with you about this topic and want to learn more about your project. It would be easier to speak by telephone. May I call you? What number and time would be best for you? Or you can call me, 425-455-5606.

Peace be with you,

Liz

Liz Budd Ellmann, M Div
Executive Director
Spiritual Directors International
PO Box 3584
Bellevue, WA 98009-3584
Main Office Telephone/fax: 425-455-1565/6
www.sdiworld.org
Tending the holy around the world and across traditions.
follow me on Twitter
Connect on Facebook: Spiritual Directors International for spiritual care
E-mail Update or Subscription Services Changes |
Did someone forward you this message? Opt-In to receive Spiritual directors International E-Mail
Unsubscribe at any time
http://www.sdiworld.org/about_us/submit-an-address.html
-----Original Message-----
From: ggleiner@bu.edu [mailto:ggleiner@bu.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, August 04, 2010 8:42 AM
To: office@sdiworld.org
Subject: Basic Requirements of Spr. Dir Training

Hello,

I am a spiritual guide trained by the "SDI" spiritual direction initiative directed my Sr. Joan McCarthy in Massachusetts. Currently I am working my D Min thesis project in which I will be comparing my program to one or two others.

The reason for my writing to your office is to ask, does the spiritual Directors International organization provide some standards or guidelines for the spiritual direction training programs? If so, would you please share these with me?

This information would be very helpful to me as I compare the elements of a couple of programs. I will appreciate your help in this and any other input you might like to give me.

Thank you,
Georgia Gojmerac-Leiner, BCC, D Min in Process Boston University School of Theology
No virus found in this incoming message.
APPENDIX G

“Pears” by Jean Francois Millet
1862-66


*C21 Resources: A Service of Boston College, Church in the 21st Century*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2000-


*The Book of Job*, New American Bible


