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DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF TAMIL SAIVAITE TRADITION

1. 'Discipleship-Ecclesiology'

Any significant reflection on the theology of Guru has its corresponding ecclesiological implications. Particularly, the idea of discipleship which is inseparably linked with the idea of the Guru, presents us with an image of the Church which could deepen our understanding of certain aspects of the Mystery of the Church. As Pope Paul VI said in his opening allocution at the second session of Vat. II (Sept. 29, 1963): "The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and greater explorations."¹

Indeed the dimensions of the Church are so rich and complex that every image brings out a particular aspect of its depth, breadth, length, and height². Let us, then, consider the significance offered by 'Discipleship'.

The significance of seeing the Church as 'Discipleship' stands out clearly. For, if we regard the Church principally as 'Discipleship', the inter-personal relations which constitute the fellowship becomes primary in our Ecclesiology with the result that we are less preoccupied with Baptismal enrolment and organizational membership. It does not, however, mean that we separate Faith and Baptism or devalue the membership in the Official Church; but that we begin to respect the fact that a person who is committed to Christ and follows Christ in his life, might not receive Baptism on considerations of social situations and family conditions.

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1. Cited by Walter M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II*, (New York : 1966), p. 14.
 2. A. Dulles, *Dimensions of the Church* (Maryland, 1967).

Secondly, the 'Discipleship-Ecclesiology' makes us more aware of the truth that Faith could be accepted and lived out in different ways according to the personal manifestation received in particular situations. For, discipleship is primarily a personal relationship. The question is, therefore, not merely that all, having the same faith, practise (realize) it differently, but that in the very appropriation of faith there could be different modes which grow dynamically.

If that is so, how then could we relate the different stages of the growth of Faith to their ecclesial expression? For example, in an extreme case like the valid Baptism without fruit, Faith could be absent; on the contrary, a catechumen might have Faith long before, receiving Baptism. And so to define the presence and the absence of Faith in terms of Baptism is not adequate.

However, in considering 'Faith without Baptism'³ we do not at all intend to minimize the importance of Baptism; we would rather, like to point out the concrete conditions in which the call to conversion is received and responded to differently. In other words, though Faith and Baptism are 'made' for each other reciprocally, their mutual expression could take varied forms.

In this perspective, then, a non-baptized could be called a disciple of Christ, while a baptized could be considered a non-disciple of Christ. What matters really is not the fact that one is baptized (a practice more as a sociological obligation than a religious commitment) but that one lives a life of personal dedication to Christ. Hence, the membership in the Church cannot be categorized into visible and non-visible. When the Church is seen as a complex reality of inter-personal relations (fellowship in Discipleship) 'belonging to the Church' it becomes an analogical existence with different shades of meaning.⁴

With this vision, then, we could discern the 'Ecclesial Reality'⁵ wherever men strive to relate themselves to each other in Spirit and in truth,⁶ for example, in a 'Satsang' of a Hindu asram.⁷ It helps us to

3. M. A. Amaladoss, 'La Foi sans le Baptême', *Spiritus* 52 (1972), Janvier pp. 45-47.

4. *Concilium* (1971), pp. 35-47.

5. We use the word as understood in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, Vat. II (19).

6. 'Satsang' means True Company or Fellowship in Truth.

7. If we grant the existence of an anonymous Christianity, we might speak of an 'anonymous Church'.

perceive all ecclesial existence as movement towards eschatological growth and regard non-Christian religions as being parallel and converging towards the same eschatological fullness.

Next, the 'Discipleship-Image' leads us to reconsider the present structures of the Church.⁸ The fact that the discipleship could not be (psychologically and socially) realized except in 'small' *intimate groups*, suggests that the current organizations in the Church have to be refashioned.⁹ Certainly, the monolithic structures and bureaucratic functions are a barrier to a life of Discipleship¹⁰; unless the big parishes and anonymous congregations contain small cells of discipleship, they remain organized establishments devoid of life in the Spirit. Indeed, the Universal Church cannot ever be renewed except through the local groups where the disciples of Christ live and share together.

If we take the Lord's saying, "Where there are two or three in My Name, there I am" (Mat. 18, 20), as one of the most basic ideas of the Church, then, the Discipleship-structure seems to be the ideal one. Further, ought not the Church-Structure ever to preserve her Image as the 'Little Flock' of the Lord (Luke 12, 32)? How else could the Church—the Body of Christ—grow up except through the living cells of discipleship?

In the context of the great need felt today in the Church for building up local Churches, our reflection on small groups of discipleship becomes all the more important (e.g., The Theme of the Synod—Oct. 1973—was 'Local Churches'). But, how could the Local Churches grow up if they do not have within themselves cells of discipleship dedicated to prayer and service? The phenomenon of 'Prayer-groups'¹¹ and the movements of 'Charismatic Renewal'¹² indicate that Christians today are trying to discover new forms of living the vocation to discipleship.

Moreover, it is relevant here to note what a Hindu convert like Chenchiah¹³ has to say about the Church-Structure. "The Hindu

8. N. Jeremiah, *Change and the Catholic Church: An Essay in Sociological Ecclesiology* (Baltimore: 1965).

9. M. Novak, *Concilium I* (1965), pp. 79-91.

10. S. Benki, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio*, (London, 1964).

11. See. *Concilium* 79 (1972), pp. 101-107; and also *Concilium* 72 (1972), pp. 107 ff.

12. Kevin and Dorothy Rangan, *The Catholic Pentecostals* (New York, 1969).

13. He was one of the leading lay-theologians in the Church of South India and attempted to formulate an Indian Christian Theology.

mind may be said to be institutional in social life and highly individual in religious life...Hinduism organizes strongly on the social side in order that man may be free religiously...an all-powerful organization dominating religious life is repugnant to Hindu instincts...Hinduism insists that smaller units are far more enduring and powerful in religion than central organizations. There has always been a strong feeling in Hinduism that in higher religious life, there should be no visible, concrete institutions, no solid power-houses..."¹⁴ In short, we could say that the Image of the Church as Discipleship helps us to rediscover some of the deeper (if not newer) aspects of ecclesial living; it calls for profound changes both in our approach to Ecclesiology and our attitude towards non-Christian Religious Communities.

Just as the Image of the 'People of God' after Vatican II, brought about a major shift in the emphasis on Lay-People¹⁵ in the Church, so too the Discipleship-Image would further enlarge our vision of the Mystery of the Church by enabling us to discern Ecclesial Reality (existence) beyond the Church of the baptized. While the image of 'People of God' makes us conscious of the election and mission of the baptized (I Pet. II, 9-10) the 'discipleship' reminds us of the Universal Call addressed to all men. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mat. 28, 19). In other words, we are urged to become more sensitive to the hidden and humble ways in which the Church grows till the time of eschatological fullness.

2. Guru Vs. Spiritual Director

In pastoral perspectives, could one consider the Priests to be similar to the Guru? The question is symptomatic of the complex and evolving image of the priesthood today,¹⁶ particularly in a developing missionary country.¹⁷

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14. D. A. Thangasamy, *The Theology of Chenchiah* (Madras : 1966), pp. 147-149.
 15. *Sacerdoce et Laicat-Cogitatio Fidei* 4 (Paris : 1962); see also Y. Congar, *Jalons pour une Theologie du laicat*, (Paris : 1964).
 16. *La Crise d'identite sacerdotale* (Rapport de la Commission Internationale de Theologie); also *Le pretre hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, (Congres d'Ottawa du 24 au 28 Aout, 1969, Paris : 1970).
 17. J. Neuner, 'The Missionary Priest', *Missionalia* 5 (1972, Rome), pp. 117-133.

As described by *Presbyterorum Ordinis*¹⁸ of Vatican II, a priest is ordained for the service of the Word and the Sacraments and hence priestly vocation is primarily an Ecclesial service.¹⁹ In 'Mission and Grace' Karl Rahner sums up the current theology of priesthood in the following brief definition: Priest is 'the servant of the People of God'.

Besides, as Raymond Brown²⁰ says in his biblical reflection on Priesthood: "The spiritual idealism of the later Christian priesthood was dominantly shaped by the role of the disciple of Jesus as graphically portrayed in the Gospels." Priest is then a disciple. In a very real sense, all Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus, but it has been felt that those engaged in the special Christian Ministry are bound in a special way by the demands of Christian discipleship. But the Guru belongs to the order of (mystical) pneumatic experience realized through personal holiness of life.²¹ And so the Guru ought to be, rather, related to the Spiritual Father or Director who might be a priest or a non-priest, as once practised in the Oriental Traditions of the Church.²²

In order to point out the characteristic differences between the Spiritual Director and the Guru we could relate the two in three basic aspects, respectively;

The nature of the relation of the Spiritual Director to the aspirants and that of the Guru to the Disciple;

The Role and the function of the Spiritual Director and the Guru;

The manner of contact the Spiritual Director and the Guru have with the guided or the disciple.

A. *Fatherhood of the Director*

All through the Christian Tradition—from the time of the Desert-Fathers (Antony, Pacomius) among the Fathers of the Church, (Jerome,

18. Cf. W. Abbot, *The Documents of the Vatican II* (New York: 1966).

19. Cf. *Concilium* 43 (1969); also K. Rahner, *Serviteurs du Christ* (Paris: 1969).

20. *Priest and Bishop* (New York: 1970), p. 21.

21. Cf. *The Synthetic View of Siddhanta Guru*, Part II, pp. 313-316.

22. M. J. Rouet de Journel, 'Le Pretre Spirituel en Russie Chretienne', *Supplement de la Vie Spirituelle*, 34 (1955), pp. 277-287.

Ambrose, Augustine) in the Coenobitic and Monastic traditions (Benedict, Dominic) and later among the great mystics like St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila, and up to the modern spiritual Masters like St Francis de Sales—the Spiritual Guide has always been considered as the Father.²³

The earliest Christian literature which speaks of the first great Masters and Ascetics describes the great man as 'Pneumatikos Pater'.²⁴ In fact the collections of the Sayings of the Fathers of the Desert are called 'Paterika'.²⁵ From the IV century onwards, the Director is also called 'Geron' (in the tradition of the Greek Fathers) and 'Staretz' (in Russian tradition). Thus the meaning of the relation between the Spiritual Father and the Spiritual Child is entirely new and Christian.

The Orientals particularly never questioned the legitimacy of describing the Director as the Father. Even the commentators of Chapter 23 of Matthew have issued no admonition with regard to this point. As Origen interpreted it, Mat. 23, 8 was understood as a warning against pharisaical vanity. Hence in the Oriental Hagiographies²⁶ we find a constant affirmation of the pre-eminence of the Spiritual generation over the Natural birth.²⁷

On the other hand, Guru in the Tradition of Saiva-Siddhanta described in *Cittiyar* (8.18-26) and *Siva-Pirakacam* (4-6) assumes different types of relation towards the souls. For example, a friend to a friend, and a lover to the beloved, according to the needs and circumstances of the souls. In fact Manikkavacakar refers to his Guru, as Father, Mother, Master, Lord, King, the Mighty one, the Beloved, etc..(*Tiruvacagam* 4 and 51).

The Guru, therefore, guides the souls progressively through the different paths such as *dasa marga*, *satputra marga*, *saha marga* and *san marga* till they become mature enough for his final manifestation.

23. 'Direction Spirituelle', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, Tome, III (Paris : 1967).

24. M. J. Rouet de Journel, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 277-278.

25. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, Tome III, p. 1013.

26. Cf. *Vie de St. Symeon le Nouveau Theologien*, 12 (1928), pp. 61.

27. It evokes the image of the fatherhood of Abraham for Israel and the biblical vision of the Fatherhood of the First Adam for all mankind. Here, we do not enter into the comparative study of 'paternity' in the Bible and the Hindu Tradition.

The pedagogical relation of the Guru is, thus, unique with regard to each soul. The Guru guides the soul unknown and unseen even before he manifests himself to it (*Payan* 34-36).

B. *The Function of the Director as Mediator*

The Spiritual Director, as St. John of the Cross says, is neither the superior of the client nor the Master of the Souls but a humble instrument.²⁸ Hence the function of the Director is instrumental, since mediation in the order of grace is always instrumental. Authors like St. Francis de Sales²⁹ and Jean-Nicolas Grou³⁰ describe this mediating function as one of conducting and leading souls in the ways of God in the manner of traveller's guide. "Voulez-vous a bon escient vous acheminer a la devotion ? Cherchez quelque homme de bien qui vous guide et vous conduise. . ." "Diriger une ame c'est la conduire dans les voies de Dieu."

The Spiritual Masters, today, consider the function of the Director as a service.³¹ However, it is evident that the Director is considered to fulfil always the *mediating function* in his different roles such as Counsellor, Educator, Doctor, Guide, Friend, etc. . . .

But the Guru, in the Siddhanta-tradition, is neither an instrument nor does he perform the role of mediation. As *Tirumantiram* (hereafter T.M.) states, the Guru himself offers grace removing the *mala* of the souls (T.M. 161 and 2, 019). Again according to Tirumular, the Guru is both the way and the Guide (T.M. 2, 018). Hence, finding the Guru is not a means but attaining the goal itself, since the Lord himself is the Sad-Guru (T.M. 2, 011).

C. *Manner of Contact — Dialogue*

As Louis Bouyer says in his 'Introduction a la Vie Spirituelle' the Spiritual contact is realized, primarily by means of "parole de conseil qui sonde les cœurs et les eclaire sur ce qu'ils doivent faire et l'action transformante de sa presence."³² In the Apophthegms of

28. Vive Flamme III, 3, cited in 'La Direction Spirituelle d'apres St Jean de la Croix', *Etudes Carmelitaines*, p. 179.

29. *Introduction a la Vie Devote*, Parts I and IV (Paris : 1889).

30. 'L' Art de la Direction', *Christus* 25 (1960), Jan., pp. 104-110.

31. Cf. *Christus* 25 (1960), p. 105.

32. Louis Bouyer, *Introduction a la Vie Spirituelle* (Belgium, 1960), p. 211.

the Fathers³³ we find a typical dialogue which portrays the characteristic situation of Direction : “ Abba dis moi un mot pour mon salut.”³⁴ It is interesting to note that Gregory of Nyssa compares the manner of direction to the process of learning a language through conversation.³⁵

In the early monastic tradition, as the Rules of St. Basil testify, the aspirants and monks obtained direction by means of confessing sins and faults. So also, in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, particularly in the *Annotations* (15, 16, 17),³⁶ we see the pattern of Direction built around the manifestation of conscience — opening of the soul, with all its inner movements, to the Director.

In fact the Director's principal function of discerning and counselling cannot be realized except in the open dialogue between the guide and the guided. Indeed it is significant that Fr. Jean Laplace entitles his book on direction as ‘*La Direction de conscience ou le Dialogue Spirituel*’. Also Father Raymond Hostie depicts succinctly the situation of pastoral guidance in a representative dialogue of search and acceptance — “ Puis-je vous parler ? ” — “ Volontiers, parlez en toute liberte, je vous ecoute.”³⁷

On the other hand, ‘ Dialogue ’ is not the normal means through which the Guru establishes the *śiṣya*. As Manikkavacakar sings (*Tiruvacagam*, II : 25-28 and 26 : 29-30), the Guru communicates by this gracious and transforming touch. In fact, he communicates more by his silent presence than by his speech. *Cittiyar* (12.6) says that the Guru converts the disciple into his form by means of touch, thought and sight in the same way as the fowl and tortoise and fish hatch their eggs by touch and thought and sight respectively. Hence, in *Tirumantiram* the presence of the Guru is compared to the alchemy which transforms the materials by its contact (T.M. 2, 010 2, 013). In general, the Guru initiates the *śiṣya* by *mantra* and *dikṣa*. Both Manikkavacakar and Tirumular offer beautiful descriptions of their own experiences of the initiation. (*Tiruvacagam* 26 : 29-31 and *Tirumantiram* 15 and 1, 571).

33. See *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, p. 1013.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 1015.

35. Cf. *Christus* 25 (1960), p. 9.

36. Translated by L. J. Phul, S.J. (Allahabad : 1962), Pius XI in *Mensa Nostra* (1929), qualifies the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius as the most universal guide to direct souls.

37. *L'Entretien Pastoral* (Paris : 1963), p. 242.

Consequently while the Director discerns the movements of the Spirit in the client, the Guru enlightens and illumines the soul of the disciple by his grace of Jnāna (*Tiruvacagam* I : 37, 68, 69). And so the contact with the Guru is not so much a process of education and formation, which is the way of the Director, as an instantaneous experience of inner-change and conversion. Even a single contact with the Guru is powerful enough to change one's life.

From the above consideration of the difference between Spiritual Director and the Guru in the Siddhanta tradition we could make the following observations :

First of all, the Spiritual Direction, in the words of Gregory the Great, is the ' Art of Arts ' ³⁸—a gift acquired in the light of experience and the power of the Spirit. And like every art it needs apprenticeship. ³⁹ But, the grace of ' being a Guru ' cannot be merited. ⁴⁰ Although Direction is also a gift, a charism ⁴¹ which helps the Church and the members, the order of Guru pertains to Mystical grace, entirely gratuitous ; no amount of practice or exercises could make a man a Guru. In fact, the Guru himself never poses to be one ; he is, usually, acknowledged and approached by others as Guru.

Secondly, there are differences in the way one reaches the Guru and the Spiritual Director. The Director is normally chosen by the novice or the aspirant, whereas it is by the grace of the Guru himself one finds the Guru ; it is the Guru himself who calls the disciples. Again the principal function of the Director is to listen to the client and serve him in his search for and growth in God. As against this, it is the Guru who is listened to and served by the disciples.

In brief, the Spiritual Director is like a mirror who reflects the soul of the novice while the Guru is like a luminous crystal which is transparent before the disciple. In other words, the Director guides while the Guru transforms. However, the image of the Spiritual

38. ' *Ars est Artium regimen animarum* ' ; Cf. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, also Cf. *Christus*, 25, pp. 22-47.

39. *Etudes Carmelitaines* (1951), p. 330.

40. The *Sad-Guru* takes possession of someone of his choice.

41. Cf. J. Laplace, *Op. Cit.*, p. 51.

Director in the Eastern Tradition of the Church seems to be closer to the Siddhanta's vision of the Guru. Also, it is relevant to note that today, in the Occident, there is a growing expectation to find the Spiritual Director who is more like a Guru. The image of the Tertian Instructor (of Jesuits) projected in the '*Jesuites Canadiens*'⁴² is a typical example of this trend.

Hence, the concrete differences we find between the Director and the Guru, instead of leading to a contrast between the two, actually help us to relate them as the two complementary ways of approach to grace. Thus, the Director could be viewed as fulfilling the Ecclesial (Mediation) Service and the Guru could be said to offer 'Pneumatic' grace operating personally in the soul. In this perspective we could see, then, how souls are led either through directors or directly by Christ Himself as in the case of Saints like St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, etc... The testimony of St. Theresa of Lisieux is worth noting here: "C'est Jesus tout seul Qui m'a instruite, aucun livre, aucun theologien ne m'a enseigne."⁴³

Thirdly, one could ask whether and what is the special significance offered by our consideration of Guru to the vision of the Spiritual Director in Christian Tradition. In response, we could do no better than to narrate the dialogue between a Kashmiri teacher and a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist asked the teacher how he could profit from the Indian wisdom⁴⁴: "Whenever I listened to the Indian sages, I always asked myself whether I would not have to overhaul my whole psychotherapeutic knowledge or give it up entirely.

I was so perplexed by the contradictory experiences of my Indian journey that finally my tormenting doubts overcame me in the presence of my Kashmiri teacher. He could see my trouble in my face, broke off in the middle of a sentence and went on: 'Do not think you would have to apply in some way, in your profession, what you have learned in India, or derive from it new psychotherapeutic technique... the best thing you can do as a conscientious doctor is quietly to assimilate your Indian experiences. If these have impinged

42. *Jesuites Canadiens* 89 (1972), Jan., pp. 12-13.

43. *Etudes Carmelitaines* (1957), p. 247.

44. Medard Boss, *A Psychiatrist Discovers India* (London: 1965), pp. 189-190.

deeply enough, everything else will follow of itself. Your patients will sense that your actions are becoming meaningful in and for themselves !”

After hearing the Kashmiri Teacher, the psychiatrist said to himself : “ In this intimate contact with the Master, I gained for a while the great peace that simply allows all things to come to pass. This simple thing was the certainty that what our psychotherapy needs above all is a change in the psychotherapists. If our science of mental health is to become more effective, psychotherapists will have to balance their knowledge of psychological concepts and techniques with a contemplative awareness.”⁴⁵

Like the psychiatrist, we could also conclude that the Spiritual Direction would be enriched if it is offered with a contemplative and mystical awareness which is the characteristic mark and grace of the Guru. Thus the science and art of Direction would be complemented by the personal realization of the man of God.

Conclusion

To conclude, our reflection on discipleship and Spiritual direction, first of all, helps us to focus on the personal approach of Christ to each man in his own unique history of salvation and thus marks out significantly that Christ is not only unique as the ‘Universal Saviour of mankind but also unique as He enlightens every man as required by his particularity and individuality. Secondly, it emphasizes the fact that discipleship (implying mystical relation to Christ as signified in ‘advaita’ union) is the root and the basis of fellowship in the Church. Consequently, it suggests certain new structures for the Church which should be less of a centralized and organizational nature and more of an inter-personal origin which would be the result of intimacy and depth of discipleship experienced in the small groups of local communities.⁴⁶

In fine, what is the theological contribution of this study? First of all, unlike the *metaphysical* (two natures and one Person: Chalcedon) and *functional* (Scholastic soteriology) approaches to Christology, the Guru-Śiṣya-tradition inspires us to focus on the mystical approach to the Person of Christ, based on the experience of His personal love

45. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

46. Today, there is a great deal of interest and study relating to grass-root Church. Cf. Dominique Barbe, *Demain, les Communautés de base* (Le Cerf : 1971),

and grace (since *Guru* is the transparently divine communicator of grace). Such a *complementary* approach in Christology would help us to see that the *Guru-Śiṣya* bond symbolizes the intimate and immediate relation between Christ and the faithful. This means that the individual Christian receives revelation not only from men and sacred books, but also from Christ himself through His indwelling Spirit.

While the providential role played by the Scriptures, the Magisterium and fellow-believers is not minimized, the *Guru-Śiṣya* bond emphasizes the need for personal experience of the revelation; for, revelation is not something which can simply be delivered to men by other men. It is God that reveals. St. Paul affirms emphatically: "I did not receive it from any man" (Gal. 1.12).⁴⁷

Furthermore this study poses significant questions such as why did Christ not write out the Gospel for mankind?⁴⁸ Why did He communicate the mysteries of the kingdom only by personal contacts? And above all, why did the Risen Christ reveal His Pascal presence only to the disciples? These relevant questions lead us to pursue and investigate into the significance of the living communication of faith (Tradition) in the Church from one generation of disciples to another by an osmosis of intimate contact. For, the *Guru-Śiṣya*-tradition consists not much in secret communication and sectarian allegiance as in a strictly personal and vital contact by which experience is best communicated.

In this perspective, we could conclude that the disciples of Christ, in every generation, are called to share and live the very experiences of the first disciples with Christ who is ever present wherever the disciples are gathered in His Name. Indeed Christ is the *Sad-Guru* and the baptized are His chosen disciples who must always sit and listen at the feet of the Master and Lord (Jn. 13, 14).

47. Cf. also 1 Jan. 2-27; "Let the anointing you have received from him dwell in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you."

48. It is not a mere coincidence that the great religious teachers have communicated their message by personal relation, and it is the disciples who seem to have written out the teaching of their Master.