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— Norvene Vest, author of *Preferring Christ, a Devotional Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict*

A Science of the Saints

Studies in Spiritual Direction

Edited by
Robert E. Alvis



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*To the students and alumni of
Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology*

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Introduction

Robert E. Alvis

Long before it was a term, spiritual direction was a practice. From the very beginnings of the faith, earnest followers of Christ recognized that the way of life they had embraced was more than just a set of tenets to believe, practices to perform, and virtues to embody. Regular guidance from a wise mentor could enable individuals to better recognize their own challenges and to move forward in the quest for holiness. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul encourages spiritually advanced members of the community to reach out to others who may be struggling: “Brothers, even if a person is caught in some transgression, you who are spiritual should correct that one in a gentle spirit” (Gal 6:1). In chapter 4 of the *Didache*, a Christian handbook written toward the end of the first century, the faithful are enjoined to meet regularly with individuals of spiritual distinction: “Frequent the company of the saints daily, so as to be edified by their conversation.”¹

As the Christian community has adapted to changing circumstances over time, the practice of spiritual direction has evolved in tandem while remaining enduringly relevant. Starting in the third century, growing numbers of spiritually ambitious Christians abandoned mainstream society in favor of an array of monastic

¹ Maxwell Staniforth, trans., “The *Didache*,” in *Early Christian Writings* with rev. translation, introductions, and new editorial material by Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 192.

movements. Fundamental to this way of life was the careful mentoring of disciples by experienced masters. The literary deposit of the Desert Fathers and Mothers offers the first detailed portrait of Christian spiritual direction in antiquity. By the fourth century, new generations of Christian leaders, formed in monastic contexts and called to serve in the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were bringing monastic values to bear on the broader Church. These values included a high esteem for spiritual direction.² St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who grudgingly abandoned monastic life in favor of a clerical career, famously praised the practice of spiritual guidance as “the art of arts and the science of sciences.”³

In the Middle Ages, monastic orders in both the East and the West continued to serve as vital centers of spiritual direction. A regimen of spiritual mentoring was integral to the monastic life, and many outsiders took advantage of the counsel of holy monks and nuns. In time, newer religious orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans brought fresh forms of pastoral outreach, including spiritual direction, to population centers across much of Europe. Meanwhile, laypeople embraced novel forms of intentional discipleship, such as third orders and the *Devotio Moderna*, in which spiritual direction was often an integral feature.

Amid the tumult of the early modern era, including the fracturing of the Western Church into rival confessions and the so-called wars of religion, the practice of spiritual direction reached new heights of popularity and sophistication. In his quest for sanctification, St. Ignatius of Loyola developed a program of “spiritual exercises” and a distinctive approach to spiritual direction that are practiced widely to this day. St. Francis de Sales, to whom the term *spiritual direction* is commonly attributed, offered another enduring model that has been preserved both in his published

² See George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

³ Quoted in Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 242.

correspondence and *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, an immensely popular spiritual guidebook intended for a general audience. In the emerging Protestant confessions, prominent leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox engaged in direction, and Luther's writings on the topic have proven enduringly influential.

In the past two centuries, an expanding array of luminaries have provided novel iterations of spiritual direction through published works and public presentations and private counsel and correspondence. Their ranks include St. John Henry Newman, Evelyn Underhill, C. S. Lewis, and Fr. Thomas Merton, to name just a few. Their advice has resonated well beyond their original audiences, in part because they are carefully calibrated to the distinct challenges of modern life.

While spiritual direction has been a constant feature of the faith, interest in the practice has expanded markedly in the United States and other societies in recent decades. This interest is rooted in part in broader sociological developments. Growing numbers identify as "spiritual but not religious," a term that signals a hunger for cultivating a relationship with the transcendent alongside dissatisfaction with more institutional manifestations of religion. Spiritual direction, it seems, affords opportunities for personal, interior growth that are especially attractive to many in our day. The heightened demand for spiritual direction has given rise to a variety of initiatives focused on providing this ministry, as well as to a considerable body of literature on the topic.

Regarding the recent literature on spiritual direction, much of it is highly practical in nature. The authors typically are experienced spiritual directors who are writing in order to guide new generations of directors and directees. They base their guidance primarily on instructive encounters they have had in spiritual direction, and they often draw insights from related fields like psychology.

A Science of the Saints, the title of which is borrowed from an observation by the renowned spiritual director and cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, belongs to a modest subset of the literature that takes

a more historical approach to the subject.⁴ Works of this type explore how spiritual direction has been practiced within distinct contexts across the Church's 2,000-year history. Such studies help illuminate an essential and often underappreciated dimension of the Christian experience. At the same time, they often yield timeless wisdom that can fruitfully inform the practice of spiritual direction in our own day.

The genesis of this project is closely linked to the mission of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, where the authors of the following chapters teach. Spiritual direction is fundamental to the work of Saint Meinrad. Many on its faculty regularly receive spiritual direction, provide spiritual direction to others, and model the practice of direction to the future Catholic priests and lay ministers they are training. Many have also studied spiritual direction on a more theoretical level. This shared interest and expertise gave rise to the idea of an edited volume devoted to the topic. Each of the nine chapters is rooted in the individual author's larger area of expertise. In addition to contributing to the scholarly understanding of the Catholic tradition of spiritual direction, the chapters are designed to be accessible to a more general audience and useful to those engaged in offering or receiving spiritual direction.

The first two chapters of the volume focus on a pair of traditions of spiritual direction emerging in antiquity. In chapter 1, Sr. Jeana Visel, OSB, analyzes the legacy of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Emerging in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Asia Minor around the fourth century, desert monasticism took various forms, from the hermit life, to small groups of disciples gathered around a spiritual father or mother, to large monasteries shaped by more communal elements. At the heart of desert spirituality was the wisdom gained by the *ammas* and *abbas*. Through personal experiences of wrestling

⁴ Bérulle once observed that spiritual direction "is part of the science of the saints, as Scripture speaks of it. It is a science which belongs to the saints, which the saints do and which directs saints in the ways of heaven." Quoted in *Writings on Spiritual Direction by Great Christian Masters*, edited by Jerome M. Neufelder and Mary C. Coelho (New York: Seabury Press, 1985), 89.

with sin, aiming for virtue, and ultimately coming to know God in love, these spiritual masters became equipped to help others along the spiritual journey. Visel extracts enduring lessons concerning spiritual direction from this legacy, including the personal integrity and commitment to growth required of spiritual directors, and the importance of customizing direction to address the distinctive trajectories of individual directees.

In chapter 2, Fr. Christian Raab, OSB, reflects on the underappreciated yet vital tradition of spiritual direction cultivated within Benedictine monastic circles. He begins by considering the wisdom of St. Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Rule* concerning the qualities that a spiritual director should possess. He then examines the contributions of three modern Benedictine thinkers. Blessed Columba Marmion presents an example of spiritual direction in relation to the development of the directee's spiritual life. Fr. Thomas Merton offers advice concerning how to receive spiritual direction. Fr. André Louf crafts a synthetic vision of spiritual direction that incorporates the insights of monastic tradition, Ignatian spirituality, and contemporary psychology. Taken together, these four figures point to a distinctively Benedictine approach to spiritual direction that can serve as a worthy complement to the dominant Ignatian model.

The next two chapters discuss several figures of the early modern period who, each in their own way, significantly enriched the Catholic tradition of spiritual direction: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Francis de Sales. While previous scholars have examined the contributions of these three saints in considerable detail, the chapters in this part of the book offer fresh insights that enhance our understanding of their respective legacies.

In chapter 3, Fr. Mark O'Keefe, OSB, juxtaposes the insights of the Carmelite mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. Spiritual direction was a principal ministry of John of the Cross, and his prose writings have been described as written spiritual direction. His contemporary and collaborator Teresa of Avila had a great deal of experience with spiritual direction as her deep spiritual journey unfolded—some of it helpful, much of it not. Both

Carmelite authors offered valuable observations about spiritual direction and the qualifications of spiritual directors, emphasizing in particular the need to be learned in Scripture and theology, experienced in the journey toward holiness, and discerning of the movements of the Spirit in the soul. This chapter examines their counsel and suggests how it can serve spiritual directors today.

In chapter 4, Kevin Schemenauer discerns the distinctiveness of Francis de Sales's model of spiritual direction by viewing it through the lens of a saint's biography and piecing together the counsel he dispensed in his spiritual writings and letters. A portrait emerges of a saint focused on guiding people of all stations active in the world, emphasizing love of God and surrender to God's will. Schemenauer highlights three themes that echo throughout de Sales's corpus—total surrender to God, the need for gradual growth, and the cultivation of holy liberty—and considers the practical relevance of these themes for those engaged in the work of spiritual direction.

The volume's focus shifts next to several twentieth-century figures not commonly associated with the Catholic tradition of spiritual direction: St. Faustina Kowalska, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), and Fr. Louis Bouyer. The authors demonstrate how the diverse legacies of these figures have much to teach us about complicated work of spiritual direction.

In chapter 5, Robert E. Alvis considers the counsel that priestly confessors offered to St. Faustina Kowalska as she coped with a tumultuous interior life punctuated time and again by powerful mystical encounters. She was anguished by the skepticism of most of the priests in whom she confided, but not deterred from pursuing the work she believed God was calling her to undertake. The several priests who believed her claims provided emotional support and critical assistance. Her experience offers lessons to contemporary priests who offer spiritual direction to people claiming private revelations.

In chapter 6, Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, gleans insights into spiritual direction from the life and extensive correspondence of St. Edith Stein. Roughly a third of Stein's correspondence shows

her offering spiritual direction, vocational discernment, and personal encouragement for protégés and students. Gricoski's analysis illustrates how spiritual direction often occurs in unexpected times and places well beyond the boundaries of a formal relationship devoted to the same. He also underscores the role of personal holiness in the lives of would-be spiritual directors. The theme that resounds most prominently in Stein's guidance, though, is the summons to take up the crosses one encounters in life and to recognize them as invitations to participate more fully in the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

In chapter 7, Keith Lemna considers the model of spiritual direction developed by the French Oratorian priest Louis Bouyer, who was a decisive influence on some of the most important French Catholic ecclesial figures and intellectuals in the contemporary Catholic Church, including Jean-Luc Marion. This model is anchored in a deep appreciation and thorough familiarity with Scripture and the theological corpus of the church fathers and great mystics, and it invites earnest Christians to discover in these resources a higher order of knowledge around which to orient their lives, including the divine event of love and the trinitarian basis of creation and our human destiny. His model recovers the essential interdependence of spiritual theology and dogmatic theology, dimensions of the Christian experience which all too often have been considered in isolation from one another in recent centuries.

The final two chapters of this volume look to the arts to offer innovative insights regarding the practice of spiritual direction. Specifically, they offer nuanced analyses of a number of remarkable films and works of literature. While the characters in these films, short stories, and novels are fictional, they bear the imprint of their creators' profound wisdom regarding the human condition and thus deserve careful attention.

In chapter 8, Fr. Gueric DeBona, OSB, turns to cinema to illuminate some of the seminal lessons embedded in the Ignatian approach to discernment and spiritual direction. Drawing from his remarkable personal journey, St. Ignatius of Loyola developed

an influential model for discerning the movements and stages of development within the soul, but how do his theories manifest in the messy lives of ordinary people? DeBona suggests that we can learn a lot in this regard from great films that depict the spiritual maturation of their central characters. To illustrate his point, he demonstrates how Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* and Robert Bresson's *The Diary of a Country Priest* offer particularly apt examples of the spiritual dynamics encompassed in the first and second of Ignatius's "rules" for the discernment of spirits.

In the ninth and final chapter, Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, considers literature as a potential source of spiritual direction, and he unpacks some of the spiritual lessons embedded in the works of three modern Catholic authors. Flannery O'Connor's short stories employ the motif of the Southern Gothic to highlight the sometimes "violent" nature of spiritual discernment and how God's grace can be encountered in some of the most unsuspecting moments, places, and people. At the center of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is the fraught relationship between its two main characters, whose respective life choices shed light on the dynamics of spiritual seeking and the consequences of conversion. Finally, Robert Hugh Benson's dystopian *The Lord of the World* invites readers to contemplate the heavy cost of discipleship in the context of a triumphant and suffocating secularism. Robinson suggests that the distinctively compelling qualities of literature—its capacity to move us and delight us—make it a worthy complement to more traditional sources of spiritual direction.

Taken together, the nine studies in *A Science of the Saints* shed new light on the richness of the Catholic tradition of spiritual direction. It is the shared hope of the authors that their contributions advance the scholarly understanding of this tradition, stimulate further study of this important dimension of the Christian experience, and offer practical lessons for those engaged in the work of spiritual direction.

CHAPTER ONE

Spiritual Direction among the Desert Fathers and Mothers

Sr. Jeana Visel, OSB

Some of the earliest traditions of Christian spiritual direction have their roots in the practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, monastic men and women who lived either solitary or community-based lives outside of cities. The literature of these holy men and women appears around the fourth century, arising almost simultaneously in Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and elsewhere.¹ As Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan, so these men and women also found the desert a place of spiritual struggle for holiness. Here they quickly discovered the importance of engaging the discerning guidance of others who

¹ André Louf, OCSO, "Spiritual Fatherhood in the Literature of the Desert," in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West*, ed. John R. Sommerfelt, Cistercian Studies Series #38 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 37; George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 1–9; Rosemary Rader, "Early Christian Forms of Communal Spirituality: Women's Communities," in *The Continuing Quest for God: Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition*, ed. William Skudlarek (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 90; Gabriele Winkler, "The Origins and Idiosyncrasies of the Earliest Form of Asceticism," in *The Continuing Quest for God*, 11, 28, 29; Armand Veilleux, "The Origins of Egyptian Monasticism," in *The Continuing Quest for God*, 44ff.

likewise had been tested.² While most early Christians sought spiritual leadership from priests, bishops, family members, or other Christians, in the desert tradition God was understood to speak through elders.³ Because of their ability to transmit spiritual life to others, these elders commonly have been called “mothers” and “fathers.”⁴ The true *amma* or *abba* was one who had been tried in virtue and found faithful, a wise and discerning guide for others, regardless of chronological age or educational background. What might the example of these spiritual leaders offer to spiritual directors today? In examining their style of direction, the subject matter they address, and the process by which Desert Fathers and Mothers became guides for others, we can find models of wisdom that may assist those called to direct souls today.

Sources

What we know of the Desert Fathers and Mothers comes to us via different forms of monastic literature. Most well-known are the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, or *Apophthegmata Patrum*, gathered and circulated among the monks and nuns themselves, and published in Greek in the latter fifth century by an unknown editor. The literature comprises a collection of about a thousand short vignettes and quotations from about 120 desert ascetics.⁵ The sayings soon were followed by more formal biographies, or *vitae*, such as St. Athanasius’s *Life of St. Antony the Great*. Other biographies followed in the fourth and fifth centuries, as travelers to

² Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), 3–4.

³ Louf, “Spiritual Fatherhood,” 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ The sayings are organized in two forms: either by the elder’s name into the alphabetical collection or by topic in the systematic collection. See Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975); Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 3; Joseph Lienhard, SJ, “On ‘Discernment of Spirits’ in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 520; J. William Harmless, “Apophthegmata Patrum (Sayings of the Desert Fathers),” *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. Oliver Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Egypt and Palestine met the monks and nuns firsthand and wrote of their experiences.⁶ Palladius's *Lausiac History*, Rufinus's translation of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, and John Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* were particularly influential in bringing some of these sayings and stories to Western monasticism.

Beyond the sayings and the lives, writings from the Desert Fathers and Mothers themselves also are a source of their wisdom. Early Coptic monks like Antony and then his follower Ammonas wrote letters; while Antony's letters tend to be somewhat abstract, the fourteen letters of Ammonas clearly address the changing circumstances of particular people.⁷ Similarly, in the early sixth century, two desert monks named Barsanuphius and John lived near Gaza, counseling a number of different kinds of people via letters. Responding to the concerns of monastics, simple laypeople, church leaders, and political figures, these letters provide a beautiful example of how elders provided personalized spiritual guidance. While the sayings tend to be short, pithy responses to questions, and stories from the lives provide examples, the letters tend to provide more context, allowing us to see how the Desert Fathers and Mothers addressed the spiritual dynamics of actual people in sometimes ongoing situations.⁸

Many desert ascetics are described as being simple people of fairly humble background, but some more educated people of culture also spent time among their number. Some produced spiritual and theological writings. St. Basil the Great, for instance, was the son of a famous orator and was educated at some of the best schools, including the university at Athens. While he did not spend his whole life in the desert, in 356 Basil made visits to the monks and nuns of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. When he returned to solitary life in Cappadocia, he began to write the *Philokalia* and

⁶ Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 3–4.

⁷ David Brakke, "The Making of Monastic Demonology: The Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance," *Church History* 70 (2001): 32; Derwas Chitty, trans., *The Letters of Saint Anthony the Great* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1979).

⁸ John Chryssavgis, *Letters from the Desert: Barsanuphius and John* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 8–9, 19.

several monastic rules before going on to become a bishop.⁹ Evagrius of Pontus, similarly, was a fourth-century intellectual of Constantinople, ordained lector by Basil and deacon by St. Gregory Nazianzen, who became his lifelong friend. He enjoyed great worldly success before fleeing to Jerusalem and then, at the direction of St. Melania, to the Egyptian monastic life at Nitria and the Cells.¹⁰ While living in great austerity, he gave spiritual direction and wrote about the spiritual and psychological dynamics of dealing with one's thoughts and temptations. He was known for great discretion.¹¹ While his more speculative *Kephalaia Gnostika* was condemned, his *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, *Chapters on Prayer*, *Antirrhetikos*, *Sentences for Monks*, and other works influenced generations of spiritual teachers.

The Style of Spiritual Direction among the Desert Fathers and Mothers

The various sources of desert wisdom indicate that the *abbas* and *ammās* used different styles of spiritual direction. While some practices might apply only to monastic usage, or might reflect culturally conditioned values that have shifted with time, some of these styles of direction still are worth imitating today. It is important to note that to some extent, both the nature of the relationship between an elder and a follower, and their style of spiritual direction, were determined primarily by the elder's way of life, and secondarily, by the form of life of the follower. Regardless, those seeking direction usually had to take the initiative to build the relationship.¹² In the desert tradition, some men and women

⁹ Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 315–16.

¹⁰ John Eudes Bamberger, introduction to Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), xxxvi–xlii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xliii–xliv.

¹² Claudia Rapp, “‘For Next to God, You Are My Salvation’: Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 78.

pursued a solitary life, perhaps with a loose affiliation with other hermits. Those of great holiness inevitably attracted regular visitors seeking spiritual advice. Callers might come from near or far to confess their sins and to receive encouragement, reprimand, or teaching from the *abba* or *amma*.¹³ Among those who came, some disciples might stay on and attach themselves to the spiritual master, either for a period of time or for life. Sometimes these disciples would live nearby, or even in the same cell as the *abba* or *amma*. Thus closely connected to their elders, these disciples learned humility and virtue through daily rather than occasional invitations to obedience, and by imitation of the life they saw. Regarding the desert hermits and their followers, the words of Dorotheos of Gaza are apropos: "The fathers say that staying in a cell is half [of monastic observance], and to see the elders the other half."¹⁴ Both solitary reflection and staying close to those of good example and wisdom promote growth.

In contrast with the eremitic or semi-eremitic tradition, more community-minded monastics, or cenobites, gathered in a group around a particular spiritual father or mother. Imitating the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles, cenobites sought to practice charity, holding everything in common and serving their neighbors. While individuals might have a personal spiritual relationship with the leader, in the cenobitic life, spiritual wisdom was learned in part via the style of life itself, often codified into a written rule.¹⁵ As in the eremitic tradition, however, obedience was still a core spiritual value, and giving up one's own

¹³ Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction*, 9.

¹⁴ Quoted in Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 42.

¹⁵ Armand Veilleux has argued in *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme* that in Pachomian monasteries, the abbot was more the organizer of the common life than a spiritual father to each monk. He says that Cassian's mis-transmission of the northern Egyptian tradition of cenobitic life caused these roles to be fused in Western monasticism. Claude Peifer, on the other hand, argues that plenty of literature describes Pachomius as a spiritual father to the monks of his monasteries; he does not believe that a stress on community negates the role of the spiritual father. See also Claude Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," in Timothy Fry et al., eds., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 337–40; Thomas Keating, "The Two Streams of Cenobitic Tradition in the Rule of Saint Benedict," *Cistercian Studies* 11, no. 4 (1976): 257–68.

will in humility was considered a trustworthy path to holiness. While a rule of life and communal expectations provided a level of basic spiritual guidance, the superior was considered to hold the place of Christ and could be expected to teach and advise the members. In large communities, a leader might delegate authority to others. Both Basil and Pachomius led large communities where spiritual direction was divided among the elders and supervised by the abbot.¹⁶

In terms of the master-disciple relationship, then, among the solitaries, a disciple might ask for onetime advice or meet with a teacher regularly. This could happen in person or via letters. A long-term follower might live with or near an elder and receive direction in a way similar to that of the cenobites, where spiritual direction might come via a personal meeting, or from general preaching to the community, or through an elder's own example or response to situations arising in the regular ebb and flow of life. Today, we see a similar range of ways for spiritual direction to happen, from a single encounter after Mass or during a retreat, to regular meetings, phone calls, or electronic communications, to full entry into a form of religious life that allows one to follow more sustained spiritual guidance.

Spiritual direction in the desert often began with a person approaching an elder asking, "Give me a word," or "How can I be saved?"¹⁷ The word of the *abba* or *amma* was seen as a movement of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the hearer. Indeed, in the desert tradition, spiritual direction was a process of guiding a disciple such that the individual might respond to his or her own calling with the graces of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The director offered a level of clarity for the directee. We are told that a disciple of Antony's

¹⁶ Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction*, 9; Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 341; "Bohairic Life of Pachomius," 26, in *Pachomian Koinonia, Volume 1*, trans. Armand Veilleux (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

¹⁷ Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 38; cf. "On Abba Helle," 12: "One of the brethren, desiring to be saved, asked him if he might live with him in the desert" (Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 91); "The Monks of Nitria," 10: "If there were many who came to him wishing to be saved, he called together the whole community." (Russell, 106).

¹⁸ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 5.

named Paul came to him immediately after discovering his wife committing adultery and, wishing “to be saved,” asked to live with him. “Antony said to him, ‘You can be saved if you have obedience; whatever I tell you, that is what you will do.’ Paul replied, ‘I shall do everything you command.’” Paul indeed went on to be astoundingly obedient and ultimately became a revered spiritual father in his own right.¹⁹ Amma Syncletica also taught about the importance of discerning one’s call and living it authentically. She said that many living in monastic communities “act like those living in cities and are lost while many of those living in cities do the works of the desert and are saved. Indeed, it is possible to live with a multitude and still be solitary in spirit just as it is possible to live as a solitary while one’s thoughts are with the crowd.”²⁰ One call might be different from another, but the wise elder could help a seeker discern the appropriate path of holiness in his or her own life. This was done in part by assisting in evaluating a disciple’s strengths and limitations. When a brother went to Abba Matoës, asking what to do about his inability to control his speaking ill of others, “[t]he old man replied, ‘If you cannot contain yourself, flee into solitude. For this is a sickness. The person who dwells with brothers must not be square, but round, so as to turn himself towards all.’ He went on, ‘It is not through virtue that I live in solitude, but through weakness; those who live in the midst of people are the strong ones.’”²¹ The Holy Spirit guides each to a way that will lead to healing and wholeness; the elder helps discern the way.

Beyond the guiding word itself, an elder’s example, prayer, and sanctity could themselves be a sacramental expression of God’s will, guiding those they led to holiness.²² Actions speak. It was said that “even when silent, Pachomius made his actions a discourse.”²³ When Abba Sisoës became impatient with having to

¹⁹ “On Paul,” 1, in Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 114.

²⁰ Tim Vivian, ed., *Becoming Fire: Through the Year with the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 225 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

²² Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 9.

²³ “Psenhaisios,” 1, quoted in Louf, “Spiritual Fatherhood,” 51.

give spoken direction, he asked: "Why do you insist on my speaking idly? Do what you see."²⁴ And to other elders who would direct disciples, Abba Poemen famously advised, "Be their model, not their lawgiver."²⁵ Dorotheos of Gaza, similarly, wrote, "Teach by deeds and by words what must be practiced, but most of all by your deeds, for examples are much more efficacious."²⁶ In many cases, actively living the Christian life is the best way of showing others what is to be done and how. Example proves that virtue is possible. Imitating an elder, disciples could discover on their own how such action reorients the rest of life in a more coherent way. For the elder, teaching by example also protected against the hypocrisy of not practicing what one preaches.²⁷ These are timeless virtues still worth practicing today.

Among the Desert Fathers and Mothers, elders often taught by means of symbolic actions, a practice used by Old Testament prophets.²⁸ Among the most well-known is the story of Abba Moses, a former brigand who became a holy man:

A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, "Come, for everyone is waiting for you." So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, "What is this, father?" The old man said to them, "My sins run out behind me and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another." When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him.²⁹

²⁴ "Sisoës," 45, quoted in Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 51; Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 185.

²⁵ "Abba Poemen," 174, quoted in Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 337; Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 160–61.

²⁶ Dorotheos of Gaza, *Letter 2*, 184, quoted in Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 52.

²⁷ Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 336.

²⁸ See also "Zacharias," 3, "Pior," 3, and "Ammonas," 8 and 9; Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 336.

²⁹ "Moses," 2, Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 117.

The symbolic action in this case provides an image of a spiritual reality to be addressed. The truly humble Christian is self-aware enough not to condemn another person for his or her sins, but in mercy entrusts them to God. In another case, the elder symbolically acts out the image of the monk who embodies the crucified Christ:

A brother asked an old man, "How can I be saved?" The latter took off his habit, girded his loins and raised his hands to heaven, saying, "So should the monk be: denuded of all things in this world, and crucified. In the contest the athlete fights with his fists; in his thoughts the monk stands, his arms outstretched in the form of a cross to heaven, calling on God. The athlete stands naked when fighting in a contest; the monk stands naked and stripped of all things, anointed with oil and taught by his master how to fight. So God leads us to the victory."³⁰

Such symbolic actions would be memorable. They point to important core values not to be forgotten. Here, the brother is given a striking image of how depending on God makes a monk like Christ, both vulnerable and strong.

Beyond providing one's own living example, when helping their disciples, elders also would share stories of other holy people. In some cases, this could be a quiet act of deference and humility, passing on good advice without pointing to oneself in the process.³¹ John Cassian's stories of idealized heroes of the desert teaching wisdom exemplify this model, with the conferences he wrote being credited to various fathers, while also advancing Cassian's own goals of reforming monasticism in Gaul.³² In his *Epistle 12*, the elder Ammonas presents the examples of Elijah and John the Baptist. He notes that after seeking God in solitude in

³⁰ *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*, §11, p. 3, as quoted in Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 34.

³¹ Aelred Gidden, foreword to *Becoming Fire*, ed. Vivian, 17.

³² See John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1997; Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction*, 114.

the desert, they then were sent to serve God by tending the souls of people.³³ While this may be a good pattern for other elders to consider imitating, it may also express quietly Ammonas's sense of his own experience and call to serve. Among the *Sayings*, an anonymous "abba of Rome," who may be Arsenius, "recalled that there was an elder who had a good disciple. Because of some narrowness of mind, he chased him out. The brother remained seated outside, and when the elder opened the door and found him still seated, he bowed to him saying, 'O father, the humility of your patience has won over my narrowness of mind. Come in; from now on you are the elder and father and I shall be the younger and disciple.'"³⁴ Both the teacher and the exemplars of the story remain unnamed, yet the humility and obedience to be imitated shine through clearly.

Across all of these forms of desert teaching, we see a style of spiritual direction marked by knowledge, care, and prayer for directees. Knowledge allows for personalized, appropriate direction. In one letter, Barsanuphius instructs a certain Paul to avoid discussions of the faith (which trouble him) because the spiritual father judges him "not capable of studying the mysteries." Instead, Paul is instructed to contemplate his own sins.³⁵ Elsewhere, Barsanuphius directs a sick monk named Andrew to be joyful and give thanks in the midst of it, enduring suffering with patience.³⁶ Knowledge of his disciple allows Barsanuphius to challenge wisely. A disciple must be able to trust in the loving concern of the elder if he or she is to be completely open and honest about matters of the soul.³⁷ Amma Talis was said to be so trusted and

³³ Ammonas, *Epistle 12*, in *The Letters of Ammonas, Successor of Saint Antony*, trans. Derwas Chitty and Sebastian Brock (Oxford: SLG Press, 1979), as quoted in Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction*, 8.

³⁴ "An Abba of Rome," 2, Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 175–76. Note that Arsenius was known to give examples as though referring to others, when they actually referred to himself. See Arsenius 33, Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 13.

³⁵ *Epistle 57–58*, as referenced in Adalbert de Vogüé, "The Letters of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza to Some Hermits," trans. Terrence G. Kardong in *American Benedictine Review* 69:2 (June 2018): 151.

³⁶ *Epistle 76.9–10*, as referenced in de Vogüé, "Letters of Barsanuphius," 153.

³⁷ Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 55.

beloved by her young sisters that their community had no need of a key to lock them in the monastic enclosure; it was considered remarkable that they freely chose to stay close to her.³⁸ Love and care also mean that the wise elder does not act shocked when a directee reveals thoughts or behaviors reflecting humanity's fallen nature. The true *amma* or *abba* knows human weakness, but also can see the image of God in each person.³⁹ Among the desert monastics, struggles with bodily asceticism, especially, called for a level of both compassion and discipline. To a brother dealing with gluttony and "other movements of the flesh," Abba John gives encouragement, saying that God is more powerful than the monk's spiritual enemies. He also suggests that when lustful thoughts occur at night, the brother should perform forty-nine genuflections, saying, "I have sinned, Lord, pardon me because of your name." At the same time, Abba John consoles him and encourages him to go to community prayer and to partake in the sacraments, knowing that they are not for condemnation, but for purification of body, soul, and spirit.⁴⁰ Many desert elders who counsel others regarding challenges with sexuality confide that they, too, have dealt with these same struggles.

The intercessory prayer of an *abba* or *amma* also was a common part of early spiritual direction. Letters to Abba Paphnutius ask for his prayers, and sometimes express prayer for his health and longevity. A certain Justinus writes to him, "for we believe that your citizenship is in heaven, and therefore we regard you as our master and common patron." A woman named Valeria refers to herself as his daughter and calls him "bearer of Christ," saying, "I trust by your prayers to obtain healing, for by ascetics and devotees revelations are manifested."⁴¹ When a monk asked Abba Apollo to pray that he might be granted a particular grace, "the

³⁸ *Lausiac History* 138, cited in Louf, "Spiritual Fatherhood," 56.

³⁹ Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 335.

⁴⁰ Abba John, *Epistles* 168.15–21, 170.9–13, cited in Vogüé, "Letters of Barsanuphius," 159–60.

⁴¹ From H. I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London, 1924), nos. 1923–29, 100–20, as cited in Rapp, "For Next to God, You Are My Salvation," 69.

grace of humility and gentleness was granted to him, so that all were amazed at him and the extraordinary degree of gentleness which he had attained."⁴² The prayer of one's spiritual father or mother was seen to be powerful, a part of God's will being expressed through the guidance of the elder. Such prayer also is an expression of the elder's spiritual assistance when conversion or clarity is needed. St. Antony the Great writes to "all the dear brethren who are at Arsinoe and in its neighborhood" and expresses grief over their confusion but encourages them, promising his unceasing prayer, that God might give them "a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment, that you may be able to offer your hearts as a pure sacrifice before the Father, in great holiness, without blemish."⁴³ Interceding for one another is a basic act of Christian charity.

Some elders were charismatically gifted with the ability to see into the hearts and minds of those they directed. Without wasting time, these directors could go right to the point needing attention. Abba Apollo, for instance, was known to notice if people were gloomy or downcast, and to ask them about it; he then told them the secrets of their own hearts and urged them to rejoice.⁴⁴ Abba Helle, likewise, was said to be able to read hearts, and after teaching the monks for a few days, he declared that "one was troubled by fornication, another by vanity, another by self-indulgence, and another by anger. He declared that this man was meek and that one was a peacemaker, bringing under his scrutiny the vices of some, the virtues of others. On hearing these things they were amazed and said, 'Yes, it is just as you say.'"⁴⁵ Then, as now, such charismatic gifts were given not for the fame or personal benefit of the elder, but for the spiritual building up of those they served.

⁴² "On Apollo," 42–43, Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 76.

⁴³ Antony the Great, *Epistle 6*, in *The Letters of Saint Antony the Great*, trans. Chitty, 17–18.

⁴⁴ Peifer, "Appendix 2: The Abbot," 336; "On Apollo," 52–53, Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 78.

⁴⁵ "On Abba Helle," Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 91.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Lens of Discernment: St. Ignatius of Loyola's First and Second Rules in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951)

Fr. Gueric DeBona, OSB

When St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* (1522–24), he had no idea that his revolutionary process of discernment would open up an enormous window for enlarging our understanding of spiritual direction for centuries to come. Like many Christian humanists of the sixteenth century, Ignatius prioritized the *imago Dei*, underlining that the glory of God is reflected in a spirit-filled person, fully alive. He understood the Holy Spirit to be close at hand, waiting to be discovered in interior prayer. We know from Ignatius's autobiography and other writings¹ that, with the grace of deepening discernment, he came to recognize the movement of the Spirit within himself, from consolation to desolation to conversion, a process that yielded a greater awareness of God's will, a more intense friendship with Christ, and "spiritual freedom."² With his *Spiritual Exercises*, he developed a

¹ See *San Ignacio de Loyola: Obras*, ed. Manuel Ruiz Jurado, SJ (Madrid: *Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos*, 2013).

² For an intelligent discussion of discernment, see George A. Aschenbrenner, SJ, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect from the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola

method for guiding others along this same journey, employing specific meditations on a series of episodes in the gospels. Initially practiced by Jesuits and other clergy and religious, Ignatius's ingenious model has steadily grown in popularity, especially after the Second Vatican Council, attracting men and women of all faith traditions into an ongoing process of spiritual direction.³

I am interested in how discernment in spiritual direction unfolds in a variety of circumstances and conditions, and particularly in the role that Ignatius's so-called Rules for the Discernment of Spirits play in the process.⁴ Engaging the progress of discernment is most helpfully described by Fr. Timothy Gallagher as a threefold paradigm of *awareness, understanding, and action*, in which one accepts what is of God and rejects what is not.⁵ But what does this Ignatian discernment look like in real life? This question prompted the genesis of this chapter on spiritual direction and its place in film culture because, in a certain sense, the *Exercises* are a practical handbook in search of case studies. Where can we find these records of discernment? In my estimation, cinematic narratives, which shape our lives in so many ways, also provide us with a road map of how we intuit the work of the Spirit in everyday life.

I do not think it a stretch to establish a connection between secular narratives and discerning the movement of the Spirit. Read one way, any character development or plot progression in Western narrative tends to be determined by making sense of the self in a process of awareness, understanding (or not) its directional fate, and then acting or choosing amid conflicts (between good and evil) with the world around it. This process might also be likened to what Aristotle called *anagnorisis* or "recognition" in the

Press, 2004); Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005); Herbert F. Smith, SJ, "Discernment of Spirits," repr. in *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola: The Best of the Review*, 1, ed. David L. Fleming, SJ (St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious, 1983), 226–48.

³ For an expansive overview of the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially regarding their background and method, see Fleming, *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises*, 19–84.

⁴ See Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, *Setting the Captives Free: Personal Reflections on Ignatian Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2018).

⁵ Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 17ff.

discussion of *peripeteia* (a sudden change in fortune) in the *Poetics*.⁶ In Aristotle's paradigmatic analysis, a character moves from ignorance to knowledge, especially in connection with a new revelation in the dramatic unfolding of the plot. I raise this connection between the dramatic circumstances in narration and the process of discernment in life to establish an important link between how we understand and represent our lives on the one hand, and the work of the Spirit on the other. Ignatius was not imagining extraordinary or paranormal occurrences: The movement of the Spirit happens in everyday circumstances—the plots of our lives, if you will—and is discernible within the human heart as manifestations of these changes.⁷ In a certain sense, Western narratives offer exemplary windows into the dynamics of discernment because they invite us into the lives of characters and events amid a detectable axis of change and potential transformation, a momentum of enlightenment that echoes the movement of the Spirit.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the interface between Ignatian discernment and film narrative. I believe that the first two of Ignatius's "rules" are most helpful in establishing an understanding of a character's struggle or "recognition" because they both identify a specific area of palpable awareness, understanding, and action inside dramatic circumstances. Where the first rule helps us discern through the Good Spirit's intervention by the pricking of our conscience, the second rule (acting in a contrary motion) finds a faithful person embattled with an enemy of the soul, but which the Good Spirit actively thwarts.⁸

⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Michelle Zerba and David Gorman (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2018), 27.

⁷ In fact, the richness of the *Exercises* allows for the so-called Nineteenth Annotation retreat, which "does not separate a retreatant from concrete, ordinary life experiences; it plunges her further into them as she prays each day." See Mary Sullivan, R.C., and Dot Horstman, "The Nineteenth Annotation Retreat: The Retreat of the Future?" in Fleming, *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises*, 302ff.

⁸ Ignatius lists the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" as an appendix to the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius says the first and the second rule are more suitable for the first week in the four-week retreat sequence of the *Exercises*. See, for instance, George E. Ganss, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola: A Translation and Commentary* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992), 121–25, and Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 27–46.

The films I have selected are *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954) and *The Diary of a Country Priest* (Robert Bresson, 1951), widely regarded as masterpieces of the mid-twentieth century. By illuminating the characteristics of these rules of discernment in these cinematic texts, we might gain some insight into the workings of the Spirit in the lives of those around us and begin to apply these observations to the spiritual direction setting. As an aside, I hope this interrogation, brief as it is, might encourage further discussion in those interested in Ignatian spirituality, as well as those pursuing the fascinating dialogue between religion and film culture.

The First Rule: Terry Malloy, *On the Waterfront*, and the Raising of Consciousness in the 1950s

When Ignatius describes the function of the fourteen Rules for Discernment in the appendix to the *Spiritual Exercises*, he says they are “to aid us toward perceiving and then understanding at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul: the good motions that they may be received and the bad that they may be rejected.”⁹ The first rule lays out one of the most dramatic and widely known encounters with the momentum of the Spirit, a divine activity evinced in both biblical and church history: “In the case of persons who are going from one mortal sin to another, the enemy ordinarily proposes to them apparent pleasures. He makes them imagine delight and pleasures of the senses, in order to hold them fast and plunge them deeper into their sins and vices. But with persons of this type the good spirit uses a contrary procedure. Through their good judgment on problems of morality he stings their consciences with remorse.”¹⁰ There are any number of famous examples that might emerge in our discussion of the first rule. In this regard, Gallagher cites St. Augustine and Thomas Merton as historical instances in which “the stinging and biting of their consciences” illustrate the way in which the Good Spirit

⁹ Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 121.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

has provoked their “apparent pleasures” by using a “contrary procedure.”¹¹ In what follows, I hope to show how Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* can lead us into a further interrogation of the role of conscience—its “stinging and biting”—in the movement of the Spirit; it is the journey to freedom with a character’s “good judgment on problems of morality” operating in the first rule.

The plot of *On the Waterfront* was inspired by a series of shocking, Pulitzer Prize-winning articles issued in a twenty-four-part series by Malcolm Johnson for the *New York Sun*, following a notorious murder in 1948 in New York and then produced as a screenplay by Budd Schulberg for Harry Cohn at Columbia Pictures and directed by Elia Kazan. Released in 1954, the film was practically as gritty and realistic as Johnson’s articles in its depiction of underground corruption and practices of systemic evil on the city’s waterfront. As the movie portrays it, the shipping on the New York docks is riddled with exploitation, bribery, and murder by the union boss Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb) and his henchmen, among them “Gentleman” Charley Malloy (Rod Steiger), whose brother Terry (Marlon Brando), a washed-up prizefighter, does the mob’s bidding for some fast cash and some easy positions working on the docks. A crisis occurs when Terry unknowingly lures a recalcitrant dock worker, Joey Doyle, to the roof of his high-rise apartment building, where Friendly’s thugs hurl the young man to his death. Terry says he thought the mob was only going to “lean on” Joey a little bit and lives in a state of denial until he meets the local parish priest, Fr. Barry (Karl Malden), and Joey’s sister Edie (Eva Marie Saint), with whom he has fallen in love. Together with Fr. Barry, Edie exposes Terry’s blindness, and he begins to see the corruption of Friendly and his brother Charley, who is himself murdered for not silencing Terry. Fr. Barry is persistent, not only with provoking Terry’s conscience, but with raising the moral intelligence of the longshoremen on the whole dock. Influenced by his emerging “biting” conscience, Terry decides to cooperate with the police investigators prosecuting Johnny

¹¹ Gallagher, *Setting the Captives Free*, 12–15.

Friendly, soon after which he is brutally beaten but makes his way as a new kind of union leader in solidarity with the remainder of the dock workers, who have cast Friendly and his mob aside to their fate with the law.

A good deal of what makes *On the Waterfront* a prime candidate for an examination of Ignatius's first rule is its director and the ensemble cast, many of whom had careers in consciousness raising in the theater.¹² Director Elia Kazan came of age acting in Group Theater of the 1930s and then directing hard-hitting Broadway smashes in the 1940s, most notably those by Arthur Miller (*All My Sons*, 1947) and Tennessee Williams (*A Street Car Named Desire*, 1947). Subsequently, he famously showcased the post-World War II "social problem" film as a genre for raising the country's temperature when it came to society's moral problems emerging after the war; these were films that confronted anti-Semitism (*Gentlemen's Agreement*, 1947), racism (*Pinky*, 1949), institutional corruption (*Boomerang*, 1947), and mob rioting (*Panic in the Streets*, 1950). Having founded the Actor's Studio in the late 1940s, Kazan brought the principles of what would be called "method acting" to both stage and screen. Much of the realistic, moody, and naturalistic characterization in *On the Waterfront* comes from Kazan's direction and the influence of Konstantin Stanislavski, whose Moscow Art Theatre had revolutionized nineteenth-century acting, making performances more emotionally available for a wider public and often referred to as "socialist realism."

It is well known that Brando's acting style brought a vulnerability and transparency to Terry's character, a style that was to influence generations of actors after him. Brando, who was trained by Stella Adler, one of the premier proponents of the method, was not alone in his depiction of the moody young man, deeply wounded by the past and society. Together with other contemporary performers

¹² For a fascinating account of the film as well as background material, see Kazan's autobiography *Elia Kazan: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988). A more recent personal account is his reflections in *Kazan on Directing* (New York: Random House, 2009), esp. 172–81. Also, Richard Schickel, *Elia Kazan: A Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), esp. 282–90.

such as Montgomery Clift, Robert Mitchum, and James Dean, he tapped into an emerging postwar understanding of the afflicted and haunted male in American culture. Significantly, such self-revelations become particularly poignant in the discovery of a conscience, since the spectator senses the gradual unfolding of a moral instrument as something like an emotional striptease. In Brando's depiction of Terry, the revelation of the conscience that has been "bitten" begins to disclose the Good Spirit in action. Besides Brando, many of the cast members, including Malden, Saint, and Cobb, were also trained in the Method and some even worked with Kazan before on the stage and the screen. Other than the principals, the cast appears to smolder under the weight of the waterfront's venality waiting for liberation, which eventually comes at the prompting of Fr. Barry.

From the very first moments of the film, we note the tangibly dirty, naturalistic setting on location (shot in Hoboken, New Jersey, in very cold weather) and which more than hints at the moral troubles of filth and corruption. The opening sequence occurs at night and within moments Joey Doyle is thrown off the roof. The actors have heavy New York accents and suggest a local realism, as well as (lower) class signification. Along these lines, Brando struggles for an adult vocabulary (together with a number of his peers), while Edie Doyle (who attends a school run at a convent and is now back home on break) and Fr. Barry are less burdened by heavily accented, working-class traces. Terry is particularly associated with a kind of pre-moral sensibility, a naivete about the money-driven, ruthless world for which he acts as a kind of gofer and into which he has been entangled. Trapped in a role of what he will later himself famously identify as "bum" (when he could have been "somebody"), the ex-prizefighter's arrested development includes a moral price tag. Consider, for instance, the important associations that Terry has with adolescence. He keeps pigeons on the roof, together with a few other boys who are at least ten years his junior. Spending a good deal of his time with training pigeons, Terry was the founding member of the teenage group, the Golden Warriors. "I was their first Supreme Com-

mander," he tells Edie. Yet Terry's sheer physicality next to Jimmy (whom Terry calls "his shadow") and the young boy's companions underlines the age difference. Brando was in top physical shape during the shooting, working out with weights and aerobic exercises, and makes the "gang" association with young people almost pathetic. Terry seems frozen in his alliance with teenage boys who have themselves yet to reach maturity (their voices are only beginning to change and deepen like those of men). After meeting Edie on the roof with Terry, Jimmy wonders aloud, "I wonder how long she's going to hang around, huh, Terry?"

Terry's adolescent behaviors and stunted moral growth begins to hint powerfully at what Ignatius's first rule suggests as the "enemy proposing apparent pleasures." Indeed, Terry not only lacks a suitable vocabulary and maturity, but enjoys everything we know to be the appetitive associations with adolescence, including Terry's sensual practices of reading "girly magazines" instead of working, together with accepting bribery for a cushy place on the docks, even while his fellow longshoremen are supporting families and are working hard at their difficult jobs. Terry moves further into a perilous ethical situation and jeopardy when Charley asks Terry to spy on the church meeting between Fr. Barry, Edie, and the disgruntled union members, saying, "Johnny does you favors, kid. You got to do a little one for him once in a while." Terry's moral behavior goes hand in glove with his identity as the "kid," and his identity is wrapped up in being Charley's younger brother. In what is arguably the most famous scene in the film, in which Terry finally confronts Charley in the back of the car about his failed boxing career, the younger man says, "You was my brother, Charley, you should have looked out for me. Instead of making me take them dives for the short-end money." While he has settled for the kind of pleasures that permit him to go from one sin to another, escalating to cooperating with social sin and murder, Terry remains still something of a child awaiting an Augustinian moral conversion. But as we will soon see, the turning point of the film comes when Terry finds redirection with the intervention of the Good Spirit and accomplished through the

mediation of Edie Doyle and Fr. Barry. What emerges is a new moral intelligence—a conversion—made possible by introducing what Lawrence Kohlberg might call a cognitive shift from a pre-conventional moral state to a conventional one, or what Jesuit Bernard Lonergan would imagine as a moral conversion moving from self-preoccupation to “self-transcendence” and involvement with social concerns.¹³

The mediation of the Good Spirit prompting conversion comes first from falling in love with Edie, the sister of the man he lured to his death. Casting Eva Marie Saint opposite Brando was an inspired choice. Brando’s Terry has brute force and physicality, where Saint’s Edie is all innocence and femininity. In fact, this was Saint’s first feature film and her inexperience on the set mirrored perfectly the overwhelming energy, eccentricity, and worldliness of her costar. At one point, this contrast is made obvious when Terry picks up Edie’s glove in the park and effortlessly puts it on his hands, as if it were a fighting glove. The dainty world of the schoolgirl meets the ex-fighter. As if to further underline their contrast, Terry comes looking for Edie to clarify his alleged innocence in her brother’s murder by breaking down the door and overpowering her, even as she shields herself with just a white slip on. Though in love with him, she is furious because of Terry’s complicity in her brother’s murder. “I don’t want you to do anything. Let your conscience tell you what to do,” she says. Challenged by the confrontation, Terry screams back, “That—word again! Why do you keep saying conscience, conscience. . . .” Edie answers: “I never mentioned the word before.” There is only a passionate kiss and no other physical contact, signifying their trust

¹³ See, for example, Kohlberg’s work on cognitive moral development in Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 1: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). Bernard Lonergan describes conversion as the human subject moving from a “withdrawal of self-enclosure” to “self-transcendence” in a sequence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), esp. chap. 10. From a Lonerganian perspective, Terry’s moral conversion opens up a social conscience that was unavailable to him before his conversion.